

Strategy

Introduction

2.1 The Local Plan puts forward planning proposals and policies which seek to provide for a diverse range of environmental, economic and social interests. These can range, for example, from new industrial development in a town to help the local economy to the protection of habitat for wildlife in the countryside. The Plan's policies must strike a balance between these different and sometimes conflicting interests.

2.2 It is therefore important that the Plan puts forward a clear strategy with its main aims, objectives and targets. They will help to identify priorities and focus the Plan on the main land use issues concerning development. The aims and objectives are not part of the Plan's policies but form the basis for their preparation. The policies and proposals of the Plan seek to achieve its objectives.

2.3 The aims and objectives will also provide a basis for monitoring whether the Plan is achieving what it sets out to do. Monitoring and review will show whether policies need to be strengthened, maintained or changed. The key areas to be monitored are stated at the end of the relevant chapters.

2.4 This chapter looks at the issues, the strategy and its aims while the more specific objectives or targets are put forward in the respective topic, town and village chapters.

2.5 Before turning to the issues that the Plan addresses and the resultant strategy, it is appropriate to look briefly at the context set by national, regional and Structure Plan policies and consultations on the Plan.

Government Guidance

2.6 The Plan is being prepared in the context of Government guidance, principally through the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs). These provide national guidance on a wide range of matters including housing, industry and commerce, the rural economy, the countryside, wildlife, other environmental issues, sport and recreation, tourism and coastal planning. PPG12 provides the specific guidance on the format and content of Structure and Local Plans.

Regional Planning Guidance

2.7 Advice on regional planning is given to the Secretary of State for the Environment by the London

and South East Regional Planning Conference (SERPLAN). The Secretary of State endorses such guidance through the publication of Regional Planning Guidance.

2.8 The Department of the Environment published Regional Planning Guidance for the South East in March 1994. The guidance embodies three objectives: enhanced economic performance; sustainable development and environmental improvement; opportunity and choice. The guidance seeks to achieve an appropriate balance between these objectives.

2.9 It also emphasises the vital role of South East England in the development of the United Kingdom economy. It contains guidance reflecting the principles set out in the Environment White Paper 'This Common Inheritance' of September 1990 and 'Sustainable Development : the UK Strategy' published in January 1994. In particular, it develops the scope for coordinating land use and transport planning policies to meet environmental objectives and is concerned with protecting the quality of the environment both in urban and rural areas. It also continues the approach underpinning previous regional guidance on the balance for development between the west and the east of the region.

East Sussex County Structure Plan

2.10 Structure Plans are prepared by County Councils to provide an overall strategic framework for development within which Local Plans are prepared.

2.11 The East Sussex County Structure Plan 1991 was approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment in 1991. The current Structure Plan policies are for the period to 2001, but the County Council has embarked on a Review of the Plan looking ahead to 2011.

2.12 The Local Plan has been prepared so as to generally conform with the approved 1991 County Structure Plan and the Deposit Draft Replacement Structure Plan November 1996 for the period up to the year 2004.

1991 County Structure Plan

2.13 The approved Structure Plan recognises that the demand for housing from people wishing to move into East Sussex is greater than the County can accommodate within acceptable environmental limits. The strategy considers that the key factor in

determining future population levels and house building should be the availability of jobs.

2.14 The Structure Plan strategy is therefore one of striking a sustainable balance between the demands for housing, a reasonable expectation of the number of jobs and the protection of the environment. It looks to a package of measures to develop the County's economy and increase jobs, together with an amount of housebuilding equivalent to that experienced in the last fifteen years. More attention is paid to the housing and employment needs of local people.

2.15 The approach to transport aims to balance the requirements of transport users and the need for economic revitalisation with the protection and improvement of the environment. Improvements to strategic road and rail routes are sought together with measures in other areas to improve the environment.

2.16 The quality of the environment has long been recognised as a major asset of East Sussex which is worth protecting and enhancing for its own sake, as well as for its benefits as a leisure and tourism resource. An integral part of the strategy is a concern for the quality of the environment, both through conservation of the existing features and character and through the requirement for new development to respect these qualities and be of a high standard.

Deposit Draft Replacement Structure Plan 1996

2.17 The Deposit Draft Replacement Structure Plan continues the above mentioned strategy but looks ahead to the year 2011 with particular emphasis on an environmentally sustainable future and the improvement of the local economy.

2.18 In terms of housing provision, the Deposit Draft states that existing commitments across the County should meet the Regional Guidance figures up to the year 2006. Beyond that date the County Council considers further land will be required to meet the suggested guidance figures. The Council believes it can accommodate the proposed District housing provision required to the year 2006, some 6600 dwellings from 1991 to 2006. This is explained in Chapter 6.

2.19 However, the situation in housing and employment terms is less certain up to the year 2011. The County Council decided to hold an Examination in Public to hear objections and other representations that have been received on the policies and proposals in the Deposit Draft Replacement Structure Plan. This took place in Spring 1998, but it is unlikely that the Structure Plan will be finally approved before mid 1999. Consequently the Council has decided, in line

with Government advice, on a ten year plan period up to the year 2004 with a review of the Local Plan policies in the context of the new Structure Plan policies when they are finally approved.

Local Plan Consultations

2.20 During preparation of the Local Plan the Council has had careful regard to the representations it has received. The Draft Wealden Local Plan was published in September 1993 for public comment. Exhibitions and meetings were held in the area to help explain the Plan's policies and proposals. All the representations received, some 1200, were carefully considered and the Council made a number of changes which were incorporated into the Deposit Plan, published in January 1995. The objections and other representations on the policies and proposals in the Deposit Plan were carefully considered by the Council when further changes were made to the Plan prior to the Public Local Inquiry held from January to May 1996. Following the Inquiry and receipt of the Inspector's Report in March 1997, the Council published modifications to the Plan in January and July 1998 for further public comment.

THE PLAN'S STRATEGY

DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

2.21 The major issue for the Plan is the need to strike an appropriate balance between the demand for development for housing, employment, leisure and tourism with the conservation of the environmental quality and character of Wealden's countryside, towns and villages.

2.22 The quality of the natural and built environment that we enjoy should not be denied to future generations by allowing harmful development. The existing qualities should be sustained and enhanced where possible. Consideration must also be given to wider environmental concerns such as global warming, the consumption of non-renewable resources and energy conservation.

2.23 The Government's White Paper - 'This Common Inheritance' - looks to Local Planning Authorities to draw up plans taking environmental considerations comprehensively and consistently into account. At the same time, the development plans should make adequate provision for development and growth for homes, employment, and associated facilities such as schools and community facilities.

2.24 Conservation and development should not be seen as necessarily in conflict. Policies for land use should

weigh and reconcile priorities in the public interest. The development plan (Structure and Local Plans) has an essential role to play in achieving the appropriate balance by providing guidance and a framework for decisions rather than allowing arbitrary change.

AIM 1 *To strike an appropriate balance between the demand for development and the conservation of the environmental quality and character of the District.*

AIM 2 *To pursue sustainable development, having regard to the principles contained in Government guidance and the Council's own Environmental Strategies.*

QUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

2.25 The conservation and enhancement of the built and natural environment in the District will form a key part of the Plan's strategy. The Council wish to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment in which people live, work and spend their leisure time as well as creating an accessible environment for all persons including those with disabilities and special access requirements. Caring for the environment relates not only to the physical environment including countryside, towns and villages, but also to nature conservation, energy conservation and pollution, which have become increasingly important issues in recent years.

2.26 The Council will seek to ensure that the effects on the environment of any proposed development are acceptable and, where appropriate, that new development contributes to environmental improvements.

2.27 With regard to the built environment, there has been understandable public concern over 'town cramming' and inappropriate development. It is recognised that there is a wide diversity of character in the towns and villages that should be conserved and enhanced. It is clearly important to ensure that new development respects and harmonises with this established character and is in sympathy with its surroundings. Equally, the open spaces and gaps which contribute to this character should be maintained.

2.28 Turning to the rural environment, the Council believes it is essential to continue to restrain development that is not justified in the countryside, seeking to protect its high quality character, much of which is nationally recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Some small scale development will be justified in terms of agricultural diversification, the local economy, tourism and leisure activities as discussed later. However, any such development should be of an appropriate high standard

respecting the existing qualities of the rural environment.

2.29 Positive measures for landscape enhancement and management designed to improve the environmental quality and character should be sought, particularly with appropriate development proposals.

2.30 The District has a rich heritage of buildings listed as being of architectural or historic value, together with historic parks and areas of archaeological importance. It also has a number of important ecological areas. Assets such as these should be conserved and protected against harmful development.

AIM 3 *To maintain and enhance the quality of the environment, for all persons, seeking an appropriate high standard of development and positive measures for environmental improvements.*

AIM 4 *To place increased value on the need for new development to respect and harmonise with the character of existing development and the surrounding landscape.*

THE LOCATION OF DEVELOPMENT

2.31 Structure and Local Plan policies have sought to maintain the existing settlement pattern in the District by giving priority to locating development in the towns, generally restricting development in the rural areas, including the villages, and giving added protection to the designated areas of countryside significance and other vulnerable areas.

2.32 No fundamental reason can be seen to depart from the strategy of protecting the countryside from inappropriate development and maintaining the physical separation of countryside, towns and villages. The Plan will, through the use of 'development boundaries' as explained in Chapter 3, define where town and village policies end and countryside or rural policies apply.

2.33 The continuation of the settlement pattern will assist in the aim of energy conservation and the need to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by minimising the amount of travel by car compared with a policy for a more dispersed or scattered form of development.

AIM 5 *To maintain the existing settlement pattern in the District, generally restricting development in the rural area.*

LOCAL ECONOMY

2.34 The Council is keen to promote a healthy local economy which in turn contributes to the general well-being of the District. However, important as this aim is, it must not be at the expense of the environmental quality of the District.

2.35 There is likely to be a growth in Wealden's workforce of some 4,000 persons by 2004. Land and premises are allocated and available for business purposes which should accommodate the anticipated growth and provide further local employment opportunities for existing residents.

2.36 However, the issue is more than one of numbers. It is acknowledged there is a need to provide a greater diversity of local job opportunities, particularly in high technology, and to reduce unemployment and commuting. Efforts will continue to be made to provide a range of opportunities from a prestige, high technology business park to equally important small workshops for embryonic firms, often through the conversion of rural buildings.

2.37 Employment development should be well related to centres of population to serve the urban and rural areas. Business development is concentrated in towns and this should continue. Efforts must be made to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of the town centres. However, it is also important to serve the rural area through villages acting as local employment centres and the re-use of rural buildings in appropriate cases. The rural economy is considered later.

2.38 The Plan must also consider the differing employment needs within the District and the strong relationship with adjoining centres such as Tunbridge Wells and Eastbourne, in relation to existing commitments and in relation to Structure Plan policies and improving communications in the south.

2.39 Care must be taken in these efforts not to detract from the quality of the environment, which is a key attraction for those residing, working or looking to invest in the District. A balance must be struck between the employment needs of the area and the protection of the environment. To allow too much employment development would fuel the demand for further housing in the District, to the detriment of the natural and built environment.

AIM 6 *To encourage a prosperous local economy whilst recognising and maintaining the environmental qualities of the area.*

AIM 7 *To ensure an adequate supply of land and premises for business use and promote a range of job opportunities including 'high tech' industries.*

THE RURAL AREA

2.40 Wealden District is predominantly rural, with the small towns and villages providing the bulk of local employment and services for those residing in the District. Concern over the 'rural economy' relates to the changes in the agricultural climate, social changes and the general rise in unemployment in the early 1990's.

2.41 Whilst agriculture remains the dominant use of the countryside, the economy of the rural areas is becoming more diverse as less land and buildings are required for food production. Farmers and landowners, encouraged by Government, seek to diversify their operations to include new land uses and conversions of buildings to compensate for loss of income. If we wish the character and landscape quality of the attractive Wealden countryside to be maintained as we know it, other financial incentives such as the 'set aside scheme' will also be necessary for farmers.

2.42 New technology, communications and cleaner manufacturing processes have enabled a much wider range of businesses to locate in the countryside, primarily through the conversion of farm buildings. While this adds to local job opportunities, it is unlikely to help those leaving the land. The growth of leisure activities and tourism also impose more demands on the countryside and can provide alternative uses of land such as open farms or golf courses. Such demands can be difficult to balance with the main aim of protecting and enhancing the environmental quality of the Wealden landscape.

2.43 Increased personal mobility has enabled people to live in the countryside (including the villages) and to work in the towns. Equally, those living in towns are able to drive to new businesses in the countryside. The lack of 'affordable housing', public transport and other facilities compounds the view of a more affluent society living in the rural area. The Plan must look to policies to help the rural economy and to sustain and improve local employment opportunities and services.

AIM 8 *To assist the rural community through the promotion of new employment opportunities and the maintenance and improvement of local services in the rural areas.*

HOUSING

2.44 During the 1980's the Council had to make provision for a considerable increase in the supply of land for housing in order to meet the Structure Plan requirements as approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The land was allocated primarily in the towns and at Stone Cross. The total number of dwellings has been magnified by previously unidentified or 'windfall' sites coming forward. There

was, in April 1997, a commitment for some 1,640 dwellings in the District over the Plan period.

2.45 The Council has to maintain an adequate supply of housing land in accordance with the 1991 County Structure Plan requirement of some 8,500 dwellings in the period 1986 - 2001. In fact, the current high housing commitment together with housing completions since 1986 already meets and exceeds this figure to the extent that the emerging requirement in the 1996 Deposit Draft Replacement Structure Plan for some 6,600 dwellings up to 2006 should also be met. It is clear that, in numerical terms, no new major allocations of housing land are required in Wealden within the plan period.

2.46 However, it is recognised that the large housing commitment will need time to be assimilated into the towns and villages both in physical and social terms. Two key issues flow from this statement. Firstly, that the provision of services and community facilities keep pace with the new development - the Council will urge the appropriate authorities to achieve this goal. Secondly, new development should respect and harmonise with the character of the towns and villages and should not result in 'town cramming'.

2.47 The large housing commitment is not, in itself, helping those in real housing need, that is those persons on modest incomes who cannot compete in the private housing market. The provision of 'affordable housing' is also a key issue which the Council is addressing through the use of both housing and planning policy, although the granting of planning permission on 'exceptional sites' is most unlikely to meet all the true need.

AIM 9 To ensure an adequate and available supply of housing land to meet Government and Structure Plan requirements.

AIM 10 To seek and encourage the provision of affordable housing for those in local housing need.

MOVEMENT

2.48 This Plan is being prepared at a time when, along with increasing car ownership, there is greater public awareness of the environmental issues associated with road traffic, namely congestion, safety, pollution and landscape impact. Government guidance in PPG13 is also very clear that in preparing development plans, local authorities should aim to reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

2.49 Whilst supporting and encouraging planned highway improvements to reduce 'through traffic', help the economy and improve safety, the Council wish to see this increasingly supported by traffic management

measures, including 'traffic calming'. The latter can help create more pleasant and safer living environments by reducing traffic speed, giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists, and reducing pollution levels.

2.50 The Council supports the early implementation of the planned improvements to the A27/A259 South Coast trunk road which will cater for longer distance traffic and help the local economy. In addition, some improvements to the cross country A22 and A26 routes will be appropriate for safety and environmental reasons. The Council recognises the importance of road and rail transport to business.

2.51 Equally, the Council will support the maintenance and enhancement of public transport services, so vital for those without access to cars, particularly in the rural areas. There is increasing concern over the reduction in the Uckfield to London railway service, and the Council will continue to press for improvements such as the electrification of the line.

AIM 11 To provide a strategy for transport seeking to reduce the need to travel especially by car, whilst encouraging a safe, efficient and environmentally conscious system for the movement of goods and people.

AIM 12 To place increased value on environmental considerations in transport planning.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

2.52 Considerable public concern has been expressed over the issue as to whether the provision of services and community facilities keeps pace with development. The issue was mentioned above under 'Housing', but it relates to all forms of development.

2.53 The Council will seek to maintain and improve the level and choice of shopping facilities in the District to meet the needs of all sections of the community. Particular attention will be paid to the town and village centres.

2.54 The Council is keen to ensure that all the infrastructure and community facilities required by any development will be provided as part of that development by the appropriate public or private agencies. Infrastructure includes services such as education and health as well as roads, water supply and sewers. Local Plans enable the providers of such services to programme their own investments with more certainty.

2.55 Community facilities include open spaces, playing areas and indoor facilities. The Council will continue its policy of requiring major new developments to

provide for an appropriate level of such facilities in association with that development.

AIM 13 To ensure that all the works, services and community facilities required by development will be provided at the appropriate time.