

Chapter 2

Context and Strategy

Introduction

2.1 This Plan has not been prepared in isolation. There are many policies, strategies and issues which influence the Plan. This Chapter outlines these various influences.

2.2 As a land use document, the Plan has been prepared in accordance with Government guidance, Regional Planning Guidance for the South East, and the Structure Plan. It has also been informed by the results of public consultations.

2.3 The Community Strategy for Wealden District is also a significant influence. It comprises a vision jointly produced by the Council and its Partners to positively help the social, economic and environmental well being of the area. The Community Strategy has influenced the Council's own corporate priorities and objectives as well as helped shape the Plan itself.

Government Guidance

2.4 The policies and proposals of the Plan are set within the context of the Government's aims for sustainable development and its advice on planning matters set out in its Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and emerging Planning Policy Statements (PPSs). Government guidance contained in PPG3, *Housing*, on sustainability, design, mixed uses and balanced communities has been particularly influential. However, the Plan has been prepared in the light of the full range of Government advice, which covers matters such as industrial and commercial development, the countryside and the rural economy, the historic environment, nature conservation, sport and recreation, tourism, coastal planning, etc. Specific guidance on the format and content of Local Plans is provided in PPG12, *Development Plans*.

Regional Planning Guidance

2.5 In March 2001, the Government published Regional Planning Guidance for the South East

(RPG9). This provides a broad framework for the preparation of local authority development plans and other strategies and programmes for the South East to the year 2016, including guidance on patterns of development, levels of housing, provision and transport planning. The key features of the guidance are:

- enabling urban renaissance
- promoting regeneration and renewal
- concentrating development in urban areas
- promoting a prosperous and multi-purpose countryside
- promoting wider choice in travel options, thereby reducing the reliance on the private car

2.6 The guidance recognises the important role of the South East in the development of the United Kingdom economy, and the need to support and further develop the prosperity and international competitiveness of the region to ensure that it contributes fully to national growth. However, it also acknowledges that a high quality environment is essential to the future prosperity of the South East. The effective protection of the environment and prudent use of natural resources are fundamental to the overall planning strategy for the region, with priority given to protecting areas of international and national importance for nature conservation, landscape and cultural value.

2.7 In 2002, the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) commenced a partial review of RPG9. The first topic to be reviewed was transport, culminating in the publication a Regional Transport Strategy for the South East (RTS) in July 2004. The RTS provides a framework that seeks to ensure that the investment programmes of local authorities, transport providers and other key stakeholders in the transport sector complement and support the wider regional objective of delivering a more sustainable pattern of development.

2.8 The RTS recognises that the challenge is to achieve a better integration of investment and management of transport capacity. The guiding principle of the RTS is therefore one of investment, particularly in public transport, supported by measures to persuade people to adjust their behaviour and reducing the dominance of the car.

2.9 In July 2004, SEERA also published proposed alterations to RPG9 in relation to Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy and in relation to Tourism & Related Sports & Recreation, for public consultation. Furthermore, Regional Waste Management and Minerals Strategies were passed to the Deputy Prime Minister for consideration in March 2004. Following consultation, it anticipated that the Secretary of State will publish the final changes to RPG9, for waste management and minerals, in 2005.

2.10 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Regional Planning Guidance will in due course be replaced by Statutory Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). The RSS for the south east region (the *South East Plan*), which is prepared by SEERA, was published as a draft for public consultation in January 2005.

2.11 The draft South East Plan sets out a vision for the region through to 2026, focusing on improvements that need to be made to ensure the region remains economically successful and an attractive place to live. It highlights investment priorities for improving transport; sets new targets for recycling waste to reduce the need for landfill; and recommends ways to improve health and the environment. The figures for the number of new houses needed in the region each year were not included in the version of the draft South East Plan published in January 2005, but were subsequently released in July 2005.

2.12 The emerging Local Development Framework for the District will need to be in general conformity with the South East Plan and planning applications will need to accord with its provisions.

County Structure Plan

2.13 The East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan is prepared by the County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council. It was formally approved in 1999 and provides the strategic planning framework for the whole of the County to the year 2011.

2.14 The Structure Plan aims to achieve a more environmentally sustainable future for the County and to meet the needs for development and change in a manner that is more sustainable

in the longer term. The key elements of its strategy are:

- protection and enhancement of the character and quality of the environment
- protection and enhancement of the countryside, whilst allowing limited development to meet local needs and allow the rural economy to thrive
- a positive approach to economic development and inward investment to improve prosperity and achieve a better balance between people and jobs
- the productive use of existing employment sites and allocations and their protection from proposals for other uses
- implementing existing commitments to new business parks, including those at Maresfield and Polegate
- providing for new housing to meet strategic housing requirements, including new land allocations for approximately 3,300 dwellings in Wealden, focussed on the Low Weald towns (Hailsham, Polegate and Uckfield)
- supporting the provision of affordable housing in towns and villages
- an Integrated Transport and Environment Strategy, which includes measures to reduce the need to travel, especially by car, and promotes improvements to public transport and the trunk road network
- town regeneration, including enhancing the environment and vitality of town centres
- supporting appropriate development in selected villages to help local needs for housing, employment and services

2.15 The Structure Plan, together with the Minerals Local Plan (adopted 1999) and Waste Local Plan when adopted, form part of the development plan for the area. Its policies apply throughout the District.

2.16 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Structure Plans are being abolished and will no longer form part of the development plan. Under the new regulations, the development plan for Wealden's area will ultimately comprise the Regional Spatial Strategy (see paragraphs 2.10 – 2.12), the Minerals and

Waste Local Plans, and the District Council's Local Development Framework.

Local Community Views

2.17 Prior to the preparation of the First Deposit Draft Local Plan, the Council consulted the local community by publishing an Issues Document and holding a series of public meetings and exhibitions across the District. A summary leaflet, incorporating a questionnaire, was also sent to every household. Careful regard has been paid to the responses received from the public, arising both from the specific consultations on the Local Plan and from similar consultation initiatives in respect of the Community Strategy and the Council's Best Value Performance Reviews.

2.18 The First Deposit Draft Plan was published in January 2003 for a statutory six week period of public consultation. A summary leaflet was circulated to every household in the District and exhibitions and public meetings were held in all of the towns. Additional public meetings were held in the rural areas when requested by Parish Councils. Some 6500 representations were received and all were reported to, and carefully considered by, the Wealden Local Plan Review Special Review Committee.

2.19 Many of the views expressed were taken into account and reflected in the Revised (non-statutory) Draft Plan, which was published in November 2004 for a six week period of public consultation. Once again a summary leaflet was circulated to all households and exhibitions/public meetings were held in Hailsham, Uckfield and Polegate/Willingdon. In addition, consultation events were held in eighteen villages to help explain the proposed allocations for affordable housing. Although representations were only invited on the changes made in the Revised Plan, some 3250 representations were received. Once again these were all reported to, and carefully considered by, the Wealden Local Plan Review Special Review Committee.

2.20 The recommendations made by the Special Review Committee, in respect of the representations submitted to both the First Deposit Draft and the Revised Draft, were considered by a joint meeting of the Development Control South and Development Control North Sub-Committees and by Cabinet before being approved by Full Council as an interim guide for development control.

Local community views are also brought forward through the preparation of Parish Appraisals and Health Checks. These provide an opportunity for local people to have their say on local environmental, social and economic matters concerning the future of the parish or village. Whilst not forming part of the development plan, such appraisals provide a valuable insight into the aspirations of communities for their local environment which can be very helpful when considering development proposals.

Wealden District Council

2.21 Wealden District Council has an overall vision for the District including corporate objectives to help achieve this vision and a number of strategies developed in consultation with the local community as listed below:

- Local Cultural Strategy
- Crime and Disorder Strategy
- Contaminated Land Strategy
- Empty Homes Strategy
- Housing Strategy
- Managing Unauthorised Camping Strategy
- Private Sector Renewal Strategy
- Asset Management Plan
- Tourism Strategy

2.22 An important consideration for the Council will be to find ways in which the land use planning system can help deliver these objectives and the actions plans in the strategies.

2.23 The Council's Mission Statement for the District is "*Working together to improve the quality of life in Wealden*".

2.24 Four corporate objectives have been adopted to achieve this mission, as follows:

- to protect and enhance a sustainable environment.
- to promote a healthier and safer community.
- to develop a more prosperous and sustainable local economy.
- striving for excellence.

2.25 These objectives will continue to be reviewed in the context of the Community Strategy and other influences.

Community Strategy

2.26 In December 2002 the Council, in partnership with other agencies and organisations known as the Local Strategic Partnership, published a Community Strategy, as required by the Local Government Act 2000. This significant document helps to set and steer priorities for local services and expenditure by the Council and its partners.

2.27 The Community Strategy has influenced and helped to shape this Plan. In turn, this Plan's policies form the land use arm looking to help in implementing the objectives and actions proposed in the Community Strategy.

2.28 The key visions of the Strategy defined following consultations with local people are listed below:

- to provide everyone in Wealden with access to lifelong learning, education and skills training to fulfil their potential
- to develop a healthy, rich and diverse environment based on sustainable principles for everybody in Wealden
- to provide everyone in Wealden with access to appropriate health and social care services and maximise their potential for good health and well-being
- to provide access to decent affordable homes suitable for the needs of all those who live or need to live in Wealden
- to provide the people of Wealden with access to a broad range of opportunities including sport, leisure, recreation and the arts, to improve their quality of life, health and well-being
- to create a prosperous, sustainable economy that is dynamic, flexible and maintains the environmental qualities of the area
- to enable everyone to live, work in or visit Wealden confident of their safety and free from the fear of crime
- to improve accessibility for all and reduce the impact of traffic on people and places

2.29 Clearly the objectives of this Plan and the Community Strategy are interlinked, particularly in trying to achieve sustainable improvements to

the quality of life for Wealden's residents. There are a number of common issues between land use planning and the local community's views through the Community Strategy including;

- conservation and enhancement of the environment
- the provision of affordable housing
- good health and other community facilities
- crime prevention
- waste disposal
- traffic control and public transport
- antisocial behaviour

The Plan's Strategy and Aims

2.30 In the light of the foregoing, the Plan is seeking to undertake the following:-

- (1) *to take forward national, regional and Structure Plan policy in a way that addresses the needs of the District and reflects the characteristics of the area;*
- (2) *to set out a strategy and policies with a vision for the District, complementing and contributing to that set out in the Community Strategy.*

2.31 The key aims of the Strategy put forward in this Plan having regard to public comments, the Council's corporate objectives and the District's Community Strategy are:-

- (1) ***to pursue sustainable development looking to improve the quality of life and equality of opportunities for Wealden's existing and future communities;***
- (2) ***to recognise the need for development in the District to be balanced with the conservation and enhancement of the District's environmental quality and character;***
- (3) ***to provide for the required new housing, business and associated growth in the District principally in or on the edge of urban areas, looking to achieve the efficient use of land with good design***

and better accessibility to jobs and services ;

- (4) to meet the housing needs of the whole community, including affordable housing, seeking balanced and socially inclusive communities;**
- (5) to promote a healthy and diverse local economy which makes adequate provision for new business development, provides local jobs, helps to reduce out-commuting, assists the rural areas and revitalises the town and larger village centres;**
- (6) to promote an efficient and sustainable transport system which minimises the need to travel, especially by car, encourages the use of public transport, walking and cycling, and provides for the needs of people with mobility difficulties;**
- (7) to ensure that a full range of community facilities and services are provided at the appropriate time to meet the needs arising from expanding communities in the District.**

Distribution of Development Strategy

2.32 The context for this Plan's distribution of development strategy has been given by the Structure Plan, namely to provide new housing and business land to meet strategic requirements for the period to 2011, including new land allocations for approximately 3,300 dwellings largely focused on the Low Weald towns of Hailsham, Polegate and Uckfield.

2.33 The Council carefully examined the capability of the Low Weald towns to accommodate major growth and also examined the capability of Crowborough, Heathfield and the Villages in the District to accommodate further growth. The analysis was undertaken with sustainable development principles at its heart with key planning considerations including accessibility, landscape, planning designations and constraints, infrastructure and community services. The analysis flowed from a broad sector appraisal down to site specific considerations.

2.34 A distribution of development strategy was originally agreed by the Council following consideration through the Council's Wealden Local Plan Review Advisory Panel comprising

Wealden District Council Members. It was subsequently re-examined and refined in view of the Highway Agency's potential objection to the level of growth envisaged in Hailsham and Polegate and its impact on the A27 Trunk Road.

2.35 A full explanation is given in background papers to this Plan, principally the "Review of the Council's Distribution Strategy" and the "Hailsham and Polegate Transportation Studies". Subsequently, the distribution strategy was reviewed by the Council in response to the representations made on the First Deposit Local Plan and the Revised Local Plan.

2.36 The Distribution of Development Strategy is set out below. The specific sites are detailed in the Housing Chapter, as well as in the Chapters for each of the towns and villages.

	Location	Dwellings
(i)	Hellingly Hospital	400
(ii)	Welbury Farm and Woodholm Farm	400
(iii)	Other urban extensions in Hailsham	385
(iv)	Land west of A22, Polegate*	600
(v)	land east of Shepham Lane, north east Polegate	250
(vi)	Land north of Eastbourne Road, Uckfield	220
(vii)	Other urban extensions in Uckfield	180
(viii)	Urban extensions in Crowborough	200
(ix)	Village extensions at Buxted, East Hoathly, Five Ash Down, Maresfield and Isfield	240
(x)	Rural affordable housing allocations	83-97
(xi)	Business Park at Polegate	

*phased to the completion of the proposed A27 west Polegate improvement.

2.37 The Distribution of Development Strategy is illustrated on the key diagram at Figure 2.1.

