Matter 4 /WDC

Wealden District (Incorporating part of the South Downs National Park)

Core Strategy Hearing

Matter 4: The Local Economy - Statement by WDC/ SDNPA

December 2011

Wealden District Council and South Downs National Park Authority
Response to the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions
(Issued 3 November 2011)

Matter 4: The Local Economy (WCS1, WCS3)

A) Does the Core Strategy accord with national policy, particularly PPS4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth and the Ministerial Statement on 'Planning for Growth'?

1.1 The Ministerial Statement on 'Planning for Growth' identifies the top priority of promoting sustainable economic growth and jobs, and that every effort should be made to identify and meet the business needs of the area. PPS 4 states that the overriding objective is sustainable economic growth which is defined as "growth that can be sustained and is within environmental limits, but also enhances environmental and social welfare and avoids greater extremes in future economic cycles" (PPS4, paragraph 9). The Core Strategy identifies the economic strategy to improve economic prosperity and reduce economic disparities (pages 16 to 18) including the provision of retail and increasing tourism visitor spending. The evidence supporting this strategy is provided in Background Paper 3: The Economy and Provision of Jobs (reference A19). The revised floor space calculations for Employment Land Provision (reference H4, Table 1, page 5) shows that the employment land provision alone seeks to improve economic circumstances through economic growth on the basis of closing the employment growth rate gap by half (by increasing employment growth from 0.47% to 0.645% per annum), increasing the resident economic activity rate to the SEEDA target (from 82% to 85%), and reducing unemployment so that the gap with the South East in activity rates and unemployment rates across the District with the South East average is halved (from 6.6% to 5.2% of the economic active resident floorspace), whilst the Sustainability Appraisal (reference A2, pages 93 to 97 and 105 to 106) shows the options considered and the selection of the most appropriate options in sustainability terms. The tourism and retail strategy is additional benefit to this growth, with currently 10% of the jobs in Wealden supported by tourism (reference A19, paragraph 3.40). The proposed increase in visitor spend will therefore contribute significantly to economic growth.

1.2 Based on the strategy it is considered that the Core Strategy accords with Planning Policy Statement 4 and aligns with the Ministerial Statement on 'Planning for Growth'.

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B) Is the scale and distribution of employment growth in the Core Strategy justified by the evidence base? Is there an appropriate balance between the scale and location of additional employment allocations in relation to those for housing?

2.1 The evidence base justifying the scale of employment growth is detailed in Background Paper 3: The Economy and Provision of Jobs (reference A19) and the Revised Floor Space Calculations for Employment Land Provision (reference H4) and the Sustainability Appraisal (reference A2). It is considered that the scale and distribution is fully justified by the evidence base.

2.2 The scale of growth seeks to close the employment growth rate gap by half (by increasing employment growth from 0.47% to 0.645% per annum), increase the resident economic activity rate to the SEEDA target (from 82% to 85%), and reduce unemployment so that the gap with the South East in activity rates and unemployment rates across the District with the South East average is halved (from 6.6% to 5.2% of the economic active resident floorspace). This sustainable economic growth not only accords with Government guidance, but also accords with the South East Plan. In the Sussex Coast Sub Region, where sustainable economic growth should be promoted, Policy SCT4 states that sufficient employment space should be allocated to at least match anticipated increases in resident workforce. The Revised Floor Space Calculations for Employment Land Provision (reference H4, table 1, table 5) shows that the provision of 40,000 sq metres of floor space is 24,915 sq metres is greater than that needed for the amount of housing proposed.

2.3 The link between the scale of employment growth and housing is shown in The Revised Floor Space Calculations for Employment Land Provision (reference H4, pages 6 to 8). The housing and employment growth has been aligned by concentrating employment development to the areas with significant growth. In order to tackle deprivation on a strategic scale, and to adhere to the principles of the South East Plan relating to promotion Sustainable economic growth in the Sussex Coast Sub Region, economic growth is directed to Hailsham and Polegate. This takes into account the opportunities to deliver employment floorspace in sustainable mixed use urban extensions (SE Plan Policy SCT4), as well as need. Where employment opportunities are limited, housing is also balanced to ensure sustainable growth overall. The opportunities and issues in the main settlements of Wealden are identified in Background Paper 3: The Economy and Provision of Jobs (reference A19, pages 11 to 14).

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2.4 Based on the approach of distributing employment to the areas of where there is more significant growth or opportunities to access the new employment allocations, it is considered that there is an appropriate balance between the scale and location of additional employment allocations in relation to those for housing.