

PLANNING CONTEXT

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2.01 This chapter presents a brief overview of the context in which the Local Plan has been prepared, together with some of the key issues it addresses.

The Local Context

2.02 Hastings and St Leonards is best known as a seaside resort. The seafront is dominated by tourist activity, although many of the former seafront hotels have been put to new uses. There is little scope for further outward expansion of the built-up area because:-

- (i) The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers most of the northern edge of the Borough;
- (ii) The AONB also encompasses the 245 hectares of Hastings Country Park to the east of the town;
- (iii) To the west is the green wedge of Combe Haven Valley (partly a Site of Special Scientific Interest – SSSI) which separates Hastings from Bexhill;
- (iv) On the north western edge of the Borough is the Marline Valley, much of which is an SSSI.

2.03 The urban area is characterised by a hilly landscape of valleys and ridges. Hastings and St Leonards has a rich heritage of historic buildings – the medieval Old Town, the Victorian town centre in Hastings and the Regency splendour of parts of St Leonards. The Borough contains 17 conservation areas.

2.04 The urban area also has a valuable network of greenspaces important for wildlife conservation and informal recreation. Over 30 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance have been identified in the Plan.

- 2.05 Tourism and an expanding market in foreign language schools are important to the town's economy. Hastings also still supports a small shore-based fishing industry. The area has a number of industrial estates, although no one sector is dominant and most of the firms are small.
- 2.06 The area is remote from the national road network, the primary access being the A21 from London and the A259 Honiton to Folkestone Trunk Road. The town is served by regional passenger rail services, and services are available to Ashford International and hence the Channel Tunnel. Poor road and rail links have made it more difficult to tackle the town's economic problems. Hastings consistently has the highest unemployment rates in East Sussex.
- 2.07 Former editions of the Borough Plan have concentrated on guiding and directing the growth and expansion of Hastings. The Town Development Area in the north-west of the Borough has been an area of major change with new housing and industrial areas being constructed on previously undeveloped 'greenfield' sites. This planned town expansion took place mainly during the 1970s and 1980s and has largely achieved its objectives of providing a more balanced population age structure and a significant manufacturing job base for Hastings.
- 2.08 Hastings has now reached its limits in terms of further outward growth and development – only a small number of 'greenfield' sites remain available on the edges of the built-up area. There is therefore limited scope for further large scale housing and employment development within the Borough itself. In the longer term, some of the town's needs may be met through new development proposed in Rother District, particularly on land at north Bexhill where a new community and business park are proposed.

2.09 The Local Plan therefore mainly concentrates on making the most of opportunities for change which can be identified within the existing urban framework, whilst at the same time protecting those areas which should be conserved for the benefit of Hastings' people now and in the future.

Sustainable Development

2.10 'Sustainable Development' is the key principle which now underpins national planning policy. The concept of sustainability originated from the concern to minimise the long-term damage to the environment and resources caused by present day activities and development. The most commonly used definition of sustainable development is:-

"Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

(World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

2.11 A national strategy for sustainable development 'Sustainable Development the UK Strategy' was published in January 1994. It has subsequently been reviewed and updated with the publication of 'A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the United Kingdom' in May 1999. The updated strategy seeks to integrate economic, social and environmental policies "to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come." It also sets out 14 key indicators to measure progress towards sustainable development. More specifically, the strategy states that land use planning policies should promote regeneration, social inclusion and more sustainable patterns of development.

Planning Guidance

2.12 Government policy on planning matters is set out in a series of Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs), which are supplemented by Circulars, ministerial statements and other documents. The Government's general approach to planning is set out in PPG1 'General Policy and Principles' which was last revised in February 1997. The guidance is strongly founded on the principles of sustainable development. It states that a sustainable planning framework should:-

- Make adequate provision for new development, while respecting environmental objectives.
- Use already developed areas in the most efficient way, whilst making them more attractive places in which to live and work.
- Conserve both the cultural heritage and natural resources, taking particular care to safeguard designations of national and international importance.
- Shape new development patterns in a way which minimises the need to travel.

2.13 PPG12 'Development Plans', a revised version of which was published in January 2000, defines the role of Local Plans in more detail.

- It restates the government's commitment to a plan-led system which gives primary importance to development plans in determining planning applications, as set out in section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- It sets out the role of local plans within the framework provided by Government policies and Planning Guidance, Regional Planning Guidance and Strategic Planning Policies set out in Structure Plans.
- It requires local plans to set out detailed policies and specific proposals for the development and use of land which will guide its day-to-day planning decisions.

- At the same time, the guidance indicates that local plans should avoid excessive detail, and advises that local planning authorities prepare Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to provide detailed guidance on the application of particular Plan policies or in relation to particular sites and development proposals.
- In addition to defining the general role of local plans, the guidance gives more detailed advice on integrating sustainable development and transport and land-use policies in development plans.

2.14 In addition to PPGs 1 and 12, other Planning Guidance Notes cover specific topic areas such as housing, transport and the environment. These are referred to in more detail in the relevant Local Plan chapters.

Urban Renaissance

2.15 An aspect of emerging national policy of particular relevance to Hastings is an increased emphasis on urban regeneration. The foundations for this were laid in the Government's policy paper "Planning for the Communities of the Future" published in February 1998. This led to the establishment of an Urban Task Force with responsibility to identify causes of urban decline in England and recommend practical solutions to bring people back into cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods. The Task Force report 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' carried a wide range of recommendations aimed at encouraging regeneration and making towns and cities more attractive places to live. These encompassed such themes as bringing derelict land and buildings back into use, achieving more housing in urban areas, encouraging sustainable transport, and creating a high quality urban environment through improved standards of design.

2.16 The Urban Task Force recommendations have influenced the revised PPG3 'Housing', published in 2000. This requires local planning authorities to:-

- Plan to meet the needs of the whole community, including affordable and special needs housing;
- Provide wider opportunity and a better mix in the size, type and location of housing and seek to create mixed communities;
- To give priority to re-using previously developed land within urban areas, in preference to the development of greenfield sites;
- Create more sustainable patterns of development
- Make more efficient use of land by developing at higher densities;
- Seek to reduce car dependence by facilitating more walking and cycling, making public transport more accessible and by planning for mixed use developments;
- Promote good design in new housing developments in order to create attractive, high quality environments.

2.17 The policies and proposals in this Local Plan are based on these principles.

Regional Planning Guidance (RPG)

2.18 The Regional Planning Guidance (RPG9) for the South East published in March 2001 provides a regional planning framework covering the period to 2016. The RPG aims to produce a more sustainable pattern of development, focused on making better use of urban areas in the region and achieving more sustainable transport by reducing car use and promoting public transport. The strategy seeks to maintain the region's economic competitiveness and to make better use of the region's assets in terms of underused land and labour resources. Strong emphasis is given to addressing spatial inequalities in the region by supporting economic regeneration and renewal in areas suffering

economic disadvantage. These areas, termed Priority Areas for Economic Regeneration (PAERs), include the Sussex coastal towns, with the strategy identifying Hastings as one of the areas of greatest need which should be particularly targeted. The strategy gives support for transport improvements (recommending that high priority should be given to the Access to Hastings Study and Southampton to Folkestone Study, which became the South Coast Multi Modal Study), investment in urban areas, and the release of land for high quality business development.

- 2.19 In July 2001 the Secretary of State announced his decision on the Access to Hastings Study. His decision included the abandonment of the Hastings and Bexhill bypass schemes but he also recommended that improvements to the A21 and local and strategic rail services be pursued. More recently the South Coast Multi Modal Study (SoCoMMS) has recommended a number of road and rail improvements. These are set out in more detail in Chapter 6 'Transport'.

Structure Plan Policies

- 2.20 The East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan, which was adopted in December 1999, also identifies sustainability as a core issue. The Structure Plan sets out the guiding policy for Hastings as follows:-

"S24 Hastings will continue to be promoted and developed as a major centre for employment, shopping, services and tourism. Primary attention will be directed towards improving and diversifying its economy and regenerating its physical environment consistent with the setting of the town and its townscape quality and character. The early development of some new sites for high quality business uses will be allowed with good access to the strategic transport network. At the same time there will be an emphasis on the regeneration of vacant and underused sites within the urban area for appropriate uses to improve the

local economy and environment. No further outward expansion of the town beyond existing commitments will be allowed, except for that permissible for early economic development in Policy E10. Support will be given to improving strategic road and rail links. A Transport and Environment Strategy, jointly with Bexhill, will be pursued to improve accessibility, manage the transport consequences of increased economic activity, reduce reliance on the private car and enhance the environment for residents and visitors.”

- 2.21 Policies for particular topics in the Structure Plan give further guidance. As well as making the best use of land within the town to provide new employment opportunities, it is proposed to release up to 15 hectares of land in the Hastings and Bexhill area in the short term for high quality business development. This is to boost the local economy and redress the shortage of suitable sites for modern business uses in the area.
- 2.22 The housing provision figures for Hastings recognise that the land supply for housing development is limited, particularly beyond 2006.