

## Introduction

- 2.1** The Planning Strategy for this Local Plan is consistent with, and developed from, the strategy of the adopted Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan (1996), which has been successful in protecting the Borough's best environmental features and its Green Belt, and in focussing development in existing towns and villages and on the conversion of suitable rural buildings. The adopted Local Plan (1996) has also ensured that sufficient land has come forward for new housing to meet strategic requirements, while encouraging high-quality development and meeting local aspirations by enabling the provision of affordable housing, new community halls, sports centres, recreation grounds and play areas.
- 2.2** The Borough's strategic planning role within the South East Region in general, and Kent in particular, remains the same. The high-quality environment is also a constant consideration. For these reasons it is appropriate to maintain very similar guiding principles to those contained in the adopted Local Plan (1996). However, to remain relevant, and to reflect recent national and regional policy guidance, the Council's Corporate Plan and other strategies, and changing community aspirations, the principles need to evolve. There remains close interdependence between this Local Plan, the Borough Community Plan and the Borough Council's Strategies for Environment, Housing, Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Recreation, and Transport.
- 2.3** This Chapter sets out a vision for the Borough's main settlements and countryside in relation to land use changes that are likely to occur as a result of this Local Plan. These key strategic objectives are set, each with measurable targets. Finally, the monitoring and review arrangements for this Local Plan are set out.

## A Vision for the Plan Area

- 2.4** Achieving the Planning Strategy relies on locating development appropriately within a hierarchy of settlements. The sections below set out the Local Planning Authority's vision for the main settlements within this hierarchy and the countryside as far as this may be affected by this Local Plan.

### **A VISION FOR THE URBAN AREA: ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS AND SOUTHBOROUGH**

- 2.5** Government and Regional Planning Guidance state that urban areas should be the prime focus for new development within the Borough. Consistent with the approved Structure Plan, the urban area of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough will be the focus for major development. Edge-of-town development is restricted by the Green Belt, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other landscape character areas.

#### **Royal Tunbridge Wells**

- 2.6** The historic importance of Royal Tunbridge Wells, and the need to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas, will be important factors in determining the form and appearance of new development. By the end of the Plan period the high environmental quality of the town will have been retained and, in some cases, enhanced. Whilst the town will be the focus for new development, new buildings will respect their context. Regeneration of some of the least attractive parts of town through new, high-quality development will make a positive contribution to the character of the town's environment.
- 2.7** The thriving town centre will continue to attract people from the sub-region. The centre will be enhanced by new shopping, services, entertainment and hotel development, together with a more pedestrian and cycle-friendly environment.

- 2.8** The town centre and local neighbourhoods will remain the focus for local communities. They will be strengthened, in some cases, by new housing development which will support town centre and neighbourhood facilities. As greater protection is afforded to these facilities, there should be no decline in the importance of neighbourhood centres.
- 2.9** The increasing number of smaller households, and those in need of affordable housing, will find a range of suitable new homes provided.
- 2.10** Further large-scale employment and out-of-town retail provision will be concentrated in Longfield Road. This area, in particular, will benefit from the construction of the proposed A21 dual carriageway to link the Tonbridge and Pembury Bypasses.
- 2.11** New development will be located close to the town or neighbourhood centres and will be served by a range of transport provision. This should reduce the impact of the car on an already congested road network.
- 2.12** Some traffic congestion is likely to remain an issue in the town although, by planned improvements to the network (for example, improved footways, cycleways, Park and Ride, road improvements and other non-land use initiatives), the aim is to reduce the number and length of car journeys in the town.
- 2.13** The outward expansion of the town will be limited. No greenfield allocations are proposed for this Plan period, with the exception of two recreation grounds, economic development allocations and two Park and Ride sites which are proposed at the edge of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

### **Southborough**

- 2.14** Southborough lies within the urban area but contains its own, smaller, town centre. The Plan's vision is to add to the heart of the town by making the centre the focus of regeneration, including a new supermarket, a limited amount of new housing, a primary school, recreation and children's playspace, a modernised community facility and associated car parking.
- 2.15** Apart from the development in the town centre, only small-scale change is anticipated in Southborough.
- 2.16** As well as the town centre, local neighbourhood centres will continue to be the focus of the community, and the loss of day-to-day facilities and amenities such as neighbourhood shops, pubs, surgeries, recreation grounds and children's playspace will be resisted.
- 2.17** Southborough straddles the A26, one of the principal access routes into Royal Tunbridge Wells, and the impact of traffic will continue to be felt. The impact should be reduced through better pedestrian crossing facilities linking both sides of the town centre, improved bus and cycle provision, and other non-land use transport measures such as traffic calming.

### **A VISION FOR SMALL RURAL TOWNS: PADDOCK WOOD, CRANBROOK AND HAWKHURST**

- 2.18** These towns will continue to serve a wider rural hinterland with a range of local services. Further development is limited by the strategy to concentrate sufficient housing development in the urban area of Royal Tunbridge Wells/Southborough. The town centres will remain the focus of the community and their vitality and viability will be enhanced by new development opportunities.

### **Paddock Wood**

- 2.19** Paddock Wood has expanded considerably in the last few decades. Edge-of-town development at Paddock Wood is restricted to the west by the Green Belt and more generally by the River Medway floodplain. There are opportunities within the recently-enhanced town centre for mixed use development, including housing and a new community hall.
- 2.20** Little change is expected in the number of new houses in Paddock Wood as no new housing allocations are made and there are only limited opportunities for small-scale housing (such as infill, development or conversion) to come forward.
- 2.21** By the end of the Plan period, land for economic development off Maidstone Road to the north of the railway line should be developed.
- 2.22** The town is served by bus connections and has a railway station, where an improved bus/rail interchange should be available along with new cycleways and an extension to the railway car park.

### **Cranbrook and Hawkhurst**

- 2.23** These towns are located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Plan's strategy is to protect the unique character of the setting of the towns and the character of the central conservation areas.
- 2.24** The centres of Cranbrook and Hawkhurst should continue to thrive with the addition of new retail floorspace and car parking. Hawkhurst will retain much more local trade as a result of a new supermarket, and the vitality and viability of the centre will be significantly enhanced.
- 2.25** Traffic will continue to be an issue at the centre of Hawkhurst, but a number of initiatives, including those funded by development proposals (such as an additional pedestrian crossing linking the new supermarket and the Colonnade, and traffic calming measures) should assist pedestrian and cyclist safety.
- 2.26** Population change is likely to be limited as no new housing allocations are made at Cranbrook, whilst one brownfield site is allocated within walking distance of the centre of Hawkhurst.
- 2.27** By the end of the Plan period new economic development opportunities should be provided on a brownfield site between Cranbrook and Hawkhurst on the A229.

### **A VISION FOR VILLAGES**

- 2.28** There are a number of villages within the Borough that all have some facilities such as a primary school, shop, public house and church, together with basic recreational facilities such as a village/community hall, recreation ground and children's play area:

Benenden  
 Bidborough  
 Brenchley  
 Five Oak Green  
 Frittenden  
 Goudhurst  
 Hawkhurst (The Moor)  
 Horsmonden  
 Iden Green  
 Kilndown  
 Lamberhurst  
 Langton Green

Matfield  
Pembury  
Sandhurst  
Sissinghurst  
Speldhurst

- 2.29** The approved Kent Structure Plan 1996 classifies such settlements within Policy RS2 and the Kent & Medway Structure Plan (2006) Policy SS1(d).
- 2.30** Most villages are located within the Green Belt and/or the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Special Landscape Area. In addition, only a limited range of local facilities and transport options are available. Villages will remain suitable for only minor development such as infilling or redevelopment.
- 2.31** Only limited change is anticipated with the character of the designated conservation areas preserved and enhanced and key open spaces and areas of landscape importance protected.
- 2.32** Outward expansion will not occur except on sites required to meet the needs of the local community (for example, primary schools, recreation grounds, community halls and affordable housing).
- 2.33** The Planning Strategy aims to prevent the loss of a range of essential village services (including shops, pubs, community halls and recreation grounds).

### **A VISION FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE**

- 2.34** Landscape character is one of the most important assets of the Borough and the Plan aims to protect the area outside the principal settlements from the encroachment of development. Nevertheless, by the end of the Plan period there is likely to have been some change.
- 2.35** Considerable non-agricultural job opportunities will be generated through the conversion of certain rural buildings, the expansion of existing firms or institutions and tourist development. Some new housing will arise through the conversion of appropriate rural buildings, whilst the limited extension to existing homes may be allowed. A very limited number of new homes may also be permitted for key workers for whom it is essential to live on-site.
- 2.36** Development restraint in the countryside applies also to small hamlets and dispersed groups of buildings. For the purposes of the Kent Structure Plan 1996 the following are classified within Policy RS5 and the corresponding policy covering development in the countryside is Policy SS7 of the Kent & Medway Structure Plan (2006):

Ashurst  
Castle Hill, Brenchley  
Cranbrook Common  
Colliers Green  
Curtisden Green  
Four Throws, Hawkhurst  
Groombridge (that part in Kent)  
Hartley  
The Down, Lamberhurst  
Petteridge  
Sandhurst Cross  
Sawyers Green  
Tudeley  
Wilsley Green  
Wilsley Pound  
Other small hamlets and dispersed groups of buildings

## Strategic Objectives

- 2.37** Since the adopted Local Plan (1996) was prepared, sustainable development has become established as the key theme of international, national and local policy-making. Sustainable development is often defined as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Government now requires Local Plans to be subject to an environmental appraisal which is published with this Plan. Although the scope of this Plan is not wide enough to cover all the changes and new policy directions required to achieve sustainable development, it can make a substantial contribution.
- 2.38** The overall aim of this Local Plan is to promote sustainable development and for that reason the Planning Strategy is guided by three strategic objectives:
1. To protect the unique, high-quality environmental character of the area and to promote enhancement by encouraging excellence in the quality of all development;
  2. To conserve finite, non-renewable resources such as land, energy, water, soil and air quality; and
  3. To retain and provide an appropriate level and distribution of development to meet identified housing, economic and community needs.
- 2.39** Each of the strategic objectives will be achieved through the combined effect of a range of Local Plan policies. The achievement of each strategic objective will be monitored through a number of targets.

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

**To protect the unique, high-quality environmental character of the area and to promote enhancement by encouraging excellence in the quality of all development**

- 2.40** The number and extent of areas and buildings designated for their environmental importance shown in Appendices 3 and 4 (such as conservation areas, listed buildings, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Ancient Monuments and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) reflects the quality of the local built and natural environment. It is important that these features are conserved and enhanced and that policies remain in place to achieve this aim. The roles of the Metropolitan Green Belt and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty remain essential to checking the unrestricted sprawl of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough and the safeguarding of countryside from encroachment. The landscape of national importance, which provides the setting to the area's towns and villages, must be protected. More generally, the impact of development on the landscape, including noise and light pollution, should be minimised when considering development proposals. Within the towns and villages, important open spaces and areas of landscape importance contribute much to the history, character and amenity of the built up areas and should not be sacrificed for unsympathetic development which is harmful to their conservation. In all locations, sites valuable for nature conservation should be protected from detrimental impact.
- 2.41** The emphasis of this Local Plan is not merely to conserve and enhance features of importance, but is to foster high-quality development throughout the Plan area. Both larger scale urban renewal and incremental change bring the opportunity to extend the environmental quality of the Borough to new, sometimes degraded, areas. As opportunities arise to regenerate parts of the towns and villages through the development of sites allocated in this Local Plan, or in other unidentified locations, good design will be expected which respects the site context and local distinctiveness and creates new memorable townscapes. Consequently, detailed design requirements for new development are an integral part of this Plan.

### Targets for the Plan Period

2.42

- There will be no loss of Scheduled Ancient Monuments or Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated of national importance;
- No development within the Metropolitan Green Belt will be permitted other than that which is in accordance with PPG2 and this Local Plan; and
- No development, the design of which is incongruous within its context will be permitted.

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

**To conserve finite non-renewable resources such as land, energy, water, soil and air quality**

2.43 The quality of the Borough's landscape and the extent of river floodplains in certain parts of the Plan area reinforce the national policy to safeguard the countryside for its own sake. The Planning Strategy aims to minimise the loss of greenfield sites to irreversible development, whilst maximising the development potential of previously-developed (brownfield) sites within existing built up areas through new, high-quality development. Restraint of development in the countryside through Green Belt, Limits to Built Development and landscape policies is essential to the regeneration of the Borough's brownfield sites.

2.44 Brownfield sites within, or close to, town, neighbourhood or village centres, or with good public transport links, bring exceptional opportunities for a more sustainable pattern of development. The density of development should be maximised on such sites without compromising environmental quality.

2.45 Concentrating development within existing centres, at urban areas and places where a range of transport options are available, can also have an important influence on energy conservation. In addition, the Plan aims to reduce energy consumption through the layout, orientation, design and materials of buildings.

2.46 In relation to water conservation, the Plan aims to protect the quality and the quantity of ground water resources, protect surface water features, control aquatic pollution and protect floodplains.

2.47 Similarly, the Plan aims to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land.

2.48 Although the scope of the Plan cannot influence all aspects of air quality, the Planning Strategy aims to control the location of, and carefully assess the impact of, potentially polluting uses. In addition, the provision of a wider choice of travel options is aimed at reducing the impact of the car on air quality.

### Targets for the Plan Period

2.49

- No development within the Metropolitan Green Belt will be permitted other than that which is in accordance with PPG2 and this Local Plan;
- 90% of new dwellings will be developed on previously-developed land;
- 80% of housing development built on sites allocated in the Plan will be within the Royal Tunbridge Wells Central Access Zone defined in the Plan or within 400 metres of the defined Primary Shopping Areas of Southborough, Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst;
- 15% of housing development built on sites allocated in the Plan will be within 400 metres of a defined Neighbourhood Centre in Royal Tunbridge Wells/Southborough;

- 45% of new economic floorspace gains will be constructed on previously-developed land or through converted buildings;
- Densities of 30-50 dwellings per hectare or greater will be achieved on all housing allocations;
- Travel plans will be secured for appropriate development schemes in accordance with PPG13 (2001);
- No development which would have an unacceptable effect on the quality or potential yield of groundwater, the quality within, or supply to, surface water features will be permitted; and
- No development in areas at high risk from flooding will be permitted without measures to protect it and prevent the increased risk of flooding elsewhere.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3**

**To retain and provide an appropriate level and distribution of development to meet identified housing, economic and community needs**

- 2.50** The Planning Strategy is to meet the strategic housing requirement for the Borough set out in the approved Structure Plan. The need for more, smaller dwellings and affordable housing is recognised and such development is to be integrated into all larger schemes. Affordable and key worker housing may be allowed as an exception to normal planning policy outside the Limits to Built Development within rural areas to meet a clearly-identified local need.
- 2.51** The Planning Strategy is to enable a diverse range of job opportunities without economic overheating resulting in an unsustainable demand for labour and consequent skill shortages. Economic development will be brought forward through the allocations of sites to serve the urban area of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough and the rural towns of Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst. In addition, the allocation of land, and enabling policies, for other employment-generating uses such as new retail, education, health and tourism development are contained in the Plan. The needs of the rural area are recognised by allowing the conversion of certain existing rural buildings and through policies which aim to retain key village services.
- 2.52** Sites are allocated for new community facilities (including a district general hospital, primary schools, recreation grounds, children's playspace and community halls) where a need has been identified. Development which would have an increased demand on such facilities will be expected to contribute towards their provision. Well-distributed facilities which are close to the population they serve will reduce the length of journey and increase the likelihood of using more sustainable forms of transport. The Planning Strategy aims to protect existing neighbourhood and village services.

#### **Targets for the Plan Period**

- 2.53**
- 2,900 additional dwellings will be built;
  - Housing developments will provide a mix of new dwellings including on larger sites around 75% of small and intermediate dwellings (up to 60 square metres and 61-80 square metres respectively);
  - The provision of affordable housing will be maximised, particularly through negotiation on larger sites, where a maximum of 30% affordable housing will be sought;
  - Up to 85,000 square metres of new business floorspace (B1, B2 and B8 Uses) and 23,500 square metres of retail floorspace (A1 Use Class) will be permitted;
  - Wherever possible, community facilities, including primary schools, shops and community halls, will be retained. When a need has been identified, the provision of new community facilities will be encouraged when suitable opportunities arise; and

- Recreational open space will be retained where it is required to meet an identified need. In areas of open space deficiency, new facilities will be sought in connection with new residential development, or where other suitable opportunities arise.

### Monitoring and Review

- 2.54** The Local Planning Authority will monitor all targets set out in this Local Plan.
- 2.55** Planning decisions will be monitored in order to determine the location of development, particularly in relation to areas of constraint such as the Metropolitan Green Belt, areas of nature conservation value and other areas of environmental importance identified in this Plan.
- 2.56** In the case of housing development, progress on the implementation of housing allocations and the contribution of unidentified sites will be annually monitored. Particular attention will be paid to monitoring the density of housing development and the provision of small and intermediate-sized dwellings, and affordable homes.
- 2.57** In the case of economic development, progress on the implementation of allocations and other consents will be monitored annually in the context of data on the local labour market, notably levels of unemployment and skills shortages and the availability of vacant premises.
- 2.58** Whether housing or economic development is permitted on previously-developed land will be monitored annually by the Local Planning Authority.
- 2.59** In the case of transport and parking, targets are contained in the Local Transport Plan and the Borough's Transport Strategy.
- 2.60** In the case of town centres, the Local Planning Authority will continue its series of surveys which will be updated annually to assess vitality and viability. In the case of neighbourhood and village centres, the provision of the small-scale day-to-day facilities referred to in Chapter 5 will be monitored.
- 2.61** This monitoring work, together with reviews of the impact of new development proposals outside the Plan area and an assessment of evolving strategic and Government advice, will provide the basis for the Local Development Framework.