

VILLAGES & THE RURAL AREAS

The rural areas of the Borough are characterised by a thriving network of towns, villages and hamlets. There are 17 villages, each with its own individual character. Most of the villages are located in either the Green Belt and/or High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and many have a central conservation area. These factors make the Borough's villages and rural areas very attractive places, but they also represent constraints in terms of development. However, in its Core Strategy, the Borough Council has recognised that there are specific issues that need to be addressed in these areas. Affordable housing to meet local needs will help sustain local communities and support the local economy. The loss of local services will be resisted and the development of services to meet local needs will be encouraged.

In its Core Strategy, the Borough Council has set out the broad strategy for development across the Borough as a whole, including for the Villages and Rural Areas. The Allocations DPD will be one of the mechanisms to implement this broad strategy tangibly – by allocating sites to accommodate development and providing specific policies in connection with such development. To help inform these policies, please read this consultation pack carefully and then answer the questionnaire at the end.

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Appendices (saved separately under the Villages & Rural Areas link on website at www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/tcaap)

1. Green Infrastructure Assets Maps
2. Site Maps
3. Site List

Villages & Rural Areas Questionnaire (saved separately under the Villages & Rural Areas link on website at www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/tcaap or available to complete online at http://consult.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/portal/planning_information/spp/tcaap/tcaapall_dpd)

1. Vision & Detailed Objectives

The Core Strategy provides a spatial vision of what the Borough's places, including the Villages and Rural Areas, will be like in 2026 if its policies are implemented successfully. It also sets out the strategic objectives for development to deliver that vision. The detailed vision and objectives below build on those provided in the Core Strategy to ensure that sufficiently distinctive policies in the Allocations DPD drive appropriate development to meet the needs of the Villages and Rural Areas.

Vision

The broad vision for the villages and rural areas, consistent with that set out in the Core Strategy, is that there will be a strong rural economy based on activities that respect and make appropriate use of the countryside, including agriculture, recreation and tourism, while also benefitting from more general small-scale economic development that has developed in, for example, redundant rural buildings. Care will be taken to conserve and enhance the distinctive features of the Borough's countryside, including its landscape and biodiversity, to enable businesses, residents and visitors alike to continue to enjoy both its intrinsic character and the resources it provides.

The role that the built heritage within the villages and wider rural areas plays in giving a unique character and sense of place to each settlement will continue to be recognised and protected. Within the rural areas, the historic landscape and settlement patterns will also be recognised and protected.

Improved transport links between the villages, rural areas and main rural service centres (Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst) will be improved. This will enable Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst (see separate visions and objectives for these settlements) to be at the heart of a thriving, well connected network of villages and hamlets in the countryside, while the villages will each provide a local focus for their communities. Community services and facilities will be supported and enhanced to develop the focal role of the villages.

New affordable housing will be provided to serve the needs of the local population, through the development of rural exceptions housing and larger housing developments within the villages will be required to deliver an element of affordable housing. Housing development at the villages will help sustain the rural communities that it serves.

Objectives for the Villages & Rural Areas

1. To support a strong local economy within the villages and rural areas, recognising the importance of both agricultural and non-agricultural activities within the rural economy
2. To recognise, conserve and enhance the distinctive natural features of the countryside
3. To recognise, conserve and enhance the built heritage within the villages and wider rural area to ensure that local distinctiveness is retained and the built heritage protected
4. To improve transport links, in particular public transport links, within and between rural settlements and between the rural areas and the small rural towns of Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst. To encourage the use of non-motorised modes of transport in order to support sustainable links within the rural area and between all settlements and rural recreational areas
5. To support the focal role that villages provide for the rural areas by resisting the loss of local services and encouraging the development of community facilities, for example retail services, educational and healthcare facilities. This will help reduce the need to travel out of villages to access basic services
6. To provide affordable housing to meet local needs and to support the local communities and local service centres

The detailed Vision and Objectives above have been refined as a result of the comments received in response to the first stage of consultation undertaken in April to June 2009, and their broad

content is fixed by the Core Strategy. The questionnaire at the end of this pack does not, therefore, seek any further comments about them. However, if you feel strongly that they should be amended, please state how in the “Any Other Comments” box at Question 20 of the questionnaire.

2. Development Needs

The Allocations DPD will need to ensure that the development needs below, which have been identified for the Villages and Rural Areas, can be provided. The Borough Council has drawn on a comprehensive range of evidence to identify these development needs and, in the majority of cases, the Core Strategy has confirmed that they will be delivered and has provided broad policies to address where and how. However, it may be that you consider that the Villages and Rural Areas have different or additional development needs and you can state this in response to Question 1 of the questionnaire. It would be particularly helpful if you could provide information about the specific needs of individual villages or areas.

Development Needs in the Villages & Rural Areas

Type of Development	Quantity Needed	Commentary
Housing	<p>47 net additional market houses by 2026 (as at 01 April 2008)</p> <p>Rural affordable housing units to contribute to the need identified by detailed Parish-based housing needs assessments for each Parish</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market housing must be provided on sites within the Limits to Built Development (LBD) of the Villages. Priority will be given to previously developed land If market housing sites accommodate 10 or more dwellings, 35% will be affordable homes Rural Exceptions Sites for local needs affordable housing must be well related to the village they will serve and may be allocated or be the subject of a policy in the Development Control Policies DPD. An appropriate mix of housing types and sizes will be sought Demographic changes will create a higher demand for sheltered and extra care housing for older people across the Borough Gypsy & Traveller pitches must be provided in appropriate locations across the Borough to accommodate the number to be set by the South East England Partnership Board. Priority consideration to be given to extending existing sites; re-using previously occupied sites; and to the suitability of temporary sites
Employment	<p>Core Strategy seeks to retain employment uses in accordance with Core Policy 7</p> <p>Employment Land Study 2006 (ELS) found no need to allocate more land. This is currently being reviewed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment opportunities in the rural areas may be enhanced by development/redevelopment in the Key Employment Areas (KEA) at Gills Green. Existing floorspace will be retained and new floorspace will be encouraged here Diversification of rural buildings into employment uses is supported by policies in the Core Strategy Where appropriate, existing rural buildings worthy of retention and in suitable locations could be converted to provide tourist accommodation
Retail	<p>The loss of local services should be resisted</p> <p>The small rural towns of Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst will operate as service centres for the rural areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities will be taken to enhance the Village centres (identified in Table 11 of the Core Strategy) to provide a focus for local communities and the surrounding rural area Development of social enterprises to provide local services will be encouraged

Type of Development	Quantity Needed	Commentary
Leisure; Recreation; & Culture	No specific requirements have been identified. It is recognised that rural based recreational activities such as walking, fishing, golf and equestrian activities play an important role within the rural areas and contribute to the local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sites outside the LBD may be appropriate for certain types of recreational facilities, e.g. sports pitches Equestrian development needs to be of an appropriate scale and design to reflect its rural location
Community Facilities	No specific needs identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The retention and, where necessary, development of new community facilities will be actively pursued especially in the rural areas.
Infrastructure, inc. Green Infrastructure	Enhanced Green Infrastructure linkages where deficiencies are identified in the Green Infrastructure Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In general, the improvement of transport links within and between the settlements and between the rural areas and small rural towns will be sought Encourage the use of non-motorised modes of transport and develop public transport links The existing network of routeways can be used as an asset as part of the Borough's Green Infrastructure network

3. Green Infrastructure in the Villages & Rural Areas

“Green Infrastructure” is defined in national planning policy (in Planning Policy Statement 12) as “a network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities”. Green infrastructure assets can therefore take many forms, including the following examples:

- Parks and gardens
- Natural and semi-natural open space (in urban and rural areas)
- Green corridors, e.g. river banks; cycle routes; rights of way
- Areas/playspaces for children or teenagers
- Green roofs

Green Infrastructure has the potential to fulfil a number of objectives, such as the conservation or enhancement of biodiversity; increasing opportunities for recreation; providing sustainable transport routes; or improving water resource or flood management, for example. For this reason, the Borough Council will be preparing a Green Infrastructure Plan to use as evidence in preparing LDF documents in the future, including the Allocations DPD. To do this, it is necessary to identify existing Green Infrastructure Assets, to understand how they are used, and to identify any gaps in provision or access which hampers the use of Green Infrastructure assets as a “network”.

Map VR01 in Appendix 1 identifies the main Green Infrastructure assets in the rural areas across the Borough. Please answer Questions 10-13 on the questionnaire to help the Borough Council to develop its Green Infrastructure Plan.

4. Site-Specific Information: Making Site Allocations in the Allocations DPD

The Core Strategy states that the Borough Council will allocate sufficient sites as far as it is possible to accommodate the Borough's known development needs. The identified development

needs for the Villages and Rural Areas are set out on page 3 of this pack. The site-specific element of this consultation focuses on the need to find sites to accommodate the main built uses for which there is a need – housing and employment uses, for example. The Borough Council is aware that sites will also need to be allocated for other supporting uses, including for recreation and infrastructure. A number of such sites are already allocated/designated in the adopted Local Plan and it is likely that they will be carried forward in the LDF unless circumstances arise to suggest otherwise. It may be that some new sites that are not suitable to accommodate the main built uses will be found to be suitable for other uses as the preparation of the Allocations DPD progresses.

Rural Exceptions Sites

The Core Strategy sets out the Borough Council's intention that the small rural towns of Paddock Wood, Cranbrook and Hawkhurst will be the focus for development in the rural areas with only a limited amount, mainly to serve local needs, being directed to the smaller villages and the wider rural areas. In normal circumstances, new development will not take place outside the defined Limits to Built Development (LBD) of the Villages.

However, one significant local need in the Villages and Rural Areas is for affordable housing specifically to meet the needs of local people who would otherwise not be able to remain in their local community. In accordance with national policy, the Borough Council therefore operates a policy of enabling affordable housing for local needs to be provided on "Rural Exceptions Sites" if it cannot be accommodated on sites where development would normally be permitted.

This does not mean that affordable housing can be developed on just any site. Proposed sites must be well related to the village they are intended to serve, have safe pedestrian links to local services and normally not be more than 400m from the edge of the LBD. Furthermore, the amount of development proposed must equate to the identified need in that village. To ensure that both these factors are considered, the Borough Council has developed a programme for assessing local housing need (the Rural HeLP Project) and for identifying the most appropriate sites. The allocation of sites in the Allocations DPD is an extension of this process. It both enables the merits of identified sites to be tested formally through the planning process and increases the certainty that they will come forward for development. However, it should be noted that, in some cases, it will be necessary to assess rural exception sites through the planning application process.

Deciding which Sites to Consider Further

The Borough Council is aware of a considerable number of sites to be considered for possible allocation. Some are inside the LBDs of the Villages and could therefore be considered for general development, but the majority are outside the LBD and can therefore be considered only for rural exceptions housing. They have been identified in a number of ways, including:

- They were promoted through previous Local Plans, but were not allocated
- They have been submitted for consideration by third parties, e.g. during Core Strategy preparation; as part of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment; through the first stage of early engagement on the TCAAP and Allocations DPDs
- They have been considered by the Borough Council as part of the Rural Exceptions Programme and are currently considered to be available for development for rural exceptions housing.

Not all the sites that the Borough Council is aware of will be suitable for development and not all will need to be allocated. Through the plan preparation process, of which this consultation is a part, the Borough Council must decide which of the known sites should be allocated, and indeed, whether it is necessary to identify any additional sites.

The Borough Council must take account of a number of factors in order to decide whether or not a site should be allocated for development. Essentially, an allocated site must be "suitable" and "available" for development, and also be "capable of being delivered", i.e. the development must be

financially viable (see national policy in Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing). The Borough Council is interested in whether sites are available and viable at this stage and would welcome comments on these matters, but the focus of this consultation is on whether sites are suitable. If a site is fundamentally unsuitable for development, it would not matter if it was available or viable.

The Borough Council has, therefore, commenced the process of “screening out” those sites that it thinks do not warrant further consideration for allocation during the process of preparing the Allocations DPD.

Sites that do not warrant further consideration for Allocation

As part of this consultation, the Borough Council is proposing that the following types/categories of sites do not warrant further consideration for allocation for the main built uses: housing and employment uses and should not be considered further (other than possibly for rural exceptions housing). It may be that some sites that are not suitable to accommodate the main built uses will be found to be suitable for other uses, for example, recreation, as the preparation of the Allocations DPD progresses:

- **Sites that are subject to particular constraints¹.** Certain environmental or policy designations or constraints may mean that sites cannot be developed or can only be used for certain uses. The particular constraints are:
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
 - Areas of Ancient Woodland
 - Local Nature Reserves
 - Land in, or forecast to be in, the functional floodplain (Flood Zone 3B)
 - Land in the Green Belt²
- **Sites that are not well related to a village.** As stated above, rural affordable housing to meet an identified local need may be permitted on sites that would not normally be developed, but those sites must still be well related to the village they are intended to serve.
- **Sites that are not suitable due to the specific circumstances of the site.** Some sites are simply unsuitable for development by virtue of their specific circumstances, e.g. if they are prominent in areas with a very sensitive landscape character

The Borough Council has carried out the above screening process in order to narrow down the list of sites to those that warrant further consideration and therefore work, to determine whether or not they should be allocated. In addition to the unsuitable sites above, there is another category of sites that the Borough Council does not propose to consider further for allocation purposes – small sites that are inside the LBD of villages below 0.2ha in area (to be referred to as “small identified sites”). Note that the occurrence of this in the Villages is small.

Small Identified Sites³

Some of the sites that have been identified are quite small – below 0.2ha in area. It would be impractical to attempt to allocate a significant number of very small sites across the Borough and it would not always be particularly beneficial to do so. The Borough Council proposes that where such sites are located inside the LBD (but not in a town centre), it will not consider them further in terms of allocation. This is because, inside the LBD, development is acceptable in principle provided that site-specific issues can be addressed, and small developments usually have a less

¹ These constraints were referred to as “Level 1 Constraints” for the purpose of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, 2009

² Note that at Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough, Green Belt sites may warrant further consideration because a Green Belt review may be required in connection with its Regional Hub status

³ Because these sites have been “identified” they can be counted towards the Borough Council’s development land supply even if they are not allocated. They are not “windfall” sites.

significant impact on their wider surroundings than do large developments. These circumstances mean that the issues on such sites are likely to be adequately considered on the basis of a planning application.

Sites that Warrant Further Consideration for Allocation

As a result of the screening process above, the Borough Council is left with a list of sites that warrant further consideration for allocation. **Please note that this does not mean that they will definitely be allocated.** The decision to allocate a site will be made on the basis of robust assessments yet to be completed and in consultation with landowners and stakeholders – such as this consultation.

You can comment on the screening process above by answering Question 16 in the questionnaire. Site Maps and lists have been prepared to show the results of the screening process.

Site Maps

Map VR02A in Appendix 2 shows all the sites that the Borough Council is currently aware of in the Villages and Rural Areas. Map VR02B shows the sites in the town centre at a larger scale. Each of the sites has a reference number to enable you to find out more information about it on the accompanying Site Information List – see below.

The sites on the maps are coloured green, orange and red to illustrate the results of the screening process. Those sites that are proposed to be carried forward from the adopted Local Plan for their present allocated/designated use are coloured purple.

Green:	Sites warrant further investigation for possible allocation.
Orange:	Small Identified Sites do not need to be allocated but could be developed in principle, subject to site-specific policy and other issues.
Red:	Sites are unsuitable for development and will not be considered further for built development as part of this process.
Purple:	Sites that are proposed to be carried forward from the adopted Local Plan for their present allocated/designated use

Larger scale plans of individual sites can be made available upon request.

Site List

The Site List in Appendix 3 provides more information about each of the sites shown on the maps, including about how it has been treated in the screening process. The columns in the list provide the following information (not all of the following headings are relevant to rural exceptions housing sites):

- **Site Ref:** This corresponds with the reference number on the map
- **Building/Site Name**
- **Road Name**
- **Settlement**
- **Site Description:** A factual description of the site
- **PDL/Greenfield/Mix:** Indicates whether the site is previously developed land (PDL); a greenfield (undeveloped) site; or a mixture of the two
- **Gross Area in Hectares (Ha)**
- **Suitability:** An analysis of the site's potential suitability for development

- **Submitted/Designated/Allocated for:** Indicates what use the site has been submitted for if it has been submitted by a third party; or what designation covers it if it has been considered for that reason (e.g. if the site is a Rural Fringe site); or what it is allocated for if it is currently allocated in the Local Plan
- **Possible uses to be Considered:** Indicates the full range of uses that should be considered by the Borough Council if the site were allocated
- **Submitted no. Residential Units:** (where available) the number of residential units the site promoters state it could accommodate
- **Submitted amount of Commercial Floorspace:** (where available) the quantity of employment floorspace the site promoters state it could accommodate (in square metres)
- **Summary:** An overview of the circumstances of the site, including whether or not it warrants further consideration

You will be able to comment on individual sites by answering Question 17 of the questionnaire.

Further Site Submissions

Questions 15 and 18 of the questionnaire enable you to submit further sites that you think the Borough Council should consider in preparing the Allocations DPD. It is very important that you submit any such sites during the consultation period because it may not be possible to consider sites submitted later, owing to the assessment work that may be needed.

Next Steps

You should complete the questionnaire at the back of this pack in order that the Borough Council can take your views into account in preparing the TCAAP and Allocations DPD. Guidance about how to complete and return the questionnaire is provided in Section 3 of the Explanatory Paper accompanying this pack.

Please note that the Borough Council will be holding exhibitions in the following locations, including in the rural areas, during the consultation period where you will be able to speak to relevant Officers:

Area	Venue	Date (2010)	Time
Royal Tunbridge Wells	Tunbridge Wells Gateway 8 Grosvenor Road	Thursday 17 June	4.30-8pm
	Tunbridge Wells Gateway 8 Grosvenor Road	Friday 18 June	9am-5pm
	Royal Victoria Place (town centre shopping precinct)	Saturday 19 June	9am-5pm
	Sainsbury's Linden Park Road	Friday 25 June	4.30-8pm
Southborough	Royal Victoria Hall	Tuesday 22 June	10am-3pm
Paddock Wood	Wesley Centre, Commercial Road	Wednesday 23 June & Saturday 26 June	10am-3pm
	Waitrose, Church Road	Friday 25 June	4.30-8pm
Cranbrook	Vestry Hall, Stone Street	Wednesday 30 June & Saturday 3 July	10am-3pm
	Co-op, High Street	Friday 2 July	4.30-8pm
Hawkhurst	Dunks Hall, Rye Road	Saturday 26 June & Thursday 1 July	10am-3pm
	Budgens, Rye Road	Friday 2 July	4.30-8pm
Goudhurst	Village Hall, The Plain	Thursday 24 June	3-7pm

Following the close of consultation on 09 August, the Borough Council will analyse all the comments received and make a summary of the main issues raised available on its website. The comments will be used to inform and refine the next stage in preparing the TCAAP and Allocations DPD. In addition, the next stage will be informed by further up to date evidence (in relation to retail and employment needs and transport for example), which is expected to be completed in the autumn of this year.

Future Timetable

The consultation responses and evidence will be used to prepare a “**preferred option**” version of the TCAAP and Allocations DPD. It is the Borough Council’s intention to consult upon the preferred option (again under Regulation 25) **in early 2011**. This will set out in more detail how the development needs can be met. The “preferred option” will inform final versions to be published for comment and then submitted for independent examination in **summer 2011**.