

## WEALDEN LSP

### Notes of the meeting on Friday 16th March 10:00 – 12:00 at Heathfield Community Centre

#### Present

##### Partners

Ian Chisnall	LSP Chair, Churches Together in Sussex
Cllr Nigel Coltman	Leader, Wealden District Council
Cllr Chantal Wilson	Wealden District Council
Cllr Laura Murphy	Wealden District Council
Cllr Pam Doodes	Wealden District Council
Insp. Richard Allen	North Wealden, Sussex Police
Trevor Leggo	Wealden Association of Local Councils
Alison Horan	East Sussex County Council (for Cllr Tony Reid)
Ken Stevens	Federation of Small Businesses
Jeff Hart	Managing Director, Freedom Leisure
Martin Small	South Downs Joint Committee
Kathy Fordham	National Farmers' Union

##### In attendance

Charlie Lant	Chief Executive, Wealden District Council
David Palmer	Head of Policy and Review, Wealden District Council
Gill Cameron Waller	LSP Policy & Admin, Wealden District Council
Caroline Adcock	LSP – LDF Liaison, Wealden District Council
Michelle Patmore	Community Liaison & Engagement Officer, Wealden District Council
Cllr Di Phillips	Wealden District Council

#### Apologies for absence

Cllr Tony Reid	East Sussex County Council
Sean Nolan	East Sussex County Council
Teresa Gittins	Action in Rural Sussex (for Jeremy Leggett)
Jessica Britton	East Sussex Downs and Weald PCT
Peter Minshall	Highways Agency
Paul Smith	Environment Agency
Karen Crozier	Community Network Steering Group
Greg Falvey	Town & Country Housing Group
Philip Ayers	East Sussex Rural Transport Partnership
Mark O'Brien	District Commander, East Sussex Fire and Rescue

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

As this was Ian's first meeting as Chair, after welcoming everyone and inviting all to sit around the table, he asked everyone to give a very brief resumé of their organisations' priorities and challenges for the coming year:

Charlie (Chief Exec, WDC): Priorities at the moment are 1) surviving the elections and 2) equipping the new Council to fulfil its duties as about 50% of the membership is likely to change.

Kathy (NFU): This year's key challenge is the 'Why Farming Matters' campaign (<http://www.nfuonline.com/nfuwfm/>); key hope is that farmers might get back into profit.

Alison (Head of Community Partnerships, ESCC): Key hope is that, at County level, the Community Strategy will be fit for purpose, meeting the county-wide needs of districts and boroughs, and brings a synergy that gives added value; key challenge is the LAA – just one year into what was supposed to be a three-year agreement, the goalposts

have changed significantly. The whole LAA is to be renegotiated on an entirely new basis, over the summer period, at the same time as the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy in partnership with the districts and boroughs; involving partners properly takes time.

Ken (FSB): Issues and priorities are something of a moving target, but the key is survival and prosperity for small businesses. Profitability is a serious issue for businesses – employees come first, whilst employers pay themselves less in order to keep the business afloat.

Martin (South Downs Jt Cttee): the hope and the challenge are both funding – to maximise the funding received, and to lever in more; after 15 or more years, there is still uncertainty about the South Downs National Park, but preparations for handover are under way against the eventuality that it does happen.

Caroline (LSP – LDF liaison, WDC): to act as an effective bridge between the Planning Policy team and the LSP in the development of the LDF Core Strategy.

Ian (Churches Together in Sussex): key aim is to help the Church see its role within the community; to do this it needs to understand the community; the challenges are around falling numbers and buildings and maintenance which are a great burden. The Church needs to see beyond the physical to become a key player in the community.

Nigel (Leader, WDC): there are several challenges – the upcoming elections, finding enough opportunity for affordable housing in Wealden, making the LDF process work for Wealden, particularly in the light of changing parameters from central government – for example, windfall housing sites will no longer count towards planned housing numbers, probably to increase the overall totals. To cope with all the inter-related issues – transport, health etc, the key is working in partnership.

Laura (Lib Dem opposition group leader, WDC): concerns are around the impact of the elections on the council and the need to stay focused, not get too disrupted by the knock-on effects, need to maintain drive and continuity with the LSP, because of ongoing expectations of other members and to some extent, the public.

Di (Observer, Chair of WDC Community Scrutiny Cttee, and member of Health & Public Safety Cttee): priorities are to keep abreast of developments, particular on housing and health; key role is to feed back information to colleagues.

Pam (Deputy Leader WDC, Chair of Safer Wealden Partnership): priorities are health and safety and designing them in around new housing development.

Chantal (Independent Cllr, representing the north of the District): greatest challenge is delivery of affordable housing; the hope is that people will say 'yes, things are getting better in Wealden'.

Jeff (MD, Freedom Leisure): In five years, Freedom Leisure has grown from four to 14 sites with Wealden and other major partners. With a turnover of £8.5 million predicted for next year, and 700 employees, the challenge is to work with partners and to build a sustainable business in a very competitive market. The aim is to develop a strong vision for the future to cement a long-term relationship within in Wealden, and give even greater value to the taxpayer.

Michelle (LDF Community Engagement, WDC): priority is making the LDF interesting to the community.

Trevor (Sussex Association of Local Councils): the hope and challenge is to improve parishes' understanding of what LSPs and LAAs are all about; feedback from other sources suggests that parishes find them boring, they want to know it's happening, but don't engage; it would be good to get parishes onto LSPs.

Ian summed up by reiterating the LSP's facilitative role, that the outcomes and added value we can achieve by working together are a prize worth working for; that if we get the spatial planning right, it will be a win for all. He asked partners to bear in mind the

issues, challenges and aspirations we had just shared, in order to make and take opportunities to help each other.

### **1.1 Notes of the last meeting**

These were approved as a correct record

### **1.2 Matters arising**

Under 2.2, Kathy Fordham to be added to the Core Strategy research topic groups for the Environment and Sustainability. Caroline Adcock to liaise with WDC councillors to determine which groups they will join.

Under 2.4, the Blueprint for the Eastbourne - Hailsham Triangle: the Leader and Chief Executive of WDC met with their counterparts at Rother and Hastings to learn more about their experience of working in formal partnership together. Another meeting is planned for 19th March. The intention now is to seek to engage a wider range of organisations, such as SEEDA and other potential sources of funding, to get the Triangle concept on to the wider regional map of influential partners, to link them into the chain. Key issues for the LSP are to work to ensure that partners are not moving in opposing directions, and to make sure that all the relevant Board members and the appropriate parishes are also involved.

## **2. Local Development Framework – related (LDF)**

### **2.1 Core Strategy**

**WLSP Report 38**

Caroline Adcock introduced the report which gives a synopsis of the background and key issues for the Wealden Local Development Framework. We are still in the early, informal stages of the engagement on the Core Strategy, with the 'Issues and Options' paper due out for consultation in June. The objective is to identify and examine all the options.

One of the difficulties lies in deciding what to include and what to exclude, particularly in terms of service infrastructure. As an example, looking at Education, the population numbers which would justify new facilities are very high, and the housing numbers required to support that kind of increase tend to be significantly higher, and more concentrated than what might be envisaged in Wealden. The Planning Policy Team has contacted key infrastructure providers to outline and try to tease out some of the issues.

The final section of the report sets out some of the key questions to be considered, which led into a round table discussion:

Local knowledge plays a vital part in contributing to a practical understanding of the issues. Wealden towns are in the main already struggling to meet the demands of their current situation. Would a new settlement be a more viable option? Berwick, with its rail links is often suggested as an obvious location, but given that the minimum pupil requirement for a new secondary school is in the region of 900, it seems unlikely to meet key criteria.

New development should be based around the east – west rail link – this gives access to colleges and the universities and would work for families with younger children too. It is important to include facilities within new developments so that home-working is an option as well, and allow for the ways in which new businesses start up.

The rail link to London from the north of Wealden should also be considered, although the road infrastructure in that area is rather poor.

Some parishes have indicated that they prefer a model which promotes an even spread of development, in tranches of say, 10%, in order to retain local character and allow residents in new developments to be assimilated into the local community, thus promoting social cohesion.

It is important to be realistic about the business position in Wealden: it is not an area that attracts (or keeps) big business. We should look to build on the strength of the fact that people like to work here in a relatively small scale way which may well be more sustainable.

We are already quite good at supporting small businesses, but as far as housing is concerned, people expect new infrastructure to go with the new development. In reality, the numbers are unrealistic and there will inevitably be unwelcome pressure on existing infrastructure. We are in the position of needing to manage unrealistic expectations, even if we are only to expand a little.

At the recent parish conference, people didn't reject the idea of a new settlement, but specifically didn't want large scale expansion as it would distort local distinctiveness.

The Planning Policy Team are trying to envisage all the possible scenarios at this stage to develop the issues and options paper. They need to demonstrate to GOSE that they have not ruled anything out or anything specifically in. After the Issues and Options paper, they will develop a 'Preferred Options' paper which will argue for more specific choices (without pre-empting the site allocations which will be a separate document within the LDF suite). The LSP will have an opportunity to respond formally to the Issues and Options paper during the public consultation in June – July this year. This is a genuinely consultative challenge process, but at this stage all the options will still be in.

Outcomes from WDC's Parish Planning conference held earlier in March are being collated into a pack for circulation. The Planning Policy Team will make sure that copies are sent to all LSP Board members.

It's also worth thinking more broadly outside Wealden's administrative boundaries. For example, if we are looking at Berwick, we should look at cross-border opportunities for education in Ringmer. If the Tunbridge Wells and Uckfield lines were re-opened, many more villages would gain access to links with employment opportunities, and other services. However, the advantages need to be weighed against the 'Buxted effect' which draws in commuters from London with the attendant risk of discord and a dilution of local character.

Existing residents need to feel that new residents will be able to integrate. Some partners have had occasion to work through some of the problems at the Sovereign Harbour development in Eastbourne. This was effectively a new development with no existing community, and without the facilities to assist the natural development of a sense of community.

There was a feeling that a large new settlement would be carry high risks, and that smaller, incremental development feels safer and may be more in keeping with the nature of the area, and more at one with the aspirations of Wealden residents.

Communities feel better about development where they can see they are getting something out of it, such as a village shop or post office. Villages dislike things that change what they value, but if development strengthens what is there (eg supports the local school / shop / pub etc) is seen as good, or at least, much more acceptable. There may be a perception that planning policy is not implemented in the same way across the board. However, although applications and their circumstances vary considerably, the process for implementation of the policies is strictly adhered to, and subject to rigorous scrutiny and in some cases, appeal.

The value of the LSP's involvement in the LDF process is to play a part in setting the strategic framework for the district.

Something of the order of 22% of households in Wealden have a family member working from home, and some partners felt that the regulatory frameworks (eg about planning permission, non-domestic rates, health & safety etc) should be better designed to facilitate different ways of working.

Pursuing the idea of a potential new settlement, partners felt that as yet, there is not enough information to make even quite general 'decisions' in that area. There are also significant issues around deliverability – a planning framework can envisage and allow for development in particular places, but bringing such plans to fruition is quite a different matter.

Councillors advised that, on the basis of the housing numbers Wealden is currently asked to accommodate, it is believed that the incremental option could more or less meet the requirements of the South East Plan.

Although it is difficult to be specific about locations for development at this stage, there are factors which should be taken into account. For example, from an environmental point of view, there would be significant concerns about large-scale development just outside an AONB. So one would hope not to see proposals for major expansion of eg Friston.

Planning Policy Statement 7 permits small scale development within AONB, providing it's necessary to meet the needs of areas within the AONB, for example in terms of affordable housing. The South Downs Joint Committee is supportive of affordable housing subject to the detail of the design, location etc. However, support is less clear-cut for open market housing because evidence suggests that given people's ability to travel, they do / will choose to go elsewhere to work.

It would be helpful to have the Environment Agency's input on this as their planning policy is generally to see the High Weald settlement pattern maintained. These are very much the kinds of challenges the LSP enables us to grapple with. There are also risks associated with Government expectations of delivery against allocations. The bigger the project the bigger the potential risk – landowners have to be willing to sell, and purchasers have to be prepared to develop, not just sell the land on at a profit.

Ultimately it seems unlikely that we will end up with extreme solutions such as one large settlement or all very small incremental development. There needs to be some kind of balance. Existing development tends to take place around the main towns, with affordable housing development in villages. We may be heading for more of the same.

It will be important to build in provision for formal and informal leisure facilities – it is vital for a healthy lifestyle and often gets forgotten about.

Several partners were unable to attend the meeting, and their viewpoints were sorely missed as they have important parts to play in the LDF process, and in the ultimate delivery of key services. Some of the public sector partners have undergone considerable change in the recent past which can make it difficult for them to feel comfortable engaging in the detail of the LDF at this stage. The Planning Policy Team is gathering as much evidence as they can in order to inform the process, and wide public consultation is a fundamental cornerstone of the LDF.

Having opened up the discussions about the LDF Core Strategy and begun to reflect on some of the key questions, partners were reminded that a key part of their role is to link back to the rest of their organisation, and try to join things up both internally, and with other key players in their sphere.

## **2.2 Parish Capacity- Building Event**

With assistance from AiRS and the District Council, the LSP is organising an LDF-focused event for Town and Parish Councils. The programme is designed to offer local councils the opportunity to work directly with planners and infrastructure providers to develop their capacity to feed into the LDF process, and in particular, the forthcoming consultation on the 'Core Strategy Issues and Options' paper in the summer. The event is taking place on 25th April 2007 (10:00 – 15:30) at Pilgrim Hall, Eason's Green near Uckfield. All LSP Board members are invited, alternates are welcome, and we are also hoping that representatives from some other specific infrastructure providers will be able to join us. If you would like to attend, please let Gill CW know

[lsp@wealden.gov.uk](mailto:lsp@wealden.gov.uk).

## **2.3 Design Guide**

This is an LSP-sponsored project which responds to a need highlighted in many of the parish plans. Wealden District Council's Conservation Officer, Paul Barker is a specialist in this area, and has been responsible for developing the Guide. It recognises that Wealden is an immensely diverse place, with very different styles, particularly in the north and south of the District. The draft text has now been presented to the Council's LDF Sub-Committee (15th March) and pictures and illustrations will be added to make it easier to use. Anyone who would like to receive a copy of the draft text should contact Caroline Adcock ([Caroline.Adcock@Wealden.gov.uk](mailto:Caroline.Adcock@Wealden.gov.uk)), who will forward it. The Guide, which is not prescriptive, but encourages good, appropriate design, will go out to public consultation in June.

## **3. Other matters**

### **3.1 Community Strategy – next steps**

The revised Community Strategy was adopted by Wealden District Council on 24th February 2007 – the culmination of considerable work from all of the partners. The next steps are to look at the range of delivery mechanisms which will contribute to making our aspirations a reality. These mechanisms are many and varied, but include the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Local Development Framework as a key vehicles for delivery, as well as the corporate and business plans of LSP partners and wider partners throughout the District.

The LSP support team within WDC's Policy & Review Service will be looking to work with Board members on a mapping exercise to identify how their plans align with the Community Strategy, and as an example, a comparative table was distributed at the meeting which cross-references the elements of the LAA with the Community Strategy. Once we have a matrix of delivery plans, we should be able to identify any gaps, and discuss ways in which the partnership might seek to complete the picture. We will also look to put in place performance measures so that we can track progress in delivering the Strategy. As far as possible, the intention is to use indicators that are already being tracked locally so that there is minimal additional work involved in monitoring the Community Strategy.

### **3.2 East Sussex LSP Chairs' and Co-ordinators' Group**

Ian and Gill had attended the most recent meeting of this group on 5th March 2007. There is a strong desire amongst the group to maintain strong links and work together in a synergistic way. It had been agreed at the East Sussex Strategic Partnership (ESSP), which includes the Leaders of all the District and Borough Councils, that the six bodies would work in partnership to develop a county-wide Sustainable Community Strategy for consultation in the autumn, and publication in April 2008. A sub-group comprising the six LSP co-ordinators/managers was set up to take this project forward.

GOSE are promoting a regional Partnership Improvement Project across the South East. This will make £6000 available to each LSP as a credit against training / capacity building activities for LSP members. East Sussex LSPs have agreed to pool their resources as there are a range of common needs and an investment of £36,000 across the board should be more efficient than several smaller separate sums. This approach was ratified by the ESSP Board on 22nd February.

### **3.3 GOSE - LAA Roadshow**

Several representatives from across East Sussex attended a consultation event organised by GOSE on 15th March. GOSE's objective was to gauge the response to the Government's recent proposals for a new approach to LAAs after the initial pilot phase. The new approach is to use the LAA as a performance management framework for an area. However there is a certain lack of clarity at the moment, as the Audit

Commission is in the process of bringing in Comprehensive Area Assessments and we are not sure how, or indeed, if, they will fit together neatly. One key aspect is how partnership arrangements will operate, for example whether partners' performance indicators will be included in the LAA or not.

The situation is particularly complex in two tier areas, and Government guidance tends to focus on the much simpler unitary arrangements where there is only one Community Strategy and one LAA. The current suggestion is that we will switch to the new-style LAA from April next year. This may be relatively reasonable for the first round pilots who are currently in their third year, but the timescale is less acceptable for those second and third round pilots who are in the early stages of playing out the agreement. There are also real concerns about GOSE's own capacity to renegotiate all the South East LAAs within the timescale.

The new LAA will comprise 35 indicators (chosen according to local priorities from about 200), plus the 18 DfES Early Years targets. Over and above these, there can be local indicators, but it is clear that the approach will be very much 'top down' which is entirely at odds with the original theory. Nevertheless, the timescale is the real issue as this will make it extremely difficult to keep organisational partners on board, let alone the people of East Sussex.

#### **4. AOB**

There were no items of other business.

**Next meeting:** Wednesday 16 May 2007, 15:00 – 17:00  
Hailsham East Community Centre, Vega Close, Hailsham BN27 2JZ