

Appendix 6

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Value of Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement During the HMA

Consultation and engagement with stakeholders is good practice when developing an evidence base to inform future policy. It helps to ensure that there is some degree of consensus around the information and evidence that will inform policy development. This has the potential to reduce conflict (and delays) during the development of policy, particularly plan-making.

Government guidance increasingly encourages stakeholder involvement and partnership working in the development of the evidence base for plans and policies. There are formal consultation processes involved in the production of Local Development Frameworks and whilst stakeholder engagement is not required during the development of the evidence base, it represents good practice to do so and is likely to strengthen the evidence base.

However, there are two key points to emphasise:

- The Wealden Housing Market Assessment is not policy. It is an independent report and the authorities will need to consider whether to take on board the conclusions and recommendations it presents.
- The development of plans involves a statutory consultation process. Whilst the development of the HMA (part of the evidence base) provides an earlier opportunity for stakeholders to engage DTZ would emphasise that this should not be seen as the only opportunity. Wealden District Council is engaging stakeholders and communities in the development of their Local Development Frameworks where there are formal opportunities for stakeholders to be involved¹.

In addition to close involvement of officers from Wealden District Council, the development of the Wealden HMA involved a stakeholder event. The rest of this Appendix summarises the key issues that were discussed at the stakeholder event and this feedback has informed the HMA.

North Wealden Stakeholder Event: Emerging Findings – March 2007

The Wealden Housing Market Assessment stakeholder event was held on 26th March at Uckfield Town Hall. It was attended by around 30 stakeholders from the public and private sector.

The objective of the event was to inform stakeholders about the emerging evidence, provide an opportunity to feedback to the consultants and authorities carrying out the work. Stakeholders were asked to comment on the emerging evidence (which was presented by DTZ), to consider the implications for policy and to raise any questions. The themes discussed in response to emerging evidence are discussed below.

The housing market areas and household movements

- There was general agreement of the linkages identified within the household and commuting patterns – particularly in terms of south Wealden and Eastbourne.
- Some stakeholders felt that the data understated the commuting pattern between Wealden and Tunbridge Wells and also London. Poor local bus services locally have combined with better rail links to increase commuting flows to London. These flows are mainly from Crowborough, but also Buxted and Uckfield. DTZ did further work on this by examining commuting patterns to Gatwick/Crawley/London
- The strong links with Tunbridge Wells have meant that many people in North Wealden travel to Tunbridge Wells for services, leaving settlements like Crowborough somewhat behind.

¹ The statement of community involvement will explain to the stakeholder and the community how they will be involved, and the steps the authority will take to facilitate this involvement

In-Migration

- Stakeholders highlighted the importance of in-migration to north Wealden. This is facilitated by house prices that are relatively cheaper than other rural areas in the SE. Although there was general consensus that authorities could do little to change this pattern because they have no levers in this area – rather they need to respond to the pressures. However, there are relatively limited employment opportunities in north Wealden and so many people (including new immigrants) commute out to work.
- Similarly, to what extent can authorities plan for EU migration? However, the general perception was that Wealden had experienced relatively low EU in-migration recently.

Diversity within Wealden District

- Wealden is also a very big local authority - a long distance from south to north and very varied local authority. The population base ranges from people still very much involved in agriculture to those who have bought big houses in the area and retired or commute and a whole range of people in between.
- A comment was made that Wealden has a very strong economy. Is not a classic rural economy. It has a range of small businesses ranging from typical rural businesses to the new generation of financial business services businesses.

Households and Dwelling Mix

- Stakeholders discussed the implications of growth in single person households. Some expressed surprise at the percentage of one person households that are older.
- However, most recognised the issue of trying to match need and supply and there was broad agreement that small households may buy larger homes for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, most people buy in 2nd hand stock so it is not as simple as matching new households to new homes, although authorities do have levers over new supply and therefore will want to influence it
- Surprised at high proportion of detached housing in Wealden in the stock although some suggested that many detached homes are outside 'residential areas' but within the main settlements there are concentrations of smaller stock
- Views were divergent over the mix of homes to be provided in Wealden in the future.
- Some felt that the mix should be left to the market to 'avoid the situation in Tunbridge Wells' where some cited a glut of small properties, particularly flats, partly because of policies that required a high proportion of small dwellings. The Wealden non-statutory local plan indicates that there is a requirement for % of new housing to be small units
- Others felt that larger houses were part of the character of the area and demand remains robust and so that is what is being built. There is also a need to encourage people to live and work in the area and so there is an argument for bigger stock so people have room to set up business/office in their properties – there may be some merit in encouraging/providing live work or home working
- There are lots of large houses scattered around the whole area, there is lots of conversion from agricultural buildings to employment floor space and put together that is very significant in terms of business space.
- However, others felt by not producing smaller homes as part of the mix of new housing the economy was being constrained (or somewhat restricted to higher earning households)
- Wealden will deliver around 880 dwellings p/a over next 5 years so a mix of sizes appropriate and ought to be achievable. Stakeholders agreed that it was probably not right to build high rise flats in Wealden but there were limited good flats e.g. in Crowborough so there may be a market for a proportion of flats in some locations in the future. Some also thought it would be desirable to seek broader housing mix – particularly given the pattern of supply in the past (1980s and 1990s) which is thought to have been dominated by 3 and 4 bedroom homes eg, on the edge of Uckfield. There was a view that a lot of what has been provided in the past had been fairly similar in size and character. . Stakeholders perceived that the smaller developers were often willing to do small dwellings – different developers would propose different sizes on a site.

- Stakeholders highlighted the need for more specialist provision for older households. This raised the question about who would move into the larger houses once vacated by older people.
- There was a discussion about making specific provision for the elderly. Currently, specific provision for older people proposed by developers has been limited - McCarthy & Stone are active in some locations but are perceived to market nationally and therefore attract in-migrants rather than local residents who might wish to trade down.
- However there was mention of an extra care scheme in Ticehurst being planned which has had very good take up by local residents needing to move out of their existing homes. There is a similar scheme under development at Herstmonceaux.

Affordable Housing

- Discussion focussed around what could/ should be done in a context where there is a shortfall of overall supply. Some felt that provision of affordable housing should be prioritised in proportion to the population as a whole (not necessarily prioritising social rented accommodation for those in priority need for example). Others highlighted the need for an increase in rented provision. However, in many areas across Wealden, particularly the rural settlements, delivery of affordable housing will be constrained by what is achievable rather than the level of need.
- Generally, stakeholders supported the ideal of providing affordable housing where people expressed that they want to live. However, there remained a question around the sustainability of providing social housing in rural areas. The availability of a house for most households overrides the importance of other services – getting a decent home is their first priority and service provision and access may not be considered – there are particular implications for this tendency in an ageing population
- In terms of delivery, stakeholders cited that it was hard for RSLs to develop in the north of Wealden. They are reliant on s.106 and even then need grant. It is difficult to get housing association development to stack up. There is a further issue of site availability and thresholds (which mean that some sites do not qualify for affordable housing).
- The local authority were promoting a very large number of exception sites but progressively the number has been reduced by about half – part of this is due to politics and part due to land owners reluctance to release their land for much less than market value.
- In principle parish councils are often supportive and recognised the need for rural housing to ensure social sustainability and to avoid villages becoming dormitories but when it comes to the crunch, neighbours often object to social housing and their objections swing the parish council around in opposition to schemes.
- Land owners are very reluctant to come forward because they think that once a site has been identified as suitable for affordable housing then if they hold on long enough they will secure permission for market housing. They therefore expect a higher land value than is currently being offered for exception sites. One landowner suggested that if ‘slightly more than affordable housing rates’ were offered, land owners may be prepared to accept less than market value – but if too low they likely to hold on, taking the longer term view that if land is deemed suitable for affordable housing it is worth holding out to try and secure market housing on there as well.
- In terms of the type of affordable housing required, there was a broad consensus amongst officers that larger social dwellings were not being provided through policy and new development. They also cited the issue that some older persons sheltered provision has high vacancy rates. Thus, there is a mismatch to some extent between what is available in the affordable sector and what is required by households on the housing registers.
- The role of intermediate housing was also discussed. There was a perception that there was demand for it but the difficulty is that often it comes out as not being very affordable. Wealden lacks the first step on the housing ladder, the sort of properties which first time buyers would be able to purchase elsewhere. Some stakeholders also cited that there has not been enough demand for Key Worker flats in Crowborough and one stakeholder suggested that there had been high vacancy rates in some shared ownership schemes due to high rents.
- As with overall housing provision in Wealden, some stakeholders felt that a ‘scattergun’ approach to intermediate housing ie distribution of this type of housing across the district is

desired to keep the varied nature of the district. There would be problems with financial viability of this however which was recognised by stakeholders.

Policy issues

- Likely that people will work longer into older age in the future because they need the money because of insufficient pension funds or because they are healthy and active and wish to continue working – but may do so part time.
- Some cited the need to encourage people to live and work in Wealden and suggested that housing provision be tied in with workshops/shops/industrial units in order to sustain “rurality” of the area. There should also be a deliberate objective to try and create the sort of housing, which people would be, happy to trade down into.
- There was a general consensus that there was a need to promote social sustainability of smaller settlements with small amounts of new housing. Settlements across Wealden vary in the extent to which they ‘work’ ie offering a range of services for residents. There was a feeling that some of the smaller villages were unsustainable.
- There was discussion about the fact that planning policy seeks to concentrate new housing provision in larger developments so that funding can be secured for major chunks of new infrastructure. However the requirement for infrastructure might be less if housing development was distributed more widely. Merit in dispersing new development but difficult politically and management issues associated with new RSL properties
- Furthermore, there is a need for a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign to persuade people of the importance of housing, particularly in the villages. Some stakeholders felt that a more radical approach was needed, including a review of the AONB to allow more change of use and allow increased delivery of homes.
- There was discussion about the delivery of new housing in general. Some stakeholders, particularly developers and their representatives stressed the importance of focussing on the deliverability of sites - not just sites that are already allocated or close to town or infrastructure but what is actually deliverable. There was a fairly broad consensus that delivery of new housing was key to limiting the vicious circle of declining affordability and shortage of affordable housing (even though it was recognised that the amount of new housing in Wealden would be unlikely to have a very visible impact on prices). Some felt a delivery mechanism was required to ensure that targets are met
- Currently, there is a lot of planned housing provision in the south of Wealden (which the DTZ analysis suggests will primarily serve the Eastbourne market).

DTZ Stakeholder Event at Uckfield Civic Centre

26 March 2007

Attendees on the day

DTZ

Chris Cobbold
Simon Gooch
Kerry Higgins

Wealden District Council

Nicola Levett
Duncan Morrison
Michelle Patmore

Delegates

Graham Arr-Jones
Tezel Bahcheli

Company

E.S.C.C
Parker Dann

Nick Brandreth
Hamish Buttle
Jackie Burton
David Bysh (for James Queay)
Tim Daniells
Colin Finlayson
Jane Griffiths
Roddy Johnstone
Simon Kiley
Hazel Long
Susan Marshall
Adrian Moore
Matt Richardson
Peter Scott
Bartholomew Wren
Chris Wojtulewski

Lambert & Foster
Millwood
Raglan
Lawson Queay
Millwood
Barton Willmore
Moat Housing Group
Johnstones
Airs
GOSE
Marshall Technology
Parker Dann
Gleeson Land
CCN
House Builders Federation
Parker Dann