

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### Questions about the strategic housing options

*Question 1: Please tell us which of the housing options is the most appropriate for Wealden.*

Response:

Option 5 most closely fits the priorities of the Sustainable Community Strategy, which is the basis of the LSP's preferred approach. Among other priorities, option 5 reflects our encouragement for the provision of affordable housing and allowing villages to expand in order to provide small scale developments, including some at higher densities. It should help protect rural primary schools and aid their development in larger villages. Its service centre approach tallies with our priority of improved accessibility for all. The more dispersed pattern of development may facilitate the realisation of our vision of active communities where people join together to identify and resolve any community safety issues. Option 5 also takes into account environmental risks like flooding.

Option 5 does, however, raise issues about provision of infrastructure, particularly GP surgeries, if growth is spread across a wide, rural area. It may serve to encourage provision of outreach services and minimise travel for more isolated communities but it is not clear how, for example, it would maximise support for an increasingly aged population. There would be significant growth in Hailsham and Polegate and it is not yet clear whether the infrastructure (both physical and social) will be in place to manage this. The option does not conform to the South East Plan housing allocations to south and north Wealden which may be a material consideration, though a robust case could be made for variance from the Regional Spatial Strategy in light of the particular needs of the Wealden area.

Further work needs to be done to refine the option to address such concerns. In particular more emphasis should be given to taking account of housing needs, alongside existing provision of services, in determining where growth should be targeted. In addition, the Rural Settlement Classification identifies only seven 'accessible local service centres' and five 'local service centres' - this would seem to be a little on the low side and suggests a more flexible/innovative approach to classifying rural settlements should be adopted. For example, support for communities that have expressed an interest in accommodating some development to meet identified needs; giving greater consideration to settlements which, although they do not entirely meet the criteria for ALSCs or LSCs, still have quite a good range of services and could be 'upgraded' to take more development.

*Question 2: If you do not agree with any of the suggested housing options, please tell us how you would like to see housing growth distributed.*

Response:

Whilst Option 5 most closely matches the Sustainable Community Strategy it is not an exact fit and needs further work. The principles underpinning the pattern of housing growth should be to:

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Build on existing services to enable villages to remain vibrant: need to positively plan for defined local needs - for example, small scale affordable housing, local business needs, service development. Protect and/or extend key local services;

Enable sustainable growth of towns: utilise towns as hubs - development to reinforce distinctive character and role of the town, and to meet identified needs. Make use of shopping study (which highlights the potential of Uckfield & Hailsham in particular, but also explore opportunities in Heathfield, Crowborough and Polegate where potential exists if the offer is right for the market);

Use pattern of growth to encourage new infrastructure provision where most needed: for example, to support development of new GP surgeries to meet needs of a significant growth in the elderly population; and to extend learning/training provision in the south of the District;

Ensure development is demonstrably supported by existing infrastructure provision or phased in conjunction with provision of the required new infrastructure: particular consideration should be given to infrastructure that addresses the needs of socially deprived areas and of older populations. (NB: We note that some infrastructure providers are not permitted by their regulators to invest in infrastructure development ahead of demand. This will need to be addressed in some way). The financial implications of new infrastructure provision are great, for example, primary care facilities will cost approximately £4.5–5 million across Wealden. A coherent system for gathering contributions will need to be in place, with interested parties made aware in advance;

Ensure development is in line with environmental capacity, particularly for waste water treatment works. And take opportunities to improve the status of water bodies through spatial planning, for example with regard to the Water Framework Directive.

Support sustainable public transport: this is key to the acceptable location of new development; find creative and innovative ways of increasing flexible provision 'on demand', for example, dial-a-ride using taxis and community car schemes as well as a better integrated traditional public transport systems;

Address health, social and housing inequalities (including access to services); - and especially to increase the provision and availability of affordable housing;

Support community cohesion: for example, by considering how the location of new development can contribute in a positive way to building the local community, such as around a public green space/village green, or by providing increased demand to support local services and facilities. Have regard to Natural England's *Green Infrastructure Guidance* as the context for developing around a public green space or village green;

Increase affordable housing according to need; ensure that there is enough flexibility within affordable housing policies to achieve provision where it is needed, including on small rural sites; take care to avoid creating policies which are likely to have perverse effects, for example, on the threshold used

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to determine whether affordable housing must form an element of a development;

Address the needs of Wealden's ageing population through provision of a range of facilities, notably specialist accommodation but also including 'softer' support facilities such as church and village halls. And ensure sufficient capacity to meet changing demographics, particularly the increasing need for the care of the very elderly, including end of life care.

### **Questions about the strategic employment options**

*Question 3: Please tell us which of the employment options is the most appropriate for Wealden.*

Response:

There is no single option that appears more appropriate than any other. A strategy that mixes some of the options may be best.

*Question 4: If you do not agree with the suggested employment options, please tell us how you would like to see employment growth distributed.*

Response:

There is no clear vision set out for the pattern of economic development and therefore, employment. There needs to be much more clarity about what is expected of and for Wealden in future in terms of employment opportunities and the expectations and requirements of local business. For example, whether it is feasible to encourage large businesses into the area; what are the development needs of existing businesses; what is the skills base which would better support existing and emerging businesses; where would commercial providers of business premises wish to develop. There is an apparent tension between wanting to preserve the rural nature of the area whilst purporting to support increased employment opportunities. Resolution of this tension may help clarify the vision.

In the view of the LSP the vision should set out:

An approach that allows development of business opportunities/sites in rural areas. Evidence should be gathered on the aptitude of using redundant farm buildings and proactively enabling farm diversification, and these approaches encouraged where beneficial;

Encouragement for the development of infrastructure that supports small and micro business, particularly extension of Broadband, and planned provision of Next Generation Broadband;

Improvement to the quality, range and type of employment available, and particularly, support for new, 'clean', high-skill businesses, including the care, service and knowledge-based sectors, and for local food production and markets for such produce;

Maintaining and improving support for existing businesses;

Spatial strategy:

In general terms, small businesses and employment opportunities will follow, and should be enabled to locate, where new housing is built. This would reduce travelling times and reflect the projected growth in small enterprises and working from home. This element of dispersed development needs to be balanced with strategic allocations of employment land which integrate with development plans elsewhere in Sussex and the South East. This will lead the strategy towards the A27/A259 corridor, and raise the importance of Hailsham and Polegate at all these geographical levels. The good performance of north Wealden in secondary education is relevant, but the A27/A259 corridor approach would link in with further education and skills training opportunities, which are especially important to business. Commercial provision in Crowborough, Heathfield and Uckfield also needs to be encouraged. Employment allocations should balance these factors, but should take care not to rule out the possibility of encouraging emergent opportunities through the planning system. A level of flexibility should be available to local decision-makers, based on sound principles, which would reduce the potential for external influences - such as developers, or planning inspectors following an appeal - to disrupt the strategy.

As with the housing options, this approach reflects the balanced range of economic objectives promoted in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

**Is there anything else you would like to tell us about our vision or suggested options?**

*Question 5: Is there anything else you wish to tell us about our vision and strategic aims (Part 2) or the suggested spatial options (Parts 3 and 4)?*

Options 1 and 6 would contribute little to delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy and, despite the fact that the SCS supports the principle of reinstating the Uckfield-Lewes rail link, are not credible options in the view of the LSP. However, the consideration given to vital transport issues in options 4, 5 and 6 should be applied and developed in the final development pattern with the aim of reducing the number of car journeys.

We strongly support the principle that land allocation should be based on the use of land with lowest probability of flooding first. In addition the Strategy should support the creation of strategic flood storage areas, and encourage grey water recycling and rainwater harvesting, as well as minimisation of water use more generally.

Full regard ought to be given to the aspirations of towns and parishes as set out in their parish and town plans or visioning/master planning exercises and, as far as possible, ways sought to meet these aspirations through the pattern of future development in Wealden.

The LSP would support the principle of development in AONB locations where it meets identified needs or is necessary to facilitate the economic and social well-being of communities in those areas.

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Where required and feasible, opportunities to develop better sports facilities, together with children's play areas, youth clubs, and facilities for teenagers, should be created.

A focus on 'parks' for ensuring access to green space may be appropriate in the District's five towns, but seems less so in essentially rural locations.

The links between Wealden's strategy and surrounding areas should be clearer. The Core Strategy *must* take account of what is happening outside Wealden, particularly in terms of people travelling into and out of the district to work, and the types of employers and jobs to attract. Employment land need not only service local needs. Moreover, the issue of whether the District is a dormitory for others or a destination for jobs in its own right needs to be addressed in the integration of the housing and employment policies and the firming up of the vision for Wealden: to what extent, if any, should Wealden be planned as a dormitory for the retired and those who work elsewhere.

The Strategy needs to take more clearly into account the projected demographics of the population, with particular attention to the changing balance between different groups - for example, migrant workers, the elderly and the young, to assess the potential impact on and requirements for, for example, primary care facilities and primary and secondary education needs.

### **Do you consider there are other matters we should include in the Plan?**

*Question 6: Are there any other matters we should be addressing as part of the Wealden Core Strategy?*

Sustainable communities should understand that sensitively designed and located development is a friend and not a threat. It is vital therefore that the Strategy provides a reasoned and logical case for the development options chosen, helping to reduce the fear and misunderstanding that can lead some residents and visitors to resist development 'at any cost'. Tranquility is only a part of the rural equation. The LSP would encourage a Core Strategy that demonstrates a balanced consideration of all the elements that combine to support a thriving, living and working countryside, supporting and supported by, healthy, vibrant, rural market towns. It should cover development issues in a way that more fully reflects the complete range of Sustainable Community Strategy themes. In view of the demographics and specifically the projected growth of the elderly population, the LDF should also give consideration to meeting the need for appropriate facilities for end-of-life care.