

Villages

Introduction

18.1 The District contains a large number of villages and small settlements which vary in their nature from the larger villages which provide local services and employment to their surrounding areas, to small hamlets which are entirely residential in character.

18.2 The villages are diverse in their form and character, and many retain a distinct local identity based on historic buildings, traditional settlement patterns and attractive landscape settings.

18.3 The wider issues of housing, employment, transportation, etc, together with general policies that apply throughout the District, have been considered in previous chapters of this Plan and are briefly referred to later.

STRATEGY

18.4 The Plan's overall strategy, as set out in Chapter 2, provides for the majority of new development in the main towns, but also recognises that some villages will accommodate limited growth. The villages are a key part of the settlement pattern in the District and play an important role in the provision of housing for a large section of the population as well as jobs and services to the local community and surrounding rural areas.

18.5 The Council recognises this important role which the strategy for the villages seeks to maintain and enhance whenever possible. In determining the scale and nature of development and change in the villages, the Council has regard to their function and location in relation to neighbouring towns and villages, the need to protect their established character and rural setting, and the availability of local services.

18.6 As part of this strategy, the objectives of the Plan with regard to the villages are:-

(1) to conserve the established character of the village, its surrounding countryside and its landscape setting;

(2) to maintain and, where appropriate, enhance the residential nature of the villages;

(3) to promote the provision of affordable housing on appropriate sites through the 'exceptions' policy;

(4) to maintain and, where appropriate, improve the level and choice of local employment opportunities;

(5) to maintain and, where possible, improve the level and range of community services and facilities;

(6) to encourage the highway authority to implement appropriate traffic management measures.

18.7 The County Structure Plan strategy for the villages looks to the District Councils in their Local Plan preparation to determine the scale and nature of development (if any) in the villages. The strategy sets out criteria for village development, including the provision of local employment and housing opportunities for local need, whilst preserving and enhancing village character. Local Plans are to define village development boundaries where appropriate.

ENVIRONMENT

18.8 The villages and smaller settlements in the District are set within attractive countryside, and many are within the undulating landscapes of the Sussex Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The landscape quality of this rural setting normally dictates against further outward development of the villages which would be to the detriment of their character. Many of the villages have a distinctive character, often established around an historic core with areas of more scattered development on the rural fringe.

18.9 It is these environmental considerations, together with the location and function of the village in terms of providing employment and local services, that set the context for the development policies that apply to villages.

Development Boundaries

18.10 It is an important role for the Local Plan to identify those villages which the Council consider could accommodate some small scale new housing and employment development over the Plan period. Many villages will have reached the limit of their natural growth while in others some limited provision can be made for modest development without significant harm to the countryside or to the settlement itself. Whilst only limited provision is made for new development in the villages, major expansion has occurred and is committed at Stone Cross on land previously allocated for housing.

18.11 An assessment of all the villages and small settlements has been made in the context of County Structure Plan policies and the knowledge that no further housing land is required to meet the Structure Plan housing provisions. The study assessed

environmental considerations, including the character of the settlement and its setting, the location and function of the settlement, and the availability of services and infrastructure.

18.12 Where some limited new development would be considered acceptable in principle, either within the settlement or at its periphery, a development boundary has been drawn. As explained in Chapter 3, a development boundary does not attempt to define the physical or social limits of a village but defines the area to which Policy GD1 applies to give a sound basis for development control decisions.

18.13 In general terms, a development boundary seeks to prevent inappropriate outward encroachment into the surrounding countryside, an intensification of development in peripheral areas and ribbon development along roads. It excludes areas of more scattered development where the spaces and gaps around buildings contribute to a more rural character. Outside the development boundary, more restrictive District-wide policies apply which strictly control new housing, industry and many other forms of development.

Villages with Development Boundaries

18.14 The villages listed below have development boundaries and the considerations relating to the definition of the boundaries, together with the specific policies that apply within them, are set out in the individual village chapters, which follow this chapter, in alphabetical order.

Alfriston	Isfield
Berwick Station	*Lower Dicker
Blackboys	Lower Horsebridge
Broad Oak	Maresfield
Buxted	Mark Cross
Cross-in-Hand	Mayfield
East Dean and Friston	Maynards Green
East Hoathly	Ninfield
Fairwarp	Nutley
Five Ash Down	Pevensey
Five Ashes	Pevensey Bay
Forest Row	Punnetts Town
Framfield	Rotherfield
Groombridge	Stone Cross

Hadlow Down	Upper Dicker
Halland	Vines Cross
Hartfield	Wadhurst
Herstmonceux	Westham
Hooe Common	Windmill Hill
Horam	

* whilst not having a development boundary, Lower Dicker has been included in this list in view of housing and business allocations in the settlement.

Settlements without Development Boundaries

18.15 There are a number of other smaller villages and settlements where development boundaries have not been defined as the Council considers that new housing or commercial development would be inappropriate. This is normally because new development would be damaging to the character of the settlement and its rural environment, but may also reflect the lack of services and facilities. The following smaller villages and settlements fall within this category:-

Alciston	High Hurstwood
Arlington	Jevington
Balls Green	Laughton
Bells Yew Green	Litlington
Berwick	Little Horsted
Best Beech Hill	Magham Down
Blackham	Muddles Green
Bodle Street Green	Old Heathfield
Boreham Street	Ripe
Cade Street	Rosers Cross
Chelwood Common	Rushlake Green
Chelwood Gate	Selmeston
Chiddingly	Town Row
Colemans Hatch	Upper Hartfield
Cousley Wood	Waldron
Cowbeech	Wartling

Danehill	West Dean
Fletching	Wilmington
Frant	Withyham
Hankham	
Hellingly	

18.16 Each of these settlements is briefly referred to in alphabetical order in Chapter 20. In these cases the more restrictive Plan-wide 'countryside' policies outside the development boundaries apply which seek to prevent new development which would harm the character and appearance of such areas.

18.17 It is recognised that the lists set out above are not exhaustive of all the smaller settlements and hamlets in the District. However, the restrictive policies outside development boundaries would also apply to any other settlement or hamlet not listed in those paragraphs.

HOUSING

18.18 The Local Plan makes provision for a limited amount of new housing in the villages but, in overall terms, significant new housing development is not proposed in the rural part of the District. The main exception is the new settlement at Stone Cross where development has commenced. This is consistent with the Plan's housing strategy, principally for environmental and landscape reasons and because further land is not required numerically to meet the County Structure Plan housing provision.

18.19 However, the District Council is concerned about the lack of affordable housing, particularly in the villages where high house prices prevent local people on modest incomes, often the young or elderly, from buying or renting in the normal housing market. As part of its corporate approach to meeting local housing need, the Council's 'exceptions' policy may allow the release of small sites for affordable housing to meet a specific need outside village development boundaries.

18.20 With regard to general housing provision within the villages, new housing will be restricted to the area within the village development boundary in accordance with Policy GD1 and where proposals accord with other policies and proposals in the Plan.

18.21 It is particularly important to recognise the distinctive character of the village when considering new housing proposals. This character varies widely within Wealden through such factors as historic growth, landscape and topography, layout and the building materials used. Contrast, for example, the small linear Downland settlements and their traditional

flint buildings set within a rolling landscape with the larger ridge-top villages in the High Weald with brick or stone buildings, and hung tiles or weatherboarding.

18.22 It is especially important that new development should respect and harmonise with the particular character of the village. The Council will have careful regard to the density, scale, form and detailed design of the proposed development, together with the materials used and the quality of the environment being created.

EMPLOYMENT

18.23 Many of the villages within the District are important employment centres for their local communities and surrounding rural areas. The Council's employment strategy as set out in Chapter 7 seeks to maintain existing employment within the villages and encourage an improvement in the level and choice of local employment opportunities available. Government guidance on the rural economy emphasises the need to accommodate local commerce and industry in villages by the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings and by making provision, where appropriate, for sensitive, small-scale new development. In addition, the conversion of rural buildings, often on the periphery of villages, provides important opportunities for new employment, and this is discussed further in Chapter 5.

18.24 A number of existing business areas are identified in the larger villages which provide the focus for development within the rural area. In view of the character of the villages in the District and their sensitive countryside setting, particularly in the Sussex Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the opportunities to allocate further land for new business development are limited. This Plan contains allocations for land to accommodate new business uses at East Hoathly, Forest Row, Lower Dicker and Westham, and these are described further in the relevant village chapter.

18.25 The Council wishes to encourage small scale employment uses within the village development boundaries, particularly where the village has an employment centre function, but this will be subject to environmental considerations including traffic, access and impact on residential amenities and village character. In the majority of cases, in view of the residential character of the village and the need to prevent encroachment into the countryside, there is little scope to expand opportunities for local employment. A policy against which new employment proposals in villages can be considered is put forward in Chapter 7.

18.26 In the light of the environmental constraints that exist for new business development in the villages, it is

particularly important that as many sites and premises as possible are retained in employment use. The Council recognises the pressure to convert small premises to other uses, usually residential. However, small premises form a vital part of the rural employment pattern, bringing vitality to the settlement and often helping the viability of local services. A policy seeking to resist the loss of such premises is put forward in Chapter 7.

CONSERVATION

18.27 The development policies for the villages recognise and reflect the importance of maintaining the character and amenity of each village, and the need to conserve the attractive surrounding countryside, particularly where the village lies within one of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

18.28 Many of the villages in the District are based on historic settlements which contain a rich heritage of listed buildings, and in a number of cases, their special architectural and historic character has been recognised by the designation of a 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.

TRAFFIC

18.29 It is recognised that the residential amenities and general environment of many villages are adversely affected by the movement of traffic, particularly through traffic. The Council supports the Department of Transport and the County Council in their programme of work to improve the primary road network, and indeed urges the early completion of this programme. New roads and bypasses are providing relief to a number of villages, and more will be helped in this way, particularly along the A27/A259 route (see Chapter 9).

18.30 It is also recognised that many villages will have to continue to accept through traffic movements. In such cases it is important to consider whether traffic management measures, including traffic calming, can be introduced to reduce traffic speed and create a safer, more pleasant environment. The Council will urge the County Council to introduce measures to control and manage traffic wherever possible. In the majority of cases, the County Council as Highway Authority has no major proposals in the villages. In addition, the need for further car park provision in the villages will be monitored.

SERVICES

18.31 Local village shops, often with sub-Post Office facilities, play an important role in providing principally for food and day to day goods. Village halls and areas of public open space which provide playing pitches and children's play areas are important community facilities. The Council will seek to maintain and improve the level and choice of village shops and services; the appropriate policies are put forward in Chapter 8.

18.32 The village recreation grounds and village halls are important facilities serving the local community and surrounding areas. The village hall is often a focal point for a local community providing opportunities for limited indoor recreation, public meetings and meetings by local clubs etc. Thus it is an aim of the Plan to maintain and where possible improve the level and choice of recreation and community facilities in the villages and resist their loss to alternative uses. The provision of community facilities is primarily the responsibility of the Parish Councils whose resources for new schemes are extremely limited. In certain cases, however, the Council will consider giving financial assistance towards community facilities.