

**DRAFT MINUTES FOR COMMENTS FROM ATTENDEES - PLEASE CAN
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Erica.Peck@wealden.gov.uk by March 6th**

Wealden LDF Core Strategy

Environmental Agencies Meeting 17th February 2009

Attendees: Andrew Shaw - High Weald AONB unit
Marion Ashdown - Natural England
Jane Field - Natural England
Hannah Mears - Environment Agency
Marina Briggins Shaw - Wealden District Council
Nigel Eveleigh - Wealden District Council
Erica Peck - Wealden District Council

1) Introduction and background to meeting

NE Welcomed all attendees. Clarified the purpose of the meeting:

- To provide an update on LDF core strategy progress at Wealden and a brief on the next consultation stage.
- To identify environmental or related issues which may present particular challenges for the spatial development options being developed for the Core Strategy Consultation Document.
- To initiate the dialogue on issues of mutual concern and provide the opportunity for matters of common interest to be raised.

The target dates were clarified as follows:

April 22 nd 2009	submission of Core Strategy Consultation Document to Wealden's Local Development Framework sub-committee. If approved by the portfolio holder, the Consultation Document could be made available (in advance of the formal 6 week consultation period) to key Infrastructure Providers and Agencies.
May 22 nd 2009	Commencement of 6-week formal consultation period, for the Consultation Document (Core Strategy).
June 2010	Publication of 'proposed submission' version of Core Strategy
Sept 2010	Submission of final Wealden Core Strategy to the Secretary of State

NE Explained that following the 6-week consultation period (starting on 22nd May 2009) there is no subsequent formal consultation stage planned. However, a continued dialogue and series of group meetings would continue to provide the opportunity to address and resolve issues that emerge during the preparation of the Core Strategy.

2) Update of relevant studies undertaken

MB All evidence studies are made available at the Council's website when complete. To find the relevant page, click on Planning/Building Control on the Council's homepage, then Local Development Framework and then Evidence base for the Core Strategy.
http://www.wealden.gov.uk/Planning_and_Building_Control/Local_Plan_EvidenceBase.aspx

MB Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)
Two studies have/are being undertaken. Southern Catchment Level 1 (completed) and north (yet to be completed).

Appropriate Assessment

Applicable in respect of the Ashdown Forest (SAC & SPA), the Pevensey Levels (RAMSAR site) and the Lewes Downs (SAC). Awaiting the outcome of the Joint Mid Sussex District Council and Wealden District Council Recreation study on the Ashdown Forest. Three more studies are being proposed namely air pollution studies concerning the Ashdown Forest and Lewes Downs, and a hydrological study concerning the Pevensey Levels. An air pollution study concerning the Pevensey Levels is currently being undertaken in partnership with Rother District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Wealden District Council and Hastings Borough Council. Consultants will be commissioned to complete individual studies and to draw all the elements of assessment together.

JF There are issues with the draft recreation study. Natural England (NE) have asked that the analysis and conclusions be reassessed. Apparent errors with analysis, despite apparently sound and robust evidence base. In addition the recreational survey requires mapping of habitats together with how and where people access the Ashdown Forest.

Open Space Study

Required under PPG 17, details of open space available within the district and which open space is working.

Landscape Study

ESCC employed as consultants for study. Consultants are using the same methodology for a study of Tunbridge Wells and Natural England

has confirmed the methodology of the study meets best practice. Hinterlands of 5 towns plus larger villages have been examined with further work required on smaller settlements. Results not on web site yet, WDC happy to share results, if requested, with attendees.

Discussion ensued over to what extent green infrastructure could be taken into consideration at the strategic level of considering spatial growth options across the District. An understanding of how landscape, habitats and species interact is required. Reference made to Brighton and Hove Unitary Authority, where mapping work has been undertaken to link habitats throughout the city (contact Matthew Thomas). The use of Biodiversity Priority Areas and the open space study, can together assist in assembling a green network. Discussion regarding developer contributions for green infrastructure and biodiversity. J.F advised that at Thames Basin Heath, a developer contribution (£1.5-£2k per house) is required for development within a 5 miles distance of the heath.

MB With regards to developer contributions Wealden has very different land values to that of Brighton and Hove and Surrey. The Council is undertaking a viability study for affordable housing and as a result it will be necessary for the Council to prioritise infrastructure and other requirements when considering developer contributions. However it is noted that green space to mitigate the impact on the Ashdown Forest will potentially be required for the delivery of housing and therefore a necessary priority.

HM There is a need to include 'blue' space as well as green space as part of the 'green network', examples include river banks and other water based features.

3) **Briefing on the Council's evolving spatial development options**

NE Explained the 6 alternative spatial growth distribution options. Explained that the outcomes from several group meetings with infrastructure providers and regulatory agencies (including this meeting) are helping to develop and refine the spatial options, prior to the publication of the Consultation Document in May 09. Clarified that the South East Plan (due to be adopted this year) indicates a District split, with 7,000 and 4, 000 new homes to be split between the south and north of the district respectively. Out of the 11,000 housing requirement (2006-2026), approximately 3,000 homes are accounted for with existing commitments. Polegate and Hailsham are anticipated to be principal growth areas, with the South East Plan also indicating further growth in Uckfield.

4) **Discussion regarding the alternative spatial growth distribution options**

JF Natural England is able to object to planning applications at the reserved matters stage with regards to the Habitats Regulations where

appropriate assessment has not been undertaken for outline consent. This has been exercised by NE with regards to development at Thames Basins Heath.

JF In the absence of evidence to the contrary WDC should be applying a 'precautionary approach' to new development which may have an impact upon Ashdown Forest. Concern is raised with regard to potential development in Crowborough and within 400m of the Ashdown Forest Boundary. It is clear from the recreational study that a concentration of residents that visit the Ashdown Forest originate from Crowborough and there are some doubts that physical intervention (by means of an alternative green space) would be effective in mitigating any harm. It has also been necessary, at Thames Basins Heaths and the New Forest, to impose a 400m exclusion around the SPA to prevent predation from cats. This is a recognised area for cats roaming from home and should be considered in relation to the Ashdown Forest SPA. NE will consider these issues further in relation to the potential impact on the future development of settlements in

Action; Wealden, particularly Crowborough. NE agreed to provide information and further guidance as soon as possible.

MB It is acknowledged that Wealden has some particular flood risk constraints at a strategic level, including Pevensey and Forest Row. WDCP propose a strategic sequential test for the May consultation (informing the options) prior to a more detailed sequential test at site level for later stages of the Core Strategy.

AS The High Weald AONB can benefit from some housing development for local employment purposes, especially in this area which is dependent upon active land management and opportunities for rural employment. It is necessary to target development in the AONB where it will build on and enhance the existing communities as this is historically how the High Weald has developed, and it is a distinctive part of its character. There is a need for an understanding of how the landscape work-clusters of settlements function differently in the north compared to the south of the District. The European Landscape Convention maintains that all landscapes matter and are important and need to be taken into account. Rother District Council are working with High Weald AONB on shaping a key worker policy to include land use management workers.

5) Any other issues

Water Resources

HM EA will be requiring a reduction in the litres used, per head, per day. EA presently considering their position on water efficiency by the use of water efficiency mechanisms, this is due to the area being in a "water stress" area. Some LPAs have been very proactive in requiring water efficiency.

Comment [m1]: This is an error as the 400m relates to other issues such as trampling, fires, vandalism, trail bikes, garden rubbish dumping etc.

The Water Framework Directive is an important aspect for Wealden in relation to the Core Strategy. The EA are currently undertaking a water quality mapping exercise on a District basis. The Core Strategy should reflect the implications of development (including cumulative impact) on the aquatic environment. EA to check whether the mapping for Wealden has been completed and provide results as soon as possible.

8) **Continuing the dialogue**

All agreed that a further meeting should be arranged for early June 09. Suggested that Sussex Wildlife Trust attend next meeting (Janice Watson).

Comment [m2]: We have no record that Natural England attended another meeting at this time.