



OUR LOCAL PLANS

Boroughs' Local Plans, periodically updated, and constantly facing increased housing requirements, have huge impact, for better or worse, on the Wealden countryside which WKPS was formed, well over 50 years ago, to protect. The three boroughs which directly concern us are those of Ashford, in which over half of our 'WKPS' villages lie, Maidstone, and Tunbridge Wells.

We are fortunate to have received expert comment on the Ashford plan by an Ashford borough councillor who supports it, and an expert parish council view from the Planning Committee chair of one of the hard-hit smaller towns in the Maidstone borough. Our factual comments on the Tunbridge Wells plan are by the resident of that borough who edits Watch on the Weald.

ASHFORD BOROUGH

The Ashford Local Plan is about to make its appearance before the government inspectors to see whether it is 'sound' – that is the technical term – and can be the basis for Ashford's strategies, policies, housing and economic growth for the years to 2030. Two inspectors have been appointed and will be sitting for a number of days during April, May and June. The Inspectors will not examine every section of the Plan but will pick those areas which are the most controversial or they feel need strengthening. It may take several months for their views to be made known and no doubt there will need to be some adjustments.

The current plan has grown from the Core Strategy published in 2008 and has taken many months of work to bring it up-to-date. This has involved understanding population growth figures: both internal Ashford Borough growth and in-migration from other parts of the country. This is followed by Objectively Assessed Needs regarding housing – probably the key issue in the Plan. Independent assessments have been prepared by external research companies and have been reviewed several times over

the update process. There have also been a number of government documents released affecting planning, including the National Planning Policy Guidance.

The Local Plan covers the whole borough, except for Chilmington Green which is gradually being built out. The Planners have also taken into account Neighbourhood Plans. They have consulted the neighbouring counties and the KCC – particularly on schools and highways issues – and the Kent Health & Wellbeing Board. Residents are rightly anxious about whether there will be adequate medical resources to cover the new developments. In addition to this is the Duty to Co-operate which means that each borough has to liaise with its neighbours to see if they can help each other out, particularly over housing figures. Between 2017-2030 the Ashford borough is estimated to need 12,950 more houses.

Ashford Town will continue to be the main focus for development but the areas around Ashford, the 'urban fringe', will be heavily hit with new development. Tenterden is already taking a good deal of additional housing with Tent 1A; Tent 1B is

in the schedule to take 225 houses but only after Tent 1A is completed. The villages are expected to take a reasonable number of additional houses but not enough to alter their essential character. Emphasis is being placed on retaining and enhancing the green areas and to protect and improve the borough's heritage assets, such as the Archbishop's Palace in Charing.

What has been difficult for the Borough Council has been the contended view that Ashford ran short of a five year land supply suitable for housing: this attracted some ruthless developers to try and get planning permission before the new Local Plan is approved. Fighting appeals has cost the Council money and created anxiety in the residents of our attractive villages. Looking at the programme for the Inspectors' hearings, I can see that these developers are not going to give up without a struggle. I just hope that the Inspectors will understand the importance of retaining the Garden of England in its glory.

Jessamy Blanford
Ashford Borough Councillor
and former WKPS Chairman

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH

Staplehurst Parish Council (SPC) has always endeavoured to maintain a good relationship with Maidstone Borough Council (MBC), being of the opinion that we are all on the same team and working for the same common good. Like all families though, we have our differences of opinion.

For a long time MBC were investigating / exploring their own Local Plan and had advised SPC to wait until their Local Plan was completed before creating our Neighbourhood Plan (NP). After some years, SPC decided it was time to get started on our NP, as we were concerned about protecting our local interests and building was continuing at a pace that was of concern whilst not being included in the MBC overall housing count for the area.

After a number of years, a lot of money, effort, expert help and cooperation with MBC (compromises on housing numbers), MBC passed our Neighbourhood Plan, which had been supported by 93% of residents voting in a referendum with a 34% turnout. MBC then continued on with work on their Local Plan. This was completed in conflict with aspects of Staplehurst's NP, even though MBC had passed it, and even though the NPPF requires the local planning authority to work proactively to resolve discrepancies between local and Neighbourhood Plans in this situation.

It seems that the current legal thinking is that the latest plan, in our case MBC's Local Plan, has priority over SPC's Neighbourhood Plan. This means that should we come into conflict over any aspect, say housing numbers, MBC's Local Plan takes precedence. Having said that, our NP has been cited by MBC in support of us with planning applications.

So, overall was it worth it? Only time will tell but, so far, it has helped firm up certain planning issues that have arisen. Some areas where we have not had the result we wanted, probably have had to be worked on and conditions applied much more robustly than would have been done pre-Neighbourhood Plan. Watch this space!

Councillor Adele Sharp
Chair of Planning Committee
Staplehurst Parish Council

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH

TWBC is working on replacement of its existing (2006) Local Plan by a Plan up to 2033. Its 'Issues and Options' document was open to consultation (in which WKPS participated) in mid-2017, when the stated requirement for new dwellings by 2033 was 12,950.

551 responses to the consultation, 84% of them by individuals, were received. Unsurprisingly, the majority disagreed with particular TWBC proposals. Watch on the Weald cannot possibly summarise them all, but some fairly common broad comments included:

1. Complaints that housing requirements overshadowed environmental ones;
2. Wish for more emphasis on types of housing, especially affordability;
3. Insufficient emphasis on infrastructure problems;

4. Concern for buses, trains and cycling, and failure to acknowledge present policies' ineffectiveness.

5. Strong 'Yes' reply to question whether Limits to Built Development be retained;

6. Support for most TWBC 'ENV' (environmental) policies, though review/updates needed for some.

7. Insufficient weight given to pollution issues;

8. Insufficient recognition of High Weald AONB's significance and of HWAONB's Management Plan.

Understandably, published TWBC responses so far have been mainly of the 'will be taken into consideration' type, as the Borough Council pursues the long process of Local Plan preparation.

Peter Allen
Cranbrook

WHAT PEOPLE THINK OF THE HIGH WEALD AONB.

From September to November 2017, the High Weald AONB Unit ran a public engagement survey.

It sought to explore:

- Which aspects of the High Weald people find particularly beautiful;
- How they most like to enjoy the area;
- What improvements they would like to see; what they perceived as the biggest threats.

The 294 people who completed the survey spanned all the given age categories, the largest proportion being between 45 and 64. Their most common answers tended to be:

- Enjoyment of the countryside's sights, sounds, smells, and its contrast with busy urban life;
- Walking through the High Weald, mainly on public footpaths;
- Better maintenance of existing footpaths, to improve access;
- Increased building developments and urban expansion, against which most respondents favoured tighter planning regulations.

The High Weald AONB Unit will be conscious of these survey results when drawing up its 2019-2024 Management Plan and in other policy consultations.

Most of the towns and villages that WKPS seeks to protect lie within the High Weald AONB. We very warmly support the Unit's work.



Credit to High Weald AONB
(Vivienne Blakey)

WKPS PLANNING COMMITTEE WORK

The WKPS Planning Committee comprises members who act as scrutineers covering parts of the Ashford, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone boroughs.

We monitor the weekly planning lists produced by the Borough Councils, who are the Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), and we identify those applications that would have an impact on the Weald. Once identified, the site history, application documents, and plans are studied by the relevant scrutineer, who then refers it to the Planning Committee for discussion and decision whether to make a WKPS submission to the LPA. This may take the form of an objection, support or a general comment and will be drafted by the scrutineer. There are of course very many applications – including such issues as side extensions and roof conversions – on which WKPS makes no comment.

Most of our work involves trying to protect the Weald from inappropriate development and to mitigate any proposal's damaging impact on the Wealden landscape and the High Weald AONB in particular. Each LPA, under extreme pressure as it attempts to meet the government requirements for housing, issues a 'Call for Sites' in which landowners are invited to submit possible sites. Each may or may not be included in the borough's Local Plan, according to whether the LPA judges it as suitable. Once a site is so included, WKPS has a role to play when the planning applications are made, because although development is inevitable, it is still possible to influence

the character of the development, and perhaps mitigate its impact.

Since October 2017 the WKPS Planning Committee has commented on 27 applications across the three boroughs. Of these, 19 were objections, 2 were general comments and 6 were in support. Of the 19 objections, 11 are yet to be determined by the LPA, 7 have been refused by the LPA, and 1 objection was withdrawn by the applicant. Both of the general comments are yet to be determined. Of the 6 support comments, 4 are yet to be determined, 1 was permitted and 1 was refused. The reason that there are so many applications that are yet to be determined is because they are relatively recent ones.

In addition to commenting on planning applications, our experienced and knowledgeable Planning Committee members take part in the consultation processes for the Local Plan in each of the boroughs, and very soon we will be taking part in the consultation of the draft revision of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

If you, or someone you know, have an interest in protecting our landscape, we need you! For further information about the role of a scrutineer, please contact me, in the first instance via email: planning@wkps.org.uk

Peta Grant
Planning Committee Secretary
WKPS

SAVING A LISTED BUILDING: ALL SAINTS CHURCH, HIGHGATE, HAWKHURST

Hawkhurst has been, for several years, a major target for considerable numbers of housing developments both small and large. Very few of these are welcome, particularly the large ones for the usual reasons of excessive traffic generation, the despoiling of green space (all AONB) and pressure on doctors, schools etc.

So it is refreshing that at last along comes a development (admittedly small) which has been universally applauded by the village population, the Parish Council, the Borough Council, Historic England and of course the WKPS. This development is the Grade II listed All Saints Church in the Highgate part of Hawkhurst – a Conservation Area in the centre of the village. As far as can be established, the last service was held there in the late 70s. Since then it has stood empty, gradually becoming derelict and vandalised. It was declared redundant and deconsecrated in 1997.

The exact name of the church was The Chapel of Ease for St Laurence. It was dedicated to All Saints. With the village population increasing in the middle of the 19th century the Norman church of St Laurence, situated on The Moor, was becoming crowded. This prompted the incumbent vicar, the Rev. Canon Jeffreys, and his sister to fund the building of All Saints in 1859 on land given by Mr Jennings of Hall House. It is built of the local iron-sandstone and the builders were Davis and Son, a family concern which is still very much in business. Canon Jeffreys was the vicar of Hawkhurst for 59 years and died in 1898 at the ripe old age of 88. We can only admire the generosity of him and his sister.

All Saints Church was designed by Sir Gilbert Scott (1811-1878), although it is said he left much of the detail to his son. Scott was one of the most important British 19th century architects, whose masterpiece



is considered to be St Pancras Station. He restored various cathedrals and worked on many churches, all richly Gothic in detail. All Saints, Hawkhurst is one of the four smaller village churches considered to represent his best designs.

We owe much gratitude to our 19th century Anglican forebears for their labours and generosity. We certainly cannot blame them for building many churches where populations have subsequently fallen and churchgoing has dramatically declined. All Saints Church with its 115ft tall spire remains a landmark on the crest of a long sweeping hill characteristic of the Weald of Kent. The thoroughly sympathetic development by Southsea Property Management Services, to be started in the next few months, will make an important contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, and preserve and enhance a Hawkhurst which is in danger of losing its character due to excessive development in this rural area of the Weald of Kent.

Andrew Hill

Hawkhurst Village Representative

A COMMUNITY SHOP FOR EGERTON?

Egerton Parish Council has registered the village pub and village shop with Ashford Borough Council as 'Assets of Community Value'. Recently the shop has been put on the market for sale and so the Parish Council agreed in December to trigger the procedure which places a six month moratorium on the sale of any 'community asset' to allow a community bid for the property. At a public meeting on 21 March, a record turnout of around 170 villagers saw Peter Rawlinson, Parish Council Vice-Chairman, give an excellent presentation about the prospects of the community forming a company, investing in it, and purchasing and operating the village shop. The plan, devised by former Parish Council

Chairman Alison Richey, included renovating the shop accommodation and renting it separately as a house, while refurbishing and enlarging the shop itself, to be run by a paid manager and part time staff. After an extensive question and answer session, Richard King, chairing the meeting, asked for a show of hands of those who felt the proposed idea had merit and should be pursued: virtually everyone in the hall put their hands up. When asked if anyone disagreed, not a hand was raised. A Parish Council sub-committee is now looking into the detail of the scheme with the help of 'Rural Kent' and local accountants and solicitors. It will report back to a second meeting later in the spring.

HERITAGE: IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Watch on the Weald recent issues have included focus on the considerable number of emerging Neighbourhood Plans. WKPS definitely thinks that an NP is worth having, and encourages our hundreds of members to participate in their setting up.

Of NPs' many worthwhile aims (likely to include sensibly located new housing and other development), the preservation of landscape and habitat is certain to be close to WKPS readers' hearts, and quite right too. But, in addition to protection of the Weald's countryside and beauty, WKPS has always cared for its historic character, reflected particularly by the older buildings of small towns, villages and farmsteads, where our local legacy is so extraordinarily rich. In the NP where I am one of an impressive number of volunteer workers, we have a 'Heritage' section, which I hope may match similar sections in our Wealden neighbours' NPs.

It may be of interest to quote from its present draft introduction:

'The parish's heritage is above all a Kentish Wealden one. It includes the great Wealden forest, the Anglo-Saxon dens, the centuries of agriculture including hop growing, and the surviving High Weald AONB setting... Within that green environment..., a remarkable and distinctive settlement became established...'

The historic features of that distinctive settlement, absolutely requiring conservation, are fully and clearly set out in the 'Heritage' section of the NP.

WKPS members working on their own NDPs may perhaps seek to get a significant 'Heritage' section included?

Peter Allen

SHADOXHURST: A PARTICULARLY INTERESTING CASE

Shadoxhurst is on the eastern periphery of the WKPS area: just to the west of the green wedge which will separate it from the urban expansion of Ashford which has now commenced and will continue into the medium term.

In the late 20th century Shadoxhurst mainly comprised post-war ribbon development on three axes – Tally Ho Road, Magpie Hall Road and Hornash Lane – all to the east of the original settlement clustered around a small green and the church.

A village shop there closed down over 25 years ago. (The excellent Stubbs Cross shop at the east end of the village layout now serves the community.) The community tended to be somewhat inward-looking, with a small number of village groups but a slightly reluctant community spirit.

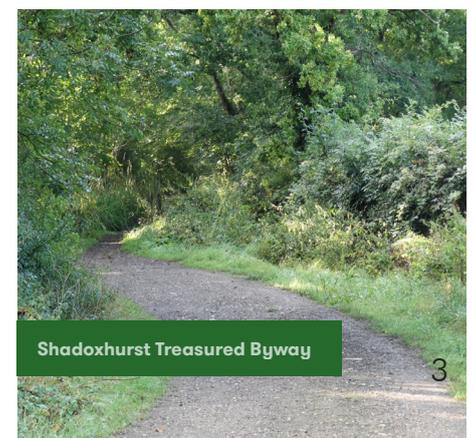
Things began to change around the Millennium, when the award-winning Kings Head pub attracted wider recognition.. But most striking is the positive contribution to vitality and quality of life recently brought by relatively discreet small new developments: new blood, and a generally younger age group, enjoying their environment, have now engendered a vigorous community spirit which benefits everybody.

The active Parish Council now publishes a lively Newsletter six times a year, with its slogan of 'Protecting the Woodland Gateway to the Countryside'. There are designated Local Wildlife Sites, although their protection is no easy task, as the woodlands are criss-crossed by byways, suffer from illegal off-roading, and face demands for residential pitches.

The February 2018 Newsletter is breath-taking. History is celebrated by recording the Methodist Church's 150th anniversary, while a History group is one of many others including Sewing and Crafts, Flower Club, Poetry, Weekend Walking, Line Dancing and African Drumming! The Newsletter also highlights a new village Spring Clean communal tidying initiative.

Social media are constructively used. The 'Shadoxhurst Kent Village' Facebook page enables its 326 members to stay in touch with village life, while the 'Rural Means Rural Campaign', presented as the voice of residents in the villages surrounding Ashford, has committed local members who are concerned about inappropriate housing development in the countryside and damage to the rural environment.

WKPS passionately shares those concerns too. But the new vitality of Shadoxhurst is a fine reminder that limited and appropriate development of a sleepy village can be wonderfully successful.



Shadoxhurst Treasured Byway

NATURE NOTES

In the natural world there are various dates around which wildlife events occur, which can either reassure us that things are still okay, or alarm us when we don't see what we expect to see.

In my wildlife calendar, around April 12 on a reasonably still and warm evening I am usually rewarded with the wonderful song of the first Nightingales from West Africa. Then, around June 1 we can in my part of the Low Weald anticipate the flowering of drifts of Common Spotted Orchids in old pastures.

But, earlier than these, from about March 10, a particularly remarkable event occurs in this part of the world. This is the migration of common Toads from their winter refuges in the leaf litter and woody debris, to search out the numerous ponds of the Low Weald in which they spawn and breed.

The numbers of these amphibians that can be seen on a wet March evening are extraordinary. On the evening of Tuesday March 13, I counted 309 toads, without trying, around the three ponds in our garden. The spectacle is striking. During mating, the male clutches the female from behind in a tight embrace while he fertilises the long triple stranded strings of eggs as she spawns among pondside reeds and rushes. The competition for a female is intense, often resulting in balls of between six and ten competing toads at the edge of the pond. The tadpoles hatch after about ten days and gradually turn into toadlets over a period of two to three months.

In our ponds this week, there have been a number of Common Frogs which also seem partial to a lady toad.



WKPS LUNCH 8TH FEBRUARY @ LONDON BEACH HOTEL, TENTERDEN

Over 60 members and friends attended the lunch, which was a very festive occasion. The food as always was superb. After lunch we were entertained by our guest speaker, His Honour Judge Jeremy Carey DL, whose speech was a splendid mix of humour and food for thought regarding the judicial system. A very enjoyable few hours was had by all. The lunch raised £1,889 through the association that London Beach has with the Savannah Charitable Trust and a further £350 raised from the raffle which was kindly organized by Caroline and Willy Everett, for which many thanks.



WKPS ARE RECRUITING

WKPS cannot continue without volunteers to fill the gaps left by some retiring members, if you can help or can recommend anyone please contact: secretary@wkps.org.uk.

We urgently need:

Committee Members – 3 Vacancies

Are you interested in the future of WKPS and want to help protect the amazing Weald of Kent. We hold 10 Meetings a year, generally on the 3rd Monday of the month in the evening. We just need willing and caring people to join and help progress the Charity.

Accountant/Book Keeper – Honorarium of £1,200

Just a few hours a week to keep track of the finances for the Charity, produce simple monthly and end of year accounts and submit Gift Aid.

Planning Scrutineers – full training will be given

Biddenden, Newenden, Rolvenden

Egerton, Charing Heath.

Chart Sutton, East Sutton, Headcorn, Sutton Valence, Ulcombe, Boughton Malherbe, Staplehurst

Frittenden, Goudhurst

Cranbrook, Sissinghurst

Village Representatives, just need local knowledge

Wittersham, Egerton, Great Chart, Hothfield, Kingsnorth, Shadoxhurst, Little Chart, Pluckley, Smarden, Westwell.

Boughton Malherbe, Headcorn, Ulcombe, The Suttons, Staplehurst.

Frittenden, Sissinghurst.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 24th May

“A Nightingale Evening with the Chairman, Michael Bax, at Moat Farm, Shadoxhurst”

7.00 pm to 7:45 – Drinks and Nibbles

7:45 pm – A short talk on Nightingale ecology and current conservation issues.

8.00 pm – Out on the farm to find some singing birds. Transport available, conditions permitting.

Tickets £15 each or £25 per couple

7-9th June

Wealden Times Midsummer Fair,

Hole Park Rolvenden – WKPS have a stand (and we need volunteers to man it please)

14th June

AGM @ Tenterden Town hall

6.45pm for 7pm - Short illustrated talk: ‘Cranbrook: 500 years of a Wealden school’ by Peter Allen

30th June – 1st July

Wealden Literary Festival

Boldshaves Garden, Woodchurch – WKPS have a stand (and need volunteers to man it please)

Sunday 8th July – 12.30 - 4.30pm

Summer Party

@ Boldshaves Garden, Woodchurch

by kind invitation of Peregrine Massey

For further details and tickets please contact

Secretary@wkps.org.uk or call 01580 861246

THE WEALD OF KENT PROTECTION SOCIETY IS RUN ENTIRELY BY VOLUNTEERS AND 2 SECRETARIES:

Peregrine Massey, President

Michael Bax, Chairman

Fay Merrick, Society Secretary

Peta Grant, Planning Secretary

Committee members:

Peter Allen, Jessamy Blanford, Richard King,

Janet Rymer-Jones, Paulina Stockell and Rosemary Taylor

Contact details:

secretary@wkps.org.uk, 01580 861246



WEALD OF KENT PROTECTION SOCIETY

Subscriptions were due on **1st April**, to save us sending out reminders please **BACS** to account no **01754514**, sort code **30-90-28** or send a cheque to the Secretary. Annual membership is only **£15 individual** and **£20 per couple**, to join please fill in the form on our website www.wkps.org.uk or email secretary@wkps.org.uk



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