THE HEATHFIELD PARTNERSHIP TRUST LTD

Ms L Benton
Programme Officer
Wealden District Council
Freepost SEA 10959
Crowborough TN6 1BR

11TH June 2012

Dear Ms Benton

WDC – Proposed Modifications to the Core Strategy Development Plan Document

The Heathfield Partnership has made many representations throughout the LDF process at every stage of consultation. We dealt with the criteria principles first and subsequently with sites. At all times in the development of the Plan we have been seeking to inject some new oxygen into the vibrancy of the Town both for commercial and housing development.

We are extremely disappointed in the current state of the Core Strategy as legislated for by the Inspector in removing all potential growth from Heathfield (both Commercial and Housing,) completely. In this representation, we wish to object vehemently to the deletion of the proposed Housing Allocation to the North West of Heathfield located immediately behind the Police Station. This can be found at SD11 in the Core Strategy Document and was strongly supported by Wealden District Council in making the original Allocation.

We would submit that there are considerable advantages to the above site, as follows:
.
1/ It's immediate adjacency to the market Town and its retail centre in particular. This makes the location ideal for the proposed housing development; especially in terms of the provision for affordable housing and the reduced dependency on the car, which is rare in a rural community. Its close location to the Youth Club and Cross in Hand Primary School are also vital factors for the wellbeing of Children on such an estate., which is in a very sustainable location.

2/ The natural growth in custom from such a development will be vital to the economic sustainability of the Market Town.

3/ The proven and growing housing needs, particularly for Affordable Housing, have not been addressed in the previous development plans, both the Wealden Local Plan (1998) and the Wealden Non-Statutory Local Plan (2005) (which are now considerably out if date,) and are well documented by our Colleagues in the Parish Council. Virtually no new Affordable Housing has been constructed in the Town in the last 20 years. It was and is of critical importance that the provision for Affordable Housing is met within the 2015/6 element of the Core Strategy. This implementation date was in fact brought forward by Wealden District Council following strong representation by the Heathfield Community. If we are not able to house the young aspiring adults in our Community, then they will drift away and our age profile will age considerably. That is not healthy or sustainable for our Society as a whole.

4/ There are no suitable alternative sites available in the Town or its surrounds. This too has been thoroughly researched and documented by our Colleagues at both Wealden District Council and Heathfield & Waldron Parish Council.

5/ The Road Access is exemplary with outstanding lines of visibility onto the A265. There are adequate (by rural standards) north/south and east/west bus routes through the Town with Bus stops in the immediate vicinity and easy access to the Town Centre for both pedestrians and cyclists alike.
.

6/ It is alleged that this partial intrusion of the Allocation Site into the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be critical for the ecological and environmental well-being of the area and it has been stated that inadequate justification for or mitigation of the Allocation Site has been made. The site in question is in fact mitigated in visual terms by being screened from any direction by substantial Trees and by virtue of being located on a sharp falling incline preventing any long view vistas. Those trees that are on the Site and protected by TPOs will remain and are valued in the landscape design. Allegations have also been made that these trees and those on adjacent land, are designated Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland but this is **not the case** and any assumptions regarding the acceptability of the Allocation on this basis are incorrect. Furthermore, the natural geological and topographical context of the foot of the site would also prevent any excessive depth of building line. The precedent set by the Springwood Road development (in close proximity) also creates a well-established development line. That development, although not connected directly to the Allocation Site, also protrudes into the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the north side of the Town.

7/ We believe that we can meet with the representatives of both the CPRE and the High Weald AoNB Unit and can illustrate on site how their fears can be fully allayed. The Inspector is also invited to make a site visit to witness the extraordinary suitability of this location.

The Heathfield Partnership has been in existence since 1995 and has managed to invest in excess of £1 million in the regeneration of the Market Town. It has enjoyed strong support throughout that time from a whole range of organisations, from the County, District and Parish Councils, The Chamber of Trade, the Rotary, the Community College, the Youth Centre Council, Churches Together of Heathfield and many other groups besides. In doing so it has brought about harmony of objectivity and collective achievement. It may be rare in today's Society that we have such common agreement on and support for such a site for Housing Development but here is such an example.

We would not want to see the lifeblood of the Town suffocated without any growth at all, common agreement on the basic principles of economics will testify to that and there are no other sites envisaged for further growth in the Town whatsoever. This development proposed by the Allocation, especially within the confines of this intended location, would fulfil that need and more importantly release some of the severe pressure of housing need within the Town. Affordable Housing to let and small accommodation market housing is what is in need. There is no call for 4/5 bedroomed housing. There are already many Family Homes in the community which retired couples, for example, would be happy to release onto the market were they able to downsize but remain within their familiar surrounds.

In conclusion, we would wish to see this site urgently re-examined as a proposed Modification at the earliest opportunity for all of the reasons outlined above.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Rupert Simmons
Chairman of the Board of The Heathfield Partnership Trust Ltd