

Heathfield

(Inset Map No.26)

Introduction

15.1 Heathfield is a small, mainly residential town lying in the heart of Wealden District, with a population of about 7,050 persons. It has an attractive elevated setting on one of the principal ridges crossing the High Weald. The surrounding countryside is all designated as being within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heathfield Park, a registered Historic Park, lies to the east of the town.

15.2 Heathfield has witnessed a considerable growth in housing, approaching a 50% increase throughout the 1980s, much of this in the form of estate development. Its role as a local service and employment centre has been strengthened by new shopping development in the town centre.

STRATEGY

15.3 The strategy for Heathfield needs to reflect the significant environmental constraints to further outward development of the town, the growth in housing to date and existing commitments, and the need for employment opportunities and community services to catch up with the housing development.

15.4 Heathfield is surrounded by the valued landscape of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, while the eastern half of Heathfield Park is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Together these designations act as significant environmental constraints against the outward expansion of the town. Heathfield's elevated setting provides fine long-distance views out into the surrounding countryside and towards the Sussex Downs to the south. It is also considered important that the existing pattern of development be maintained in order to prevent the possible coalescence of the town with the adjoining villages and to protect the countryside gaps that separate them.

15.5 It is believed that as with Wealden's other towns, a period of consolidation would be beneficial for the town to assimilate, both physically and socially, the past and committed development. Further significant new housing growth is not favoured, particularly in view of the environmental constraints, nor is it required to meet County Structure Plan housing provision.

15.6 This period of assimilation will provide time for the promotion of local employment, shopping and community services to maintain and strengthen Heathfield's role as a local centre. Land for business

activity should be brought forward in a planned manner.

15.7 The objectives of the Plan with regard to Heathfield can be defined as follows:-

(1) to conserve and enhance the landscape setting of the town;

(2) to maintain the important countryside gaps between the town and the surrounding villages;

(3) to maintain and enhance the function of the town as a local employment, shopping and service centre;

(4) to promote the viability and vitality of the town centre;

(5) to maintain and widen the range of community facilities and amenities.

15.8 This strategy is consistent with the County Structure Plan, which sees Heathfield's role as a local housing, employment, shopping and service centre being maintained and developed in line with the physical constraints imposed by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the need to allow for a reduced rate of housing development.

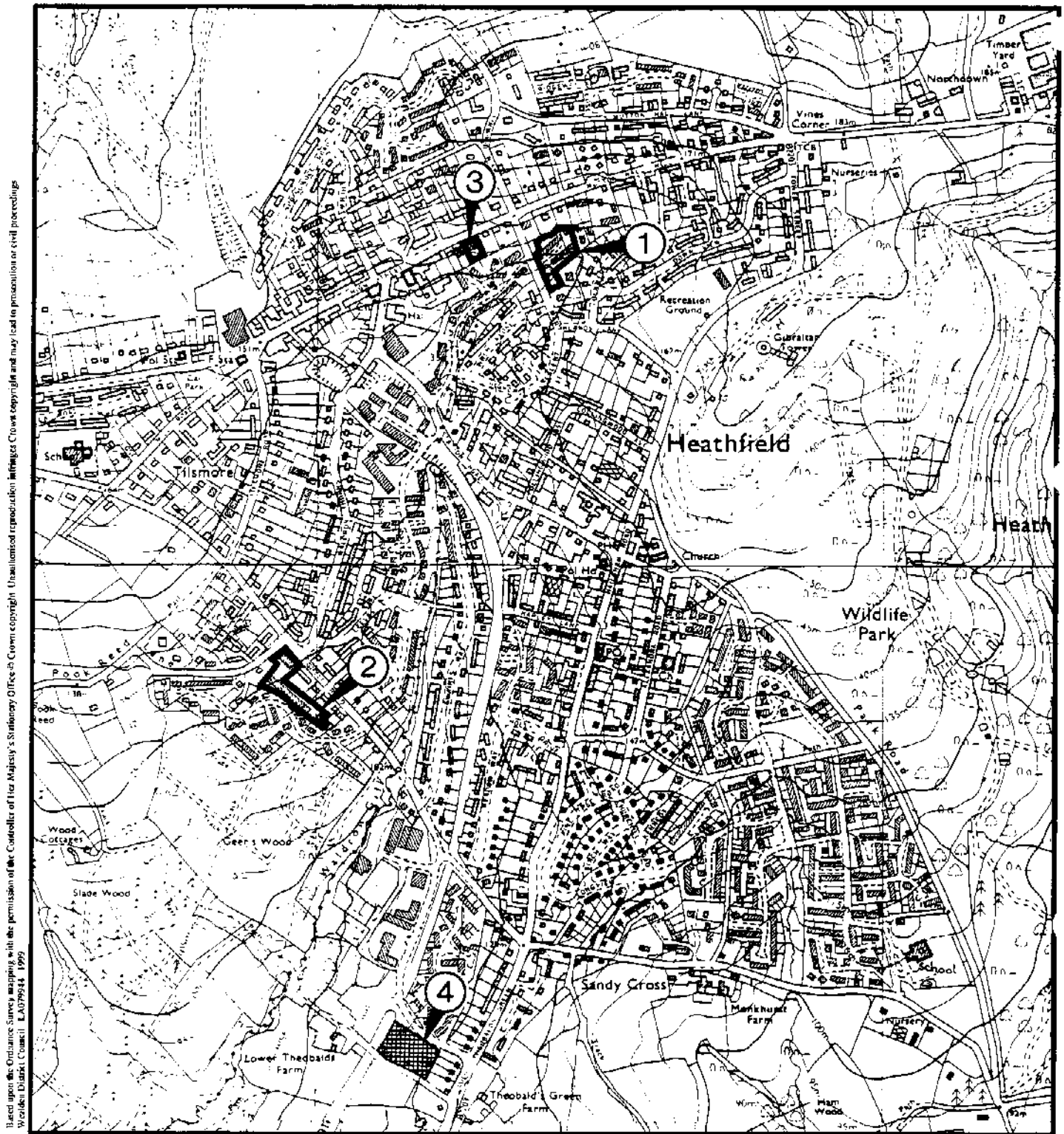
POPULATION AND HOUSING

15.9 The population of Heathfield is estimated to be 7,050 persons, which represents a 50% increase since 1981, mainly due to estate developments, particularly that at Green Lane. The population is expected to rise to around 7,250 by 2004. Heathfield has a generally younger population than that of the District as a whole, with proportionally less people over retirement age than throughout East Sussex.

Housing

15.10 The amount of land in Heathfield committed for development through planning permissions, together with unidentified sites which may come forward for development through infilling,

Housing Commitments in Heathfield (April 1997)



KEY

-  Sites with planning permission
-  Other available sites
- ② Ref No. (see Appendix 1)



Figure 10

This plan is for illustrative purposes only, and does not form part of the Proposals Map.

0 200 400 metres
1:10000

redevelopment and conversions within the built-up area, could result in the construction of over 150 new dwellings during the Plan period. Housing commitments for the larger sites in the town are shown in Figure 10. The future incidence of unidentified sites within the development boundary will depend on the extent to which proposals satisfy normal planning criteria and conform with the policies of the Plan.

15.11 This projected level of development represents a considerable reduction in the rate of growth that has taken place in the last decade or so. This is in accordance with the strategy for Heathfield, and particularly the environmental constraints to outward expansion, as outlined above. Therefore, and in view of the fact that there is no numerical requirement for additional residential development, it is not proposed to allocate any new areas of land for housing.

HE1 Within the Heathfield development boundary, as defined on the Proposals Map, new housing development will be permitted on undeveloped land, by infilling, by redevelopment and by the conversion of a building to residential use, providing that the proposals conform with all other relevant policies in the Plan.

EMPLOYMENT

15.12 Heathfield provides a significant focus of employment for the town and its surrounding rural area; it is the Plan's strategy to maintain and enhance this function. Business activity is largely concentrated in two recognised business areas, at Ghyll Road and at Browning Road off Station Road, with more commercial uses in the town centre and along Burwash Road.

15.13 An area of mixed commercial and light industrial uses along Station Road to the south-east of the Station Road Business Area also provides local employment opportunities, as does a much smaller enclave of light industrial activity based around the former Harley Works, on land to the west of the shops and residential properties in Hailsham Road.

15.14 There is potential for additional business employment in Heathfield mainly through the allocation which extends the Ghyll Road Business Area which accounts for virtually all of the 4,400m² of business floorspace commitments in 1997. There is also potential for additional floorspace through redevelopment and intensification of uses at Burwash Road. There is only limited potential for new development and extensions within the existing Business Areas and other employment sites.

15.15 In order to meet future demand for business land arising from workforce increases, reduced out

commuting and business requirements, it is necessary to ensure a range of development opportunities. The Ghyll Road allocation together with the further potential for mixed commercial and industrial uses at Burwash Road will provide a reasonable supply of future business floorspace. Together with focussing on the retention of the existing business areas, this avoids the need to allocate new 'greenfield' sites which, given the strong environmental constraints on the outward growth of the town, is consistent with the strategy for Heathfield.

Ghyll Road

15.16 A 1.85 hectares area of land at the southern end of the Ghyll Road Business Area is allocated for business purposes. The site boundaries are physically well defined, and on the western boundary, a Tree Preservation Order defines the extent of the woodland it is desired to conserve on the edge of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Any further outward expansion of development would intrude into adjoining farmland or woodland which are important to the rural setting of the town.

15.17 The protected trees are considered vital to the setting of the Business Area, and a woodland management plan will be sought to ensure their ongoing contribution to the environment, subject to any need for access to the site.

15.18 The potential site coverage of business development is limited somewhat by the steeply sloping ground and by a gas main and sewers crossing it. Notwithstanding these constraints, it is believed that the industrial development of the site could still contribute significantly to meeting business land needs over the Plan period. Furthermore, with careful attention to access, layout and design, including boundary landscaping, development should not conflict with local residential amenities. Business uses falling within Use Class B1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 will be acceptable. General Industrial uses falling within Use Class B2 will be considered against Policy BS12, whilst warehouse proposals (Use Class B8) will be considered against Policy BS13.

HE2 Land at Ghyll Road, as defined on the Proposals Map, is allocated for business purposes. Proposals for new business development will be permitted where the following criteria are met:

- (1) access should be taken from Ghyll Road or through the existing estate;**
- (2) screen landscaping should be provided on the southern and eastern boundaries;**

(3) the trees covered by the Tree Preservation Order will be retained subject to the requirement at (1) above;

(4) a woodland management plan identifying the short and long term needs of the woodland covered by the Tree Preservation Order referred to at (3) to the west of the site should be prepared and implemented to the satisfaction of the Council.

Burwash Road Commercial Area

15.19 Over a period of time, a well defined area of mainly commercial development has become established on the northern side of the A265 Burwash Road, about a quarter of a mile east of Heathfield. The mixed commercial nature of the area is regarded as an asset which complements the main industrial areas at Ghyll Road and Station Road. It is considered that future development should continue this role, as well as respect the area's prominent landscape location.

15.20 The protection of the countryside and landscape surrounding the existing commercial area is regarded as being of crucial importance. It lies within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, astride a principal ridge which affords distant views. Furthermore, it occupies a mid position between Heathfield and Broad Oak where Policy EN17, which seeks to protect the open countryside gaps between Heathfield and its adjacent villages, applies. Therefore, there is a fundamental environmental objection to the outward expansion of built development. Development to the south of the A265 would also be detrimental to the Heathfield Park Site of Special Scientific Interest and the Historic Park.

15.21 Industrial development principally for light industry and warehousing and storage uses through re-use of buildings or redevelopment is desirable to supplement provision elsewhere. The latter would take advantage of the access to the main road and complement the role of the two main business areas. Particular consideration should be given to the needs of local businesses.

15.22 Future uses may take advantage of the area's location on the A265, an important distributor road, at its junction with the B2096 Bexhill Road. Local roadside facilities, such as a petrol filling station, associated car sales, catering and overnight accommodation would be considered appropriate in principle.

15.23 Any proposals for large scale shopping development within the area will be considered against Policy SH9. It is recognised that there has been an element of retail sales associated with several of the commercial uses within the area, and this will be

permitted in future redevelopment. If necessary, conditions will be imposed to ensure that this use remains ancillary to the commercial use.

15.24 Any intensification or redevelopment within the existing area would need to have regard to the visual impact as well as traffic generation. Concerns about highway safety stem from the present form of road junction and turning traffic in the vicinity. Any substantial intensification of use within the area without the improvement and rationalisation of access arrangements would therefore be resisted.

15.25 Residential redevelopment would not be acceptable, as it would conflict with the prevailing commercial character of the area and, moreover, with the housing strategy for Heathfield which seeks to concentrate further housing growth within the existing built-up confines of the town.

15.26 The layout, design and external appearance of buildings, as well as landscaping, are critical considerations to ensure development fits in well with the surrounding landscape. Low profile buildings together with supplementary tree planting and landscaping would be appropriate in this ridge-top position. Additional screen planting is especially important on the western boundary in order to maintain the rural character and aspect of Newick Lane and on the northern and eastern boundaries and on the ridgeline. Furthermore, careful attention will need to be given to the use of external lighting to minimise the visual impact of the built form from the surrounding countryside at night time.

15.27 It is believed that a comprehensive approach to future development, whether by re-use or redevelopment, would help ensure a satisfactory rationalisation and improvement of access arrangements and an acceptable balance of land uses, including an enhanced element of industrial/storage activity, as well as other commercial uses appropriate to an out-of-town location.

HE3 The outward extension of the Burwash Road Commercial Area, as defined on the Proposals Map, will not be permitted.

Proposals for redevelopment or intensification within the Commercial Area may be permitted, particularly for uses within Classes B1 and B8 of the Use Classes Order 1987, including ancillary retail sales.

Road-side facilities such as a petrol filling station, associated car sales, catering and overnight accommodation, may be permitted.

In all cases the following criteria must be met:-

(1) the landscape quality, visual and other amenities of the locality should be protected and, wherever possible, enhanced, including by:-

(a) the retention of existing trees and hedges, with substantial additional planting along the external boundaries of the area and on the ridgeline;

(b) careful attention to siting, height and design of buildings, and external lighting, to minimise their visual impact from outside the site;

(2) a rationalisation and improvement of access arrangements to the satisfaction of the Council.

DEVELOPMENT BOUNDARY

15.28 In the light of the strategy and objectives for Heathfield outlined above, the development boundary seeks to maintain the well consolidated form of the town and protect its sensitive High Weald rural setting. It is considered particularly important to protect the countryside gaps between the built-up area of the town and the surrounding villages of Cross-in-Hand, Broad Oak, Maynards Green and Old Heathfield. Any pressures for development which could lead to the coalescence of the town with these villages will be firmly resisted in accordance with Policy EN17 in Chapter 4.

15.29 To the north of the built-up edge of the town, the land slopes away into the Rother Valley and to the east the town abuts Heathfield Park. Beyond the southern and western edges of the town, the land generally falls away into the undulating farmland and countryside of the High Weald. The development boundary recognises the existing pattern of development. However, it seeks to prevent outward encroachment into these sensitive areas of surrounding countryside and excludes some areas of development on the fringes of the town which the Council considers relate more to the rural character of the adjoining countryside. In a number of places it excludes the full depth of longer rear curtilages so as to prevent inappropriate backland development.

15.30 The development boundary generally follows the line of existing development on the northern edge of the town. The Council considers that any outward encroachment of development onto the steep wooded slope would be inappropriate and visually intrusive. To the east, the development boundary follows the built-up edge to the town where it adjoins Heathfield Park. The Council considers that any development beyond

Park Road would be detrimental to the character and setting of the Park and should be firmly resisted.

15.31 The Parkside Primary School has been included within the development boundary but the land immediately adjoining it to the south is excluded. The Council considers this to be more in keeping with the rural character of the gently undulating landscape beyond Sandy Cross Lane. The rural character of the lane itself is emphasised by its narrowness, and the mature tree cover and hedgerows. It therefore forms a well defined southerly edge to development beyond which any intensification of development would not be appropriate.

15.32 To the south-west, the development boundary wraps around the edge of existing development around Theobalds Green and the Ghyll Road Business Area, including the land allocated for business purposes at its southern end (Policy HE2). Beyond the Business Area lies the mature woodland of Geer's wood and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

15.33 To the north-west of the Business Area, the development boundary follows the clearly defined edge of the Geers Wood Estate and the well established area of residential development to the north of Pook Reed Lane. Any further outward encroachment of development would be detrimental to the attractive ghyll and woodland setting beyond.

15.34 Sheepsetting Lane and the A267 both provide clear physical boundaries to further development on the north-western edge of the town. The development boundary excludes the recreation ground and community buildings, and the large detached properties south of Sheepsetting Lane opposite the Cross-in-Hand Primary School, which are set within spacious grounds. Here the mature landscape and tree cover contribute to the more rural character and it is considered that any intensification of development within this fringe area would be detrimental to its character and inappropriate to its High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation.

TRANSPORT

15.35 The A265 is the principal route through the town centre, passing along the High Street and Burwash Road. It carries a heavy volume of east-west moving traffic directly through the town centre which contributes to the traffic congestion within the High Street. It joins the A267 at a junction to the east of Cross-in-Hand. The B2203 Hailsham Road is a well used local route and provides a direct link between Heathfield and Maynards Green and Horam to the south. It is acknowledged that there are difficulties at several junctions in and around Heathfield. In particular, the Council is concerned about the A265/A267 junction on the western edge of

Heathfield. At this stage, there is no programme for the implementation of any improvement to this junction by the Highway Authority.

TOWN CENTRE

15.36 Heathfield has an important role as a local service centre, providing a range of facilities for a wide catchment, serving the needs of the residents of the town as well as those of the surrounding villages and rural area. The town centre is the focus of shopping and business activity, providing mainly for the purchase of day to day convenience goods together with local services, and is also an important source of local employment. The Council is committed to maintaining and improving the vitality and viability of the town centre.

15.37 A main shopping area has been defined for Heathfield which provides an identifiable focus for retail activity in the town within which new and improved facilities will be encouraged in accordance with Policy SH2 in Chapter 8; the boundary is shown on the Proposals Map Inset No.26. The extent of the main shopping area recognises well established and more recent retail development. This includes a large foodstore at the western end of the High Street which followed an allocation in the Draft Plan in order to strengthen the town's shopping and service centre role.

15.38 There are over 300 off-street parking spaces in Heathfield on four public car parks. There is a high level of use of those car parks close to the town centre, and there may be a need to review management to ensure the most effective use of central and peripheral car parks. However, the overall provision of spaces within the town is adequate, particularly taking account of the additional spaces provided to serve the new supermarket and those on-street spaces on the southern side of the High Street.

15.39 A package of measures to revitalise Heathfield is being promoted by The Heathfield Partnership, a joint initiative by the public, private and voluntary sectors. In particular, it addresses town centre environmental improvements in relation to surface treatment, amenity areas, parking areas, signage and landscaping, as well as to economic schemes, including tourism promotion. The Council supports this venture in line with its town regeneration strategy and retail objectives.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Local Shopping

15.40 Outside the town centre, there is a small, well-established shopping sub-centre in Hailsham Road comprising a number of small shops and businesses of

both general and specialist nature. On-street parking on both sides of Hailsham Road, together with the high level of through traffic, leads to congestion at times. On the basis of the clear lack of an off-street parking facility and the effect on local amenities and road safety which would result from further commercial activities, it is unlikely that the Council would be able to support any intensification of shopping development along Hailsham Road in the light of the criteria of Policy SH7 in Chapter 8.

Education

15.41 Heathfield is served by four primary schools which are not expected to have any difficulties in accommodating additional pupil numbers arising from the housing commitment throughout the Plan period. The Heathfield Community College serves the town for secondary education as well as taking pupils from the surrounding villages.

Leisure and Recreation

15.42 There are three formal recreation grounds in and within easy reach of Heathfield. However, the present level of playing pitch provision in the town itself falls below the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) recommended minimum standards, as set out in Chapter 11. If the additional facilities at Sheepsetting Lane which are proposed by the Parish Council are taken into account, together with other nearby Parish Council facilities at Broad Oak, Punnetts Town, Old Heathfield and Waldron, the overall level of provision is raised closer to the required standard. The Parish Council also intends providing additional formal recreational facilities when further funding is available. The level of provision of informal children's play space within housing areas in the town is low and, in 1994, it fell below the recommended levels of the NPFA. However, provision has since been boosted by the two amenity areas on the Green Lane housing development. In terms of indoor provision, a new sports facility has recently opened adjacent to Heathfield Community College for the joint use of the College and the public.

15.43 The disused railway between Heathfield and Polegate now forms the Cuckoo Trail, an important recreational asset for the town. The Council, in association with Sustrans Ltd, is working with the County Council and local Parish Councils to extend the Trail northwards to the Kent border and southwards to Eastbourne.

HEATHFIELD PARK

15.44 Heathfield Park is a large well-wooded parkland situated at the eastern edge of the town wholly within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It

is a registered Historic Park comprising areas of ancient woodland, trees being protected by a Tree Preservation Order. The area of a steep ghyll cutting through the Park and land east of it has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Gibraltar Tower, a scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade II* listed building in the north-west of the Park is a prominent feature in the landscape. Indeed, the elevated position of the Park itself and its largely wooded appearance emphasise its landscape importance within the High Weald and its value to the setting of the town and nearby villages.

15.45 It is considered very important to conserve and enhance these visual, physical, historic and nature conservation qualities of Heathfield Park. It is considered that the Plan's existing leisure and tourism policies together with those relating to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, historic parks, ancient woodlands, SSSIs, historic buildings, as well as public access improvements, provide an appropriate framework for the consideration of 'development' within Heathfield Park.

Implementation

15.46 The implementation of policies HE1 to HE3 inclusive will be the responsibility of the Council, primarily through its development control function.