

A statement explaining the background of the application

West St Leonards Forum was approved by Hastings Borough Council on April 6 2023 as a neighbourhood forum, but in the knowledge that during the consultation residents of Collinswood Drive had asked for their road to be included in the area. Following discussions within West St Leonards Forum and formal approval of the extension of the area by the Forum at its Annual General Meeting on May 17 2023, this application is being made for the designation West St Leonards Forum as the neighbourhood forum of the extended area.

A statement that the organisation or body making the application is a relevant body for the purposes of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 61G).

The West St Leonards Forum has been established as an organisation whose purpose is to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of the West St Leonards Area. Membership is free and open to all living or working in the Neighbourhood Area, and to all businesses in the area. All local groups operating in the area and owners of land within the ward but not resident or working in the ward have been invited to be involved.

The Forum's membership represents a full cross-section of the local community.

The West St Leonards Forum is therefore a body capable of being designated as a Neighbourhood Forum for the purposes of the T&CP 1990 Act (Section 61G)

The following sections expand on the reasons for designating the West Saint Leonards Forum

History of the Area

Information about the history of the area is included separate document submitted with this application and is relevant in that it indicates the cohesion of the area.

Services in the area

With the possible exception of the Darwell Close area the different communities in the area look or have looked towards the central section of Bexhill Road on either side of the railway bridge from Grosvenor Crescent along Bexhill Road to Filsham Road and Bulverhythe Road as the centre of the local community.

The Bexhill Road parade serves residents along Bexhill Road, up West Hill Road, Harley Shute Road, and into Filsham Valley, as well as passing trade. It provides a good range of shops and services including a post office, pharmacist, butcher and greengrocer as well as cafes, fish and chip shop and kebab shop.

The area along Bexhill Road between Filsham Road and Bulverhythe Road became the centre of the expanding local community and remained so until very recently. This centrality may return with the

erection of the new Medical Centre and of the Aldi supermarket on the Bexhill Road and other potential improvements.

Demographics of the area

A detailed estimate of the population of the area has been made, and details of the calculation are included in the separate document submitted with this application

In summary the estimated current population of the proposed area is 7,222 in 3,183 households with 97 people in communal living. This gives a density of 2.27 people per household.

There will be a further increase in the population when the house building currently going on the old Grove School Site at Darwell Close / Crowhurst Road is completed, adding 210 houses and about 470 more residents

This makes the total population for the proposed area, including the new development about 7,670 or about 8.36% of the population of Hastings

The working age population is said to about 72%, but this has not been confirmed. There are about 150 commercial premises within West St Leonards including local shops, pubs, guest houses, the railway works and a large number of small car repair and similar workshops. Anecdotal information indicates that many business owners e.g. shopkeepers and landlords, are local residents

Why this area?

The proposed designated area consisting largely of one council ward, forms a coherent part of the Borough of Hastings and St Leonards, which has suffered from neglect with the decline of industrial work in the area and perceived distance from the more prosperous part of Central Saint Leonards dominated by the Burton Development of the 19th Century and the main centre of Hastings to the East.

The parts added from the Maze Hill and Central Saint Leonards wards make the area more coherent, although in any urbanised area boundaries are rarely that precise or rigid. The consultation with these communities showed that residents in the areas outside the West Saint Leonards ward identified as being part of the West St Leonards community, despite falling in another electoral ward.

The Future of the area

Overall the area has lacked any coherent plan to reverse the neglect of many years and local inhabitants reflected the feeling that this part of the Borough was not considered important.

These are examples of failed planning in the area and a lack of involvement with the local community.

There is a lot of property which is run down as well as vacant and abandoned sites, much of which is already owned by Hastings BC and which could be used for the benefit of the community.

In spite of this neglect local communities have continued to thrive and work together, this is shown particularly in the uniting in opposition to the Bulverhythe Recreation Ground plans and the lack of progress over the Bathing Pool Site. The Combe Valley Countryside Park is also beginning to excite more interest in the area, with Friends of Combe

Valley drawing its members and volunteers from all sides of the park, including West Saint Leonards.

The presence of the Countryside Park and the coast line on the south of the area make the whole area attractive for residents and visitors alike. Residents who live along the Bexhill Road have easy access on foot to the sea, those higher up Harley Shute Road can have lovely views across to the sea and over the park.

The forum would investigate what is available and explore the different options with the local community to enable the area to be revived and improved for the benefit of everyone. The proposed neighbourhood plan gives a real opportunity for the area to be reinvigorated for the benefit of everyone.