

Wealden voices
Wealden choices

Community Strategy for Wealden

As Chairman of the Wealden Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), I am pleased to present this update of the Wealden Community Strategy. The strategy represents our local vision for making Wealden an even better place to live and work. We believe it will help to bring about significant improvements in the economic, social and environmental well being of our area.

The Partnership aims to make sure the strategy is delivered through a range of vehicles which include partners' corporate plans, the Local Area Agreement, the Local Development Framework, and other routes such as Area Investment Framework-funded activity, the East Sussex Economic Strategy and the Regional Rural Delivery Framework.

A major public consultation exercise was undertaken during spring and summer 2002 involving Wealden residents, many of whom were interviewed in their own homes by their local Councillor. This formed the basis of the first community strategy for Wealden. To update this, the LSP has analysed the village, parish and town plans it has received to date, and held a 'Wider Partners' event in June 2006, with over 80 local organisations from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

The material gained from these activities has been used to re-validate or update elements which are important to improving the quality of life in Wealden. Maintaining an up-to-date community strategy is important to ensure that local priorities are taken into account, as the Government requires that the strategy should form part of the evidence base for many other plans.

The recent Local Government White Paper (October 2006) proposed a stronger role for Local Strategic Partnerships, and sustainability and environmental issues are likely to be highlighted – for example in a move to 'sustainable' community strategies, and more emphasis on combating climate change. There will be new Government guidance on LSPs, and this period of change offers exciting opportunities for partners to work together in developing the role of the district LSP to safeguard and actively promote the local vision and priorities of its communities and residents.

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Chair, Wealden Local Strategic Partnership
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Wealden, East Sussex, is home to some 143,000 people (2006 population estimate, East Sussex in Figures). Approximately half the population live in the district's five main towns: Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield. The rest of the district is predominantly rural, with many small villages and hamlets.

Despite an appearance of relative affluence, Wealden is not without its social problems. The whole district faces a chronic shortage of affordable housing, market towns have identified needs for regeneration and its rural villages face a number of challenges of sustainability, including access to services for those without their own transport.

The LSP was formed in June 2001 in order to produce a community strategy aimed at improving the quality of life of all Wealden residents. Councillors and other partners joined in a major consultation exercise that took place between April and June 2002 to identify the priorities and concerns of Wealden residents. The results were classified under eight key themes (below) and have been instrumental in shaping the priorities of the LSP partner organisations:

- Environment
- Health and Social Care
- Housing
- Learning
- Leisure
- Prosperity
- Safety
- Transport

Although the elements have been arranged by theme, there is a good deal of crossover between them and this is why partnership working is so important. In addition to the eight themes already mentioned, the LSP has borne a number of cross-cutting issues in mind when producing this strategy. These include equalities, rural issues, social inclusion, cohesion and sustainability.

No one organisation is in a position to deliver all the aspects of the Community Strategy, but their corporate plans demonstrate the contribution they intend to make, and their budgets allocate resources accordingly. All the organisations involved in the LSP recognise that they have a part to play in improving the economic, social and environmental well being of the Wealden District.

Monitoring progress

Since the publication of the first Wealden Community Strategy, the approach to performance monitoring has developed considerably. The LSP is now expected to track delivery of services on the ground more closely against community strategy objectives. We will be working with partners to identify indicators which will enable the partnership to do this, without creating significant additional burdens on already tightly-stretched resources.

Existing and on-going activity

Some, even many, of the activities which contribute to delivering the vision outlined in this Community Strategy are already happening to a greater or lesser extent, they may be starting to happen or clearly envisaged in future plans. Their inclusion in the Community Strategy simply reflects the fact that they have been identified as important aspects in the overall vision for Wealden. It is therefore appropriate and worthwhile that the Local Strategic Partnership maintains an overview of progress in these areas.

ENVIRONMENT

Working in partnership to develop a healthy, rich and diverse environment based on sustainable principles for everybody in Wealden

Our vision is to maintain and develop a healthy, rich and diverse environment based on sustainable principles which will

- **Protect and enhance the rural and urban environments for people and wildlife**
- **Reduce waste, pollution and environmental crime**
- **Ensure sustainability principles underpin decisions about local development and the future of Wealden**
- **Encourage wise use and enjoyment of natural resources, for example, through environmental education**
- **Provide for healthy lifestyles and improved quality of life**

A clean and healthy environment was top of the list of priorities in making somewhere a good place to live and most residents were happy with this aspect of life in Wealden. Concern about the environment recognised the need to protect what is already here, but action for improvement is also an important factor. The beauty and tranquillity of the area is what people said they valued most about living in Wealden. The importance of protecting the environment was equally important to all age groups.

We will concentrate our efforts in order to

- Recognise and adapt to climate change and its impact on Wealden, including management of CO₂ emissions, the demand for water and the provision of adequate water resources, including new resources where there is environmental capacity
- Support flood risk assessments and appropriate plans to reduce flood risk and make space for water; and the provision of a network of green spaces to buffer the effects of climate change on wildlife
- Strive for the provision of adequate environmental infrastructure to be in place before more houses are built
- Encourage sustainable design through the introduction of a Supplementary Planning Document which includes energy efficiency, greater use of renewables and sustainable transport
- Protect, maintain and enhance both rural and urban environments
- Encourage support for farmers, other landowners and managers who maintain the landscape and contribute to the quality and visual attractiveness of rural environments
- Encourage the sale of local food and non-food products including bio-diesel
- Support efforts to ensure that proposed new development takes account of the appearance and unique character of the area
- Encourage improved facilities for pedestrians and adequate provision of high quality, accessible open space, to include facilities for children's recreation in safe, central locations with minimal nuisance to neighbours, a safe and comprehensive network of footpaths, and rationalised signage and street furniture
- Maintain and improve public open space for people and wildlife, to include the general tidiness, maintenance of verges, removal of litter, tree planting and maintenance of existing trees and planting schemes

- Strengthen policies for dealing with waste, encouraging waste reduction and more recycling by providing additional opportunities, and their inclusion as standard in new developments
- Address the issues of litter, fly-tipping, abandoned cars, dog litter and graffiti

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Working in partnership to provide everyone in Wealden with access to appropriate health and social care services to maximise their potential for good health and well-being

Our vision is to provide everyone in Wealden with access to appropriate health and social care and maximize their potential for good health and well being. We will do this by promoting

- **Healthy lifestyles**
- **Independence and care for older people at home**
- **Social inclusion**
- **Partnership working**
- **Support for people with specific needs such as carers, families with young children, people with disabilities, older people**

The people we spoke to said that social and healthcare services were one of the top three aspects in making somewhere a good place to live - only the environment and safety from crime were seen as more important. 23% of residents identified health and social care as something which needed to be improved. Many concerns focused around difficulties in getting to services rather than the level of care received. The Healthy Wealden Partnership works to ensure targets for improving services in Wealden are met, helping to make Wealden a healthier place to live.

We will concentrate our efforts in order to

- Encourage cohesive and flexible partnership working to provide good access to health and social care services, with particular consideration for areas where provider boundaries do not match, and focus on transport issues when considering change
- Support existing outreach projects, and the exploration with relevant partners of opportunities to maximise the use of existing facilities to offer a range of health care services locally
- Increase levels of community engagement around service improvement and the implementation of change, recognising concerns about the pace and frequency of change, and people's need for clear information about proposed changes and their implications
- Promote direct links between local frontline health and social care staff and voluntary and community sector workers, exploring ways to optimise the use of existing facilities and community buildings through partnership
- Support social inclusion, especially in rural areas, and seek to promote innovative ways of addressing exclusion and health inequalities
- Maintain support for the use and development of volunteers in the delivery of local community healthcare services, for example, care and support for the elderly, children and the disabled
- Continue to strengthen partnership working with wider partners, including voluntary and community groups, parish, town and district councils, and healthcare service providers to identify areas for service improvement and innovative solutions to access issues

HOUSING

Working in partnership to provide access to decent, affordable homes suitable for the needs of all those who live in or need to live in Wealden

Our vision is to promote access to decent homes for all those who live in or need to live in Wealden, and to facilitate the use of sustainable developments. This includes

- **Providing increased numbers of affordable homes for local people including key workers**
- **Providing special needs accommodation and support – where necessary with aids, adaptations and repairs to both private and council stock**
- **Good management and maintenance of rented housing**
- **Ensuring new housing is part of mixed, balanced and sustainable development to meet the projected needs of existing and future communities**

Our consultation demonstrated that affordable homes for local people was the top priority for improving housing opportunities. The results highlight a certain amount of conflict however, as many residents did not want to see new housing development. The Wealden Housing Partnership will work to balance the requirements of the South East Plan with local needs and views. The Wealden Local Development Framework is a key planning mechanism, which will help deliver what people in Wealden want and need over the next twenty years.

We will concentrate our efforts in order to:

- Lobby for an increase in the percentage of affordable housing in developments, an extension of the requirement to include smaller schemes, and encourage affordable provision in all settlements
- Encourage initiatives to promote the green agenda, working towards a reduction in carbon emissions, and the 'eco-homes' standards in the provision of both social and private sector housing
- Encourage greater provision of specialist accommodation, eg for older people and those with special needs, in the social and private housing sectors
- Support the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Wealden Design Guide to set standards and provide a means to strengthen the case for good design which is in keeping with local character. The Guide should address issues around sustainability, quality of life and the flexibility to encourage and allow new patterns of working
- Encourage planning authorities to secure benefits from developers to contribute to adequate infrastructure in line with housing development including water, energy, transport and the provision of new jobs and services that provide for the needs of an ageing population
- Support and encourage mixed development comprising both houses and employment sites
- Influence the Local Development Framework to allow villages to expand in order to provide small scale developments, and allow higher density dwellings (eg terraced houses) in rural areas providing the design and layout is appropriate and includes suitable provision for open space and parking
- Build on partnerships and networks with private landlords to encourage best practice and access to lettings initiatives
- Contribute to the progress of the 'HOPE' project

- Promote initiatives to address the 'Respect' agenda and activities to combat anti-social behaviour

LEARNING

Working in partnership to provide everyone in Wealden with access to lifelong learning, education and skills training to fulfil their potential

Our vision is for residents of Wealden to have access to lifelong learning, education and skills training to help them fulfil their potential. We will encourage and support

- **Provision of high quality education, training and skills**
- **The continuing development of the vocational training centre in Wealden**
- **Skills for life training, including family learning and adult learning**
- **Work-based skills training**

Most residents said they are satisfied with the standard of education in Wealden and that this is an important factor in making the area a good place to live. A few thought that there should be more opportunities for lifelong learning. We will work together to ensure that targets for improving education, learning and skills are met. All residents will be encouraged to take part in opportunities for learning.

We will concentrate our efforts in order to:

- Focus on the need to provide skills for employment as a means of supporting business to encourage a thriving sector with small, clean, highly skilled businesses with minimal transport needs
- Concentrate skills training around the five main Wealden towns
- Link with existing colleges and universities through the provision of outreach centres and business centres attached to Colleges
- Support appropriate training in order to grow the local economy and provide businesses with the skills they need, for example, the Wealden Skills Centre (Uckfield) is an ideal opportunity to develop this and such initiatives should be actively encouraged
- Identify the skills relevant to the small, clean, high-skill, low transport-requirement, knowledge-based businesses to be attracted to Wealden and support training and apprenticeships which will allow local people to develop as appropriately skilled employees

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND LEISURE

Working in partnership 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

Our vision is to provide the people of Wealden with access to a broad range of opportunities to improve their quality of life, health and well-being including sport, leisure, recreation and the arts. We will encourage

- **Walking, riding and cycling**
- **Good quality, affordable, local leisure facilities**
- **A range of local cultural and arts opportunities**
- **Facilities for people with disabilities**
- **A range of sporting opportunities**
- **Library services for the district**

Almost a third of respondents felt leisure provision in Wealden needed to be improved. Only safety from crime and transport were seen to be more in need of improvement. Leisure opportunities are an important factor in attracting visitors to the region. Those involved in providing leisure facilities believe leisure can play a key role in helping to address a number of issues affecting quality of life, including ill health, community safety and prosperity.

We will concentrate our efforts in order to

- Encourage efforts to ensure coherent provision of leisure and tourism services, with more effectively co-ordinated dissemination of information about facilities
- Explore, enhance and encourage opportunities for the development and marketing of green tourism and address potential conflicts of interest between visitors and residents
- Encourage recognition that leisure and tourism are inherently linked as leisure facilities for local people are also attractive to visitors
- Explore how attractive, well equipped, multi-purpose community facilities, such as village halls, can be put to a wider variety of uses
- Encourage closer co-ordination and partnership working to provide more opportunities for sustainable tourism in Wealden and promote it more effectively

PROSPERITY

Working in partnership to create a prosperous sustainable economy that is dynamic, flexible and maintains the environmental qualities of the area

Our vision is to create a prosperous sustainable economy that is dynamic, flexible and maintains the environmental qualities of the area. This will include

- **Better links between education and business**
- **Regeneration of Wealden towns and run-down rural areas**
- **Provision of advice and support for business, especially in the agricultural and tourism sectors**
- **Good supply of business sites and units**
- **Fast, reliable broadband access**

Most people in Wealden (86%) felt that links between business and education was the most important element in improving the prosperity of the district. A number of residents are concerned about declining services in villages and the need to improve facilities in Wealden towns. Tourism plays an important role in improving the local economy as visitors spend an estimated £248 million in the area every year (Source: Tourism South East Cambridge Model, 2002). The consultation also identified a need for support and advice to agriculture and other business sectors in the area.

We will concentrate our efforts in order to:

- Support existing and emerging businesses in order to encourage a thriving range of sectors which will provide more employment opportunities as a prerequisite for enhancing quality of life in Wealden
- Encourage small, clean, high-skill businesses with minimal transport needs, eg the knowledge-based sector

- Encourage a balanced approach between residential use and new or existing business sites, for example, by encouraging a more sympathetic approach to the conversion of redundant farm buildings for alternative business uses
- Support efforts to ensure that adequate employment opportunities are in place or under development where more houses are to be built
- Ensure that appropriate support and infrastructure is available for the small and micro businesses which tend to predominate in the area
- Encourage partners to ensure the five core towns are attractive as local retail and service centres
- Encourage business links with existing colleges and universities through the provision of outreach and business centres attached to those institutions, for example to develop more apprenticeship opportunities locally
- Improve links between business and the local community for example, by encouraging local businesses to employ local people, encouraging and supporting flexible working patterns and measures to include people with disabilities
- Develop use of broadband, particularly for electronic communication and websites, and encourage more active networking amongst local businesses

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Working in partnership to enable everyone to live in, work in or visit Wealden confident of their safety and free from the fear of crime

Our vision is to enable everyone to live in, work in or visit Wealden confident of their safety and free from the fear of crime by:

- **Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour**
- **Reducing the fear of crime**
- **Improving personal and community safety**
- **Helping those affected by discrimination**

Residents of Wealden identified 'safety from crime' as the second most important aspect in making somewhere a good place to live (51% of respondents). Although levels of crime are low in the area as a whole, 41% said 'safety from crime' needed improving. The Wealden LSP believes that safety can best be improved through partnership working and by tackling people's fear of crime because this can have a big impact on the quality of life even when levels of crime are relatively low. Resources will be targeted to address problems in any areas where higher than average levels of crime are identified. The Safer Wealden Partnership (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership) will monitor progress towards achieving safety targets and has a Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy which underpins this work.

We will concentrate our efforts in order to:

- Encourage design for, and enforcement of appropriate speeds through villages and on new estates including measures for traffic-calming and pedestrian safety.
- Educate drivers to encourage better driving behaviours
- Encourage a more visible police presence where there is an identified need, for example through the use of PCSOs and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes
- Encourage members of the community to work more closely with the police and other agencies to tackle crime through Local Action Teams

- Influence the Local Development Framework to ensure that the design of housing and communal facilities enhances community cohesion and the feeling of well-being
- Promote community safety and the reduction of the fear of crime as a high priority for public, private and voluntary sector services
- Encourage members of the community to become active in the collective identification of community safety priorities and in the active communal resolution of these issues
- Promote the need for tolerance, respect and understanding for all diverse sections of the community and emphasise that a balance has to be found between individual choice and freedom, and the greater needs and well-being of the community

TRANSPORT AND ACCESS

Working in partnership to improve accessibility for all and reduce the impact of traffic on people and places

Our vision for transport and access is to improve accessibility for all and reduce the impact of traffic on people and places by

- **Improving safety on the roads by reducing speed and congestion**
- **Reducing the need to travel by car – better facilities for walking, cycling and public transport**
- **Support improvements in local strategic transport infrastructure such as road and rail**
- **Providing improved access to jobs and services**
- **Supporting integration between different modes of transport**

People identified getting to places easily and safely as being important in making somewhere a good place to live (23% of respondents). It was also seen as the highest priority for improvement (47% of respondents). The survey also highlighted concerns about the volume and speed of traffic, congestion and the lack of public transport. The LSP recognises that dealing with transport in a rural area requires a balance between ensuring people can get about easily and reducing the impact of traffic on people and places. This will be addressed through working in partnership at the various transport forums, through village appraisals and through lobbying the Strategic Rail Authority to improve rail links.

We will concentrate our efforts in order to :

- Address safety and congestion issues generated by the 'school run', for example by encouraging a greater proportion of school journeys on foot or by bike
- Encourage early consideration of traffic flow and parking issues when new facilities are being planned
- Lobby for and encourage more integrated public transport to allow interchange wherever possible between rail, bus, community transport, shared cars, cycling and walking, with appropriate facilities to promote their safe use
- Promote and lobby for the reinstatement of the Uckfield to Lewes railway line
- Lobby for further improvements to train services and better station facilities to encourage their use: this includes additional carriages to reduce overcrowding, extra trains later into the evening for leisure purposes, and a simplification of the fare structure to encourage increased use
- Encourage improved access to rail stations by all modes of transport, including provision of adequate parking facilities

Working in partnership to improve the quality of life in Wealden

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Executive Board members:

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East Sussex County Council

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East Sussex Downs and Weald PCT

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