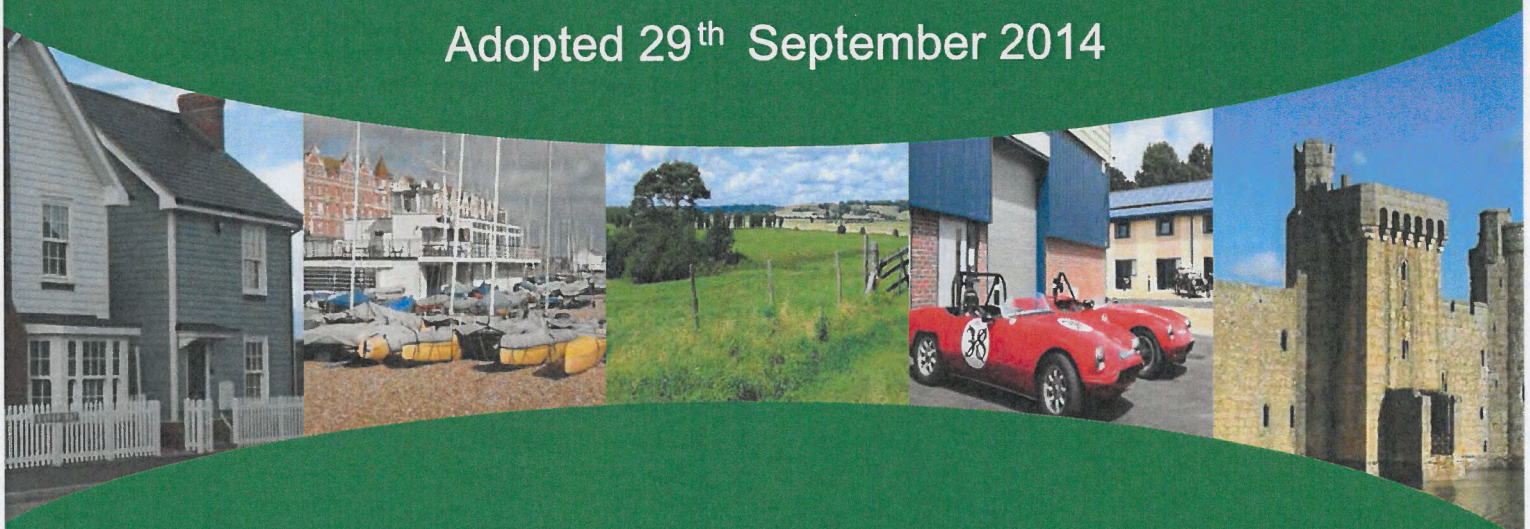
Rother
District Council

Rother Local Plan

Core Strategy

Adopted 29th September 2014



www.rother.gov.uk/corestrategy

Distribution of Development

7.32 The distribution of development has been determined by looking closely at local circumstances across the district against the backcloth of strategic issues, most notably the strategic Vision and Objectives, as well as demographic and economic projections. It has been subject to Sustainability Appraisal (SA).

7.33 Particular regard is given to the role of settlements in terms of seeking to locate most development in locations that offer a range of employment, services and facilities - thereby supporting community life and existing services.

7.34 Furthermore, as highlighted by the SA, this approach should assist in providing opportunities to reduce the need to travel by car thereby reducing carbon emissions, and encouraging walking and cycling. It is also cost efficient, maximising the use of existing facilities and infrastructure and by reducing the need for new ones.

7.35 Service provision is taken only as a starting point, as it is recognised that some larger settlements are unsuited, mainly for environmental reasons, to accommodate the levels of growth suggested by this approach, while other, smaller settlements may benefit from some growth to ensure their continued sustainability.

7.36 The overall spatial distribution of development outlined in Figure 8 also takes account of the location of existing commitments, the combined effect of these and any further requirements on the scale of population increase – with the aim of ensuring that it is not disproportionate, and on the degree of 'local housing needs'.

7.37 In all cases, the distribution of development also needs to be mindful of valuable environmental and heritage assets, as well as infrastructure availability. Potential sites to deliver the housing strategy are identified in the Strategic Housing Land Availability (SHLAA) Review 2013. These, as well as other sites, will be further assessed as part of site allocations/neighbourhood planning processes to determine whether, and if so how, they will be duly brought forward. There will be public consultation as part of these processes.

7.38 With worsening levels of deprivation relative to other parts of the country, it remains the case that Bexhill and Hastings need to regenerate economically. Additional transport infrastructure capacity is also critical to achieve such growth however. This principally relates to the Bexhill Hastings Link Road, for which construction is now underway. A report into 'Housing Delivery in Bexhill and Hastings' concludes that the town may grow at a much increased rate than in the past, while a Transport Study shows this to be possible, subject to further assessment.

7.39 The SHLAA Review 2013 indicates the potential for growth. At the same time, the degree of growth proposed is at a level that does not undermine the key local objectives to improve the balance of homes and jobs and to retain the town's "sense of place".

7.40 The degree of growth at Battle and Rye is moderated due to the high environmental factors that bear upon them. Battle is not only heavily constrained by its historic form and AONB setting, but also by traffic congestion. While it already has a major housing development planned, there are limited opportunities either for further employment sites in accessible locations or for major retail growth in the town centre.

7.41 The opportunities for further development at Rye are very limited by its historic form and topographic setting, as well as the virtual enveloping presence of international nature conservation designations, the AONB and flood risk areas (which also affect parts of the town itself). Added to this, the town seeks to prioritise social and economic challenges and, like Battle, manage its very important heritage. The SHLAA identified very little potential for further outward growth, while the yield from existing allocations may not fully materialise. For both towns, the SHLAA Review 2013 indicates some potential for further housing via redevelopment within both commercial and residential areas, although the prospects for this requires further assessment.

7.42 Some potential for sustainable growth in the Hastings Fringes is identified. Of note, a large scale site at Breadsell Farm mainly in Hastings which would have justified some development on adjoining land in Rother is not promoted in the adopted Hastings Planning Strategy. Also, the prospect of a new railway station in at Wilting (which may have facilitated some housing development) has also receded with publication of Network Rail's development strategy[5]. While current evidence does not support the identification of development at Breadsell Farm, given the housing land supply position, relevant policies are framed in such a way as to not rule out the longer-term prospect of a sustainable scheme if the environmental, access to services and transport constraints were satisfactorily addressed.

7.43 Rural communities in particular are keen to ensure that development in villages contributes to their character and sustainability of services, as well as meets local needs (such as for affordable housing, play areas, community halls, etc.). Hence, development in rural areas should be set at a level which allows for limited growth, reflecting individual settlement's needs, opportunities and service provision. At the same time, the housing provisions seek to maximise the contribution that the villages can make to sustainable growth without prejudicing their individual character and amenities, as well as those of their shared, for the most part High Weald AONB, landscape setting.

7.44 Further explanation of the development potential and overall strategies for the towns and villages is contained the relevant area chapters and the respective background papers.

5 See Kent RUS using this hyperlink: http://www.networkrail.co.uk/browse%20documents/rus%20documents/route%20utilisation%20strategies/kent/kent%20rus.pdf

Route Utilisation Strategies (RUS) are produced by Network Rail (NR). RUSs considers existing capacity, infrastructure capability and train operations, followed by forecasting future demand and providing recommendations as to how this should best be accommodated.

7.45 The overall impact of the distribution of new development proposed set out below (and in chapter 12 for individual villages) is to maintain the existing settlement pattern. It both supports the role of the main service centres in ways compatible with their context and provides for the sensitive evolution of smaller settlements, with a focus on enabling them to meet local needs locally.

Policy OSS1: Overall Spatial Development Strategy

The Strategy for the Overall Spatial Development is to:

(i) Plan for at least 5,700 dwellings (net) in the district over the period 2011-2028;

(ii) Plan for at least 100,000 square metres of gross additional business floorspace;

(iii) Identify suitable sites in accordance with the following spatial distribution:

(a) Focus new development at Bexhill, giving particular attention to promoting economic regeneration and growth of the Hastings and Bexhill area, including through mixed use developments;

(b) Provide for some development in Battle and Rye that helps maintain their small market town roles and is consistent with their respective environmental constraints and settings;

(c) Facilitate the limited growth of villages that contain a range of services and which contributes to supporting vibrant, mixed rural communities, notably in relation to service provision and local housing needs, and is compatible with the character and setting of the village;

(d) Allow for small-scale infill and redevelopment, and otherwise enable local needs for housing and community facilities to be met, in other villages; and

(e) Give particular attention to the ecological, agricultural, public enjoyment and intrinsic value of the countryside, and continue to generally restrict new development to that for which a countryside location is necessary or appropriate to promoting sustainable land-based industries and sensitive diversification, primarily for employment uses.

7.46 The broad locations for development are set out in the respective area chapters, while the distribution within the district is set out in the table below.

Approximate Development Levels 2011 - 2028		
	Housing	**Employment**
Bexhill	3,100 dwellings	At least 60,000sq.m.
Hastings fringes	100-250 dwellings	At least 3,000sq.m.
Battle	475-500 dwellings	At least 10,000sq.m.*
Rye	355-400 dwellings	At least 10,000-20,000 sq.m.
Villages	1,670 dwellings	At least 10,000sq.m.
Total	**At least 5,700 dwellings**	**At least 93,000 – 103,000sq.m.**

Figure 8: Approximate Development Levels (* includes sites on Marley Lane)

7.47 As stated above, the level of housing growth in line with this strategy is at least 5,700 dwellings. This enables a higher level of housing growth when individual sites are assessed. The exact distribution will be refined when allocations are subsequently brought forward.

7.48 The distribution of development between individual villages is set out in the Rural Areas chapter. Actual numbers and areas will be subject to further detailed investigation of potential sites.

7.49 Given the need for regeneration, especially in the coastal towns, most business development should be in the first 10 years of the plan period.

7.50 The Key Diagram (Map 1) illustrates the main elements of the development strategy, including settlements identified as having development potential.

Future Allocations and 'Windfall' Sites

7.51 The table at Appendix 3 summarises the local housing targets together with the housing land supply position at April 2011. Taking account of outstanding planning permissions, there is a need to provide for at least a further 4,295[6] dwellings in the District as a whole between 2011 and 2028.

7.52 Sites for new development will be set out in due course through a Development and Site Allocations Plan and Neighbourhood Plans. Existing Local Plan housing (and other) allocations will be subject to review as part of these processes. These allocations amount to some 1,607 dwellings which, if these are all carried forward, would still require some additional 2,688[7] dwellings need to planned for to meet the overall target.

6 4,295 comprises 3,770 (total allocations required lower end of range), plus 65 exception sites, plus 460 small site windfalls.

7 2,688 comprises 2,163 (total allocations required lower end of range), plus 65 exception sites, plus 460 small site windfalls.

7.53 Government policy in the National Planning Policy Framework states that: "Local planning authorities may make an allowance for windfall sites in the five-year supply if they have compelling evidence that such sites have consistently become available in the local area and will continue to provide a reliable source of supply." It adds that: "Any allowance should be realistic, having regard to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, historic windfall delivery rates and expected future trends, and should not include residential gardens."

7.54 In fact, there is a strong track record in Rother of both large and small (essentially brownfield) windfall sites coming forward. Moreover, these have made a significant contribution to housing numbers in past years. Typically, windfall sites are small-scale and within 'development boundaries' (which are discussed further below).

7.55 Sites for 6+ dwellings should be allocated for development, drawing on the detailed work in the SHLAA, although the prospect of some larger windfall sites will still exist. However, as allocations are not normally made for sites of less than 6 dwellings, there will inevitably by some continuing supply of small-site windfalls.

7.56 Given Rother's past record of fairly consistent small site windfall developments, an allowance for these is made in years 5-10 and 10-15, at rates of 47 dwellings and 45 dwellings a year respectively. This compares with some 90 dwellings a year on small site windfalls over the period 2000 -2010. The future allowances do not include any provision for redevelopment on garden land. Further allowance may be made for the delivery of affordable housing "exception sites" in accordance with the Council's programme. This amounts to some 65 dwellings, all of which would be in the rural areas. This programme is underway with several sites currently being progressed.

7.57 Taking the above windfall allowances into account, the outstanding requirement for further allocations is some 2,163 dwellings.

7.58 The Council will continue to monitor and review the contribution of windfalls to overall supply and the extent to which they may either reduce the need for allocations, impact on the need to release sites, or provide a contingency for certain sites not being developed. Particular attention will be given to the incidence of large windfall sites, which may increase the actual scale of housing growth over the plan period.

7.59 Further consideration of the general timing of development is contained in chapter 19.

Development boundaries

7.60 Development boundaries' around settlements are a well-established planning policy tool in East Sussex. They provide a clear and readily understood indication of where development would, and would not, be allowed in principle. Within development boundaries there is a presumption that infilling, redevelopment and changes of use will be acceptable subject to other policies of the plan.

7.61 They help to focus development and investment into sustainable locations and to protect against intrusive development beyond the substantially built-up areas of towns and villages.

7.62 Consideration has been given to whether to retain such prescribed limits, or whether to rely on a criteria-based policy. It is found that the level of certainty they afford, for all involved in planning, continues to be highly valued. They reflect the established settlement pattern and provide a useful reference for the application of policies specifically designed to help meet local needs, such as those relating to community facilities and affordable housing. Therefore the use of development boundaries is maintained. Current boundaries will be reviewed, in conjunction with the consideration of proposed land allocations, as part of the forthcoming Development and Site Allocations Plan. The relevant factors are set out in the following policy, OSS2.

Policy OSS2: Use of Development Boundaries

Development Boundaries around settlements will continue to differentiate between areas where most forms of new development would be acceptable and where they would not.

Existing development boundaries will be reviewed by the Development and Site Allocations DPD, having regard to the:

(i) Existing pattern, form and function of settlements, including of closely 'linked' settlements and important 'gaps' of countryside between them;

(ii) Character and settings of individual towns and villages;

(iii) Sensitivity to further development both within the main built up confines and in more rural fringes;

(iv) The amount of land needed to fulfil development needs and requirements;

(v) Availability of local infrastructure and services;

(vi) Accessibility to facilities and services, and avoiding scattered and ribbon development;

(vii) Environmental considerations, including the need to conserve designated areas of national and local landscape, archaeological, geological, ecological or historical importance;

(viii) Following physical features, unless this may suggest a potential for development that is inappropriate.

Sustainable Development Principles

7.63 At the heart of planning, at all levels, is the principle of 'sustainable development'. In essence, sustainable development is about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone both now and in the future. It means a more inclusive society that achieves and shares the benefits of increased economic prosperity, in which the environment is protected and improved and there is a less wasteful use of natural resources.

7.64 The NPPF sets out the key principles based around three mutually dependent dimensions – an economic role, a social role and an environmental role. The Government's 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' is set out in Policy and supporting text in chapter 2.

7.65 Key considerations in relation to the social, economic and environmental impacts of development provide the basis for assessing the sustainability of development. These are set out in core 'delivery' policies for the key aspects of sustainable development; that is, resource management, economy, communities, housing, environment and transport, and supplement policies for particular spatial areas within the district.

7.66 General development principles applicable to the identification of sites and the determination of planning applications for the development of land are set out below.

Policy OSS3: Location of development

In assessing the suitability of a particular location for development, when both allocating land for development and determining planning applications, sites and/or proposals should accord with the relevant policies of this Core Strategy and be considered in the context of:

(i) The spatial strategy for the particular settlement or area, and its distinct character;

(ii) The capacity of, as well as access to, existing infrastructure and services, and of any planned or necessary improvements to them;

(iii) The local need for affordable housing;

(iv) Needs and priorities identified in approved Local Action Plans;

(v) The low carbon and renewable energy potentials of the site;

(vi) the character and qualities of the landscape;

(vii) Making effective use of land within the main built-up confines of towns and villages, especially previously developed land, consistent with maintaining their character;

(viii) Any constraints relating to land stability, contamination, air quality, agricultural land quality and coastal erosion, and the ability to satisfactorily address these;

(ix) The deliverability of development, including consideration of land ownership patterns and the viability of development;

(x) The need for and access to employment opportunities.

Policy BX2: Bexhill Town Centre

The Strategy for Bexhill Town Centre is to:

(i) Promote a co-ordinated town centre initiative to improve its use for shopping, services and leisure, including through investment in the public realm, increased parking capacity, links to the seafront, activities and marketing;

(ii) Develop a holistic pedestrian and traffic management strategy that combines improved accessibility for buses and additional parking capacity with ensuring a more attractive shopping environment;

(iii) Provide for some 2,000 sq m additional convenience goods and 4,000 sq m comparison goods floorspace, primarily through 'edge of centre' retail expansion on the north side of the railway, as well as effective use of town centre accommodation;

(iv) Provide for hotel accommodation, well related to the town centre and/or the De la Warr Pavilion;

(v) Facilitate leisure, office and high quality residential developments within walking distance of the centre;

(vi) Ensure that development and change respects and, where appropriate, enhances the late Victorian/Edwardian character of the Conservation Area.

Strategy for development

8.46 Physical growth at Bexhill is not heavily constrained by national environmental designations. Therefore, there is capacity for sustainable urban extensions to help meet the overall strategy objectives, in particular for economic development.

8.47 Housing growth may both stimulate business development as well as help otherwise achieve the vision for the town. However, large-scale growth would not be consistent with the objective of retaining its essential character, nor with the commercial property market. Even within these other sustainability parameters, the very limited highway capacity, primarily along the A259 trunk road towards Hastings but extending through the town, is a real constraint upon development at present.

8.48 Looking forward, the current substantial highway limitations will be addressed when the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road is completed, currently scheduled to be in 2015.

8.49 Delay in opening the Link Road impacts on the timing and, hence, overall quantum of housing growth, as the Highways Authorities have indicated that they do not believe that large new sites can be built ahead of the Link Road. The weakened property market following the recession also lessens the prospects for a high level of house building. The prospects for increased house building following the decision to build the Link Road has been assessed. This report on 'Housing Delivery in Bexhill and Hastings' recognises developers' plans to bring significant developments forward. It concludes that, over the remaining plan period, a housebuilding rate of up to 200 dwellings per year could be achieved.

8.50 A housing target of 3,100 new dwellings between 2011 and 2028 is considered appropriate, and equates to an average of some 182 dwellings a year. It is recognised that this is well above the average house building rate over the last 20 years and will place an added weight on initiatives to stimulate job growth. Hence, particular emphasis will be given to schemes that bring significant employment benefits.

8.51 It is anticipated that the rate of housing development will take place following construction of the Link Road will increase quickly to the annualised target.

8.52 There are outstanding commitments for almost 350 dwellings. Deducting these from the total leaves a requirement to identify sites for some 2,750 additional dwellings.

8.53 The current development strategy already provides for a major urban extension to the north east of the town (including some 1,300 dwellings and 50,000 sq m of business floorspace), It is still regarded as the most appropriate location for urban expansion of the town, as it secures vital new business land in an accessible location (to the A21 and A259, the urban area, the town centre, existing employment areas and areas of greatest job need), supports sustainable development, is most acceptable in environmental terms and integrates well with green space proposals.

8.54 Allowing a reasonable estimate for small sites coming forward, further allocations are needed for some 1,100 dwellings. The 2013 SHLAA indicates some potential within the existing built-up area, as well as sites and broad locations around the northern and western edges of the town. Development to the east would erode the marginal but critical open countryside gap to Hastings.

8.55 Further outward expansion to the north east of the town would threaten the integrity of the strategic gap with Hastings, the planned Countryside Park and clear topographical limits. However, it may be extended westwards adjacent to the urban area without undue impact on the wider landscape. This provides the opportunity to extend the proposed 'country avenue' serving the existing allocation in the area of Preston Hall Farm as far as the A269, Ninfield Road, thereby relieving Sidley of significant through traffic. Development extending west of the A269 will also be considered, if appropriate, linking to the Ibstock brickworks site. Development in this area would also be expected to contribute to the extension of accessible green space from the Countryside Park towards the High Woods area.

8.56 Development to the west of Little Common, both north and south of Barnhorn Road (A259), will also be considered. Again, the area enjoys an attractive pastoral character, but without impacting on the wider landscape for the greater part. It also benefits from reasonable access to shops and services at the Little Common district centre. Access would need to be created directly off the A259, supplemented by existing estate roads. Whydown Road and Sandhurst Lane are unsuitable access roads.

8.57 These areas will be the focus of attention in accommodating the additional housing requirement. The scale, timing and locations will ideally be determined at the Site Allocations stage. This is the most appropriate time to assess in further detail the key issue of the capacity of the A259 and local roads, as well as specific development issues.

8.58 It is anticipated that further consideration will also be given to the future of the ex-United Arab Emirates training centre a little beyond the western edge of the town in preparing the Development and Site Allocations Plan as this has closed down.

8.59 In advance of the Link Road, the focus of employment growth will be within and adjacent to the town centre and at existing business sites. This will be complemented by a focus on public realm and town centre improvements, addressing deprivation issues, encouraging healthy, active lifestyles and securing housing in line with the strategy on urban sites.

Policy BX3: Development Strategy

New residential and employment development will contribute to the overall strategy for Bexhill through:

(i) A total of at least 60,000 sq m of new business floorspace, focused on new strategic employment areas associated with construction of the Link Road, with further provision in and adjacent to the town centre and as part of other developments;

(ii) An overall level of housing growth of 3,100 dwellings between 2011-2028;

(iii) Over and above development opportunities within the existing urban area, new housing and business development will be focussed on a strategic site to the north east of the town (as already planned), together with further sites to the north and west of the town, the scale, timing and locations of which will ideally be determined through the Site Allocations process; and

(iv) In advance of construction of the Link Road, new opportunities for business growth, including office schemes, will be encouraged mainly within and adjacent to the town centre and existing employment areas.

General development considerations

7.67 In addition to the above criteria, the suitability of a specific development proposal also needs to be considered in terms of the extent to which it delivers appropriately high standards that conserve landscape character and bio-diversity, makes most efficient use of finite water and energy resources, as well as fosters local identity and safeguard amenities.

7.68 All development should be capable of accommodating the reasonable expectations of likely occupiers, including in terms of indoor and outdoor space, personal safety and not be unduly affected by adjacent intrusive uses and buildings. They should cater for practical needs, such as parking and access, refuse and recycling facilities and open space.

7.69 At the same time, the amenities of neighbouring properties needs to be protected, in terms of loss of light and privacy, avoiding an overbearing presence and otherwise causing intrusion such as through noise, activity at unsocial hours, lighting, etc.

7.70 Environmental impacts need to be carefully addressed, such that landscape character is conserved, inappropriate fragmentation of the countryside avoided, important trees, woodlands and hedgerows retained, and where appropriate, supplemented by new landscaping, and wildlife habitats protected and encouraged.

7.71 Good design should respect the character of its setting, whether urban or rural, and make a positive contribution to reinforcing local distinctiveness. This relates not only the layout and design of buildings, but also the treatment of external areas, which should respect landscape character. Key design principles are set out in chapter 17.

7.72 Density standards are not advocated as development should respond to its setting and accord with the principles of good design. This includes looking at higher densities in more accessible locations. Minimum standards can also lead to inappropriate cramming, although unduly low densities may also be inappropriate in failing to make effective use of development land.

7.73 The need to ensure that infrastructure and facilities required to service development are available or will be provided is addressed in chapter 19, while drainage matters are covered in chapter 13, and meeting the transport and access demands created is addressed in chapter 18.

7.74 The following policy addresses those general development considerations concerned with 'fitness for purpose' and local amenities, and complement other policies relating to other factors. Such policies include policy EN1 relating to landscape, policy EN3 relating to design and policy EN5 relating to biodiversity.

Policy OSS4: General Development Considerations

In addition to considerations set out by other policies, all development should meet the following criteria:

(i) It meets the needs of future occupiers, including providing appropriate amenities and the provision of appropriate means of access for disabled users;

(ii) It does not unreasonably harm the amenities of adjoining properties;

(iii) It respects and does not detract from the character and appearance of the locality;

(iv) It is compatible with both the existing and planned use of adjacent land, and takes full account of previous use of the site;

(v) In respect of residential development, is of a density appropriate to its context, having due regard to the key design principles.

Policy RA2: General Strategy for the Countryside

The overarching strategy for the Countryside is to:

(i) Maintain the farming capacity of the district, and support the agricultural industry, including diversification within farming;

(ii) Encourage agricultural practices, land-based economic activities and woodland management, and related agri-environmental schemes, that reinforce local distinctiveness, landscape character and ecology;

(iii) Strictly limit new development to that which supports local agricultural, economic or tourism needs and maintains or improves the rural character;

(iv) Retain traditional historic farm buildings by continued agricultural use or by appropriate re-use, in accordance with Policy RA4;

(v) Support rural employment opportunities in keeping with rural character and compatible with maintaining farming capacity;

(vi) Support enjoyment of the countryside and coast through improving access and supporting recreational and leisure facilities that cannot reasonably be located within development boundaries, such as equestrian facilities, compatible with the rural character of the area;

(vii) Support tourism facilities, including touring caravan and camp sites, which respond to identified local needs and are of a scale and location in keeping with the rural character of the countryside; and

(viii) Generally conserving the intrinsic value, locally distinctive rural character, landscape features, built heritage, and the natural and ecological resources of the countryside.

12.52 In applying this policy, it is important that the other parts of the Core Strategy are also referred to, in particular the opening sections of this chapter dealing with the introduction to rural areas and the villages (which deals with key services such as employment areas, ICT & broadband infrastructure, rural tourism, rural communities and services such as village shops, pubs, village halls, recreation & leisure, historic environment and accessibility). Cross-reference also needs to be made to the thematic chapters such as 15. Housing, 16. Economy and 17. Environment. Further consideration is given to development in the countryside, and specifically to the reuse of traditional farm buildings, in the following sections.

Development in the Countryside

12.53 Farming and woodland management are the predominant land uses in the district's countryside. The agricultural land is of mixed quality; mostly grade 3, but with significant areas of higher quality grade 2 towards the east of the district along the Brede Valley and East Guldeford Level.

12.54 Agricultural production of food and by-products is a key economic function of the countryside; the support of British farming and sustainable food production is one of the three key priorities set out in DEFRA's Business Plan,[28] and a number of national initiatives are in place to support this objective[29].

12.55 Changes in agricultural practices during the 20th century saw a decline in traditional land and woodland management, with a consequent decline in skills in environmentally sensitive land management. Maintaining and developing such skills, and practices, offers opportunities for local employment and has a vital part to play in maintaining the district's distinct landscape character, especially in the High Weald.

12.56 Meanwhile the shift towards more sensitive environmental land management over the previous 10 – 20 years has helped support the farming industry and the conservation of landscape features and ecology. DEFRA's programme of agri-environmental schemes, through a structured programme of payments to farmers, remains an important way of ensuring effective land management to protect and enhance the environment and wildlife in the district.

12.57 Modern farming practices often require new agricultural buildings to meet specific needs. To ensure viable farming industries, these will be supported in principle, though whilst the size and mass of such buildings is inevitably dictated by their function, care is still needed in their siting, design and materials, to minimise the visual impact on the landscape character of the countryside.

12.58 Development pressures in the countryside arise from a number of demands; agricultural, economic/tourism, recreational, and residential. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

12.59 More generally, development in the countryside must have regard to impacts on both landscape character and natural resource management. 'Natural resources' in this context includes biodiversity, water resources, water quality, floodplains, coastline, air quality and minerals.

28 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Business Plan 2011-2015, November 2010

29 including those supported by the Prince's Countryside Fund and the NFU 'Why Farming Matters' campaign

12.60 However, changing farming needs and development economics have meant that many former farm buildings, historic and modern, have become available for conversion and re-use. To support the rural economy in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, the policy presumption for such conversions is for uses which contribute to the local farming and rural economy, either by direct employment or by encouraging visitor spend. Such uses include workshops, farm shops or tourist facilities, and other employment uses such as offices. Buildings suitable for conversion should be generally in keeping with the rural character of the area in terms of scale, siting and appearance, be of permanent and substantial construction, and be capable of conversion without major or substantial reconstruction.

12.61 Occasionally, the replacement of such buildings for employment uses might be preferable to conversion where this would result in a development which is more acceptable in terms of landscape impact and visual appearance.

12.62 The range of activity operating within the district's countryside is wide; including food production, equestrianism, vineyards, horticulture, tourism and leisure, and a broad range of business activities. There is often high interdependency and mutual benefit between these industries. For example, a number of farmers markets and farm shops operate within the district, producing and supplying local foods and associated products. Vineyards, local food markets and plant nurseries help attract tourists into the district, while livery yards also offer rural employment opportunities, and help support wider industries such as vets, animal foodstuffs and also equestrian activities and events.

12.63 Tourism and recreation activities, such as holiday caravan and chalet developments, including the current trends for yurts and other forms of camping, equestrian facilities, and other recreational activities such as fishing, can add to the enjoyment and economic vitality of the district's countryside and rural communities, but can also lead to development and land-use pressures. For caravan and camping sites, the emphasis will be on improving the amenities of existing sites to maintain and enhance their tourism value, though consideration will be given to new small-scale provision to respond to modern market expectations, recognising environmental factors.

12.64 To protect the undeveloped and rural landscape of the countryside, new residential development, as for other forms of development in the countryside, must be limited to that which cannot be located in an urban area, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, and which positively contributes to maintaining the landscape heritage and character of the area. In particular, new dwellings may be essential for the proper functioning of land-based businesses (i.e. farming, forestry and equine-related activities). Such businesses should be demonstrably 'financially sound', which normally means that permissions will initially be on a temporary basis. Permanent dwellings will normally require the agricultural unit and activity to have been established for at least three years, have been profitable for at least one of them, be currently financially sound and have a clear prospect of remaining so. Careful consideration should also be given to the siting, size and design, as well as access. The siting of new dwellings should be well-related to existing farm buildings or other dwellings, wherever practicable. To ensure that a dwelling remains available to meet the recognised need, occupancy conditions will be applied.

12.65 The approach to the conversion and re-use of traditional historic farm buildings for residential use is discussed in the following section, and in Policy RA4. The conversion to residential use of modern or non-traditional farm buildings (normally considered to be post 1880) or of farm buildings requiring substantial or speculative reconstruction, would not serve to ensure the retention of features of acknowledged historic importance and value in landscape character. Therefore, this would not be an acceptable form of development in the countryside.

12.66 Changes to existing dwellings, be they extensions to dwellings, extensions to domestic curtilages into countryside, alterations to previously converted traditional former agricultural dwellings, ancillary works such as fences, walls and gates, or new outbuildings within curtilages, can, cumulatively, have a significant impact on the character of the countryside. It is therefore important to ensure that such proposals do not suburbanise the countryside, compromise the character, integrity or form of distinctive building typologies, nor compromise their contribution to the landscape character.

12.67 Similarly, replacement dwellings should not increase the visual prominence of the building in the countryside nor detract from the rural landscape character and local context of the area, and should take every opportunity to improve any existing adverse landscape impact.

Policy RA3: Development in the Countryside

Proposals for development in the countryside will be determined on the basis of:

(i) Supporting new agricultural buildings and other non-domestic buildings demonstrably needed to support farming, woodland and other land-based industries that are of appropriate size, siting and design and materials and directly related to the enterprise;[30]

(ii) Supporting suitable employment and tourism opportunities in the countryside, including by the conversion, for employment use, of farm buildings generally in keeping with the rural character, and by the sensitive, normally small-scale growth of existing business sites and premises;

(iii) Allowing the creation of new dwellings in extremely limited circumstances, including:

(a) Dwellings to support farming and other land-based industries. Normally, accommodation will initially be provided on a temporary basis for a period of three years. Both temporary and permanent dwellings will be subject to appropriate occupancy conditions, and all applications should comply with the following criteria:

i. Demonstrate a clearly established functional need, relating to a full-time worker primarily employed in the farming and other land-based businesses;

ii. Demonstrate the functional need cannot be fulfilled by other existing accommodation in the area;

iii. Demonstrate the unit and the agricultural activity concerned are financially sound and have a clear prospect of remaining so;

iv. Dwellings are of appropriate size, siting and design.

(b) The conversion of traditional historic farm buildings in accordance with Policy RA4;

(c) The one-to-one replacement of an existing dwelling of similar landscape impact; or

(d) As a 'rural exception site' to meet an identified local affordable housing need as elaborated upon in Chapter 15 – Local Housing Needs;

(continued overleaf)

30 Conversion, replacement and extension of existing sites and premises all refer in this sense to buildings generally in keeping with the rural character of the area in terms of scale, siting and appearance, of permanent and substantial construction, and be capable of conversion without major or substantial reconstruction.

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(iv). Ensuring that extensions to existing buildings and their residential curtilages, and other ancillary development such as outbuildings, fences, enclosures, lighting and signage, would maintain and not compromise the character of the countryside and landscape;

(v). Ensuring that all development in the countryside is of an appropriate scale, will not adversely impact on the on the landscape character or natural resources of the countryside and, wherever practicable, support sensitive land management.

Historic Farm Buildings

12.68 Rother's countryside has a highly distinctive and important architectural character by way of settlement pattern and building typologies. The historic hamlets and farmsteads of the High Weald create a distinct and picturesque landscape, with the rolling pastureland and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofs of medieval houses, barns and oasts. Building typologies reflect locally distinct historic agricultural practices, for example the distinctive brick roundels of the hop industry's oast-houses, fine timber-framed barns and modest brick cowsheds and outbuildings.

12.69 Traditional historic farm buildings are a vital element in defining the distinctive character of the district's countryside, as well as being a valuable economic resource. They have cultural and archaeological value, not just in their fabric, but also their location and setting, to help our understanding of the historical development of farming in the district. Traditional historic farm buildings are generally considered to be those dating from pre 1880, though there may be other pre-war buildings, either late Victorian or Edwardian that are of interest in a farmstead or landscape context and may be worthy of retention.

12.70 English Heritage have analysed the character of rural settlement and farming in the South East, and particularly in the High Weald, within which the majority of the district's countryside falls, in their Farmstead Character Statement[31]. This highlights the historic typical small farm sizes, leading to small 'farmsteads' of mostly dispersed cluster plans or loose courtyards, and typically consisting of just the farmhouse, one large multi-purpose barn, and perhaps an oasthouse or a small open-fronted outbuilding.[32]

12.71 In accordance with English Heritage advice in the document 'Living Buildings in a Living Landscape: finding a future for traditional Farm Buildings', the priority uses for traditional agricultural buildings are to retain such buildings in continued farming-related uses, and secondly to convert for employment uses, including tourism.

31 Historic Farmsteads Preliminary Character Statement: South East Region English Heritage & The Countryside Agency 2006

32 Further research available in 'Farm Buildings of the Weald 1450-1750' David and Barbara Martin Heritage Marketing & Publications Ltd 2006