

Chapter 18

Uckfield (Inset map Nos 56 & 57)

Context

18.1 Uckfield has a population of around 13,200. It is situated some seven miles south of Crowborough within the attractive, undulating countryside of the Low Weald. The town functions as a local employment centre providing a range of jobs in manufacturing and services, and also as a shopping centre for both its residents and those in the surrounding rural area.

Strategy

18.2 The Structure Plan sets out broad policy guidance for Uckfield. It recognises that the town is a location where major peripheral development may take place to contribute towards the new strategic housing allocations required for 2006 – 2011. This development is subject to the availability of appropriate transport infrastructure, and any other necessary measures, to ensure that it will not add to transport problems both locally and in the wider area.

18.3 In the light of the Structure Plan policies and the Local Plan distribution strategy, the objectives for Uckfield are:

- (1) to strengthen Uckfield's role as a residential, employment, shopping and service centre;*
- (2) to regenerate the town centre, increasing accessibility and improving the range and quality of shopping and other services;*
- (3) to provide additional local employment to serve both existing and future residents;*
- (4) to provide for around 400 new homes with appropriate infrastructure, community services and facilities, minimising the impact of development on the landscape setting of the town;*
- (5) to ensure that new development respects the particular character and quantities of the town, and makes a positive contribution to its townscape and local environment.*

Housing Allocations

Previously Developed Land

18.4 In line with Government guidance in PPG3, the Council has searched for sites within Uckfield in order to identify, in the first instance, the potential for new housing from previously developed or vacant land and buildings in the urban area. This Urban Capacity Study has not been able to identify any suitably sized sites for specific housing allocations within the existing built-up area of the town, although it is recognised that small sites will continue to come forward as infill sites. Consequently the town's major contribution to the plan's housing land and requirements, some 400 dwellings, has to be found through urban expansions.

Urban Extensions

18.5 The distribution strategy outlined in Chapter 2 shows that Uckfield's contribution to the requirement for new development includes some 400 dwellings on three separate sites located at the southern and eastern edges of the town. These proposed new allocations are put forward below.

18.6 New development to the north and north west of Uckfield is not favoured due to its damaging effect on the landscape and rural character of the surrounding countryside. Such development would also reduce the important gap of countryside between the town and the villages of Maresfield and Five Ash Down. Further development to the south-west of Uckfield would be intrusive and damaging to the open, visually exposed and rural qualities of the slopes which fall from the edge of the town towards Ridgewood Stream.

Land north of Mallard Drive

18.7 This site lies to the west of Framfield Stream, between Mallard Drive and Uckfield Community Hospital (see Figure 18.1). It comprises gently sloping grassland, which is generally well-contained by existing development and mature woodland on the slopes above

Framfield Stream. It is estimated that the site could accommodate some 120 dwellings.

18.8 Vehicular access should be obtained from Mallard Drive. Footpath and cycle links will be required through the development, providing safe and convenient access to Harlands Primary School, the Community Hospital and Framfield Road. Provision of new or improved bus services between the site and Uckfield town centre will also be required. A new bus route between Framfield Road and Mallard Drive would be particularly beneficial and may be achieved by installing bus gates/rising bollards at the access road to the Community Hospital.

18.9 The existing trees and woodland to the south and east of the site should be retained and protected by a landscape buffer area that would also provide public amenity space as part of the development. A children's equipped play area will also be required in accordance with the Council's approved standards.

18.10 While the housing site lies outside of the 1 in 100 year indicative flood plain of Framfield Stream, as defined by the Environment Agency, any developer will be required to undertake a flood risk assessment in accordance with Appendix F of PPG25 and policies in Chapter 13 of this Plan. This will need to demonstrate that the development itself would not be at risk from flooding and that it would not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. Particular attention should be paid to surface water drainage to ensure that the development does not increase the rate of run-off to Framfield Stream. An overall plan for drainage infrastructure will need to be agreed before development proceeds.

Policy UC1

Land north of Mallard Drive, as defined on the Proposals Map, is allocated for housing purposes. Proposals for new housing development will be permitted when provision is made for all of the following:

- (1) approximately 120 dwellings, of which around 36 shall be affordable dwellings and around another 24 shall be small units;**
- (2) vehicular access shall be taken from Mallard Drive;**

- (3) safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle access through the site, providing links to Harlands Primary School and Uckfield Community Hospital;**
- (4) a comprehensive landscape scheme, incorporating a landscaped buffer and public amenity space along the eastern edge of the site;**
- (5) an equipped children's play area; and**
- (6) a flood risk assessment is undertaken in order to demonstrate that development will neither be at risk of flooding or exacerbate the risk of flooding elsewhere.**

Developer contributions will also be required in accordance with the Plan's policies to secure the provision of appropriate off-site community facilities, transport and other accessibility and infrastructure improvements. These will include new secondary school places and associated facilities, new primary school places, youth/adult playing space, highway and transportation works (including town centre improvements), new or improved bus services to serve the site, additional car parking spaces at Uckfield Community Hospital, and foul and surface water drainage requirements.

Land north of Eastbourne Road

18.11 The site comprises pasture land on the undulating slopes above Framfield Stream, at the south-eastern edge of the town (see Figure 18.2). It is estimated that the site could accommodate some 220 dwellings. The development will be expected to retain existing trees and woodland, which should be reinforced with additional planting. A significant tree belt will be required along the eastern boundary of the site in order to eventually screen the development from the surrounding countryside.

18.12 Vehicular access should be obtained from Eastbourne Road. The speed limit on this section of Eastbourne Road will need to be reduced to 30mph by means of off-site highway works. Traffic management measures will also be required along Eastbourne Road and New Road to address the safety concerns that would arise from an increase in vehicular movements along this route. This could involve the partial

closure of New Road and would be subject to a separate public consultation. The provision of new or improved bus services between the site and Uckfield town centre will also be required.

18.13 While the housing site lies outside of the indicative 1 in 100 year flood plain of Framfield Stream, as defined by the Environment Agency, any developer will be required to undertake a flood risk assessment in accordance with Appendix F of PPG25 and policies in Chapter 13 of this Plan. This will need to demonstrate that the development itself would not be at risk from flooding and that it would not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. Particular attention should be paid to surface water drainage to ensure that the development does not increase the rate of run-off to Framfield Stream. An overall plan for drainage infrastructure will need to be agreed before development proceeds.

18.14 Whilst the site is not affected by any nature conservation designations, rare and protected species have been found in the vicinity and consequently there is the potential for them to be present on the site. Equally, the trees, hedgerows, ponds and watercourses could potentially provide a habitat for a variety of species, including bats, reptiles and breeding birds. A full ecological survey undertaken during the appropriate season will be required to identify whether there are any sensitive habitats or protected species on the site. Areas of landscape and habitat may need to be set aside to mitigate against the impacts on wildlife. In the event of any protected species being detected on the site, all necessary licences would need to be obtained prior to the commencement of any works on site.

Policy UC2

Land north of Eastbourne Road, as defined on the Proposals Map, is allocated for housing purposes. Proposals for new housing development will be permitted when provision is made for all of the following:

- (1) approximately 220 dwellings, of which around 66 shall be affordable dwellings and around another 44 shall be small units;**
- (2) vehicular access shall be taken from Eastbourne Road;**
- (3) traffic management measures to discourage the use of New Road to through traffic to the satisfaction of the Local Highway Authority and after local consultation;**

(4) safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle access through the site;

(5) a comprehensive landscape scheme, incorporating significant new tree belts along the eastern boundary of the site;

(6) public amenity space and an equipped children's play area;

(7) a flood risk assessment is undertaken in order to demonstrate that development will neither be at risk of flooding or exacerbate the risk of flooding elsewhere; and

(8) appropriate measures to mitigate against the effects on any protected species or habitat if detected by a full ecological survey carried out to the satisfaction of English Nature.

Developer contributions will also be required in accordance with the Plan's policies to secure the provision of off-site community facilities, transport and other accessibility and infrastructure improvements. These will include new secondary school places and associated facilities, new primary school places, youth/adult playing space, highway works (including town centre improvements), new or improved bus services to serve the site, additional car parking spaces at Uckfield Community Hospital, and foul and surface water drainage requirements.

Land at Sandpits

18.15 This site is located on the crest of Ridgewood Hill to the west of Lewes Road (see Figure 18.3). Part of the land has previously been worked as a quarry. The site is considered to be well-related to existing residential development, which contains the site on three sides. It is estimated that the site could accommodate some 60 dwellings.

18.16 Vehicular access should be obtained from Lewes Road. The speed limit on this section of Lewes Road will need to be reduced to 30mph by means of off-site highway and traffic management works. Improvements to the bus service between the site and Uckfield town centre will also be required. Provision should be made for vehicular access from the site to Ridgewood Manor (Nursing Home) in order to enable development of the land north of the existing access road to this property.

18.17 In order to minimise the impact of development on views from the countryside to the south, provision should be made for a new woodland copse immediately north of the access road to Ridgewood Farm, with the land between the copse and the development boundary utilised for garden or amenity space. A significant tree belt along the crest of the site will also be required in order to ensure that trees are the principal skyline feature in all views towards the ridge.

18.18 The existing pond should be retained and incorporated into the design of any housing scheme in order to form a focal point for the development and the site access road. The design should also address the need to prevent public access to the former quarry rock face. A children's equipped play area will be required in accordance with the Council's approved standards.

18.19 Whilst the site is not affected by any nature conservation designations, rare and protected species have been found in the vicinity and consequently there is the potential for them to be present on the site. Equally, the trees, hedgerows and pond could potentially provide a habitat for a variety of species, including bats, reptiles and breeding birds. A full ecological survey undertaken during the appropriate season will be required to identify whether there are any sensitive habitats or protected species on the site. Areas of landscape and habitat may need to be set aside to mitigate against the impacts on wildlife. In the event of any protected species being detected on the site, all necessary licences would need to be obtained prior to the commencement of any works on site.

Policy UC3

Land at Sandpits, as defined on the Proposals Map, is allocated for housing purposes. Proposals for new housing development will be permitted when provision is made for all of the following:

- (1) approximately 60 dwellings, of which about 18 shall be affordable dwellings and about another 12 shall be small units;**
- (2) vehicular access shall be taken from Lewes Road;**
- (3) vehicular access through the site to Ridgewood Manor (Nursing Home) and**

land north of the existing access road to Ridgewood Manor (Nursing Home);

- (4) a comprehensive landscape scheme, incorporating a tree belt along the crest of the site and the retention of the existing pond;**
- (5) an area of woodland between the allocated site and the access road to Ridgewood Farm;**
- (6) an equipped children's play area; and**
- (7) appropriate measures to mitigate against the effects on any protected species or habitat if detected by a full ecological survey carried out to the satisfaction of English Nature.**

Developer contributions will also be required in accordance with the Plan's policies to secure the provision of off-site community facilities, transport and other accessibility and infrastructure improvements. These will include new secondary school places and associated facilities, new primary school places, youth/adult playing space, highway works (including town centre improvements), an improved bus service to serve the site, additional car parking spaces at Uckfield Community Hospital, and foul and surface water drainage requirements.

Business

18.20 In recent years, Uckfield has successfully attracted a significant amount of industrial and commercial investment and now provides a wide range of jobs in manufacturing and services. The majority of activity is contained on the two main business areas at Bellbrook and Ridgewood, together with a variety of businesses in the town centre.

18.21 The Structure Plan and the adopted Wealden Local Plan include a proposal for a new high quality business park (the Ashdown Business Park) at Maresfield, to the north-west of the town. The proposed site is allocated as a main business area in Policy BS2 in Chapter 8 of this Plan. When developed, this new business park will provide about 20,000m² of light industrial and office premises within a landscaped setting and make an important contribution to meeting the employment needs of Uckfield's residents.

18.22 The Council's business land study identifies a need for some further business floorspace to help improve the balance between homes and jobs and to maintain the economic buoyancy of the town. However, apart from the provision made at the Ashdown Business Park, no suitable sites with good access to the A22 have been identified. It is anticipated that there will be some relocations from Bellbrook to the Ashdown Business Park, which will create vacancies within the town for new or expanding businesses. The situation will be monitored.

Town Centre

18.23 Uckfield's main shopping centre, as defined on the Proposals Map, is essentially linear in nature and focussed on the High Street. A primary shopping frontage has also been defined, incorporating properties in the High Street between Church Road and the railway, in order to retain an identifiable retail focus within the town centre.

18.24 There are a number of key factors to be addressed in looking to future development and redevelopment in the town centre and seeking to maintain and enhance the town's attractiveness and economic viability. A town centre study area was drawn on the First Deposit Draft Plan to help focus studies and local opinion about future development.

18.25 The key messages emanating from the public consultations are:

- Luxford Field should be retained for open space/recreation and no other development permitted
- New development should not be permitted in the flood plain (until proper flood defences are in place)
- A one-way gyratory road system is not supported
- The reinstatement of the Uckfield-Lewes railway line is supported
- Additional parking on the former railway station site is supported

18.26 The issues arising are outlined below.

Luxford Field

18.27 Whilst the importance of Luxford Field as an open space is acknowledged, it would also offer a potential opportunity for comprehensive remodelling of the town centre, taking advantage of the change in levels to provide a mixed use scheme to include shops, other services and housing, which could retain an element of open space. Whether such a mixed use scheme could be achieved without Luxford Field would need to be the subject of a study but the amount of land available would be significantly reduced.

Flooding

18.28 In October 2000, Uckfield was subjected to severe flooding by the River Uck. Floodwater depths reached almost 2m in the High Street and Mill Lane, and the majority of Bellbrook business area was also affected. Following this event, the Environment Agency commissioned a study into the options for future flood management but has concluded that there is no economic case for providing a major new flood alleviation scheme for the town.

18.29 The existing river channels through the town centre will continued to be maintained and the Agency will support local initiatives for reinstatement of a functioning plain, including the removal of buildings or other development where possible. Potential schemes that would improve flood management locally are currently being investigated by the Environment Agency and will eventually be subject to a Project Appraisal Report to assess their economic, technical and environmental viability.

18.30 Nevertheless, properties located in the floodplain of the River Uck will continue to be at risk from flooding, and this clearly has implications for the future development of the town centre. The Plan's policies for flood risk are set out in Chapter 13, Community Services. Any proposals for development or redevelopment that would damage the capacity of the river floodplain to convey and store floodwater would not be permitted under these policies.

Highways

18.31 The Bell Lane roundabout is close to capacity during peak periods and in the town centre the number of traffic accidents involving personal injury is rising, with a particularly high incidence at the Bell Lane/High Street junction. Further development in the town will exacerbate

this situation unless new highway works and traffic management measures can be achieved.

18.32 Transport measures for pedestrians, people with reduced mobility, and cyclists are identified as a priority in the Uckfield Local Area Transport Strategy, approved in March 2002. The County Council, as Highway Authority, has no current proposals to overcome the peak hour vehicular traffic congestion at the Bell Lane roundabout.

18.33 The Highway Authority requires any development in Uckfield generating a 2% or more increase in traffic to contribute to traffic management solution that will overcome congestion in the town centre. An achievable traffic management solution for the town centre has yet to be established, although the Highway Authority believes that a new one-way gyratory road system, utilising the lower High Street, the former railway station site and the area between the River Uck and the Bell Lane roundabout would be technically feasible. This suggested scheme was not favoured by respondents to the First Deposit Draft Plan following consultation options for the future of the town centre.

Railways

18.34 The route of the former Uckfield- Lewes railway line is protected by policies in both the adopted Local Plan and the Structure Plan. The long term aim of re-instating this line has implications in terms of future requirements for a level crossing in the High Street and possibly a new railway station to accommodate additional services.

18.35 The existing train services between Uckfield and Hurst Green were improved by the introduction of new rolling stock in 2004. This may lead to an increase in passenger numbers and demand for improved station facilities, including additional car parking. The investigation of improved rail/bus interchange facilities is identified as long term measure for implementation in the Uckfield Local Area Transport Strategy.

Car parking

18.36 The car parks adjacent to Luxford Field, Bell Walk and the supermarket off Bell Lane operate at near capacity during peak shopping periods, although spare capacity exists elsewhere. Further development in and around the town will lead to an increased demand for public car parking. The adopted Local Plan allocates land for an extension to the existing car park at River Way. However, this site is owned by the Town Council and has been declared a Local Nature Reserve by the County Council.

The Way Forward

18.37 There is clearly a need to progress further studies with all key partners in order to provide a policy framework for the future of the town centre. This could be progressed as an Action Plan within the forthcoming Local Development Framework for Wealden District.

Transport

18.38 The form and topography of Uckfield create a number of transportation issues within the town. In particular, the River Uck and the railway combine to split Uckfield into northern and southern sections, with the High Street providing the only crossing point. This significantly restricts accessibility within the town and has a particular impact on potential pedestrian and cycle movements, since the distance involved in undertaking an indirect movement encourages use of the car, thereby adding to the congestion problem in the town centre.

18.39 The District and Town Councils are therefore committed to the provision of a footpath along the valley of the River Uck, extending from Hempstead Mill through the town centre to the Uckfield Bypass. Some progress has already been achieved and, when complete, the new footpath will provide additional safe pedestrian routes, both into the town centre and out into the surrounding countryside.

Policy UC4

A new footpath is proposed between Hempstead Mill and the Uckfield Bypass, as shown on the Proposals Map. Permission will not be granted for development which would prejudice the implementation of this scheme.

outdoor playing space in the town will be sought from developers in accordance with Policies UC1, UC2 and UC3.

Policy UC6

Land to the south of Victoria Pleasure Ground, as defined on the Proposals Map, is allocated for public open space.

New Town

18.40 Along the High Street between Framfield Road and New Place, several of the properties are listed for their special architectural or historic interest, whilst others make an important contribution to the character of the area by reason of their age and architectural style. In accordance with the Plan's policies to conserve the quality of the built environment, the Council will seek the retention of these buildings, particularly the larger Victorian properties, by allowing their conversion to residential flats or office use.

Policy UC5

Within the area between Framfield Road and New Place, as defined on the Proposals Map, proposals for the conversion of properties to office use or residential flats will be permitted.

Services and Infrastructure**Education**

18.43 Expansion of the Community Technology College will be required to serve the new residential developments allocated in the Plan. Contributions to fund additional secondary school places, together with the provision of an all-weather sports pitch to enhance the on-site playing field space, will be sought from developers in accordance with Policies UC1, UC2, UC3, V1, V3, V5 V6 and V7. Developer contributions will also be sought to fund additional primary school places in the town, in accordance with Policies UC1, UC2, and UC3.

Health Care

18.44 An expansion of health care services in Uckfield will be required to meet the needs arising from the new residential development in the town and contributions to fund the provision of additional car parking spaces at the surgery at Uckfield Hospital will be sought from developers, in accordance with Policies UC1, UC2 and UC3. The Sussex Downs and Weald NHS Primary Health Care Trust is seeking alternative premises for the existing Meads GP surgery in the town centre, which needs to move from its current inadequate premises. However, it has not so far been possible to identify an appropriate building or site within the town centre for this replacement facility.

Recreation and Leisure

18.41 Outdoor playing space in Uckfield is currently below the minimum standard recommended by the National Playing Fields Association. The shortfall is estimated at 15 hectares, as shown in Appendix 4 of the Plan. Furthermore, the vast majority of the existing provision is in the form of playing pitches for youth and adult use; the current level of provision of children's play space is well below the recommended standard.

18.42 It is therefore proposed to maintain the allocation for public open space on land to the south of Victoria Pleasure Ground. Contributions to fund the provision of additional

Drainage

18.45 Southern Water, the relevant drainage authority, has advised that there is likely to be insufficient foul sewerage capacity in the town to accommodate the new housing development

north of Eastbourne Road. Hence, the developers of this site may be expected to requisition or otherwise fund new sewers, as described in Chapter 13, Community Services.

Power/Utilities

18.46 The supply of water and power is a statutory responsibility of South East Water, EDF Energy Networks Ltd and British Gas. No significant constraints have been identified in meeting the needs generated by new development at Uckfield. Some localised reinforcement works may be required to upgrade the existing supply networks and new site connections will be necessary, which may require some diversions. Such works will need to be requisitioned under the appropriate statutory procedures and will be subject to standard connection charges, both of which are outside the scope of planning control.

Map

Map

Map

