# WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

# EXAMINATION INTO THE WEALDEN DISTRICT CORE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

## MATTER 2

ASP

Planning and Development Consultancy

## Matter 2: Settlement Hierarchy and Rural Areas Strategy

**(a) Are the Categories in the Core Strategy Settlement Hierarchy Appropriate and Justified**?

1. Yes as a matter of principle the use of a settlement hierarchy is an appropriate mechanism to direct development to rural settlements with sufficient facilities and services to sustain it. It is also appropriate that the hierarchy is based upon a range of relevant factors that will allow growth to be proportionate to the settlements ability to absorb such development. It is therefore appropriate that larger villages such as Wadhurst accommodate a large proportion of the District's rural growth.

2. In general terms the evidence base appears to support this approach insofar as it is underpinned by an assessment of each settlement in relation to its location, services and facilities. While it is difficult in all circumstances to place settlements in categories that sufficiently recognise their differences, the categories do generally reflect a logical range.

3. Policy WCS6 is unclear in that it fails to include the category in which each settlement falls and this lack of clarity undermines the usefulness of the policy. Rather than being addressed earlier in the Core Strategy in paragraphs 3.2, 3.3, it is contended that the settlement hierarchy and the related settlements should be an integral part of the policy.

**(b) Does the evidence base support the position of individual settlements within the settlement hierarchy?**

4. The evidence base broadly supports the position of most settlements within the settlement hierarchy but Stone Cross and Polegate, to which the plan proposes significant expansion and development, are currently defined as a Service Centre. Both are proposed for extensive growth over the Plan Period and inclusion as District Centres would be more appropriate. This proposed growth in the settlements of Polegate and Stone Cross should therefore be recognised within the settlement hierarchy.

**(c) Is it appropriate for the Core Strategy to indicate the overall scale of new housing allocations in individual villages and if so is the level of provision justified and deliverable?**

6. The housing allocations within individual villages appear to have based on the settlement hierarchy and from the available land set out by the SHLAA allocations. This follows the logic that the larger allocations should be met by identified individual villages rather than a general housing provision for the rural area as a whole. This is however on the provision that the villages provide sufficient housing to meet the housing need set out in the evidence base (BP2) identified by the Core Strategy evidence base which may mean settlements such Wadhurst need to accommodate larger growth than that set out in the Strategy. The principle of larger villages with services and facilities accommodating larger housing allocations within the rural area is sound. This individual allocation will allow for more effective monitoring of the implementation of the rural strategy within the District.

**(d) Has the approach to development boundaries in some villages been justified by the evidence base?**

7. The evidence base that underpins the approach to development boundaries is supported by the settlement hierarchy whereby settlements outside the District, Service and Local Service Centre classifications will have no development boundary. It is sound to relate the removal of development boundaries to the status within the settlement hierarchy in order that development in directed to appropriately resourced settlements.

**Conclusion**

8. The Core Strategy's Rural Strategy is generally sound with regard to the settlement hierarchy and distribution of development. This has been justified by the evidence base but the effectiveness of the strategy is undermined by the policy content of WCS6 which lacks sufficient clarity and content in defining the different village's status within this hierarchy. The plan has considered alternatives and complies with national policy.

9. The Policy should be amended to include the settlement hierarchy and the villages within each classification to make the policy effective in achieving the aims of the rural strategy. It is considered the status of Polegate and Stone Cross and their proposed growth should be represented within the Settlement Hierarchy.