

Uckfield

(Inset Map No.53 - Mapsheet)

Introduction

17.1 Uckfield is one of the larger settlements in the District with a population of around 13,000. It is situated some seven miles south of Crowborough within the attractive, undulating countryside of the Low Weald, and surrounded by small woodlands, hedgerows and open farmland. The town serves as a local employment centre providing a range of jobs in manufacturing and services, and as a shopping centre for both its residents and those in the surrounding rural area.

17.2 Uckfield has experienced significant growth over the last decade or so. Large scale housing developments have been completed which has resulted in the population growing by over a third since 1981.

STRATEGY

17.3 The strategy for Uckfield recognises the significant rate of development and change that has taken place in the town in recent years. There is, in addition, still a large commitment of land for housing development in the town which should cater for the needs of existing and future residents. Furthermore, there is no numerical requirement to release further areas of land for residential development in order to meet County Structure Plan housing provision. The Council therefore considers that the opportunity should be taken for Uckfield to assimilate, both physically and socially, past development and further development that is committed. Furthermore, a period of consolidation is considered important in order to enable the necessary provision of community services for the new population to take place.

17.4 There are also considered to be significant environmental constraints to the outward expansion of the town. Further development would encroach onto areas of attractive countryside and would be detrimental to the rural setting of the town. This would be particularly intrusive in the open landscape to the south west. Development would also conflict with the Plan's policies to protect the important gap between Uckfield and the villages of Maresfield and Five Ash Down.

17.5 For the above reasons, further expansion of Uckfield to facilitate significant growth is not favoured by the Council and no new allocations of housing or business land are proposed. On this basis, the Council's strategy for Uckfield is to provide for a lower rate of development than over the past decade, with increased

emphasis on meeting local housing and employment needs and securing an appropriate level of community services and facilities. Priority will be given to maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the town centre by encouraging new investment, creating a safe and attractive shopping environment, and improving accessibility.

17.6 In relation to this strategy, the objectives are:-

(1) to protect the landscape setting of the town and the important countryside gaps between the town and surrounding villages;

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

(3) to provide for a broad range of new employment opportunities related to the anticipated needs of existing and future residents;

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

(5) to maintain and encourage an improvement in the availability of local services and community facilities.

17.7 The Council's strategy for Uckfield is consistent with the County Structure Plan which states that the role of the town as a local housing, employment, shopping and services centre will be maintained and developed.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

17.8 The population of Uckfield is estimated to be 13,000 persons. This figure is expected to rise to around 13,350 by 2004. Population and housing statistics for Uckfield are contained in Appendix 1.

Housing Policy

17.9 The amount of land in Uckfield committed for development with planning permission for housing, together with unidentified sites which may come forward for development through infilling, redevelopment and conversions within the built up area could result in the construction of around 330 new dwellings during the Plan period. Commitments are illustrated in Figure 13. 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 in the Plan.

17.10 This overall level of housing provision represents a marked reduction in the previously high rate of development that has taken place over the past decade or so in line with planning policy. However, in view of the environmental constraints to outward expansion and the fact there is no numerical requirement for additional housing development, the Council considers the release of further land to be inappropriate and unnecessary.

UC1 Within the Uckfield development boundary, as defined on the Proposals Map, new housing development will be permitted on undeveloped land, by infilling, by redevelopment and by conversion of a building to residential use, providing that the proposals conform with all other relevant policies in the Plan.

EMPLOYMENT

Existing Situation

17.11 In recent years Uckfield has attracted a significant amount of industrial and commercial investment and now provides a wide range of jobs in manufacturing and services. The majority of activity is contained on the two main business areas at Bellbrook and Ridgewood, together with a variety of businesses in the town centre. Policies for uses appropriate within these business areas are contained in Chapter 7.

17.12 To the north-west of the town, there is a proposal for a new prestige high-tech office and business park which could result in the provision of over 1,000 jobs. The low density, landscaped character of the development would complement the more traditional business areas in Uckfield. The development would provide a valuable opportunity to attract 'high quality' employment to the District and the Uckfield area in particular, and would make an important contribution to meeting the employment needs of Uckfield residents.

Business Land

17.13 Over the Plan period, in order to provide for the increase in the local workforce as well as to improve the balance between homes and jobs and help revitalise the town, additional business floorspace will be required. However, potential exists through the development of land within the town with planning permission on the Bellbrook Business Area. Additional business floorspace is available in vacant premises in the town. On this basis, in order to meet local employment needs, there is at present no apparent

numerical requirement to release new areas of land for business development.

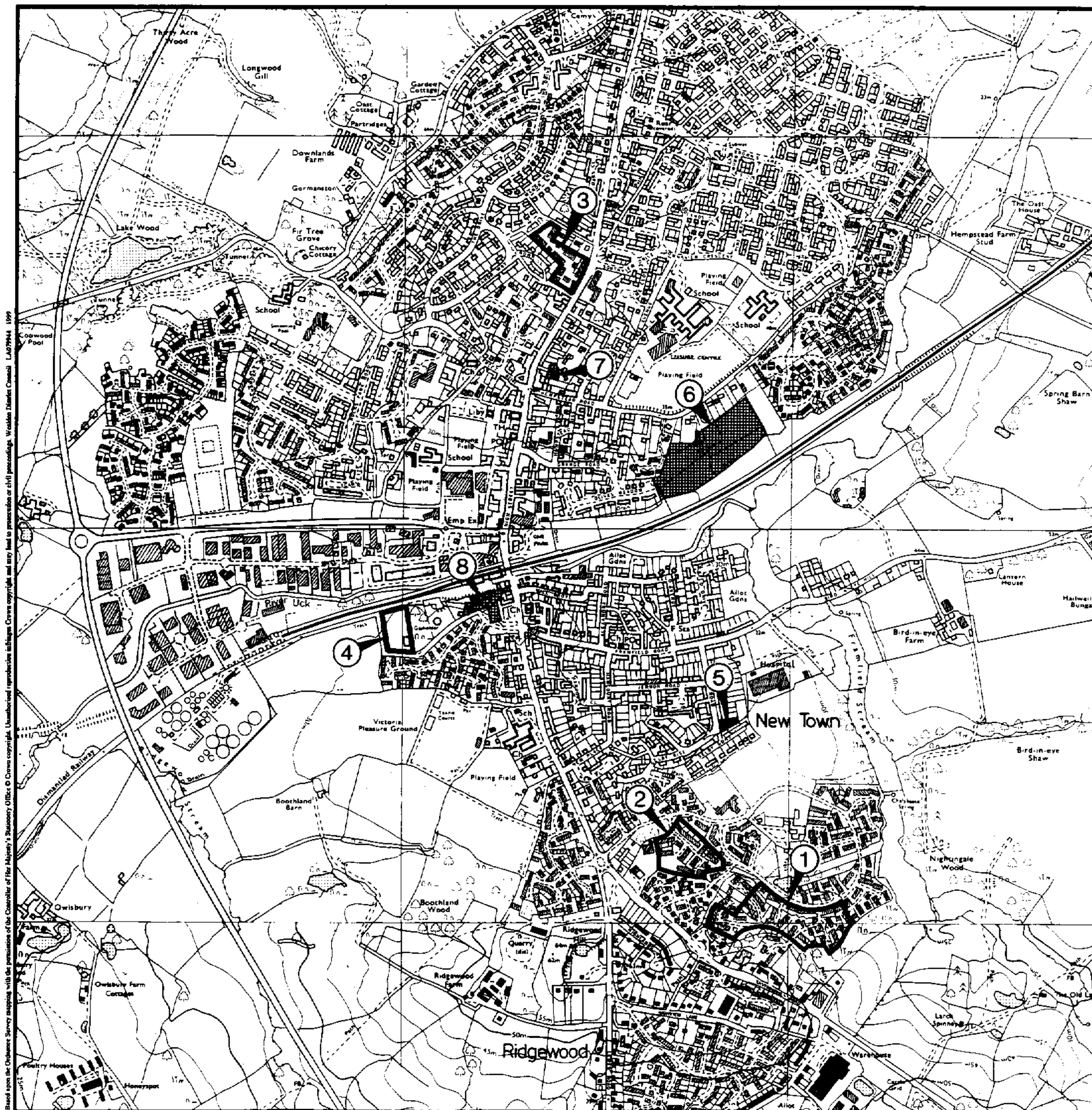
17.14 Careful consideration has been given to allocating additional business land in order to promote further development over and above existing commitments. However, in the light of the assessment of employment needs and the environmental constraints that exist for expanding either Bellbrook or Ridgewood Business Areas, or indeed that apply to development on other greenfield sites around the town, the Local Plan makes no new allocations of business land.

17.15 The Council recognises that this implies a reduced rate of business development over the Plan period when compared to that which has taken place over recent years. However, this reflected the previous strategy for growth and, in contrast, both Structure and Local Plan strategies for Uckfield focus on meeting local needs and assimilating the commitment that exists. Furthermore, the release of new areas of land for employment purposes could fuel the demand for additional housing development over and above that already committed. It should also be recognised that new business development in Crowborough for which there is a relatively high level of commitment will serve a wide area and could potentially meet some of the employment needs of Uckfield and North Wealden residents.

DEVELOPMENT BOUNDARY

17.16 The development boundary for Uckfield seeks to conserve the rural setting of the town and prevent outward encroachment of development into the attractive surrounding countryside which would be intrusive on the landscape and detrimental to its character. The development boundary follows existing development, includes current housing and industrial commitments, but excludes some peripheral areas in order to prevent an intensification of development that would be detrimental to their loose-knit, more rural character and an extension of ribbon development along the roads into the town.

Housing Commitments in Uckfield (April 1997)



KEY

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

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

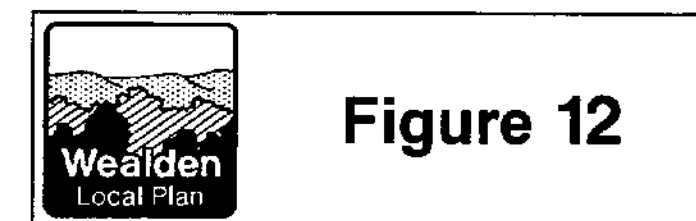


Figure 12

0 200 400 metres

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17.17 In the northern part of the town, the development boundary follows Snatts Road and the edge of Manor Park but excludes land and buildings beyond where there is a distinct change to a more rural character, emphasised by Views Wood, Paygate Wood and other areas of attractive woodland which are prominent in the landscape. Properties at Ringles Cross have been excluded in order to prevent an intensification of development which would be detrimental to the more loose-knit rural character. Furthermore, it is considered particularly important to resist inappropriate development within the area between Uckfield and the villages of Maresfield and Five Ash Down in order to prevent a possible coalescence of the settlements. A policy to protect the gaps between the development boundaries of these settlements is contained in Chapter 4.

17.18 Along the eastern edge of the town, the development boundary follows the curtilages of existing properties and includes the committed housing sites south of Hempstead Road and at Harlands Farm, together with the new community hospital. However, land within the floodplain of the River Uck and Framfield Stream, the wider areas of farmland and woodland to the east, and the small ribbon of properties along Bird-in-Eye Hill have been excluded to prevent an outward encroachment of development into an essentially rural landscape.

17.19 To the south, in the Ridgewood area, New Road marks a notable change in character between the relatively compact built-up area and the more rural character created by the wooded grounds of Ridgewood House, the recreation ground, allotment gardens and countryside beyond. For these reasons the development boundary follows New Road, includes the business area, but excludes adjoining land where it is considered that new development would be intrusive on the landscape and detrimental to its rural character. To the west of Lewes Road the development boundary excludes existing development in order to prevent an intensification which would be detrimental to its more loose-knit character.

17.20 Along the western edge of the town the development boundary generally follows the edge of the built-up area in order to prevent an outward encroachment of development into existing and proposed buffer and recreational areas and into the countryside beyond. To the south of Bell Farm Road, the development boundary follows the edge of Bellbrook Business Area but excludes an area of land that is proposed for public open space. Further south the landscape is very open and exposed to long distance views from the bypass and beyond, and has therefore been excluded from the development boundary in order to prevent intrusive development. To the north of Bell Farm Road the development boundary includes the new housing estate west of Rocks Park but excludes the public parkland further west and the buildings and grounds of Buckswood Grange School, where the

mature tree cover creates a distinctly rural character on the fringe of the town. Further north, areas of mature woodland are prominent features in the landscape and have therefore been excluded from the development boundary.

TRANSPORT

17.21 Uckfield is located at the confluence of the A22 (London to Eastbourne) and A26 (Maidstone to Newhaven) roads. The A26, A22 and A272 west of Maresfield are classified as primary routes. These all serve to link the towns to the main motorway and trunk road network.

17.22 In the town centre, some congestion occurs along the High Street and Bell Farm Road, particularly at peak times. However, since the bypass opened, the town centre has benefited from the removal of through traffic, in particular heavy goods vehicles.

17.23 The possibility of closing part of the High Street to vehicular traffic has been carefully considered, but is not a practical option as the High Street remains the principal route for local traffic travelling between the northern and southern parts of the town and for traffic using the town centre.

17.24 Within the Harlands Farm residential development, provision has been made for the distributor road to be continued towards Bird-in-Eye Hill should this be needed in the future. However, at present, such a link road does not form a proposal in the Local Plan.

TOWN CENTRE

17.25 The town centre is the commercial heart of Uckfield, with a variety of shops, offices and other businesses providing services and employment opportunities for the town and its surrounding area. It is also the location for a number of community facilities including the Civic Centre and the Library.

17.26 The commercial town centre has developed in a linear form along the High Street (the former A22) and comprises a number of areas with different shopping and business characteristics. The main shopping area has developed between the cinema in the north and the railway in the south. More recently the focus of shopping activity has shifted southwards as a number of shopping developments have taken place, namely Bell Walk and the supermarket south of Luxford Field.

Main Shopping Area

17.27 A main shopping area has been defined in order to provide an identifiable focus for shopping within which increased retail activity can take place by new development, redevelopment of existing floorspace and the more efficient use of existing floorspace and land. The general policies for shopping and business activities which may be permitted within the main shopping area are all contained in Chapter 8.

17.28 The main shopping area has been carefully defined having regard to the extent of the existing shopping centre, the nature and character of land uses contiguous with it, and any future requirements for new shopping facilities. On this basis, the main shopping area represents a clear policy statement that further shopping proposals outside the defined area will normally be resisted.

17.29 In defining the main shopping area for Uckfield, the Council has given careful consideration to the potential of the town centre to accommodate a new shopping development. Although a significant increase in demand for new retail floorspace in the town centre may not occur over the Plan period, the Council considers it important to identify locations for new development in order to provide a framework for further investment. After a careful assessment of the opportunities for new shopping development within or on the fringes of the town centre, the area considered to offer the greatest potential for a comprehensive development scheme is the area to the east of the High Street opposite its junction with Bell Farm Road. Elsewhere in the town centre, opportunities are considered to be far more limited, being constrained by existing development, the Conservation Area and the desire to broaden rather than further elongate shopping development.

17.30 The site referred to above currently comprises one supermarket and a number of unit shops fronting the High Street with principally residential use at upper floor levels, an area of public car parking and access road which also serves the adjoining office development. An area of land allocated for public car parking in the Uckfield Local Plan abuts the eastern boundary. The Council believes the area could accommodate a comprehensive redevelopment for shopping purposes, subject to the careful consideration of the traffic implications of such a proposal. Development could accommodate a new larger food supermarket together with a number of unit shops at ground floor level. Above ground floor level, the provision of residential accommodation and office accommodation would be encouraged. Proposals for redevelopment will depend on market demand and the co-operation of the landowners concerned.

Secondary Shopping Areas

17.31 The commercial frontages to the High Street outside the main shopping area have a mixed use of

shops, services, offices, restaurants, garages and public houses. Many of the shops are of a specialist nature and several have changed to non-retail use in recent years.

17.32 These shops and other businesses fronting the High Street north of the Town Hall and south of the railway perform an important role as secondary shopping areas, complementary to the main shopping area. It is considered that this function should be maintained but a significant expansion of shopping uses resisted in view of the policy to concentrate new shopping floorspace in the main shopping area. In these areas, on the edge of the main shopping area, new retail proposals will also be considered under Policy SH11.

17.33 Small scale proposals for office use, financial and professional services as well as other services appropriate to a town centre may be acceptable subject to access, parking and amenity considerations. The reference to Use Classes in the following policy relates to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 - see Appendix 7.

UC2 The function of the areas north of the Town Hall and south of the railway as secondary shopping areas, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be maintained. Major expansion of shopping uses within Use Class A1 will not be permitted, although small scale extensions to existing premises may be acceptable. Proposals for small scale development, extensions and changes of use of existing premises to uses within Use Class A2 (Financial and Professional Services), A3 (Food and Drink) and B1 (Business) will be permitted.

Former Railway Station Site

17.34 The former railway station site is located on the southern edge of the town centre and is vacant following construction of the new railway station to the east of the High Street. The site is located within the development boundary, on the edge of the main shopping area, and a wide range of uses may be appropriate where they accord with the policies in the Local Plan.

17.35 The former railway station buildings themselves are part of the town's heritage and their attractive Victorian architecture makes an important contribution to the character of the southern part of the town centre. In accordance with the policies which aim to conserve the built environment, the retention, refurbishment and conversion of the buildings for alternative uses will be sought by the Council. Whilst re-instatement of a railway station use in association with re-opening of the Uckfield to Lewes line remains a long term possibility, as discussed in Chapter 9, additional uses could also be accommodated in the buildings.

17.36 Within the site, appropriate measures will need to be taken to restrict development which would significantly prejudice reinstatement of the former Uckfield to Lewes railway line, as required by Structure Plan and Local Plan policies.

17.37 Use of the existing access off the High Street to serve new development on the site would not be supported by the Highway Authority due primarily to poor visibility in a southerly direction. The alternative of access from Bell Lane to the north would involve bridging the River Uck and would need to allow for reinstatement of the former railway line and provide for a level crossing at a later date. Access from Bridge Farm Road to the south is constrained by the change in levels down to the station site and the likely impact of traffic on a residential area and on the junction with the High Street. Development proposals would need to consider the access constraints in detail in consultation with the Council and the Highway Authority.

17.38 Provision for safe and convenient pedestrian access should be made through the site from the High Street which will enable the proposed River Walk (Policy UC8) to be continued through the town centre towards the bypass.

17.39 Development proposals should be prepared on a comprehensive basis and be of a design to reflect and complement the architecture of the existing railway station buildings where appropriate. Further guidance will be prepared by the Council to set out more fully the development issues and include guidance based on the general policies in the Plan.

High Street, New Town

17.40 Along the High Street between Framfield Road and New Place, a number of the large Victorian properties have been converted to residential flats in recent years. The area also has potential to further enhance opportunities for small scale office development on the periphery of the town centre.

17.41 Several of the properties in the area are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest and many others, by reason of their age and architectural style, make an important contribution to the character of the area which is prominent on the approach to the town centre. Whilst the Council considers that residential flats and office uses are appropriate in this area, in accordance with the Plan's policies to conserve the quality of the built environment, a presumption in favour of redevelopment is no longer considered appropriate. The Council will normally resist redevelopment within the area unless there are structural or other reasons which would justify redevelopment or the building does not possess the necessary character to warrant its retention.

UC3 Within the area between Framfield Road and New Place, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for the conversion of properties for office use or residential flats will be permitted.

Land north of Bell Farm Road

17.42 The County Council has closed the fire station which was situated within a residential area at Keld Avenue. Planning permission was granted for a new facility in Bell Farm Road which has now been built and is fully operational.

Elsewhere in the Town Centre

17.43 Outside the areas defined above, the remaining parts of the town centre within the inset map area comprise primarily residential properties (including housing commitments), public open space and public car parking. It is considered likely and appropriate that these uses would remain undisturbed, although small scale development proposals may be appropriate where they conform with normal planning criteria and the policies in the Plan.

Car Parking

17.44 There are currently some 855 public car parking spaces in Uckfield town centre. The car parks at Luxford Field, the supermarket off Bell Lane and at Bell Walk operate at near capacity during peak periods but spare capacity exists elsewhere, mainly at the 'Somerfield' car park.

17.45 Over the Plan period it is anticipated that extra car parking spaces will be needed in view of the projected growth in population and the likely increase in car ownership levels. An extension to the existing car park at the rear of the 'Somerfield' supermarket is proposed which could accommodate some 150 spaces. The land in question is well related to existing shopping facilities in the High Street and adjoins the area which the Council believes could accommodate a shopping redevelopment. The additional car parking could be implemented as part of redevelopment proposals or alternatively, the Council could seek to implement the proposal if adequate resources were available.

UC4 Land east of the existing 'Somerfield' car park is allocated for public car parking.

OTHER SHOPPING FACILITIES

17.46 Outside the town centre a number of local shops and services are located in a neighbourhood centre at

Framfield Road and a DIY retail warehouse has opened on the Bellbrook Business Area.

Framfield Road

17.47 Framfield Road provides shopping facilities and services for the daily or casual needs of local residents and passing trade as well as containing a number of more specialist shops. It is also the location for a number of industrial and commercial uses, including factories and builders' merchants, and it provides access for the new community hospital at its eastern end. The commercial uses are interspersed with many residential properties along its entire length.

17.48 Framfield Road is classified as the B2102 and is a busy cross-country route linking the town with the A275 at Cross-in-Hand via the villages of Framfield and Blackboys. There are on-street parking controls along its northern side in order to aid the free flow of traffic. The use of Framfield Road by through traffic adds to the problems of congestion and road safety caused by a general lack of off-street parking and servicing provision for both residential and commercial properties. The problems of congestion and road safety have a detrimental effect on the amenity of the area, particularly for local residents.

17.49 Proposals for new shopping facilities within or contiguous with neighbourhood centres will be considered in the light of Policy SH7. However, the Council is concerned that further development for shopping or other commercial purposes could add to the problem of traffic congestion with the resulting deterioration in residential amenity. Limiting further traffic congestion is also considered essential to ensure safe and convenient access is available for emergency vehicles travelling to and from the Fire Station, and the new hospital and ambulance station.

17.50 Careful consideration has been given to constructing a public off-street car park, but in view of the dispersed nature of houses and commercial premises along the road, it is felt unlikely that a single car park would significantly improve the situation. On this basis, the high cost of constructing such a car park, where land acquisition would have to reflect a commercial or residential value, could not be justified. In view of the limited opportunities available to improve the current situation, the Council will ensure that development proposals that result in a material increase in traffic generation along Framfield Road or in further on-street parking and servicing are normally resisted. Development proposals will be considered in the light of Policy SH8 and the more restrictive policy for Framfield Road.

UC5 Development proposals which result in a material increase in traffic generation or any increase in on-street parking or on-street

servicing along Framfield Road, as defined on the Proposals Map, will not be permitted.

Retail Warehousing

17.51 The Council's policies give priority to investment in Uckfield town centre and include policies for new shopping development, as set out earlier in this Chapter. In line with the District-wide policies set out in Chapter 8, the Council considers that some provision for non-food retail warehousing outside the town centre is appropriate but only on a scale that would complement the role of the town centre. At present, there is a small DIY store of 900 square metres on the Bellbrook business area occupying a former industrial unit together with some ancillary retailing in other premises

17.52 Some further provision outside the town centre on Bellbrook business area is therefore considered appropriate, particularly in view of its good access to the A26 via Bell Farm Road and the availability of suitable land and premises. Such provision could be achieved either by new development or the refurbishment of existing buildings.

17.53 Within the Bellbrook business area, in addition to the provision already made for the DIY store, it is considered that some 2,500 square metres of additional non-food retail floorspace would be appropriate which, with the required access for car parking, servicing and landscaping, could result in about 0.6 hectare within the industrial estate being developed.

UC6 Proposals for non-food retail warehouse development of up to a maximum of 2,500 square metres of gross floorspace within the Bellbrook business area, as defined on the Proposals Map, will be permitted when the criteria in Policy SH9 are met.

17.54 Over and above this provision, further proposals for retail warehousing and other shopping facilities outside the town centre will be considered in the light of Policy SH9 where a particularly strong case should be made and a number of specific criteria met.

CONSERVATION

17.55 The historic centre of Uckfield around the northern part of the High Street contains a concentration of buildings listed as being of special architectural or historic interest. The special architectural and historic character of this part of the town has been recognised by its designation as a Conservation Area, the extent of which is shown on the Inset Maps. After careful consideration, the Council has extended the existing Conservation Area. The

Council attaches particular importance to the control of development in Conservation Areas and development affecting listed buildings, and District Wide policies are put forward in Chapter 4.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Education

17.56 There are six primary schools serving the Uckfield area. Secondary education for the town and surrounding villages is provided by the Uckfield Community College. The County Council considers that the expected increase in secondary school pupils over the Plan period will require extensions to be built to the college.

Community Facilities

17.57 The Utopia Leisure Centre offers a range of indoor recreational facilities, whilst the main outdoor facilities are at the Victoria Pleasure Ground, the New Road Recreation Ground at Ridgewood, Hempstead Lane, Luxford Field, New Barn Farm and at West Park. Outdoor playing space in the town is currently below the minimum standard recommended by the National Playing Fields Association as discussed in Chapter 11. The vast majority of existing provision is in the form of playing pitches for youth and adult use and the level of provision of children's play space is well below the recommended standard.

17.58 In the light of this assessment and the projected population growth, it is important that further provision is made for outdoor play space over the Plan period. New playing pitches have been provided at the Harlands Farm housing development and the Town Council has advised that, in the light of demand that continues to exist for playing pitches, it proposes to acquire and lay out land south of Victoria Pleasure Ground. With regard to public open space for more passive forms of recreation, recent developments and further proposals will considerably improve provision in the town. In addition, an area of land to the north of The Mount and The Drive is owned by the District Council and is considered appropriate for public open space.

UC7 The following areas of land, as defined on the Proposals Map, are allocated for public open space purposes:

(1) Land to the south of Victoria Pleasure Ground.

(2) Land to the north of The Mount and The Drive.

Footpaths

17.59 Public footpaths provide access to the surrounding countryside, including the attractive Views Wood. It is the Council's policy as set out in Chapter 9 to promote a safe and convenient footpath and bridleway network by maintenance and improvement where possible, and securing the provision of footpaths in new developments which should link with the existing network, where appropriate.

17.60 The creation of a riverside walk from Hempstead Mill to the town centre is proposed in order to extend the existing public footpath that runs northwards into Buxted Park and provide an attractive local walk. To date negotiations with the relevant landowners to obtain public access have not been successful, although the District and Town Council remain committed to the proposal. Furthermore, it is considered appropriate to extend the walk through the town centre as far as the bypass. The Council would support the investigation of ways in which the appearance and amenity of the river and its environs can be improved.

UC8 A riverside walk will be provided between Hempstead Mill and Uckfield Bypass, as defined on the Proposals Map.

Implementation

17.61 Policies UC1 - UC3, UC5 and UC6 will be implemented by the Council primarily through its development control policy.

17.62 Policy UC4 will be the responsibility of the Council and/or the private sector.

17.63 Policies UC7 and UC8 will be the responsibility of the Uckfield Town Council.