



# Rother District Council

## Local Development Framework

### Bexhill Study



### Part 1 - Main Report

August 2011

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Issues &  
Options

Strategy  
Directions

Pre - Submission

Adoption

Examination





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# Section One: Introduction

## Context and Aim

- 1.1 This paper is to be used as a background paper and part of the evidence base to inform Rother District Council's Core Strategy Development Plan Document.
- 1.2 The paper focuses on Bexhill and contributes towards refining the 'place-shaping' framework for Rother's largest settlement. The study will appraise the current policy framework, nationally and locally. It will also examine existing evidence collated by Rother District Council and will contribute to shaping the policies in the LDF Core Strategy.

## Methodology

- 1.3 In addition to officers reviewing and considering comments received during the public consultation period, it was decided to involve local representation in this process. To this end, members of the Bexhill Town Forum Executive were invited to form a small working group with planning officers.
- 1.4 In attendance at the 'Inception' meeting were two planning officers from Rother District Council and a number of Members from Bexhill Town Forum Executive (Jackie Bialeska, Phillip Lee and Conor Hill). A series of workshops were held at the Town Hall to debate the issues challenging to challenge Bexhill over the coming plan period.

## Documents Reviewed

- 1.5 In identifying and appraising the strategy for Bexhill-on-Sea, the following documents have been reviewed:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Rother District Local Plan                            | Core Strategy Consultation on Strategy Directions      |
| Market Towns and Villages Landscape Assessment August | Representations Received on the Core Strategy          |
| Bexhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal         | Bexhill Local Action Plan                              |
| Hastings and Rother Leisure facilities Strategy       | Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) |
| Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study                | East Sussex Local Transport Plan 3 July 2011           |
| Rother District Wide Retail Assessment                | Hastings and Rother Employment Strategy Review         |
| Affordable Housing Viability Assessment               | Urban Options Background Paper                         |
| Strategic Flood Risk Assessment                       | Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)             |

## **Structure of the Bexhill Town Study**

- 1.6 Section 1 is the introduction outlining what the study is about.
- 1.7 Section 2 comprises a profile of Bexhill.
- 1.8 Section 3 is a literature review including County and District wide strategies, representations made to the Consultation on Strategy Directions, the Local Plan and the evidence base.
- 1.9 Section 4 examines the Vision for Bexhill and looks at the issues and challenges facing Bexhill over the next decade.
- 1.10 Section 5 examines the issues concerning the overall strategy for Bexhill.
- 1.11 Section 6 investigates the main challenges for the town centre.
- 1.12 Section 7 considers the most appropriate strategy for development for Bexhill.

## **Section Two: Town Profile**

### **Introduction to Bexhill-on-Sea**

- 2.1 Bexhill is an attractive seaside town in East Sussex on the South Coast of England between Hastings and Eastbourne. It was a fashionable seaside resort in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century but like similar coastal towns it has struggled to regenerate and reinvent itself. However, the town is regarded as an attractive place to live and it has become one of several towns in the South East to which retirees are attracted. Bexhill lacks prime accessibility by road and rail, but is connected via trunk road access from the A21 and A22 to the north and the A27/A259 coast road, and rail access by similar routes. The town enjoys close economic ties with Hastings, but has a separate character.

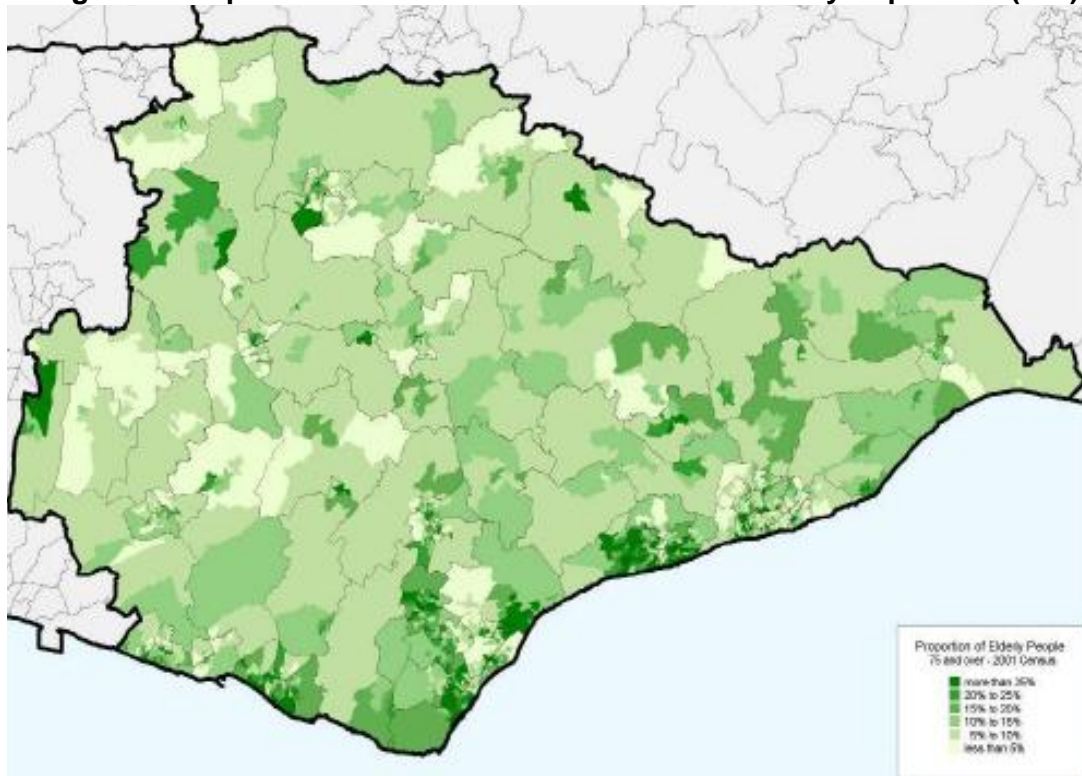
### **Brief History of the Town**

- 2.2 During the 1880s the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl De La Warr began to reshape the modern seaside town of Bexhill as we know it today. He promoted it as a health resort. Most of the buildings in the town centre were built between 1895 and 1905 under the patronage Viscount Cantelupe. The mainly terraced buildings lie on flat land and the beach, with a grid pattern of streets which mainly lie at right angles or parallel to the shore. The Old Town of Bexhill lies to the north-east on a low hill. The main commercial streets are Sackville Road and Devonshire Road, which run north-south and Western Road and St. Leonard's Road, which run east-west. Devonshire Road is particularly wide, with trees in places and was clearly laid out as the principal shopping street for the town. The iconic De La Warr Pavilion is a landmark on the seafront. The building was opened in 1935 by King George VI and cost £80,000. The De La Warr Pavillion is now afforded Grade I listed status by English Heritage.
- 2.3 Bexhill is the largest settlement in the District. The town centre and seafront of Bexhill are located between the east – west railway and the seashore, while other civic functions such as the Town Hall and the town centre's major supermarket are located to the north of the rail line. Many of the issues surrounding Bexhill-on-Sea follow the wider trends of coastal towns. Bexhill has seen its traditional economic function eroded as the tourist industry has declined, with low levels of alternative business investment. The town has to compete with larger nearby urban centres such as Hastings and Eastbourne for investment.
- 2.4 The town centre includes a Conservation Area and has a strong urban grain made up of late Victorian/early Edwardian architecture. The town centre still has a wide range of shops and retail outlets and services but has struggled to retain its competitive edge with strong competition from Hastings and Eastbourne. In recent years, the purpose-built out of centre Ravenside Retail Park has also attracted larger multiples to relocate there. As a consequence the town centre has struggled to compete.

## Population Profile

- 2.5 The population of Bexhill-on-Sea is recorded as being 43,531 in 2010. Within Bexhill the dominant age group is the 45-64 year olds (25%) which is almost twice as many in the age group 0-14 (13%). This is generally in line with the District, but within Bexhill the 45-64 age group has experienced the biggest percentage growth between 2001 and 2010 (24.7%) this followed by the 15-29 and 75-84 age group respectively with 13.6% growth in the last decade. For Rother as a whole, the majority of growth is now within the 65+ age group a trend that is forecast to increase as the 'baby boom' generation starts to reach 65 age bracket. A high percentage of all residents in communal establishments are in residential care homes with 48.7%, closely followed by nursing homes with 21.5%. Comparison with the South East percentage of 23% and 12% respectively highlights Bexhill's more aged population.

**Figure 1: Map of East Sussex with Distribution of Elderly Population (75+)**



- 2.6 The ward with the highest percentage of total population aged 65 years is Sackville at 44.8% (the highest in East Sussex), followed by Collington (43.6%), Kewhurst (38.1%) and St Marks' (35%). This compares to the East Sussex average of 22.6%.
- 2.7 The total number of households in Bexhill in 2010 was recorded at 20,734 with median income of £24,331 pa which is significantly below the south-east median of £33,232 pa. This has the effect of limiting spending power in the town. Bexhill has a far greater population density than Rother as a whole. Life expectancy averages at 80 years, slightly above the national and County averages. 69% of all pensioner households in Bexhill do not have access to a private car.

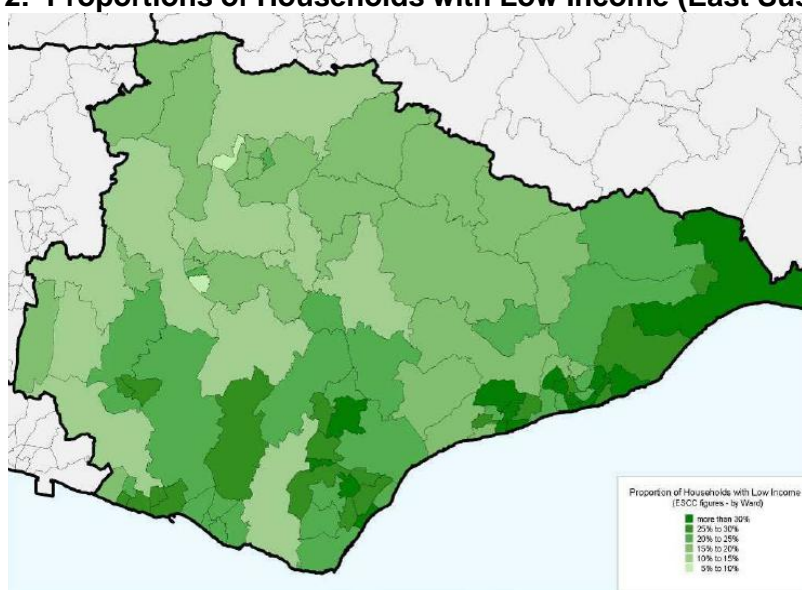


- 2.8 The public sector is a significant employer in the locality accounting for 43% of jobs in Hastings and 31% in Rother. These jobs are focused on healthcare provision, local authority services and education. The figures are relatively higher in comparison to the South East average of 25%. Distribution, hotels and catering have the next highest proportion at 27% in Rother and 22% in Hastings. The largest category of employment for Bexhill is public administration, education and health with 32%. Please refer to the Appendix – Industry of Employment for further details.

## Economic Profile

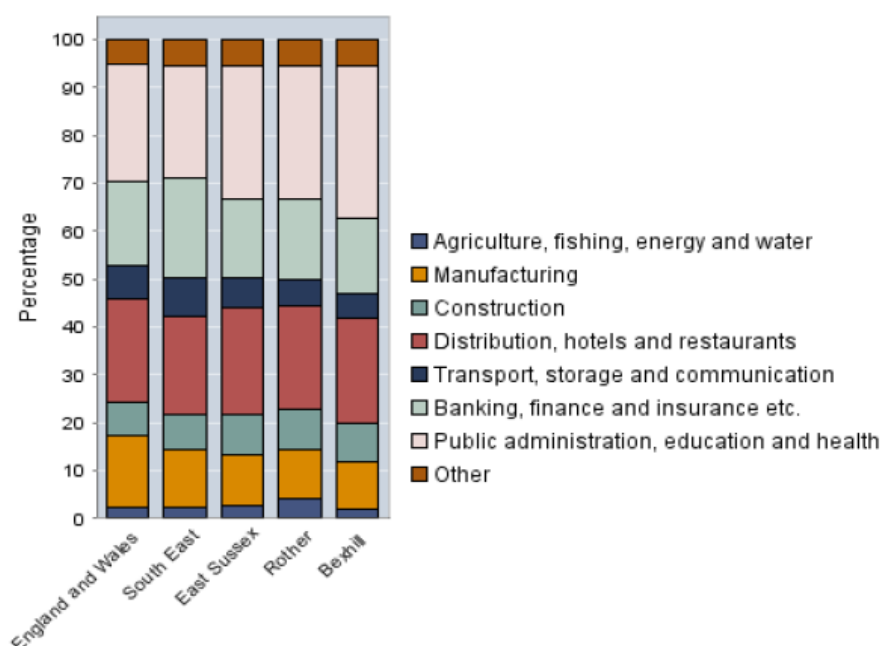
- 2.9 In 2001 there were 38,143 economically active people in Hastings and 14,788 economically active people in Bexhill, the majority of who work locally.

**Figure 2: Proportions of Households with Low Income (East Sussex)**



- 2.10 There are few large businesses or employers in Bexhill. The largest private sector employer in Bexhill is Hastings Direct. In 1998, there were 1,300 VAT registered businesses, but this has fallen to 750 in 2011. The economic base of the town is heavily dependent on services. Manufacturing is a relatively small sector of the local economy and focused primarily on two areas – Beeching Road and the smaller Brett Drive industrial estate. There is little high value-added manufacturing.
- 2.11 The largest sector of employment in Bexhill is Public Administration, Education and Health with 32% of all people aged 16-74 employed in this sector. This is followed by 'Distribution, hotels and restaurants' with 22.1%.

**Figure 3: Comparison Breakdown of Employment Sectors**



## Deprivation in Bexhill

- 2.12 In common with a number of coastal areas in the UK, Bexhill has suffered from a downward trend in recent years, with a vulnerable and low wage mainly service sector economy, unemployment issues and increasing levels of deprivation. Parts of the socio-economic conditions in Bexhill are particularly acute; one in eight (12.5%) of the Rother population claim out-of-work benefits. In Sidley, this rises to one in four (25.9%), with Bexhill Central just behind at 23.8%. earnings are also well below regional and County averages.
- 2.14 The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) shows that Central ward in Bexhill includes a significant number of residents experiencing multiple deprivation. There are two main geographical concentrations of poverty in Bexhill, in Sidley and Central wards, parts of which are in the worst 20% of wards nationally. The most deprived ward is Sidley at a score of 34.37, compared with the county average of 18.78. Bexhill Central, Eastern Rother, Bexhill Sackville, Rye and Bexhill St Michaels wards are all in the top quartile (most deprived 75–100%) for the county.

## Transport Profile

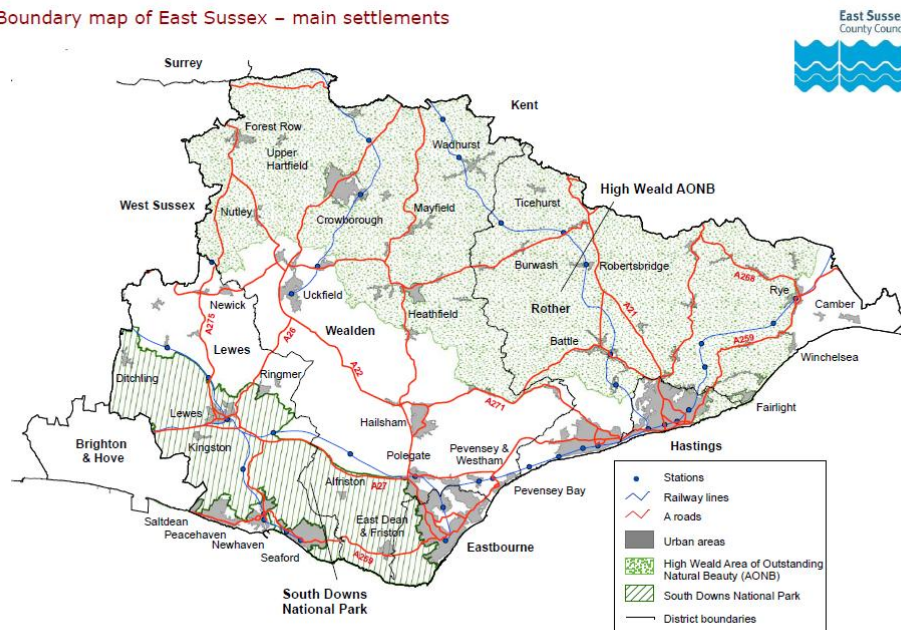
### Road

- 2.15 Bexhill is relatively isolated from the wider south east. The A21 is the most significant north-south trunk road linking the eastern end of East Sussex to the M25 and London. The trunk road can be often congested and journey times can be lengthy. Several schemes have been put forward to upgrade

the road to reduce congestion and shorten journey times but few have come to fruition.

**Figure 4: East Sussex Showing Transport Links Between Main Settlements**

Boundary map of East Sussex – main settlements



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- 2.16 The east-west trunk road is the A259 with the A27 which connects Kent with West Sussex. Like the A21, journey times can be lengthy, and congestion is often a factor cited as disincentive to inward investors. Journey times along the A259/A27 can also be lengthy and congestion can be a frequent occurrence, especially between Bexhill and Hastings.

## Rail

- 2.17 Bexhill is connected by the East Coastway rail line which runs along the South East connecting Ashford with Brighton. The Charing Cross line from Hastings to London is also a main connection route up to London. Unfortunately, rail links are not particularly effective. The indirect service and lengthy journey times are often cited as constraining economic development and is part of a wider issue of connectivity in the district. Future infrastructure investment is likely to be limited. Between Bexhill and Ashford, the line is restricted to diesel trains which are noisy, inefficient and slower than modern electric trains. Environmental constraints and high costs prohibited upgrading the track to electric. The Thameslink upgrade programme in London has also resulted in a knock-on effect on services between London and Hastings. The upgraded rolling stock scheduled to be employed in the Thameslink programme cannot operate between Tunbridge Wells and Hastings because of infrastructure constraints.

## **Bus**

- 2.18 There are a number of bus operators that run services locally in Bexhill. Generally the town is well served, but a number of routes do require financial support from East Sussex County Council. There is provision for important service routes including Conquest Hospital and Hastings/Bexhill Colleges. Community transport also plays a significant part in meeting gaps in a service that commercial operators cannot fulfil.

## **Cycle**

- 2.19 The town is served by number of local and national cycle paths. The national cycle route (NCR2) approaches Bexhill along the coast connecting Brighton to Camber.

## **Community Infrastructure and Local Services**

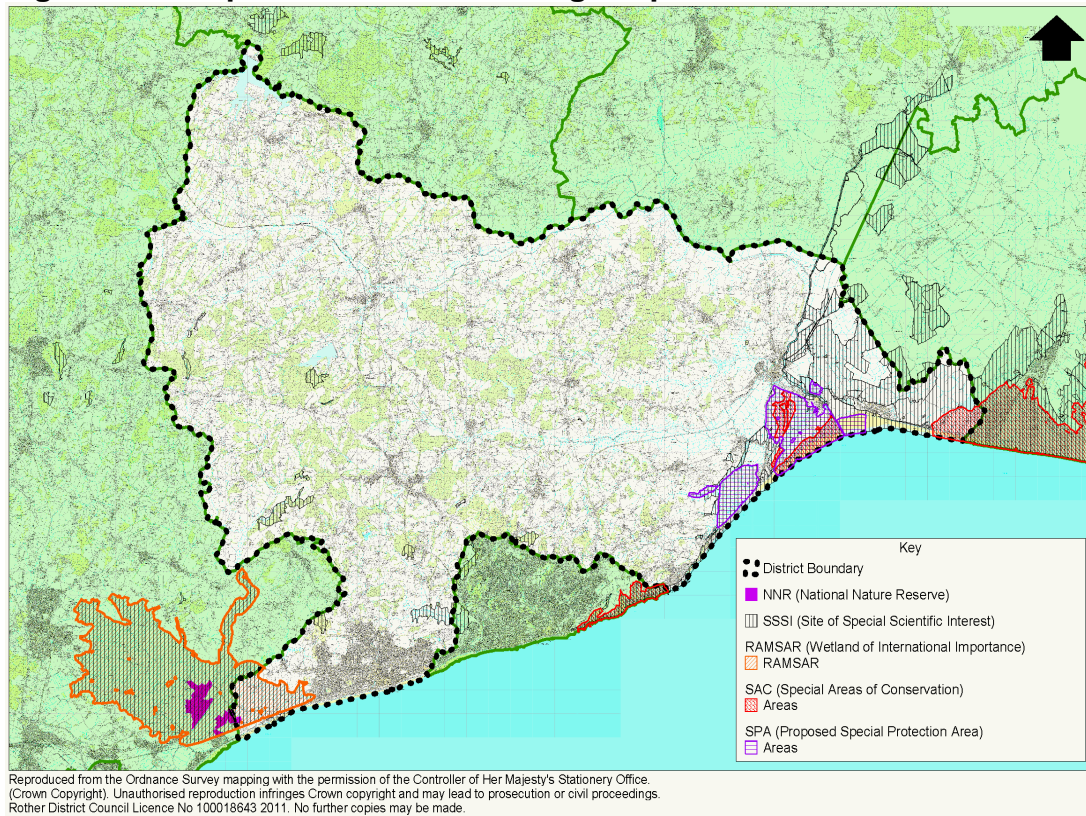
- 2.20 Bexhill is the main town in the District and is well provided by a range of services which caters for the local community. There is adequate provision of recreational facilities in terms of football pitches, health clubs and parks (with planned provision). Access to 'Green Infrastructure' could be improved; this is elaborated on in the Environmental Profile.
- 2.21 The new Bexhill High School opened in November 2010. The other significant educational institution in the town is Bexhill College. Bexhill is fairly well served by shops and there are community facilities located across the town. The town's local library is sited on Western Road.

## **Environmental Profile**

- 2.22 Bexhill is fortunate to be surrounded by attractive countryside and rich wildlife habitats. Parts of Combe Haven and High Woods are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Pevensey Levels are important in terms of conservation, and recognised internationally. Another significant habitat feature are ancient woodlands, a habitat special to Sussex and the south east region.



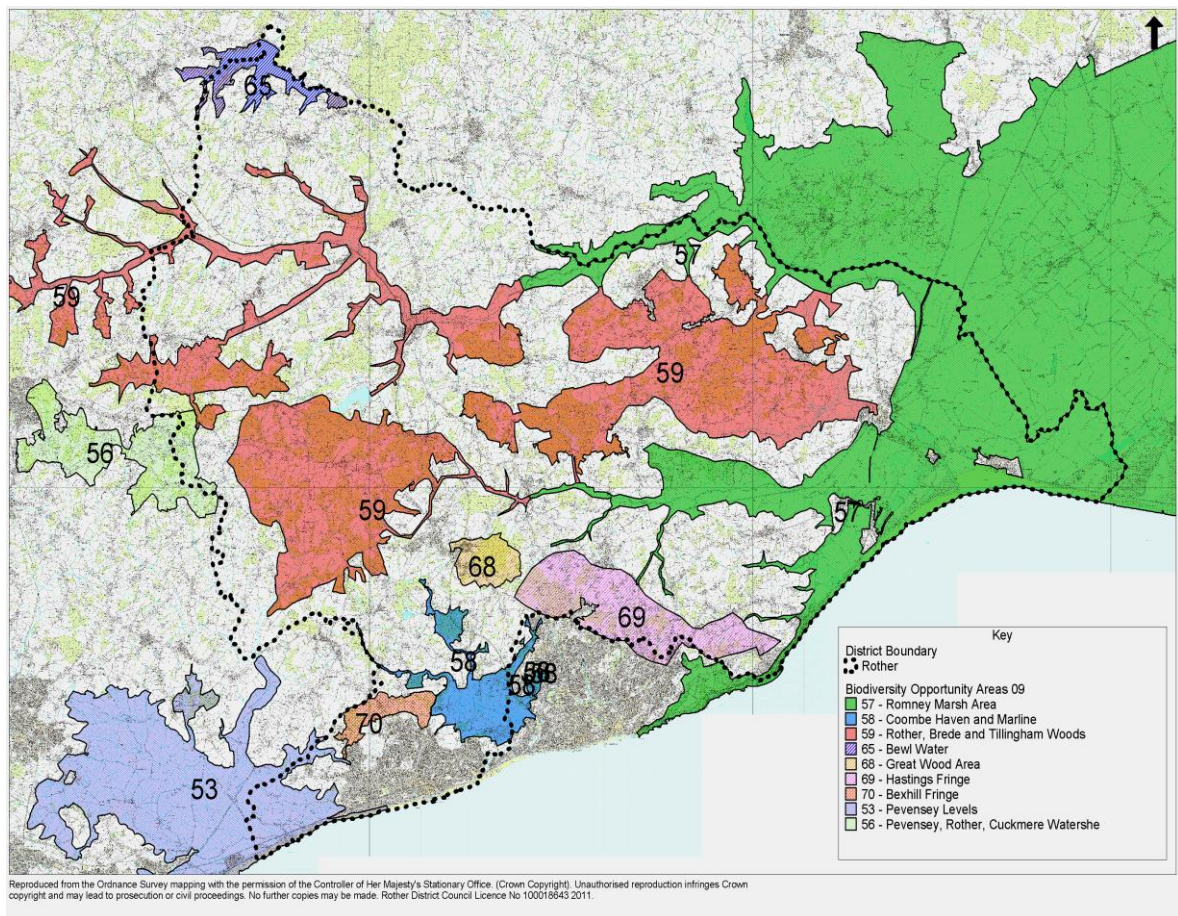
**Figure 5: Map of Rother Showing Important Environmental Sites**



- 2.23 The Hastings and Bexhill fringes comprise areas of ancient woodland such as Combe Haven and parts of Pevensey Levels, some of which are designated as SSSIs or SNCIs. Much of this area is designated as a Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs). Because of its proximity to urban areas it is recognised that there could be opportunities associated with new development. The area would also benefit from access management, woodland management and restoration.
- 2.24 The creation of the Pebsham Countryside Park is a key part of this initiative. It is also recognised that landscape improvements can be gained from green infrastructure schemes around the built up areas.
- 2.25 BOAs extend and link sites across the region. Outside of the formally designated sites, these areas are considered to be the most important areas for habitat enhancement, restoration and creation of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats. Figure 6 shows the BOAs around Bexhill. Further details can be found in the Green Infrastructure Background Paper.



**Figure 6: Map of Rother Showing Biodiversity Opportunity Areas**



- 2.26 BOAs provides a focus for enhancement, restoration and creation of BAP habitats in the district at a strategic scale. Opportunities exist for improvements around the Bexhill urban areas. For further details please refer to the Green Infrastructure Background Paper.

## Housing Profile

- 2.27 Household sizes are small in Rother when compared to the national and regional average. However, there are notable differences within Bexhill. Whilst Sackville has a very low average household size of 1.69, other areas are similar to the national average. The majority of households within Bexhill are owner-occupied (78.4%) and, of these, 48.5% are owned outright. These figures are slightly above that of Rother as a whole and well above national levels. The social rented stock is concentrated geographically to the north-east of the town, particularly Sidley Ward. There is minimum social housing in St Marks' Ward.
- 2.28 Census information in 2001 breaks down households in Bexhill by 5 different household types. The most common household type within Bexhill is 'married couple households', although the proportion of this type is lower than wider Rother and the south east. Bexhill exhibits low proportions of 'cohabiting couple households' and 'other multi-person households'. Bexhill has relatively

high proportions of one person households compared to other areas, perhaps reflecting the relatively elderly nature of the population. Please refer to the document - Part 2 Appendices and Maps for further details.

## **Section 3: Review of Literature and Evidence Base**

### **Rother District Adopted Local Plan 2006**

- 3.1 The 2006 adopted Local Plan identifies a broad planning strategy for Bexhill. Further development should respect the character of the town and retain its distinct identity from Hastings. The Local Plan's strategy for Bexhill is largely oriented towards fostering a combination of residential and business growth at a rate commensurate with maintaining the town's character and amenities and improving accessibility.
- 3.2 Policy BX1 Proposals for development and change in Bexhill should be compatible with and, wherever practicable, contribute positively to the following objectives:
- I. To develop its residential, employment, shopping and service centre functions;
  - II. To provide for both the growth of local firms and appropriate inward investment in order to improve the range of job opportunities for local people as well as to ensure that residential development is sustainable;
  - III. To ensure that development is of a rate and form compatible with the town's environment and amenities, whilst also contributing to a long-term spatial vision;
  - IV. To promote the regeneration of the town centre in a way that reflects its unique character and cultural assets;
  - V. To significantly improve accessibility both within the town and to important employment centres, especially Hastings, by all modes of transport;
  - VI. To maintain and enhance the town's distinctive character and identity, including maintaining the strategic gap to St. Leonards in accordance with Policy DS5.
- 3.3 There are a number of strategic housing allocations identified in the adopted Rother Local Plan within Bexhill. They are 'Land north of Pebsham' and 'Land north of Sidley' (Policies BX2 and BX3 refer). Together, these provide for at least 1,100 homes and 50,000 sq m of business floorspace. These policies are elaborated upon by the North East Bexhill Supplementary Planning Document.
- 3.4 Other allocations include land comprising the former Galley Hill Depot, Ashdown Road, Bexhill, which is allocated for housing purposes (Policy BX8) - where it is anticipated that some 48 dwellings will be built.
- 3.5 Policy BX9 'Land off Down Road, Bexhill', the former High School and Drill Hall, is allocated for mixed-use development comprising offices, community



buildings and high density housing, following relocation of the secondary school. The balance and layout of development is proposed to be the subject of a Planning Brief.

## **Core Strategy – Consultation on Strategy Directions**

- 3.6 The 'Consultation on Strategy Directions' (2008) followed the 'Issues and Options' document (2006) and proposed the appropriate vision and strategy for Bexhill. It aims to address the weaknesses in the local economy and improve the economic and social well-being of Bexhill, whilst fully respecting and sensitively managing its independence from Hastings and retaining the historic character of the town.

### **Aim and Objectives in the Preferred Strategy**

***To strengthen the identity of Bexhill and for it to become one of the most attractive places to live on the south coast, attractive to families, the young and elderly alike, within an integrated approach to securing a more prosperous future for the Bexhill and Hastings areas.***

#### **Objectives:**

*To foster a more balanced demographic profile while at the same time providing for the needs of older people;*

- I. To improve the quality of the built environment;*
- II. To increase the range of local job opportunities;*
- III. To secure investment in improved community infrastructure;*
- IV. To ensure that development strengthens the identity of the town and its character.*

#### **Strategy**

- 3.7 As well as meeting the changing needs of the existing populace, the strategy needs to look at ways in which to widen the appeal of Bexhill, with specific regard to the availability of jobs as well as housing, quality and accessibility of education and training, supporting active lifestyles.
- 3.8 It needs to address the town's relatively low incomes, primarily by increasing earning potential, but also recognise low household incomes, especially as many people are on fixed incomes. Parts of Sidley, and also Central ward fall within the worst 20% of areas in terms of certain indices of deprivation. The area is ranked poorly for child poverty in particular. Particular attention should be given to parts of the town that demonstrate forms of deprivation, to reduce economic disparities.

- 3.9 Bexhill has a good level of community activity. This should be further encouraged, particularly the role of the voluntary sector, which is especially valuable given the town's socio-economic profile and trends.
- 3.10 A further vital aspect of the town's character is the amenity provided by the quality of parts of its urban fabric and its green spaces. This latter will be consolidated by the implementation of the Pebsham Countryside Park.
- 3.11 The built environment of the town is generally attractive and distinctive, but would benefit from additional investment in several respects. The attractiveness of the town centre, commercially and visually, is a particular concern. It has suffered in recent years from competition from other centres and, as a consequence, has a relatively weak commercial market. However, additional retail investment potential (for both convenience and comparison goods) is highlighted in the 'Shopping Assessment'. Facilitating this will help the town centre meet most of its residents needs for shops and services.
- 3.12 Closely linked to the well-being of the town centre is the attractiveness of the seafront. Better integration of the two through investment in both the public realm and sensitive commercial and leisure schemes will be promoted.
- 3.13 Stimulating the market, encouraging local firms and attracting new investment and jobs, and improving infrastructure to support it, is a challenge, but must be a key part of the strategy. This also bears upon the town's ability to support sustainable growth. Bexhill is identified in the South East Plan as one of only two parts of the 'Sussex Coast' that is not heavily constrained by national environmental designations. It therefore directs a proportion of the sub-region's growth towards the town.
- 3.14 Bexhill's aspirations' for its future role are critical to the approach to growth as well as to how it meets the aim and objectives for the town.

### **The 'Urban Options' Background Paper**

- 3.16 This background paper was completed in 2008 and the purpose of the paper was to consolidate existing information and aid consideration of the preferred urban spatial strategies for each of the towns in the District.
- 3.17 The Issues and Options consultation document put forward three options that relate to the future role of the town, and their respective implications for the need for development and change. These were:

**Option 1:** Maintain Bexhill's role. This looks to retain the town's current function and its relationship with Hastings.

**Option 2:** Expansion of Bexhill's role. This proposes expansion of the town's function, making it a stronger centre for jobs and services, with a clear independent identity and re-balanced demographic profile.

**Option 3:** Coordinated development at Bexhill and on the edge of Hastings. Rather than focus on Bexhill simply in terms of its own urban needs and potentials, this proposes taking a holistic view of the needs and opportunities of Bexhill and Hastings, especially in terms of their combined potential for regeneration. Improved connectivity between the towns is important with development well related to both in terms of linkages.

**Figure 7: Options for Bexhill**

| Central   | Scale of growth | Main areas of change  | Strategy emphases  | Strengths/ weaknesses   |
|---|-----------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Maintain Bexhill's role</b>                            | Low - medium    | North-east and north-west Bexhill                                     | Efficient urban area, including town centre; Regeneration of parts of town, its facilities and environment               | Strengths: Retains town character; Low risk/ low interventions; Weaknesses: Limited economic/ demographic change                        |
| <b>Expand Bexhill's role</b>                              | Large           | North and west Bexhill Bexhill town centre                            | Strong identity; Growth areas; New transport infrastructure; Retail growth; New facilities; Major public realm projects; | Strengths: Supports demographic change; Meets growth agenda; Weaknesses: Relies on investment in roads, etc; High scale of job creation |
| <b>Coordinated approach to the Bexhill/ Hastings area</b> | Medium - large  | North Bexhill and west Hastings; Pebsham Park; Bulverhythe; Ravenside | A shared catchment; 'Green heart'; Cross-boundary infrastructure, including Wilting Station and bus corridors            | Strengths: Efficiencies in delivering facilities Joint "voice" Weaknesses: Weakens identity of town                                     |

**Source: Urban Options Paper November 2008**

- 3.18 The Urban Options Paper considered these options against Sustainability Objectives and are summarised below:
- 3.19 *'Option 1 should have positive effects for housing, health, social inclusion, accessibility and protecting and enhancing the character of the town. As the strategic growth areas are all greenfield land, the option would be likely to have adverse effects on biodiversity and the efficient use of land. The new road associated with this option may in the short to medium term help relieve congestion; in the long term there are likely to be negative effects on air pollution and it does not reduce car usage. There would be less overall scope for economic turnaround'.*
- 3.20 *'Option 2 presents significant opportunities for providing affordable homes, improving health, deprivation, accessibility, educational attainment and for meeting the regional aspiration for economic growth in the Sussex Coast Sub*

*Region. As might be expected with a higher growth option there is a likelihood of adverse effects against the ‘environmental’ SA Objectives including efficiency in land use, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, conserving and enhancing biodiversity and reducing waste generation. Mitigation proposals could lessen the significance of effects, but there will need to be some acceptance that there are negative aspects to higher growth aspirations.’*

- 3.21 *‘Option 3 has more uncertainty surrounding the option’s ability to address deprivation issues in Bexhill and the need to raise educational attainment. The option could be considered to weaken the identity of Bexhill as the focus tends to be Hastings-led and the major improvements would be seen in Hastings and on the east of Bexhill – so the option doesn’t necessarily consider the holistic needs of Bexhill as its own entity. This is likely to result in less scope for Town Centre improvements. Similar issues to options 1 and 2 surrounding efficiency in land use, conserving biodiversity and generation of waste’.*
- 3.22 The paper concluded the town and its built environment, would benefit from additional investment, especially in the town centre. Locational disadvantage constrains wider business investment and activity. Stimulating the market and attracting new investment, and improving infrastructure to support it, is a real challenge. These factors also heavily question the ability of the town to support large-scale sustainable growth. Therefore, the most appropriate strategy for Bexhill should be one that emphasises its independent but complementary function vis-à-vis Hastings, as well as its own priorities for future well-being, notably to become more attractive to families and young people.

### **Further Broad Locational Options for Development**

The ‘Urban Options’ Background Paper also gave specific consideration to alternative broad locations for future development with a focus on North Bexhill and West Bexhill:

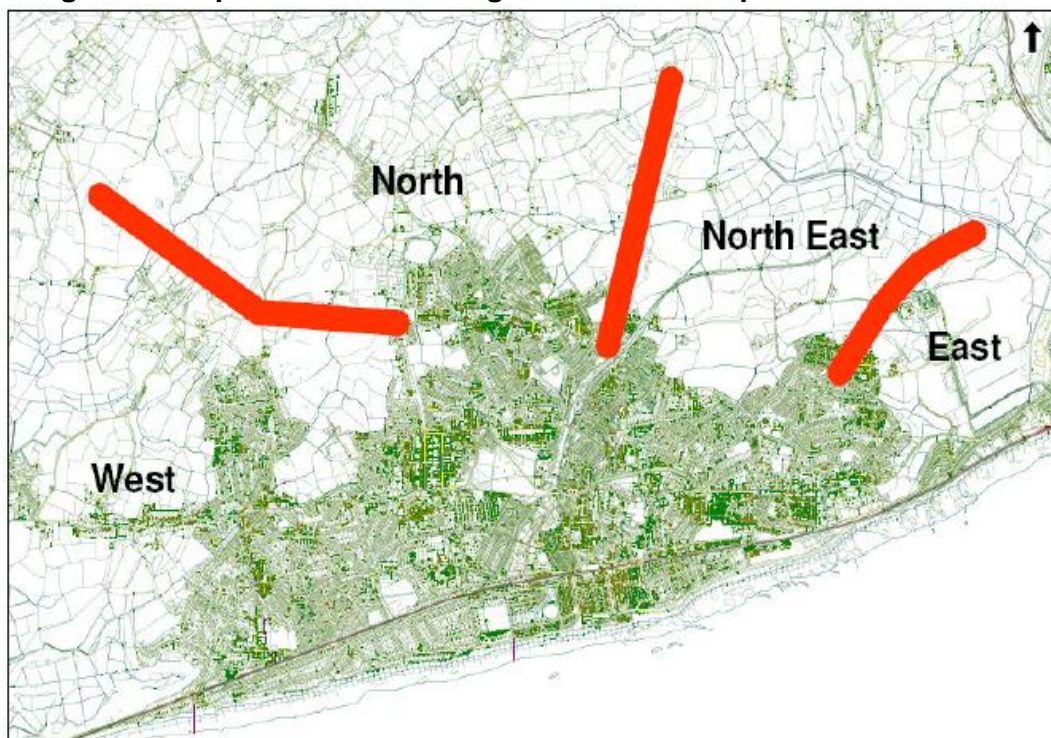
#### **North of Bexhill:**

- 3.23 *‘This relates to land stretching north westwards from the proposed North East Bexhill development towards the A269 Ninfield Road. Key considerations are that there will be good road access, with both the A269 and the proposed ‘country avenue’ linking to the existing built-up area, both being public transport corridors. However, large scale development would impact on links to the south and on the A259. It may also threaten to absorb The Thorne and Lunsford Cross into the built-up area.’*
- 3.24 *‘Development west of the A259 would assist in providing the infrastructure regarded as essential to the planned landfill use of the Ibstock Brickworks site in Turkey Road without impacting on Sidley. Also, access to the existing major employment allocation is improved from the west and south. It is rolling farmland, divided by several areas of ancient woodland.’*

### **West of Bexhill:**

- 3.25 *This includes land extending westwards from Little Common running along Barnhorn Road (A259). The potential area encompasses both sides of Barnhorn Road and is defined clearly by Flood Zone 3 which surrounds three sides of the potential development and Little Common residential area backs onto the east side forming the final boundary line. The A259 is the main road that serves the development. It may be extended northwards, although at present there is no main access road to the development area as it stands and it is served only by the Whydown Road from the west and Sandhurst Lane from the east.*
- 3.26 *'The key issue for this whole area is the capacity of the A259. It is clear that to accommodate any scale of development would necessitate the construction of a new road linking the A259 across the A269 to the Link Road. This may be a development road in large part, but not entirely because of the need to maintain open land, floodplains and woodland. Development may increase run-off to the Ramsar Site and impact on its water management regime.'*

**Figure 8: Map of Bexhill Showing Potential Development Zones**



**Source: Urban Options Paper November 2008**

**Figure 9: Characteristics of the main areas of search around Bexhill**

| <b>North of Bexhill</b>   | <b>West of Bexhill</b>  | <b>North West of Hastings</b>   | <b>Upper Wilting Farm</b>   |
|---|---|---|---|
| Environmental designations: AONB is some distance to the north but is visible from higher ground. A Flood Zone overlays the Combe Haven SSSI to the north east. Several woods are SNCIs, including Cole Wood. | Environmental designations: The Pevensy Levels, which is Flood Zone 3, a SSSI and Ramsar site, limits westward growth. There are SNCIs and an SSSI in the High Woods area.              | Environmental designations: The AONB quite tightly surrounds the north west edge of Hastings. Marline Wood in Hastings is an area of SSSI. Beauport Park is classed as a SNCI.                              | Environmental designations: The Combe Haven SSSI/ floodplain limit southern and western extents of development, the southern edge of the AONB is just to the north.                   |
| Other designations: To the east is the Strategic Gap, which is overlain and extended westwards along the Combe Valley by the Countryside Park. Several areas of ancient woodland.                             | Other designations: No Strategic gaps; Broad Oak park and golf course highlighted in PPG17 audit.   | Other designations: Strategic Gap to south of Battle Road covers whole area in Rother up to the Hastings boundary   | Other designations: The whole area lies within the Strategic Gap  |
| Topography and landscape: Rolling, well wooded countryside around the upper Combe Valley.   | Topography and landscape: Patchwork of small fields divided by tree-lined hedgerows, falling away to marshland.   | Topography and landscape: Small scale fields, mostly under grass, divided by small woods. Commercially managed woodland of Beauport Park to north. Land slopes southwards from ridge toward Marline Valley. | Topography and landscape: Farmland on elevated position above the Combe Haven.  |
| Access: The main road access is by the A269 Ninfield Road but may also connect to the 'country avenue' around the NE Bexhill allocation north of Sidley.  | Access: There is direct access to the A259 trunk road. Further north, access is only via narrow lanes. Pear Tree Lane off the A269 links to west Bexhill. There is a station at Cooden. | Access: The main roads which serve North West Hastings are the B2159 and A2100. Direct access to Queensway would be across the Marline Valley.  | Access: The area is directly served by Crowhurst Road. Future access may be via Queensway and the Link Road. It is astride the London railway line and a new station may be possible. |

**Source: Urban Options Paper November 2008**

**Figure 10: Assessment of areas of search around Bexhill**

|   | <b>North of Bexhill</b>  | <b>West of Bexhill</b>  | <b>North West of Hastings</b>   | <b>Upper Wilting Farm</b>   |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Accessibility and linkages to jobs, shops and services by non-car modes</b>  | Would be readily accessible to Sidley, new business areas, and wider area if new road were a bus/cycle route.                    | Most distant from town centre and new business areas, but on main East - West road and rail corridor.                             | Poor access currently to local services although potential if new facilities as part of larger scheme and improved bus frequency. | Poor access currently to local services although potential for new station and bus services along the proposed Link Road.     |
| <b>Contribution to 'building communities' (retain/improve services; mixed uses)</b>   | Could dovetail with allocated development to north-east of Bexhill; also provide traffic relief to Sidley.                       | May support Little Common district centre, job opportunities to west of town and broader balance of housing.                      | May contribute to making a larger development in Hastings more able to support new services, otherwise would be isolated.         | Similar to north west Hastings, but better location for businesses, and a railway station should reduce car journeys.         |
| <b>Landscape and environment, including biodiversity and heritage</b>   | Capacity for development south of high ground and Lunsford Cross to north. Ancient woodland and stream habitats may be retained. | More potential for development in east of area, although attractive landscape. Most potential for impact on Ramsar site           | Some Development potential, more acceptable if proposed development in Hastings occurs.   | Relatively high Landscape impacts due to exposed siting. Some potential Straddling Borough boundary in south-east.            |
| <b>Physical and infrastructure constraints, incl. flood risk, access</b>  | New road to link to A269 needed, but potential development road. Sloping, valley-side sites; need to limit runoff to haven.      | Would need new road around town for other than small scale development. Moderate Flood Zone 2 impacts, being along stream courses | Readily accessible and no known physical constraints, other than reliance on Baldslow Road Improvement for larger scheme.         | New railway station, under investigation. Need to very carefully manage run-off; also dependent on Baldslow Road Improvement. |
| <b>Resource efficiency potential, including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDs), wind/solar, brownfield, low value land</b> | East-west orientation; may include elevated ground. Greenfield farmland  | Southern areas quite exposed. All greenfield land. Mainly agricultural use.   | Greenfield land, although not all farmed. More RE potential if adjacent area developed.   | Farmland. Parts exposed to south-west. Unlikely to be SUDS potential close to haven.  |
| <b>Commercial potential, Including ownership pattern</b>  | Understood to be few principal landowners. Not presently promoted.   | Landowner interest in large areas; relatively high land and property values.  | Landowner interest. Fringe urban location attractive.   | Mainly public landownership.  |

**Source: Urban Options Paper November 2008**

## Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

- 3.32 The SHLAA was published in March 2010. The SHLAA is required by Planning Policy Statement 3 'Housing' and the Assessment will form a key part of the evidence base for the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF). In particular it is relevant to the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) and any future Site Allocations DPD. **It should be emphasised that the SHLAA is an evidence-based document which does not allocate land for housing nor pre-empt or prejudice any future Council decisions about particular sites. It is an aid to plan making and not a statement of Council policy.**
- 3.33 Consideration was given to the suitability and deliverability of many sites undertaking extensive on-site surveys assessed against environmental and planning factors, financial viability and access to local services. The study identifies up to 40 units that could potentially be accommodated from SHLAA developable sites (green), and identifies a further 1,551 units on potentially suitable sites (amber).

## Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

- 3.34 The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) was completed to inform housing and planning policies. The Assessment was commissioned by both Rother District Council and Hastings Borough Council to update the original 2006 SHMA and consider the effects of the current housing market downturn. The Assessment is an important consideration in terms of mix and tenure of housing sites.

## Affordable Housing Viability Assessment

- 3.35 Rother District Council carried out a viability assessment of its affordable housing policies. The work was undertaken to inform the development of planning policy and was completed in 2010. Given that it will not always be possible to secure affordable housing on all development sites within Bexhill, Battle and Rye or in rural areas. The Assessment recommends an appropriate threshold for affordable housing in Bexhill would be **30%**. Rother District Council will adopt a process within the emerging LDF for resolving what the contributions should be. Constraints to viability of development sites could include:
- Deteriorating market conditions
  - Abnormal build costs associated with topography and contamination
  - Abnormal or unforeseen costs associated with access arrangements
  - Lack of Affordable Housing grant or the availability of funding from Housing Associations
  - Strategic infrastructure requirements



- Ecological or wildlife considerations

### **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)**

- 3.36 Under the provision of Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood Risk, Rother District Council has undertaken a SFRA Level 1 assessment. SFRA presents sufficient information to enable Rother DC to apply the PPS25 Sequential Test to potential strategic development areas within their boundary and, where there are no more reasonably available sites, to assist in identifying if the application of the PPS25 Exception Test will be necessary.
- 3.37 Most of the Bexhill urban area is raised above the floodplain and flood risk is largely due to poor surface water drainage and occasional blockage. The Cuckmere and Sussex Haven Catchment Flood Management Plan policy for Bexhill is: *'To take further action to sustain the current scale of flood risk into the future (responding to the potential increases in flood risk from urban development, land use change and climate change).'* At the western end of Bexhill along Cooden there is an identified risk from tidal flooding. A 'hold the line' strategy is in place with sea defences in position to protect properties and infrastructure.

### **District-Wide Retail Assessment (2008)**

- 3.38 Rother District Council commissioned GL Hearn consultants to undertake a District-wide retail assessment in June 2008. Qualitatively, Bexhill has a distinctive local identity and the town centre has a high proportion of smaller independent retailers and service providers. Typically national multiple traders seek larger units to accommodate their trading formats and relocate to places like Ravenside where such accommodation can be found and where car parking is readily available.

### **Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (November 2007)**

- 3.39 Rother District Council undertook a local open space sport and recreation study across the District. The study includes an audit of all open space provision providing a clear vision, priorities for future open space, recreation and sport provision and a direction for the allocation of future resources. The study puts forward a number of recommendations that impact on the town of Bexhill. Please refer to the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study for further details.

### **Hastings and Rother Leisure Facilities Strategy (2009)**

- 3.40 In 2008, Rother District Council, Hastings Borough Council, the County Council, (ESCC) and Sport England commissioned a Leisure Facilities Strategy. The strategy identified gaps in provision and opportunities to improve overall quality of facilities across Hastings and Rother.

3.41 There is a shortfall of a number of key sport facilities in Bexhill and they are:

- **Swimming Pools** – 2-3 lanes to be incorporated in any new leisure centre development
- **Sports Hall** – 4 court sports hall to be provided at new Bexhill High School site
- **Health & Fitness** – 70-101 stations required
- **Synthetic Turf Pitch** – 1 new pitch required (to be provided on the new Bexhill High School site)
- **Indoor Tennis Courts** – 8 courts for Rother as a whole (location to be confirmed)
- **Multi Use Games Area (MUGA)** – MUGAs are required in Bexhill as none are currently provided. The quantity and location of these will be subject to further investigation by the Council, depending on their priorities for targeting provision
- **Skate Parks** – Bexhill Skate Forum has aspirations for an indoor skate/youth facility to complement existing outdoor provision. The quantity and location of additional provision will be subject to further investigation by the Council, depending on their priorities for targeting provision.

### **Hastings and Rother Employment Strategy and Land Review (2011)**

3.42 Hastings BC and Rother DC jointly prepared a review of employment strategy reflecting the close economic and employment links between the two areas. Some of the main characteristics found in the review are as follows:

- 54,695 people live and work in Hastings/Rother, which represents 79% of the 69,545 residents in employment.
- The two districts “lose” 9,384 working people (net) each day in net outcommuting, equivalent to 13.5% of their employed workforce.
- The ward to ward movements show that the majority of the travel to work within the sub-region is focused upon Hastings, although the flows between Hastings and Rother as a whole are in balance.
- Hastings and Rother can therefore be seen to possess a fairly self-contained labour market, although with some well defined linkages with surrounding labour markets.

- The main employment centres that “draw” labour out of Hastings and Rother are Tunbridge Wells, inner/central London, Wealden and Eastbourne (approx. 2,000 people each).
- Hastings and Rother draw workers in mainly from Wealden, Eastbourne and, to a lesser degree, Tunbridge Wells.

The joint Hasting and Rother Employment Land Strategy Review recommends the provision of 60,000 sq. m of employment floorspace to be provided in Bexhill over the plan period.

### **East Sussex Local Transport Plan 3**

- 3.43 Local Transport Plan 3 is the statutory transport document covering the years 2011-2026. The document provides the framework for East Sussex County Council and its partners to deliver the LTP vision across East Sussex. LTP3 was adopted in July 2011.

### **Bexhill Local Action Plan**

- 3.44 The Bexhill Local Action Plan was initiated by the Council in 2010 with a community open day to help identify the needs and issues of the people living and working in Bexhill, and to understand and highlight how their daily lives may be affected by things happening around the town. A series of public consultation events were organised to ensure a wide spectrum of opinions were gathered including information gathering sessions across the District. Some of the key statistics include over 1,300 completed questionnaires returned at over 20 collection points. Over 5,000 written comments submitted. Over 400 people attended one of the Have Your Say events. Some of the issues include:

- Lack of training & job opportunities across the town
- Lack of knowledge of local events, facilities & amenities
- Bexhill residents have to travel to Hastings for minor health treatment
- Lack of places for young people to meet and socialise safely
- Perceived high cost of public transport for young people. Insufficient local bus services
- Numerous issues related to the ‘look & feel’ of Bexhill town centre
- Lack of local identity and feeling of community

## **Bexhill Conservation Area Character Appraisal**

- 3.45 Bexhill Conservation Area Appraisal was adopted by RDC in February 2003. A Conservation Area character appraisal is an assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of a particular Conservation Area. The document should identify the wider qualities of distinctiveness of place by defining and protecting those physical elements that contribute to the special character. The town centre is characterised by a rich Victorian and Edwardian heritage which gives the town a distinctive character. Much of the town centre of Bexhill is covered by Conservation Area status. Subsequently significant change in the town centre is limited. It is acknowledged that large multiples have difficulty relocating in Bexhill town centre because of the restrictions imposed by smaller units. Instead, the larger retailers are moving to adjacent Ravenside or other urban centres such as Hastings or Eastbourne.

## **Representations to the Core Strategy**

- 3.46 A total of 110 representations were returned on Bexhill and Hastings Fringes, and 58 on the Preferred Strategy for timing of the Link Road, which is approx 12% of the consultation data base. A total of 1,359 representations were returned. In summary:

| <b>Issue</b>  | <b>Representations</b> |
|---|------------------------|
| Bexhill and Hastings Fringes                                      | <b>29</b>              |
| Box 8 Shared Vision for Bexhill and Hastings                      | <b>6</b>               |
| Box 9 Bexhill Aims and Objectives                                 | <b>4</b>               |
| Box 10 Preferred Strategy for Bexhill                             | <b>34</b>              |
| Box 4 Preferred Strategy for timing of Bexhill/Hastings Link Road | <b>58</b>              |

- 3.47 The main intention of this stage of the consultation was to gain an impression of the weight of public opinion on a range of issues concerning Bexhill and provide Rother District Council with a steer on development issues.

## Implications of the Consultation Response

3.48 The responses provide the following three main indications which the District Council will need to consider before progressing to the next stages of LDF preparation:

- An indication of the general weight of submitted public opinion on a range of options;
- The comments of statutory consultees, who because of their status and importance in the planning process have significant weight;
- An indication of public opinion on the major, strategic development proposals put forward in the Core Strategy Strategic Directions.

3.49 There is a requirement for careful consideration over the next few months. The following statutory consultees,, development interests and local organisations have responded along with individual representations:

South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA)

Land Securities

Sussex Wildlife Trust

Trinity College

Natural England

Crowhurst Society

Ibstock Brick Limited

English Nature

Highways Agency

Seaspace

Guestling Parish Council

Southern Water

GCMS Consulting

The Fairfield Partnership

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Croudace Strategic Limited

Hastings Borough Council

East Sussex County Council

Trustees of Glyndebourne

Land Securities

Sussex Enterprise

Bexhill Rail Action Group

Crowhursh Parish Council  
Battle Town Council  
Millwood Designer Homes  
Whatlington Parish Council  
Sedlescombe Parish Council  
Urban Vision UK  
Individual representations

## **Summary of the main issues**

- 3.50 Below is a broad summary of representations made by organisations and individuals. It is noted that some representations are from an individual, or developers with a land interest, so do not necessarily reflect a general view.

### **Shopping:**

- Current shopping provision inadequate – limited choice, few good quality shops.
- Need to encourage retailers to open.
- Local residents currently shop elsewhere.
- Shopping area could be reduced.
- Small shops are Bexhill's character.
- Improved retail provision in Bexhill is crucial.
- There is interest from retailers wishing to be located in Bexhill.
- Ravenside Retail Park can provide large retail units. Town centre's growth should be focused in providing small to medium sized retail units.
- Suggest if no site available in town centre to accommodate forecast retail floorspace needs, other existing retail developments should be considered.
- Must curb deterioration of shopping centres. Refuse consent for further out of town development.
- Ravenside Retail Park should be identified as a district centre.

### **Town Centre:**

- Bexhill will continue to be a backwater because it is of no economic relevance to the country.

- Need ambitious approach to be adopted to save town centre.
- Difficult to see how town centre will benefit from new population planned around fringes.
- High quality hotel not needed.
- Encourage vibrant modern town tastefully linked to seafront.
- Any redevelopment of Town Hall Square must include Sainsburys and an associated car park to maintain balance of town centre convenient with Ravenside out-of-town retail park.
- Car parking in town centre should be reviewed. Suggest need some form of multi-storey car park - probably as part of Sainsbury's re-development. Remainder of town should be metered but seafront should remain free.
- Be realistic... Bexhill is a seaside residential town and plan accordingly.

#### **Sea Front:**

- Regeneration of area priority over seafront improvements.
- How would seafront improvements be paid for?
- Should be a 20 mph speed limit to seafront.
- Road junctions should provide for safer pedestrian access across to seafront.

#### **Housing:**

- Should be more flexible approach to land supply and development locations.
- Land at west Bexhill deliverable without significant new public infrastructure.
- No "Plan B" if no delivery of north-east Bexhill.
- Extended westward development from link road is not supported and unlikely to be achievable. Omit it or at least its link to A269.
- Need more details about "development west of A269 "(para 6.34) otherwise omit.
- Plans for north and west Bexhill would destroy or prejudice green space.

- Strategic gap should be maintained between Bexhill/Crowhurst ..... threatened by proposed houses and employment. Severe effect on roads.
- If north-west and west Bexhill allocated – potential adverse effect on Pevensey Levels Ramsar Site.
- Land north of Bexhill could come under the control of a Community Trust. Portion of land adjacent development area be used as a community farm (teaching agricultural skills).

#### **Link Road:**

- Implications associated with delivery of link road on overall development strategy.
- Have to be careful the link road doesn't take away the people we need to bring investment and prosperity to the town.
- Link road is not a solution. Still be traffic congestion.
- Need improvement to road infrastructure to attract work and younger people to area.
- Link road with new homes/light industry will cause further congestion. Need to extend it in present form so its joins A259.
- What happens if link road does not go ahead?
- Bexhill link road will encourage traffic away from town centre.

#### **Cycling:**

- Cycle lane between St Leonards and Bexhill.
- National 2 Cycle Path along seafront should be determined.

#### **Infrastructure:**

- Addition to Para 6.55 to highlight need for provision of water and wastewater infrastructure.

#### **Countryside Park:**

- Support proposals for Pebsham Countryside Park and other open space.
- Enlarge country park area to make national country park leisure facility.
- Long-term – a countryside park in north western Bexhill should be proposed.



**Other:**

- Welcome suggestion of new leisure centre. Other leisure facilities could be relocated to the new facilities.
- New station at Glyne Gap – welcomed.
- No mention of further pre-school facilities, youth facilities or special needs school facilities.
- Additional primary school places will be needed for pupils arising from future major development.
- Should be a specific mention of protecting and enhancing the High Woods-SSSI.
- Strongly object to use of Ibstock brick works as landfill site.
- In support of improving housing, employment and transport in and around Bexhill.
- In support of encouraging people into work, increasing educational attainment and upskilling of the population in general, and providing appropriate employment space.
- Wildlife sites should be protected and enhanced.

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

- 3.51 A 'SWOT' analysis table exercise was undertaken with Members of Bexhill Town Working Group on the 23 March 2011. Initial work on the table had been taken by officers at Rother District Council, but Members of the Executive were asked to elaborate on the issues raised as further strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were discussed and included in the final SWOT analysis. Additional issues have come out of the debate and prompted further investigation into issues initially brought up either by representations or through the consultation process.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b><u>Strengths:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seaside location</li> <li>Attractive urban area</li> <li>Low crime</li> <li>Range of community organisations</li> <li>New college</li> <li>Independent retailers in the town centre</li> <li>Generally good housing stock</li> <li>Stable Population</li> <li>Extensive seafront</li> <li>Recently redeveloped high school</li> <li>De La Warr Pavilion</li> <li>Edwardian town centre</li> </ul>  | <p><b><u>Weaknesses:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low economically active population</li> <li>Service demands of elderly</li> <li>Limited jobs available</li> <li>Lack of investment in infrastructure</li> <li>Poor accessibility</li> <li>Weak commercial property market</li> <li>Town centre faces strong competition from Hastings and Eastbourne</li> <li>Areas of deprivation</li> <li>Loss of young people</li> <li>Lack of parking facilities in the town.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b><u>Opportunities:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spin off from cultural investment, including hotel</li> <li>Capacity for retail growth</li> <li>Support for investment in the town centre</li> <li>Business sites and land for new homes will be opened up by proposed Link Road</li> <li>Interest in increasing cycling</li> <li>Proposals for Pebsham Countryside Park between town and Hastings</li> <li>Potential for local businesses</li> <li>Development of tourism sector</li> </ul> | <p><b><u>Threats:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic downturn threatens local jobs and spending power</li> <li>Dominant service sectors (e.g. retail, public sector, tourism) vulnerable, as are lower income households</li> <li>Increasing demographic imbalance as "baby boomers" reach retirement age</li> <li>Loss of local independent shops and local services like the corner shop or local Post Office.</li> <li>Transport network overloaded, and no investment in road or rail makes relative accessibility worse</li> <li>Access to housing for young people harder</li> <li>Major shops/chains going to larger towns</li> </ul> |

## **Workshop Analysis and Identification of Key Issues**

- 3.52 The Bexhill Town Forum Working Group identified a number of key issues for consideration, which formed the basis of a series of co-ordinated workshops. Below is a summary of the main points from the Working Group meetings:

### **Inception Meetings -7-10 March 2011**

- 3.53 Following initial discussions, it was proposed to focus on the following areas:

- Vision for the town
- Planning for “well-being”
- Future of the town centre and retailing
- Providing for job growth
- Local housing needs
- Traffic and growth potential

### **The Vision for Bexhill and Planning for “Well-Being” 23 March 2010**

- 3.54 The Bexhill Town Working Group met again on the 23 March 2010. The session started with the ‘Vision for Bexhill’.
- 3.55 All of the Members present at the meeting are opposed to further physical integration with Hastings and felt the two settlements should remain distinctly separate. It was acknowledged that Bexhill and Hastings have very close economic and social ties.
- 3.56 The session also dealt with Planning for “Well-Being” with Members acknowledging there are pockets of deprivation in the town.
- 3.57 The following is a summary of the issues discussed in the meeting:
- Bexhill-on-Sea should retain its character and remain separate from Hastings
  - Bexhill suffers from a perception of being a sleepy seaside town. The town requires rebranding.
  - Acknowledgement that Bexhill has a close socio-economic relationship with Hastings but the town should retain its independence.
  - Public transport links to Ravenside are relatively poor with the out-of-centre retail park severed from the town centre. The larger nationals are not attracted to the smaller business units often found in the town centre.
  - A suggestion was made that some of the smaller units in the town centre could be acquired and merged into larger units. There are significant difficulties associated with determining ownership. In addition the centre is

also a Conservation Area and there would be limited scope for expansion of units.

- The history of Bexhill is a valuable resource and asset and should be embraced. Engagement of Bexhill 100 Motoring Club and Rowing Club should be encouraged to develop cultural, historical and social enterprise in the town
- Tourism should be encouraged as the town has significant culture and historical heritage to offer visitors.
- Opportunities for start up units should be encouraged to promote enterprise
- Incentives should be brought in to encourage investment in the town.
- Calls for improvements to the town centres and shop facades.
- The Old Town is in a good condition. A strong community spirit amongst residents keep the condition of the buildings in high regard.
- Retailers are struggling in the town to compete with larger centres such as Hastings and Eastbourne. Local residents are spending money outside the town.
- The lack of parking is a significant issue in the town for retailers and shoppers.
- There is a shortage of low cost housing for young people in the area
- The elderly have significant spending power but tended to spend their money outside the town.
- There are pockets of deprivation in the town which need addressing. Job creation should be priority.
- There are adequate leisure facilities in the town
- Cultural amenities should be promoted more. The loss of a permanent local cinema in town was mentioned.
- The town should be open to all sections of the communities including minorities. The Strategy for Bexhill should reflect all communities.

## **The Future of the Town Centre and Retailing, Providing for Job Growth, Housing Needs and Traffic and Growth Potential 1 April 2011**

- 3.58 The meeting dealt with the remaining issues concerning the future of Bexhill. The Group is made up of senior officers from RDC and many stakeholders to drive regeneration of the town centre and deliver a vibrant and viable centre fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- 3.59 Members of the Executive acknowledged there are limited employment sites for small businesses. Hastings had a significant sphere of influence on the local economy and policy direction should be co-ordinated with Hastings. The local economy is service and public sector orientated and is sensitive to the financial change. Greater effect must be encouraged to make the town more business friendly although it was acknowledged a major employer is unlikely to move into the area with other major urban areas nearby.
- 3.60 Members recognised the evidence that local people who want to live in Bexhill could not because of affordability and would move to areas where it was cheaper like Hastings. The debate was generally supportive of developing a strategy to make it easier to support young people who wanted to stay in the town by finding suitable accommodation. Members expressed the view that affordability was difficult at the moment.
- 3.61 The uncertainty surrounding the Link Road was bad for the town. Members agreed the road would have brought much needed confidence in the town and probable investment would have followed. Members were keen to stress such a delay in the decision should not hamper any strategic development in the town. The Core Strategy would push forward with its plan for Bexhill and inertia would not be acceptable.
- 3.62 There was general support in the strategic growth/direction of the town. Members thought it was good that new people should move into the area bringing much needed spending power to the town, supporting local shops and services and increasing the tax base of the town
- 3.63 The following is a summary of the issues discussed at the meetings:
- A steering group on the Town Centre has been established and is seeking short, medium and long term solutions to the town centre
    - Short term - public realm improvements
    - Medium term – developing a strategy for the town centre including identification of opportunities to stimulate growth
    - Long term – development of town centre through expansion – north of the railway line?
  - Requirement for greater footfall and greater spend from visitors

- Lack of parking remains an issue. Enforcement of parking should be addressed
- Lack of nationals in the town centre – why? Restrictions on unit size is a common factor, fragmented ownership of units and changing consumer behaviour was also cited as a reason (internet shopping)
- Independent traders are an asset to the town. The character of the town centre should be retained.
- At the moment the town centre is not a destination for retailers
- Lack of an information points for visitors in the town centre and in general the town should be marketed better as part of any strategy.
- More culture attractions at the De La Warr Pavilion to bring in visitors and greater spend. It is the only significant landmark in the town that would bring visitors from outside the area.
- The town is missing out on the market for conference facilities and accommodation provision in the town is relatively poor.
- Tourism is not the major driver in the local economy
- The profile of the town is lacking. Investors and people require confidence and the Council should be promoting the town.
- Charity shops are popular in the town centre. Should the town develop a niche town centre – different from Hastings and Eastbourne
- The possibility of financial incentives for investors were discussed but there is limited scope to drive enterprise through such avenues because of current framework
- The town centre is too small for enterprise zone status
- The vision for the town centre and town should be strengthened
- Commercialisation of Bexhill's history should be encouraged.
- The balance and mix of the town centre uses should be observed carefully. The town centre is also a place for work, to live and spend leisure time. Should Bexhill evolve from the traditional town centre (retailing)
- Young people should be supported to get onto the housing ladder
- The delay in the Link Road decision should not hamper development especially in the first 5 years of the plan period

## **Bexhill Town Forum**

### **Meeting of the Executive Committee**

#### **5 April 2011**

3.64 The Working Group meetings concluded with a short presentation to the Bexhill Town Forum Executive followed with a discussion on the main issues brought up in the workshops. Overall, the presentation was generally well received by the Bexhill Town Forum Executive Committee and it did generate debate among Members. The following points were made in the discussion:

- Older people are an asset for the town and should not be marginalised
- The 'grey pound' is an important part of the local economy. A balance should be sought to bring in more families who are the key demographic likely to spend a significant proportion of their income in the local economy
- Strong support for the town centre but there was acknowledgement that consumer behaviour is changing shopping patterns to the detriment
- It is unlikely that an investor or major employers will relocate to Bexhill with significant improvements in infrastructure and investment. The town should concentrate on its strengths of the town, like medical care and accommodation with such an elderly population.
- The recently published 2011 Multiple Indicators of Deprivation highlights certain Super Output Area's (SOAs) within Bexhill have fallen into the bottom 10% of areas nationally. A bold solution is required. Otherwise Bexhill faces a rapid decline, requires bold solutions
- General support for the Link Road but sustainable transport should be also prominent part of the Strategy
- There should not be a delay in planning for the future of Bexhill causing by the uncertainty of the Link Road
- There is a requirement for strong policy direction to reverse serious decline in the town.

## Section 4 The Vision for Bexhill

### The Issues and Options Document (October 2006)

- 4.1 The 'Issues and Options' consultation document (which was at this stage a product of the now superseded PPS 12 Local Development Framework), comprised of three discrete parts:
- The Issues and Options discussion document – This suggested development options for consideration.
  - Rother in Profile – This reviewed the District's main characteristics and their spatial variations and the factors that will influence future development patterns. Its function was to provide a basis for discussion about the key issues to address in the district.
  - Residents Questionnaire – The purpose of which was to gain an understanding of the priorities of local people, to inform the emerging planning strategy.
- 4.3 A number of questions in the Issues and Options document concerned Bexhill. In the Consultation on Core Strategy Issues and Options (October 2006) we asked the following question:

*Question 13: 'Should the current objectives for Bexhill be carried forward or amended to incorporate any of the aspects identified above (in Section 13 of the Issues and Options document) and, if so in what ways?'*

#### Main Points and Common Themes

- 4.4 All main groups development interests, environment groups and community bodies, business and an individual were represented. There was no common theme under this section. Each respondent made a different comment probably due to their different agendas.

#### Development Interests

- 4.5 Bexhill's development potential is reliant on the delivery of the link road. The Core Strategy must be flexible enough to allow for a different approach to development if the Link Road is not delivered.

#### Environment Groups and Community Bodies

- 4.6 Bexhill Against Landfill and Incineration (BALI) would support eco-friendly development in north Bexhill, recognising the need for affordable housing and more jobs. The Environment Agency would like it to be remembered that for the Area Strategy when considering the linkages between Bexhill and Hastings, the Combe Haven area offers a natural buffer between the two towns. The area has both flood risk and biodiversity issues will



influence the decision made in the area. Bexhill and District Garden and Allotment Society see no need for a hotel.

### Business

- 4.7 Rother Homes would like Bexhill to become more self sufficient in respect of jobs at the same time as expanding its retail, recreational and commercial sectors. Bexhill should however retain a clear identity and independence of Hastings.

### Individual

- 4.8 Many comments mentioned there is little point looking at future objectives until road and rail is improved.
- 4.8 In addition to Question 13 the Issues and Options document also asked the following question:

Question 15

*‘Which development option is most appropriate and why?’*

### Main Points and Common Themes

- 4.9 This question commanded the greatest response of this section. There was however no common consensus for one particular option with some support for all three. The most favoured option however was Option 3.
- Option 1 – Maintain Bexhill’s Role
  - Option 2- Expansion of Bexhill’s Role
  - Option 3- Coordinated development at Bexhill and on the edge of Hastings

### County and District Councils

- 4.10 Hastings Borough Council supports Option 3 as also helps Hastings develop and reinforces logic of regional hub. East Sussex County Council is concerned about the 800 dwellings at Wilting Farm. Concerning schooling, they believe that housing growth should be planned around the existing spare capacity in primary schools. Wealden District Council support Option 1 but wants suitable infrastructure provision to cater for growth.

### Parish

- 4.11 Crowhurst Parish Council thought that the redundant Mountfield Gypsum mine site should be developed into a “small new town” and the Mountfield station could be reopened.
- 4.12 The Highways Agency stated that traffic and transport implications of all proposed locations should be considered and where developments are

likely to have significant implications. Transport Needs Assessments including travel plans are required.

#### Development Interests

- 4.13 Developer interests considered Option 1 is the best despite the potential delays in the delivery of the Link Road. The Home Builders Federation supports Option 3 and feels that Greenfield development is the option which would provide greatest opportunity for improving competitiveness with the rest of East Sussex and Kent. There was further support for Option 3 through improving retail opportunities and leisure facilities.

#### Environmental Groups and Community Bodies

- 4.14 Rye Conservation Society supports Option 3, however, preserving the recognised strategic gaps between the two settlements as far as possible. Bexhill and District Garden and Allotment Society think that Rother should be left largely unchanged as represents requirements on quality of life. They believe that conserving the countryside and strictly controlling development is not compatible with new development, highways and businesses.
- 4.15 The National Trust supported a strategy that focuses development in Bexhill (and Hastings) with restricted development elsewhere. The Forestry Commission stated there should be no damage to ancient woodlands in considering growth options. Rother Voluntary Action sees Option 3 as the most realistic but includes the ambitions of Options 2.

#### Businesses

- 4.16 Business interests put forward that greenfield development should not be limited to north and North West Bexhill and consideration should be given to development south of the A259. Wm. Morrison Supermarkets Plc believes that because of Bexhill's character and influencing factors development Option 3 would be most appropriate.

#### Individuals

- 4.17 Individual representations generally saw Option 3 as the most advantageous due the location of the link road. Allowing smaller development at Bexhill will retain its character. On the other, hand another individual thinks the land west of Bexhill identified in options 1 and 2 has a role in delivering the strategy as a major strategic development as part of a wider strategy including strategic infrastructure, or as a smaller stand alone development, or both.
- 4.18 Objectives for Bexhill have evolved since the Local Plan, such as looking at ways to widen the appeal of the town and strengthen the economic base. Regarding the economy, environment, transport and overall distribution of development, the emerging Strategy responds to points raised insofar as

the relationship of development to the Link Road is identified, the economic interdependence of Bexhill and Hastings is being tackled in a co-ordinated way by the two Councils, the independent identity of Bexhill is emphasised and supported by the establishment of the Countryside Park between it and Hastings, and major development will be expected to meet high sustainability standards.

## **Strategy Directions Document (November 2008)**

4.19 Below is a summary of some of the broad range of representations received during the Strategy Directions consultation:

- Placement of large retail units/vitality of town centre commercial core
- More cohesive town centre strategy
- Car-parking, speed limits
- Development land west of Bexhill favoured – new landowner/developer.
- Soundness of greenfield housing allocations in relation to PPS3 and PPS12 (in relation to North Bexhill/Link Road)
- Clarification on scale of strategic site development
- Traffic impact associated with alternative west Bexhill development
- Sustainable transport elements, including seafront cycle links
- Identify gap to Sedlescombe, Pett, Guestling, Three Oaks, Westfield. Impact of development on Crowhurst Gap

4.20 The representations made on the Core Strategy - Strategy Directions were used to inform the drafting of the pre-submission version of the Core Strategy along with the relevant evidence studies. The main issues raised at the Strategy Directions stage are summarised in the table below. The table also highlights the Council's response and any consequent changes to be taken forward onto the Proposed Submission Core Strategy.

### Summary of Main Issues at Strategy Directions

| Main issues               | Key themes  | Response and relevant amendments to the Core Strategy   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| <b>The Vision</b>         | Bexhill has a distinct identity and is discrete from Hastings | The vision for Bexhill reflects the town's character and priorities, whilst recognising its relationship with Hastings. This is emphasised by having a specific chapter for Bexhill, with the 'shared approach to future prosperity' and the Hastings fringes elsewhere.  |
|                           | Shared vision with Hastings                                   | This was generally supported, notably by Hastings Borough Council, but has been updated and considered as part of the overall spatial strategy.   |
| <b>Location of Growth</b> | Developer interest in alternative locations                   | Alternative locations for outward growth have been further assessed and it is accepted that land to the west of Bexhill is worthy of further detailed investigation in line with the overall strategy for the town. The Core Strategy is amended accordingly.   |
| <b>Town Centre</b>        | Strengthen role   | A specific policy to guide development and other initiatives to support the town centre is put forward in the Bexhill chapter.  |
| <b>Traffic</b>            | Continued congestion  | Traffic modelling has been carried out to assess the impacts of planned development and has informed the Core Strategy, while it is accepted that this will need to be refined further when individual sites, and traffic management measures, are developed. The position regarding the Link Road is considered in relation to the overall development strategy. |
| <b>Countryside Park</b>   | Broad support   | The Core Strategy maintains a strong commitment to the Countryside Park.  |

## **Bexhill Local Action Plan**

4.21 In 2010, there was a consultation event held with residents of Bexhill. The findings from the consultation process would form the platform for a **Bexhill Local Action Plan**. The findings highlight a number of issues that local people wish to be addressed over the short and long term to improve the vitality of the town, these included:

- Lack of training & job opportunities across the town.
- Lack of knowledge of local events, facilities & amenities.
- Lack of local identity and feeling of community.
- Better use of green spaces.
- It is difficult for Bexhill residents to recycle cardboard.
- Poor public toilet facilities around the town.
- Numerous issues related to the 'look & feel' of Bexhill town centre.
- Poor state of pavements, including litter & dog-fouling.
- No recognised, connected cycle track along the seafront.
- Perceived high cost of public transport for young people.
- Insufficient local bus services.
- Bexhill residents have to travel to Hastings for minor health treatment.
- Lack of places for young people to meet and socialise safely.
- Negative attitude towards young people.

## **Conclusion - The Vision for Bexhill**

- 4.22 Analysis of the representations made to previous stages of the Core Strategy, and engagement with Bexhill Town Forum suggest Bexhill realistically aspires to be a place of distinction. That distinction would be based on the quality of life in Bexhill which includes access to the sea, the countryside and the cultural and historic assets of the area.
- 4.23 The distinctiveness of the town would lie at the heart of efforts to secure the economic future of the town, by seeking to attract, retain and build businesses that place a high value on that distinctiveness. Initiatives to strengthen the economic base and increase opportunity through investment in infrastructure and planned growth will ensure that all residents in Bexhill can share in the prosperity that would be generated.
- 4.24 The need to ensure that all the residents of Bexhill can share in a more prosperous future of the town will also require action to address the very real needs of many residents including improving access to housing for young people; create employment opportunities; tackle deprivation in some of the town's wards; promote an environment attractive to families and retain young people in the town. Such action is required to be undertaken alongside initiatives to secure the economic development of the town and towards a more prosperous future.

## Section 5 Overall Strategy

- 5.1 Consultation highlights a strong independent sense of identity, separate from Hastings. This sense of identity is defined by the history of the town. Although in recent years the town has struggled in the economic recession and there is significant deprivation in parts of the town, Bexhill's profile is not wholly uncommon along the Sussex coast. Compared with South East averages, there are higher levels of multiple deprivation, lower levels of GVA, lower earnings, higher levels of unemployment, lower rates of business formation, a poorer qualified workforce and an ageing population.
- 5.2 Bexhill first grew up on a hill about half a mile inland and overlooking flat marshy ground. This is now the Old Town and designated a Conservation Area. The building of the railway in 1846 to the south was key to its development. In the 1880s, the 7th Earl De La Warr commissioned the sea wall and promenade, paving the way for development, which he promoted as a fashionable health resort, namely Bexhill-on-Sea.
- 5.3 Most of the buildings in the town centre were built over a ten-year period around 1900. As such, they provide an unusually complete early Edwardian townscape. Along with the Old Town, Bexhill town centre is now designated a Conservation Area adding to a strong sense of identity and an active community network.
- 5.4 The underlying environmental quality of the town is high. Key assets are the seafront, the internationally acclaimed De la Warr Pavilion, the well-preserved and mixed-use town centre and a variety of pleasant residential areas interspersed with substantial areas of parkland and open space.
- 5.5 The countryside setting of the town, although not part of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, is also undulating and attractive. The area is rich in wildlife habitats. Parts of Combe Haven and High Woods are Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Beyond the western fringe are the Pevensey Levels, of international nature conservation importance.
- 5.6 Bexhill's population has grown steadily over the last 30 years. There was significant development in the 1980s, but this has slowed down considerably in recent years. Partly due to its seaside location and high number of private schools, in the first half of the 1900s, the town developed a particular role as a retirement location. As a consequence, a high proportion of the population is over pensionable age.
- 5.7 It is acknowledged Bexhill has close economic ties with neighbouring Hastings. The need for the economic regeneration of the two towns is recognised in regional policy. The economic base of the town is very dependent upon service sectors. The manufacturing base is small, being focused on the Beeching Road estate and the smaller Elva Way industrial areas (the former Sidley Goods Yard).

- 5.8 Despite the close economic relationship between Bexhill and Hastings, both towns are served poorly in terms of strategic infrastructure. Bexhill currently has a poor rail service to London. Currently the fastest journey time between Hastings and London is 1 hour 33 minutes and in the peak period journeys take longer and the quality of journey experience is poor.
- 5.9 Many areas of the south east with good access to the capital have benefited from the dispersal of economic activity from London. The relatively poor quality of rail service from/to London means that Bexhill is disadvantaged in its ability to attract new economic activity to the town, and existing businesses are disadvantaged.
- 5.10 Compared to most towns in the south east with a similar distance from London, relatively few people commute from Bexhill to London. Those who commute to London from the outer south east generally have higher level skills. The relatively low level of commuting is one reason why the area has a lower proportion of its population employed in managerial and professional occupations than is typical for towns a similar distance from London which enjoy better rail services to London.
- 5.11 In addition to rail links to London, Bexhill is also served by the East Coastway railway line that runs from Brighton and further west, through to Ashford via Lewes. Support remains for the railway between Hastings and Ashford via Rye to be electrified and that the route improved to permit a fast service to Ashford calling at Rye.
- 5.13 In contrast to the issue of the Hastings - Ashford service, the issue of improving services between Hastings and Brighton. Brighton is only 35 miles from Bexhill, yet the rail journey from Bexhill to Brighton takes nearly an hour, in part due to the fact that services need to go down into Eastbourne and reverse out again.
- 5.14 The A21 is the trunk road that connects Hastings to the national motorway network at the M25. At present the A21 is dualled from the M25 as far as Tonbridge, with another section of dual carriageway to the east of Tunbridge Wells. Hastings is some 30 miles from where the continuous dual carriageway from the M25 ends. Currently, when traffic is reasonably light it takes an hour to travel from Junction 5 of the M25 to the outskirts of Hastings. When traffic flows are heavy the journey time is greater, adding to drivers' frustration at the stop/start nature of the journey and increases the perception of Bexhill's inaccessibility by road.

## **Main Issues in Bexhill**

- 5.15 The evidence shows in Rother, 28.1% of total population is aged 65 years and over, the highest proportion in the county. The ward with the highest percentage is Bexhill Sackville, at 44.8% (the highest in East Sussex), followed by Bexhill Collington (43.6%), Bexhill Kewhurst (38.1%) and Bexhill St Marks' (35%) (all in the top decile for the County). This compares to the East Sussex average of 22.6%.

- 5.16 Rother is the third most deprived district in East Sussex. The most deprived ward is Bexhill Sidley, which is in the top decile in East Sussex, at a score of 34.37, compared with the county average of 18.78. Bexhill Central, Eastern Rother, Bexhill Sackville, Rye and Bexhill St Michael's wards are all in the top quartile (most deprived 75–100%) for the county. It should be noted that the Index of Multiple Deprivation is calculated nationally for Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), which are smaller than wards. Thus, Bexhill Sidley ward is made up of four LSOAs, two of which are in the top 20% ranked nationally and one in the top 30% most deprived nationally. Bexhill Central has three LSOAs, one in the top 20% and two in the top 30%. Eastern Rother has two LSOAs in the top 30%, while Bexhill Sackville and Rye have one LSOA in the top 30% deprived LSOAs nationally. The least deprived ward is Bexhill St Mark's, with a score of just 7.70. One in four (25.8%) households are on a low income, which is defined as less than 60% of the national median income. One in eight (12.5%) of the Rother population claim out-of-work benefits and in Bexhill Sidley, this rises to one in four (25.9%), with Bexhill Central just behind at 23.8%.
- 5.17 Along with significant social deprivation in parts of Bexhill the town's economy suffers from structural economic weaknesses. Many of these are shared by the Hastings Travel to Work Area (TTWA) and indeed the rest of East Sussex which is one of the South East's weakest economic sub-regions. Bexhill has seen its traditional economic function eroded as the tourist industry declined and levels of business investment has fallen over the last 30 years. This has left the town with relatively high unemployment and relatively low high value jobs with high level wages. It has also left the town centre with an increasing need of investment. In addition, the town centre must compete with Eastbourne and Hastings and other shopping centres in the region.
- 5.18 The town centre is considered to be an attractive location and is afforded Conservation Area status. There is much fine late Victorian/early Edwardian architecture, representing an attractive location for residents and visitors alike. The attractions also include the Grade I listed De La Warr Pavillion on the seafront, an important venue for cultural activities. There is therefore a distinctive environment within the town centre for business operations which is an asset for the town. The town centre also has wide range of viable shops and retails units.
- 5.19 Tourism is still an important industry for Bexhill although fewer people now stay overnight. The town is attractive for day visitors with a range of leisure amenities and a unique heritage which continues to attract people to the town and town centre. The De La Warr Pavilion, the promenade, the beach and local features of interest such as the birthplace of British Motor racing. Visitor spending in Rother District as a whole was estimated at £221,264,000 and a significant proportion of that would have been in Bexhill.
- 5.20 However unemployment is high in Bexhill. Bexhill has a large retired population many on low incomes, a low wage economy, many households



dependent on benefits and relatively few economic opportunities. This has the effect of severely limiting the available spending power in the town.

- 5.21 The town has a narrow employment base. The local economy is over-reliant on public sector employment and the retail and tourist sectors, with relatively few employment opportunities in business sectors that are more dynamic, have growth potential and have better paid jobs. There is little high value-added manufacturing or a sizable service sector.
- 5.22 There are few large employers. There are few large businesses or employers in Bexhill. This contributes to a lack of dynamism in the local economy, as small businesses are often the least able to invest in training or new facilities and often pay low wages.
- 5.23 The joint Hastings and Rother Employment Strategy Review indicates that the office market in Rother is essentially small and local; the supply of office space in Rother is, likewise, of generally low quality and out of date, with the market essentially characterised by a lack of quality business space across all size ranges. Consequently speculative office buildings have not been built in Rother and, in particular Bexhill, since the 1970s, with the majority of buildings being purpose built for the public sector. There has been no supply of serviced commercial land in recent years, largely due to an absence of institutional investment, with consequent shortages of new space
- 5.24 Recorded development activity in Rother has provided employment floorspace totalling 8,343 sq m over the six year period 2001-2007. This equates to some 1,390 sq m per annum, although the recently opened Elva Way has increased supply but there remains a shortfall in provision. The majority of demand comes from light industrial firms, together with some local businesses requiring mainly storage space, either in the district or in nearby areas. It is very much occupier led and the most common requirement is for serviced freehold plots, preferably with room to expand.
- 5.25 Many smaller firms have turned to rural accommodation, seemingly because of lower costs, availability and often more flexible terms. There is clearly ongoing demand for small workshops and storage space in rural Rother, as evidenced by the number of small sites, conversion schemes and high occupancy rates. Many of the smaller developments stem from the reuse of former agricultural buildings and, collectively, these provide an important source of business space in the area.
- 5.26 Real growth in both office and particularly light industrial floorspace in Rother is currently constrained due to the major development site being contingent upon the construction of the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road. Following approval of the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road, sites located in Rother District, to either side of the proposed link road, have scope to provide a major addition (some 60,000 sq. m) to the area's employment floorspace and meet the needs of both local and in-moving occupiers. The development of these sites is wholly dependent on the timely delivery of the

Link Road and will have an important bearing on the whole Hastings and Bexhill area. This is discussed in detail in the next section.

## Connectivity

- 5.27 The relative peripheral nature of Bexhill to the wider south east region has been cited as an economic constraint. The towns of Hastings and Bexhill are located 100 KM to the south east of London and 26 KM to the east of Eastbourne on the coast of East Sussex. Currently, the towns are relatively isolated from other major centres in Kent and Sussex, and are poorly served by road and rail connections from London. The town centres are located within 8 KM of each other and are separated by the Combe Haven Valley, containing extensive wetlands and several environmentally protected areas including two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and areas of semi-natural ancient woodlands. To the north of the valley lies the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 5.28 The significant road link between Bexhill and Hastings is the single carriageway A259 Bexhill Road. The only alternatives to this route are either a cross-country route on narrow lanes to the north, a route only suitable for low volumes of traffic, or a very long circuit via principal roads, the A271 and the A2100, further to the north of the towns, both of which pass through or on the edge of parts of the High Weald AONB.
- 5.29 The A259, which is a trunk road outside the boundary of Hastings Borough, runs east-west and from Bexhill it runs along Barnhorn Road, Little Common Road, Belle Hill, King Offa Way, Bexhill Road, and the Marina in Hastings. The A259 continues along the seafront of Hastings until turning inland along the A259 Old London Road. The A259 is one of the key link roads in Bexhill and Hastings and carries high volumes of traffic, particularly along the Bexhill Road section (between Bexhill and Hastings). East Sussex County Council
- 5.30 The proposed Bexhill to Hastings Link Road (BHLR) has many objectives including relieving congestion on the local network but the primary objective of the BHLR is its regeneration potential and as such it forms part of the clearly defined package of regeneration measures. The poor socio-economic conditions in Hastings and Bexhill are particularly acute and the Government's Indices of Multiple Deprivation recognise parts of Bexhill and Hastings as the most deprived areas in the south-east.
- 5.31 The need for regeneration in Hastings and Bexhill is widely acknowledged and has been recognised by the Government as a priority for the region for some time. The BHLR will release much need land for housing and employment and will be a catalyst for regeneration.
- 5.32 The BHLR will be accompanied by a Greenway to accommodate activities such as cycling, walking and horse riding. The aims of the Greenway are to:-

- Encourage people to use alternative modes of transport.
  - Meet the needs of the rural community for rural access routes.
  - Mitigate for the impact upon rights of way in the area.
  - Respect the planning context for the scheme, provided by the proposed Pebsham Countryside Park, as a recreational and wildlife area.
- 5.33 The Greenway would not only provide an important facility for day to day utility for commuters but would also provide the links into new paths to serve the proposed Pebsham Countryside Park.
- 5.34 In addition to the Greenway, the proposal for the BHLR examined the potential impact of the proposed new road on the surrounding road network. This resulted in the development of a series of complementary measures for traffic management in the area.
- 5.35 The following five areas were identified where indicative highway engineering measures are proposed as possible complementary measures:
- The Ridge – junction improvements;
  - A259 Bexhill Road – bus corridor;
  - Harley Shute Road – traffic calming measures;
  - Gillsman’s Hill – traffic management measures; and
  - Hollier’s Hill/Wrestwood Road – junction improvements.
- 5.36 The complementary measures will be delivered separately through Local Transport Plan 3. Proposals to encourage modal shift from road to rail along the A259 Bexhill to Hastings corridor is supported and seen as a way of relieving congestion and addressing environmental issues in the area. The close economic relationship between Bexhill and Hastings requires a need to enhance connectivity between Bexhill and Hastings. The Bexhill Link Road is one means of achieving this. The scheme would also be a positive contribution to raising the quality of the environment, and create a more attractive place in which to live, an important aim of the overall strategy for regeneration. Public transport enhancement continues to be a key objective for both Bexhill and Hastings. The expansion of the existing Bus Quality Partnership in Hastings would be an opportunity for new bus routes between Bexhill and Hastings especially along the proposed Link Road route. The additional road capacity released on existing routes, particularly along the A259 coast road, would allow implementation of bus priority lanes through the Local Transport Plan process.
- 5.37 Poor transport links are identified as a significant contributor to the economic problems in Bexhill and Hastings, and these transport problems greatly constrain the improvement of employment opportunities. Improved transport links between the two settlements are needed to create a more vibrant enterprise culture in the two towns to allow businesses to trade more widely, local businesses to expand, and to attract new business into the area. The problem is not confined to the A259 corridor, but impacts much further afield, as many people take alternative and quite unsuitable routes to

avoid congestion in the area. This leads to high volumes of traffic using unsuitable roads, through some of the rural villages and Battle, adversely affecting these settlements.

## **Sports and Leisure Provision in Bexhill**

- 5.38 Bexhill has reasonable community facilities; these include a bowling alley, the De La Warr Pavilion, restaurants and a number of pubs. There is general support from stakeholders to promote an active lifestyle and provide facilities for young people. The Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facility Assessment and The Hastings and Rother Leisure Facilities Strategy highlight existing facilities and identifies deficiencies in open space, sports and recreation provision.

## **Conclusion - The Strategy for Bexhill**

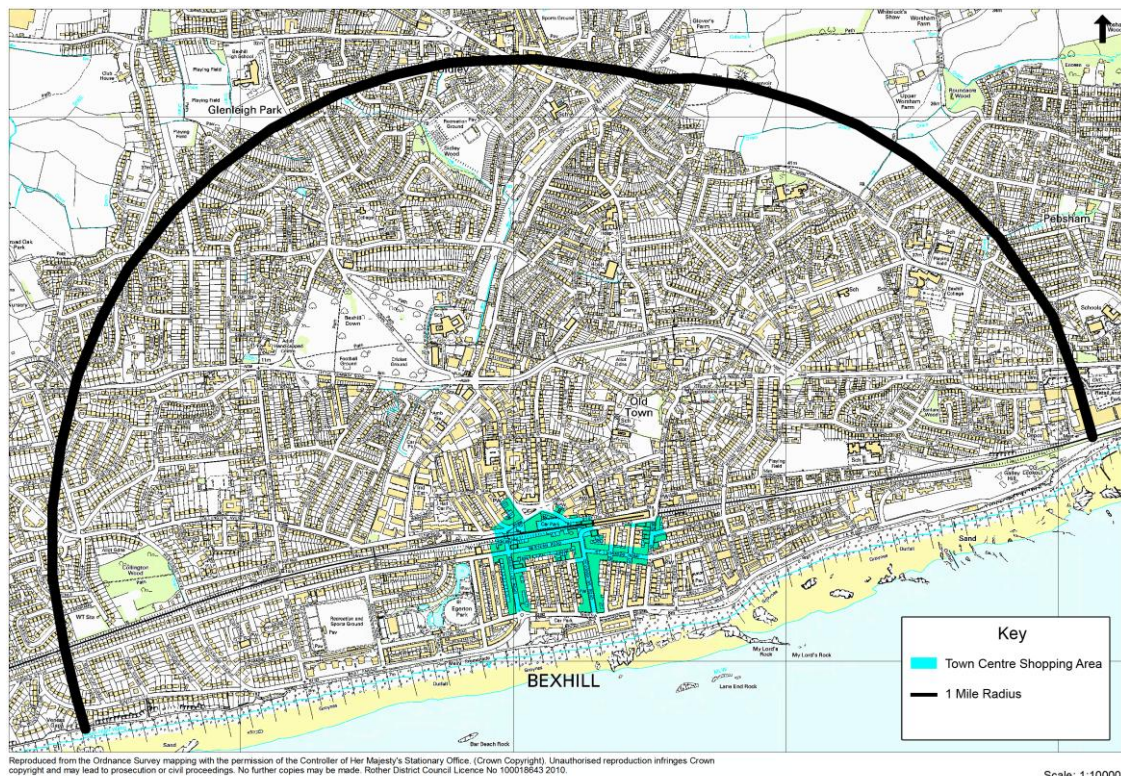
- 5.39 The challenge for Bexhill is to find a strategy of ensuring that the underlying weaknesses in the town do not hinder investment and growth of the town. The close economic links with Hastings is acknowledged but Bexhill remains a separate settlement. There are pockets of deprivation in the town but there are many positives like the quality of life and environmental assets such as the countryside and the seafront. The Overall Strategy for Bexhill should embrace the following elements:

- Maintain Bexhill's independence from Hastings;
- Promote economic performance of the town and community by delivering much needed employment land and infrastructure;
- Foster a better balance in the community through the creation of new jobs and new homes, reduce deprivation and tackle social exclusion by spreading the benefits of sustainable new development as widely as possible across local communities;
- Promote active lifestyles and improve quality of life through the implementation of the recommendations for Bexhill in the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facility Assessment and The Hastings and Rother Leisure Facilities Strategy;
- Improve local transport links to strengthen economic ties with Hastings through the implementation of the Bexhill to Hasting Link Road and sustainable transport measures;

## Section 6 Town Centre

### Context

- 6.1 The town centre is situated adjacent to the seafront, but otherwise fairly centrally in the town. (Please refer to the plan below). It is physically distinctive, being developed on a grid-like pattern over a very short period around the end of the 20th Century as the focus of the creation of 'Bexhill-on-Sea' by Earl de la Warr. This history has warranted its designation as a Conservation Area, the key attributes of which are available from the Council's ['Bexhill Town Centre Conservation Appraisal'](#).



- 6.2 A Shopping Assessment carried out for the Council in 2008 showed that the town centre has an estimated total retail turnover of £18.2m, of which £13.3m is on convenience goods. It is predominantly made up of small shop units, with a relatively high number of independent retailers. The national multiples include Boots, Clinton Cards, Holland and Barrett, New Look, M & Co, and WH Smith. There are also Sainsburys and Co-op supermarkets.
- 6.3 The town centre is relatively strong in the service sector, with a full range of banks, building societies, Post Office, library, drop-in pharmacy, etc.

| <b>Bexhill Town Centre Composition by Unit/Floorspace 2006</b> |              |          |                                   |               |
|--|--------------|----------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
|  | <b>Units</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>Floorspace (m<sup>2</sup>)</b> | <b>%</b>      |
| Convenience  | 21           | 6.5      | 5,686                             | 11.6          |
| Comparison   | 155          | 48.0     | 23,384                            | 47.8          |
| Service  | 104          | 32.2     | 13,592                            | 27.8          |
| Vacant   | 41           | 12.7     | 5,565                             | 11.37         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>323</b>   |          |                                   | <b>48,227</b> |
| <i>Source: Experian Goad (08/2006)</i>                         |              |          |                                   |               |

**Source: Rother District Wide Retail Assessment (2008)**

- 6.4 A 'health check' carried out as part of the Shopping Assessment, concluded that:

*'Bexhill is generally healthy, vital and viable. The centre offers a good range of convenience and comparison shopping opportunities, including some national multiples, a range of interesting comparison goods independents, eating and drinking establishments as well as a selection of community facilities and leisure uses. It further benefits from good levels of accessibility, stable commercial yields and reasonable levels of demand for retail premises within the centre.'*

*Vacancy rates are higher than average, however, this appears to be at least partly attributed to the limited size and nature of retail premises within the centre, which are not considered sufficiently large or flexible to attract national multiples.'*

*Conforming to the traditional Victorian street pattern, the centre is unusual in shape and configuration. Lacking a retail focus or core, the centre has developed around dense typically Victorian residential development. It is further separated into two distinct components by the railway line. While expansion of retail provision and retail floorspace, particularly in providing larger space units would be appropriate within Bexhill to assist the town in fulfilling the District's key retail centre function, the existing pattern of development and physical separation of the centre by the railway line does constrain future expansion.'*

- 6.7 The most recent retail survey conducted in August 2011 shows there to currently be twenty-five vacant retail premises within the Town Centre.

| Date           | No. of Vacant Units |
|----------------|---------------------|
| September 2010 | 26                  |
| January 2011   | 22                  |
| April 2011     | 21                  |
| August 2011    | 22                  |

- 6.8 It is clear from the representations on the 'Strategy Directions' document and from the stakeholder views expressed at the 'health check' event (see above), that there is significant enthusiasm to put the town centre "back on the map" as the heart of Bexhill. In particular, traders wish to see a reversal of a perceived gradual decline of the Town Centre in terms of tourist visitors and also general shopping footfall, which is attributed to the growth of Ravenside Retail Park and of both town centre and out-of centre stores in Hastings and Eastbourne.



- 6.9 Other issues that have been raised relate to the lack of parking, scope for public realm improvements, lack of prime retailers, poor linkage to the cultural attractions, lack of events and severance by the railway.

## **Policy Coverage**

- 6.10 In response to the general drive for improvements, the Council has already recognised the need for coordinated action to support the Town Centre through the recent establishment of a 'Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group'.
- 6.11 In view of the above, it is proposed that a specific strategy for the town centre be incorporated in the Core Strategy. This should be holistic, but also specifically address issues relating to its commercial strength and to its accessibility.

## **Role of the Town Centre**

- 6.12 Although Bexhill town centre provides the largest quantum of retail floorspace in the district, and features the widest range of national multiples, it essentially functions as a service centre for the town itself, its wider catchment being limited by the proximity of Hastings and Eastbourne.
- 6.13 Therefore, the focus of the strategy for the town centre will be to ensure that it better serves the town's community, and generates increases in both the level of trade and footfall as far as possible.
- 6.14 This involves its use for both shopping, services and leisure, recognising that local residents like to link their trips to Bexhill town centre with food shopping, banking or post office requirements, browsing, sports and leisure and community facilities, or visits to local cafes and restaurants.
- 6.15 At the same time, trade can be generated from businesses in and around the town centre and from visitors to the town. In these respects, it both benefits from being the District's administrative centre and having an established presence of, albeit mostly small, offices, as well as from its seaside location and adjacent De La Warr Pavilion.
- 6.16 Unlike many town centres, Bexhill maintains a strong local identity and individuality, which largely stems from the combination of its high proportion of local, independent retailers and Edwardian street pattern and traditional shop fronts and street furniture. Ensuring that it retains this character and remains a clean, well-maintained and a safe place to shop is vital if new commercial development opportunities are to be successfully integrated.

## **Commercial Opportunities**

- 6.17 As noted above, national multiple store representation within the town centre is low for a centre of Bexhill's size. Hence, the range and depth of the comparative shopping offer is currently lacking. Also, the main convenience goods shopping provision, Sainsbury's at Buckhurst Place, is somewhat

dated, has relatively modest sales floorspace and falls short of customer expectations of a modern supermarket/superstore in terms of range of goods, in store services, layout and overall store size.

- 6.18 Given that Bexhill is proposed to accommodate new housing, the town centre may benefit from growth in spending potential over the next 10-15 years. Also, in the light of the competition which the town faces from both Hastings and Eastbourne, it is considered appropriate to seek to enhance Bexhill town centre's market share through retail expansion and co-ordinated town centre marketing to capitalise on the existing distinctive retail offer.
- 6.19 The Shopping Assessment recommends that, by applying a sequential approach, the quantitative need would support additional gross convenience goods floorspace in Bexhill town centre of some 3,409sqm (2,525 sqm sales) in 2016 and 3,824 sqm (2,832 sqm sales) in 2026. (Table 7.4 refers.) It adds that this level of need points to a superstore sized facility, based on around 65% food (convenience): 35% non food (comparison), as well as stating that the floorspace estimates rather than prescriptive floorspace targets.
- 6.20 The tight layout of smaller units in the core of the town centre, coupled with integrity of the buildings (for the most part) to the Conservation Area, means there are no opportunities for the scale of floorspace proposed on a single site.
- 6.21 The Rother District Local Plan (2006) already identifies a site to the north of the railway (but extending over the railway to Western Road) within the town centre for mixed retail led re-development which includes the existing Sainsbury store.
- 6.22 This general location has the potential to provide a modern large foodstore and some comparison goods shopping within the town centre to meet the shopping needs and expectations of the growing population of Bexhill.
- 6.23 In order to support the town centre, a location for retail development should be well connected and related to it to encourage linked trips. An assessment of the area that can be regarded as "edge of centre" has been undertaken and concluded that sites north of the railway fronting Station Road/Buckhurst Place/Terminus Road may be considered from Sea Road as far as, and including, the southern end of Beeching Road.
- 6.24 The success of any redevelopment proposal in this area will depend to a large extent on its integration with the main part of the town centre on the southern side of the railway line, and a key to this will be the provision of a strong physical and visual pedestrian connection to ensure linked trips are maximized to benefit the whole town centre and that the foodstore does not operate predominately as a stand alone car borne facility.



- 6.25 In relation to comparison goods shopping floorspace, there is, qualitatively, some room to improve its retail offer and trading performance, and recapture trade some market share from surrounding competing centres (predominately Hastings and Eastbourne - but also Ravenside Retail Park for certain goods).
- 6.26 The Shopping Assessment concluded that the Council should plan to improve the comparison shopping market share of Bexhill town centre. It considered that there is potential for 6,315 sqm gross (4,355 sqm sales) additional comparison goods floorspace in 2016, increasing to 15,702sqm (10,829 sqm sales) in 2026 (Please to [Rother District Wide Shopping Assessment](#) - Table 7.5).
- 6.27 As for convenience goods, the opportunities for expanding comparison shopping provision within Bexhill town centre are limited due to its constrained nature. However, smaller scale expansion may be achieved via selective redevelopment and infill development within and around the town centre, including as part of any redevelopment in the area identified above or a potentially linked redevelopment of properties to the south of the railway along Western Road.
- 6.28 The good range of services also contributes to the attractiveness of the centre; hence, encouragement should be given to maintain and improve the range and quality of key services, as well as of cafes, pubs, bars and restaurants that can also develop the town's evening economy.
- 6.29 Bexhill also has a number of hotels, guest houses and bed and breakfast facilities, a number of which are around the town centre. A study of [hotel potentials](#) undertaken for the Council has identified the possibility a boutique hotel with a good food offer, and prime seafront location and possibly spa and leisure facilities. Although national boutique hotel companies are unlikely to be interested in such a proposition, a local entrepreneur might be interested, possibly as part of a mixed use scheme, given a prime seafront location and a favourable land deal. It also recognised the potential for a budget hotel.

### **Accessibility**

- 6.30 Access to the town centre is identified as an issue in respect of both ease of access and convenience of movement around the centre. Car parking is a specific aspect of ease of access.
- 6.31 Being located close to the sea, the town centre has the natural disadvantage of only a 180 degree catchment. This is compounded by the fact that the main core of the town centre is on the relatively narrow seaward side of the main South Coast railway, which means that vehicles from inland parts of the town are limited to the crossings at Sea Road to the east and Sackville Road to the west.

- 6.32 There is some pedestrian movement between the northern parts of the town centre and the town centre core, by way of a pedestrian footbridge over the railway line located to the east of Devonshire Square. This is however, a clear barrier to movement and clearly separates the two components of the town centre.
- 6.33 There is good penetration into the centre by buses from within Bexhill and from Eastbourne, Hastings and Rye. A community-run bus also operates within Bexhill concentrating on improving public transport accessibility in and around the town centre.
- 6.34 Cycle access is perhaps not so developed, although there are plans for a local cycle network, as well as current work by East Sussex County Council for a new path extending from Hastings to connect to the existing route from Ravenside Retail Park over Galley Hill.
- 6.35 A positive aspect is that the railway station itself is relatively close to the town centre, fronting Sea Road, although there is a considerable non-commercial frontage along Endwell Road, between the station and Devonshire Square.
- 6.36 Other notable linkages are those between the town centre and the leisure and community uses along the seafront and at Egerton Park, approximately 325 m to the west of Sackville Road. As well as the various leisure uses often associated with seaside towns – sailing club, rowing club, cafes, amusement arcade, “bucket and spade” shops – the iconic 1930’s modernist De La Warr Pavilion is an attraction in its own right as well as for the exhibitions, events and performances it hosts. Egerton Park hosts the town’s Museum and Art Gallery as well as attractive gardens and recreation facilities.
- 6.37 Within the town centre, its street pattern means that there is no clear centre, nor are there any pedestrianised areas within the town centre. Consequently, pedestrian traffic is dispersed, perhaps with greatest activity around the Western Road/Devonshire Road area. St Leonard’s Road and Sackville Road appear to have somewhat less pedestrian activity and include more local neighbourhood shops.
- 6.38 Car parking is mainly on street, with only the car parks being next to the De La Warr Pavilion and a small one on Eversley Road. There is also Sainsbury’s own car park and a car park off Wainwright Road, accessed from Beeching Road, but this is generally viewed as too distant and inaccessible from the centre. Untypically of town centres today, there is on-street parking on all the shopping roads, supplemented by spaces on Station Road and along the seafront, as well as on surrounding residential streets.
- 6.39 The only real opportunity to create more off-street spaces is as part of a redevelopment scheme, as currently provided for. Capacity may also be created by increasing turnover of spaces, and directing longer stay parking

to less central locations. Detailed appraisal of parking duration and occupation is needed to inform such a proposal. Enforcement will be key to such a regime, as it is now.

- 6.40 Care should be taken to avoid undue pressure on local residents' parking, as it is clear that the spending power of local people makes an important contribution to trade. Indeed, the town centre benefits significantly from the close inter-relationship between town centre uses and dwellings. If anything, further opportunities for town centre living, especially if it attracted higher spending power, would directly benefit the town centre.
- 6.41 Supporting sustainable travel may also play a greater part, especially in relation to developing attractive pedestrian and cycle routes that have the town centre as the point of destination.
- 6.42 More attractive connections to the seafront and Egerton Park can also stimulate more linked trips, especially in relation to more "leisure-oriented" trips.

## **Conclusion**

- 6.43 Therefore, a policy should embrace the following elements:
- Promotion of a co-ordinated approach to the town centre
  - Highlight its multi-functional use for services, employment and leisure, and living, as well as shopping
  - Give specific attention to improving accessibility by all modes, links to the seafront, and integration of such considerations with ensuring a more attractive shopping environment and compatibility with its Conservation Area status
  - Application of the recommendations in the Shopping Assessment, and identification of the opportunity to accommodate some of these on the edge of the centre
  - Also give encouragement to additional hotel accommodation, leisure, office and high quality residential developments within walking distance of the centre

## **Section 7 Strategy for Development**

### **Objectives**

- 7.1 The 'Consultation on Strategy Directions' reviewed the growth potential of Bexhill. It highlighted the main considerations bearing on the development strategy as being:
- a) recognition of Bexhill's status as the largest town and main service centre in the district;
  - b) the need for economic regeneration and improved job opportunities in the town and the wider area;
  - c) the social/community objectives contained in the Vision;
  - d) transport capacity;
  - e) maintaining the distinct identity and character of the town;
  - f) environmental and other planning factors that apply to particular locations.

### **Scale of Growth**

- 7.2 Previous consultation was on the basis of some 3,100-3,300 net additional dwellings between 2006-2026. This was regarded as consistent with the opportunities for growth relative to the other towns, in order to achieve the South East Plan target.
- 7.3 However, as explained in the 'Housing Provision in Rother District' Background Paper, the South East Plan target was formulated at a time when the Link Road was due to have been built by now. This delay in the construction of the Link Road is critical in two respects:
- 1) It is required, both directly and indirectly, to release land for both significant employment and housing development;
  - 2) It has implications for the rate at which economic growth is likely.

### **The Link Road and Development Potential**

- 7.4 The Highways Agency has previously advised that any significant new development will create undue pressure on the strategic road network without additional capacity. It viewed the Link Road as potentially providing this capacity. The County Council, as local highway authority, has indicated that it considers the Link Road to be critical to accommodate additional traffic on the local road network without undue congestion.
- 7.5 Traffic modelling of the level of growth advocated in the 'Consultation on Strategy Directions' tends to confirm this general position, as it shows congestion widening out at certain points the network, notably along the A259 corridor, by 2016 without the Link Road.

- 7.6 It also suggests that the construction of the Link Road, coupled with complementary measures, will create sufficient capacity to accommodate the strategic allocation currently contained in the Local Plan, as well as some further expansion. (The location of growth is considered further below).
- 7.7 Transport consultants recognise that the network modelling presents a broad overview of the operation of local roads, but is not so refined as to make full allowance for alternative routes that may be taken in the light of a build-up of traffic at particular junctions; nor does it model the impact of specific improvements that may be made to ease congestion, such as variations in signal timings, junction widening, right hand turn lanes, etc. The location of new development, and its form, will also have a bearing on both traffic generation and flow patterns.
- 7.8 Therefore, further work is envisaged in relation to potential allocations for specific sites. However, it is evident that the capacity of the network is very limited without the Link Road, which suggests consideration of a pre-construction and a post-construction development target.

### **The Link Road and Economic Growth**

- 7.9 There is a recognised need for economic growth to support the regeneration of the Bexhill and Hastings area, which is a specific priority locally and regionally. (South East Plan policy SCT2 refers).
- 7.10 The Employment Strategy and Land Review (ESLR) highlighted the limited supply of available business land or premises in Bexhill, especially of higher quality and modern accommodation.
- 7.11 There are existing Local Plan allocations which have the potential to make some 2,000 jobs, and hence represent the most significant element of employment land supply. This cannot be realised without the Link Road, as it provides the necessary access to the sites.
- 7.12 Evidence provided by the local regeneration company, Sea Space, to the Link Road CPO Inquiry also identified that delay in road construction would have the effect of slowing down employment development projects in the area.
- 7.13 Therefore, in order to improve the balance between employment development and housing development, it is important to ensure that they move forward together. Large scale housing in advance of significant employment development would be unlikely to contribute to the Vision for the town.
- 7.14 In practice, the current economic climate is reducing pressure for housing development; hence, a low short-term housing growth rate is in line with the market.

- 7.15 Housing development responds to economic fluctuations, but also average out over time. The table below shows the average number of dwellings built in Bexhill over the last 20 years, in 5 year periods:

| Bexhill Five Year Housing Completions |                   |       |                   |       |                   |       |                   |           |                   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 91-96                                 |                   | 96-01 |                   | 01-06 |                   | 06-11 |                   | 1991-2011 |                   |
| Total                                 | Average Per Annum | Total | Average Per Annum | Total | Average Per Annum | Total | Average Per Annum | Total     | Average Per Annum |
| 596                                   | 119               | 181   | 36                | 639   | 128               | 729   | 146               | 2145      | 108               |

- 7.16 It can be seen that there has been a significant variation within the 20 year average of 108 dwellings per year. Between 2006-2011, when the property market was booming, there were some 146 dwellings built per year.
- 7.17 As at 1 April 2011, there are still outstanding planning permissions for some 1,097 dwellings. A far greater supply exists in the form of sites allocated for housing in the Local Plan:
- North East Bexhill
    - o East of Link Road
    - o West of Link Road
  - Galley Hill sidings
  - The Down site
- 7.18 There is every reason to believe that these sites will come forward, and progress is regularly reviewed in the Council's six-monthly 'Housing Land Supply Position Statement'.
- 7.19 The rate of development across Bexhill will depend on overall market conditions, as well as the relative attractiveness of the town as a place to live and relative affordability.
- 7.20 There is evidence to suggest that coastal towns are enjoying something of a renaissance, especially where the local economy is prospering and/or communications to major cities are good (e.g. Brighton, Bournemouth and Newquay). Image is often also an important factor.
- 7.21 With the stimulus of the Link Road, and its direct effect on land supply, it is considered feasible to plan on the basis of the average house-building rate increasing to 150 dwellings per year over time.
- 7.22 It is noted that this would be well above the 20-year average of 108 dwellings per year, but this higher rate is seen as compatible with the objectives for the town, especially in terms of providing opportunities to create new jobs, support young people to live locally and attract a greater proportion of economically active in-movers.

- 7.23 Indeed, a higher rate of house-building may well be possible, but it is likely that this would “run ahead” of economic growth, and therefore not support the Vision.
- 7.24 Given the limitations imposed by transport constraints, especially on significant employment development, then a lower rate of growth is regarded as more appropriate prior to the Link Road construction. An average of 75 dwellings per year would be consistent with these considerations, as well as with current land supply and market conditions.
- 7.25 On the basis of an end 2014 Link Road opening, the trajectory of housing completions would be:
- |                        |                                      |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2011 - 2015 (4 years): | 300 dwellings @ 75 dwellings/year    |
| 2015 - 2016 (1 year):  | 100 dwellings @ 100 dwellings/year   |
| 2016 - 2021 (5 years): | 700 dwellings @ 140 dwellings/year   |
| 2021 - 2028 (7 years): | 1,050 dwellings @ 150 dwellings/year |

## **Distribution of development**

- 7.26 The ‘Consultation on Strategy Direction’ promoted new development via:
- a) *further intensification of the urban area particularly in accessible locations, notably in and around the town centre and district centres, and along main bus corridors;*
  - b) *the main broad locations for new development, firstly to the north east of the town (as already planned) together with its subsequent extension westwards over time, facilitated by an extension of the ‘Country Avenue’ linking to the A269.*
- 7.27 The relative merits of the broad locations, together with other directions of growth were summarised in the document, but more fully explained in the ‘Urban Options’ Background Paper.
- 7.28 Further consideration has been appropriate in the light of the subsequent ‘Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment’, representations received and further evaluation, including the ‘Sustainability Appraisal’. The conclusions are reviewed below.

## **East Bexhill**

- 7.29 Given that the retention of the Strategic Gap between Bexhill and Hastings and the creation of the Pebsham Countryside Park are fundamental elements of the strategy for the area, the incursion of development beyond the existing eastern urban edge is regarded as inappropriate. It is recognised that there is an outstanding Waste Local Plan allocation in the area, as well as some limited development that may be integral to the Countryside Park, but these are regarded as exceptions, and would themselves need to be of a siting and form consistent with retaining an effective strategic gap.

### **North East Bexhill**

- 7.30 The relative merits of this location, and the strategic employment areas involved, justify its continued prioritisation. Its strategic significance is recognised by its specific inclusion within the South East Plan.
- 7.31 It is acknowledged that its release is dependent upon the construction of the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road, but, on this basis, this location warrants early development. This is already facilitated by its allocation in the current Local Plan, and elaboration of the relevant policies via the North East Bexhill SPD.
- 7.32 It will be necessary to review the allocations in the absence of a related planning permission as part of the Development and Site Allocations DPD. However, the basic extent of development is well defined by topographical and landscape features, as well as the adjacent Countryside Park allocation, such that no significant north-easterly expansion is envisaged. Further consideration will need to be given to the western extent of the allocated area in connection with any further development to the north – see below.

### **North Bexhill**

- 7.33 As identified in the Urban Options Background Paper (see section 2 above), this area is relatively accessible to Sidley, the major employment sites allocated in the Local Plan and, via the A269, to the town centre, and to north-west Hastings via the Link Road.
- 7.34 The area is identified as having landscape capacity for development in the Landscape Study undertaken by the County Landscape Group in 2008. Indeed, it also has the potential to incorporate a westward extension of the Countryside Park to create a green corridor extending from the east to the north of the town.
- 7.35 In transport terms, any significant development would need to incorporate a through route connecting the Link Road to the A269, Ninfield Road, in order to avoid adding to pressure on Sidley High Street. This road would itself be of value in relieving Sidley of a proportion of through traffic. It would be well suited to being a bus route, with connections into the north-east Bexhill employment areas, and hence either into the town centre or to north Hastings and the Conquest Hospital.
- 7.36 Careful consideration would need to be given to the extent of development and the provision of local services, as parts of the area are not within walking distance of existing services.
- 7.37 The SHLAA considered the potential capacity of this area to be up to 650 dwellings. However, in the context of the overall strategy, further consideration should be given to a much lesser scale of housing, to contribute to an overall total of some 250-450 new allocations, in addition to



existing permissions and Local Plan allocations. Additional employment land would not be necessary when that to the north-east of the town is provided.

- 7.38 A general issue for any new significant urban expansion is the overall capacity of the highway network, as discussed above. This would be further evaluated as part of the 'Development and Site Allocations DPD, as this will allow the combined impacts of all developments to be considered as a whole.

### **West Bexhill**

- 7.39 As stated in the earlier 'Urban Options' background Paper (see section 2), there is a large swathe of countryside abutting the westerly edge of Bexhill both to the north and the south of Barnhorn Road.
- 7.40 The 'Consultation on Strategy Directions' did not favour significant development in this area, assessing that it performs less well than North Bexhill, and North East Bexhill, against relevant criteria. However, work on the Appropriate Assessment suggests that there is scope to mitigate impacts on the Pevensy Levels Ramsar site, as well as to avoid impacting on adjacent flood risk areas or on the water levels and quality in the Levels. Even so, these remain potential negative consequences, which will require detailed assessment in relation to specific sites.
- 7.41 While it is still considered that development would involve the loss of attractive countryside, it is noted that the SHLAA does not rule out large parts of the area out on this ground. It highlights areas to the north and south of Barnhorn Road, with the potential for up to 600 dwellings and 175 dwellings respectively, that should be further investigated and would contribute to an overall total of some 250-450 new allocations, in addition to existing permissions and Local Plan allocations
- 7.42 Access remains an issue, both in terms of the acceptability of connections to the existing network and the traffic impacts on those roads. Also, as noted above in relation to North Bexhill, there is a general concern over the cumulative impacts of any new significant urban expansion on the overall capacity of the highway network.

### **Conclusion**

- 7.43 The Sustainability Appraisal concludes that North East Bexhill remains the most sustainable direction for urban expansion, while development to the north is still favoured over that to the west. However, the differences are not so significant, and that development in different parts of the respective sectors, or of different forms, may yield alternative assessments as to their respective merits. For example, local services as part of development to the north would reinforce its merits, while significant employment development and accessibility improvements would assist the sustainability

of development to the west. In both cases, green infrastructure provisions would also be material to their respective merits.

- 7.44 Therefore, it is proposed that priority continue to be given to development to the north-east of the town, but that the option of additional development to both the north and the west kept open for further investigation and assessment, and consultation, as part of preparation of the Development and Site Allocations DPD.

