

The New Wealden Plan - Issues and Options – indicative outline

At this stage in the development of the plan, the key objective is to take a constructive and comprehensive view of the potential and opportunity for development, as well as identifying potential constraints.

Part one Context

Why we need a new plan

The regional requirements the new plan must meet

What makes Wealden distinct? A spatial portrait

What principles might the new plan adopt?

Part two Wealden's Landscape

Landscape shaping development

Wealden's landscape character

Wealden's biodiversity

Wealden's water cycle

Managing small scale changes to Wealden's character

- Key urban design principles as they apply to Wealden's settlements, including community safety & inclusive design
- Visual / landscape impact
- Amenity, noise, daylight and sunlight
- Access, and transport impact
- Mixed uses in accessible locations
- Residential change of use and redevelopment in the countryside
- Change of use in town centres
- Employment – small scale changes of use and new development within settlement boundaries
- Employment and agricultural change in the countryside
- Recreation and tourism in the countryside
- Protection of local services
- An overall framework for planning obligations
- Wealden's renewable and low carbon energy potential
- The shift away from farming

Part three Wealden's Settlement Patterns

Classifying towns

- Population size
- Retail network
- Catchment
- How towns of different sizes function in relation to each other

Classifying villages

- Population size and history of growth or contraction
- Nature of the village and the way in which it evolved
- Local service centre or not, level of services available
- Conservation importance
- Landscape sensitivity
- Level of potential for growth

Settlement boundaries

- Maintain?
- Drop?
- Maintain and amend?

Urban / rural split

The new plan will need to take a broad stance on the amount of growth allocated to towns and to villages

- Town focus?
- Town and accessible villages focus?
- Town and distributed villages focus?

Brownfield development, town extension or new settlements?

Options for the overall housing requirement

- South East Plan figure?
- Some additional housing over and above the SE Plan figure to improve housing market and pay for additional infrastructure?

Options for the Sussex Coast Policy Area

Options for the Rest of Wealden

Part four Wealden's Places

The spatial challenge: How can we make the best choices for broad locations for development in ways that add to, and don't detract from, the best characteristics of individual towns and villages?

- Main options for development (not just housing) in and around the five main towns
- Broad areas with potential for development around villages
- Village priorities – what do you wish to see from the new plan as it relates to your village?

Part five Wealden's Communities

The spatial challenge: Wealden needs to boost employment and affordability of housing and improve services to a scattered community. How can we do this with poor transport links and high house prices?

- Economic opportunities
- The Sussex Coast economy
- Employment space
- The Eastbourne – Hailsham Triangle
- Tourism
- Education needs
- Health needs
- Overall housing needs
- Affordable rural housing needs
- Gypsies' and travellers' needs
- Transport needs
- Open space needs
- Minerals and waste
- Infrastructure planning and delivery

Part six Developing a Spatial Vision for Wealden

A preliminary suggestion: Wealden District by 2026....

Its beautiful landscape of weald, forest and down, coast, level, village and town will be preserved and enhanced for future generations. Development and land management will flow from the potential of landscape and place in innovative and sustainable ways.

Necessary development for homes, employment, tourism and farm diversification, new community facilities and enhanced infrastructure will be sensitively integrated into this landscape. Growth will be focused where it will be accessible, most sustainable and most benefits the objectives set out for that place.

It will be a constellation of small towns and villages working together. These and their rural surrounds will be made better, not worse, places to live, and affordability of housing will be improved.

There will be increased economic momentum – it will be a place for small businesses to start and grow, and for all businesses to invest – in particular the Eastbourne – Hailsham triangle will have become the South Coast choice for investment.

It will be a much better connected place. The Wealden Line will be re-opened, with direct rail links to Tunbridge Wells and the South Coast, and major north – south through road traffic will continue to be discouraged.

Possible spatial objectives for Wealden

1. That the importance of the District's landscapes, including the nationally designated landscapes of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sussex Heritage Coast and the proposed South Downs National Park, are protected, well-managed and enhanced, together with appropriate development to meet local needs.
2. In recognition of the need to protect the countryside, to maximise the use of previously developed land, and make full and efficient use of land, ensuring at least 75% of new residential development is at a density of at least 40 dwellings per hectare.
3. To enhance the biodiversity and geodiversity of Wealden, meeting local biodiversity action plan targets, and protecting locally and nationally designated sites of nature conservation importance; in particular the internationally important sites of the Pevensey Levels and Ashdown Forest.
4. To ensure that the built heritage of the Sussex countryside and towns, which is nationally important, is protected and enhanced for future generations.
5. To meet the requirements for additional housing as set out in the South East Plan, also ensuring that the backlog of housing completions is 'on trajectory' by 2012, and ensuring that the minimum target in the plan for provision of affordable housing is met.
6. To increase visitors staying in Wealden by at least X(tbd) by 2026, focusing on sustainable tourism, whilst ensuring that the tranquillity and beauty which attract people to the area is not undermined.

7. To ensure a step change in the quality of urban and rural design in Wealden through the application of policies in the new plan and the principles set out in the Wealden Design Guide.
8. To work with partners to help ensure that Wealden remains a safe place, with levels of crime and disorder well below the national mean.
9. Working with partners to effectively meet the health and lifelong learning needs of a widely dispersed population.
10. Broadening the weak retail offer of the District's towns through meeting the need for an additional X(tbd) comparative goods floorspace, and an additional Y(tbd) convenience goods floorspace by 2016.
11. Ensuring that by 2026, no Super Output Areas within Wealden District are within 15% of the most deprived such areas within England.
12. Increasing the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the District by X% (tbd) from 2007 levels by 2026.
13. To reduce the shortfall of open space, leisure and recreational facilities in the District, providing quality parks in or adjoining each of the District's towns by 2026.
14. To take full account of the local impacts of climate change and to ensure that development is 'carbon neutral' as far as practical.

Part seven What happens next?

The Core Strategy Issues and Options paper will be published for a six week formal consultation period beginning in July. Each section of the paper will set out a range of options and ask which you favour. You will also have the opportunity to offer additional views or options which will be considered in the light of the evidence. All assertions must be supported by evidence to meet the stringent tests of soundness set by the Government.

For example, the Inspector will not just want to know where development should not go, he/she will require evidence as to where else it should go instead, presenting an alternative strategy for development. The lesson is that we need to be positive and constructive in our approach. The new system is designed to 'frontload' discussion on the key planning issues and future choices for Wealden. We face a range of complex issues and this is an exploratory phase – highlighting an issue in the forthcoming consultation is simply that – bringing it to notice. No decisions have been made.

The next key stage will be the publication of preferred options – for further consultation, together with a draft Strategic Environmental Appraisal. Following this, the Council will submit its plan for examination, when you will have an opportunity to say if and why you think it 'sound' or not.