

**Ashford Local Development Framework
Tenterden and Rural Sites Development Plan Document
(October 2010)**

**Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment
Adoption Statement**

Introduction

Ashford Borough Council adopted the Tenterden and Rural Sites Development Plan Document on the 21st October 2010.

This statement has been prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (16) (3) and (4), which requires a statement to be produced on the adoption of a plan or programme, to detail:

1. How environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme;
2. How the Environmental Report has been taken into account;
3. How opinions expressed through public consultation have been taken into account
4. The reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with;
5. The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.

Planning Policy Statement 12 (PPS12) widens these considerations from environmental, to broader sustainability issues, so this statement provides information on the wider sustainability appraisal process.

Sustainability appraisals (SA) help local planning authorities fulfil their objective of contributing to the achievements of sustainable development in preparing plans through a structured assessment of objectives and against key sustainability issues for an area.

This statement will examine each of the above points in turn.

1) How environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme

- 1.1 Environmental considerations are at the forefront of the plan making process and were embedded in the Councils' adopted Core Strategy which establishes the broad development principles for the Borough up to 2021. The Core Strategy was subject to its own extensive Sustainability Appraisal and significant levels of public consultation.
- 1.2 The Core Strategy is the principle document within the Local Development Framework to which all other plans must accord. In relation to development in the rural areas; the Core Strategy sets out:
 - broad development principles, including the protection of the countryside, enhancement of the natural and built environment, flood prevention, promoting sustainable transport and promoting challenging sustainable design and construction targets
 - an appropriate overall quantum of residential development to be allocated in the rural area
 - the strategic dispersion of allocated development through tiered settlement hierarchy, ensuring that growth is located in the most sustainable way
- 1.3 The Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD takes these strategic issues forward and applies them to the policy approach set out within the DPD. The vision of the DPD clearly demonstrates that environmental considerations are embedded within the policy approach in the Plan. The vision is as follows:
- 1.4 *'Achieving the right balance between the protection and enhancement of the rich and varied landscapes that contribute so much to the character of this part of Kent with the need for rural communities to grow and evolve in ways that will not overwhelm or damage their own, often unique, attributes is a major challenge.'*
- 1.5 *The rural areas of the Borough are defined by attractive rolling countryside, including parts of two AONBs (the Kent Downs in the north and east and the High Weald in the south and west). The countryside offers an intrinsic character, heritage and beauty with a diverse mix of rich landscape features and characteristics. It plays a key recreational role for residents and visitors alike, whilst supporting an array of wildlife, habitats and natural resources. Within these areas of open countryside, the paramount planning objectives are of protection and control of new development to ensure that the quality of these areas is not eroded or diminished.*
- 1.6 *The countryside also acts as the setting for an array of small rural villages and hamlets which offer an attractive and varied character, which is often derived from their historical status. These settlements are often regarded as the defining image of the Borough and it is essential that planning policies reflect their inherent qualities and characteristics that play such a key role in determining the overall character of the countryside.*
- 1.7 *However, many villages also provide a vital degree of service provision for their residents. It is essential that this role continues wherever possible to retain the economic and social vitality of village life. In some cases, this may also mean that a limited amount of new residential development could be justified in providing the means for organic growth and evolution to avoid economic stagnation without fundamentally altering the character of the place.*
- 1.8 *The Core Strategy identifies a number of rural service centres (these are:- Tenterden, Charing, Hamstreet, Wye, Aldington, Bethersden, Biddenden, Chilham, Pluckley, Rolvenden and Woodchurch). These settlements generally offer a higher level of service*

provision, often including shops, pubs and health care facilities. Combined, these services help to serve and sustain, not only their immediate residents, but also the smaller surrounding rural communities as well. They may also provide a focus for local job opportunities although the nature of the rural economy is that there is a generally dispersed pattern of employment that includes agricultural activities or former agricultural premises which have diversified into other enterprises. The Council's objective is to encourage diversity and enterprise within the rural areas whilst ensuring that uses that are suitable by their scale or type are located in the most appropriate places.

- 1.9 *The traditional rural market town of Tenterden, located in the south-west of the Borough, is the main rural service centre and second largest settlement after Ashford itself. It offers a significantly different scale and level of service provision compared to the Borough's other rural settlements. Tenterden is a highly important focal point in the rural area and serves a wide hinterland within and beyond the Borough's boundary by offering a range of jobs, cultural, shopping, tourist and leisure opportunities. The town's character is of exceptional conservation and historical importance, derived from its well defined pattern of development around the historic core area, including many listed buildings. Tenterden is a key tourist attraction, drawing regular visitors from abroad and is a real asset to the Borough and has a busy and thriving town centre. The Council's priority is to retain the qualities that make Tenterden special whilst enabling a planned expansion of development commensurate with the Core Strategy*
- 1.10 *Core Strategy policy CS6, has already set out that the principal service centres (Tenterden, Charing, Hamstreet and Wye) should be apportioned the majority of new housing development in the rural areas. Policy CS6 also identified a provisional third tier of settlements which should be further assessed to determine which should be attributed new housing allocations. These settlements have been assessed in detail and the most appropriate sites within that tier selected for limited housing development.*
- 1.11 *The Council believes that only the adoption of a carefully managed approach to the release of suitable land for development will ensure that change in the rural area occurs in a controlled and incremental way without significant harm to the countryside or the attractive nature and character of the Borough's settlements. This DPD, in line with policy CS6, advocates a phased approach to the release of acceptable housing development sites, in or next to a range of suitable rural settlements, to fulfill this aspiration.*
- 1.12 *Providing an appropriate balance between protecting the countryside and meeting the needs of the highly valued rural economy is a key aspiration of this Plan. In fact, the protection of the countryside often relies on viable agriculture and rural businesses to manage and maintain the landscape. A range of policies which respond to the needs of the changing rural economy, ensuring its continued vibrancy and vitality, whilst also ensuring any impact is acceptable, are included within this Plan'.*

2) How the Environmental Report has been taken into account

- 2.1 The Sustainability Appraisal has contributed to the evolution of the Tenterden and Rural Sites Development Plan Document in providing a broad qualitative appraisal of the approach as it emerged. The Appraisal has added transparency to the process as well as improving the sustainability of the emerging policies contained within the DPD.
- 2.2 The SEA/SA process began with the preparation and consultation on the SA scoping report for the DPD, conducted in early 2007. The Council targeted a variety of key consultees, including the then three statutory environmental consultation bodies (English

Heritage, the Environment Agency and Natural England) on the SA scoping report for the DPD. Others targeted for consultation were: GOSE, Learning and Skills Council, Ashfords Future, Kent Chamber of Commerce, Shepway District Council, Swale Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, SEERA, Housing Corporation, Mid Kent Water, Dover District Council, Canterbury City Council, Tonbridge Wells Borough Council, Kent County Council, Ashford Primary Care Trust, Southern Water, Maidstone Borough Council and CAGE.

- 2.3 This consultation led to a number of issues being identified, at the early stage of the process. These issues are set out under page 8 and 9 of the Sustainability Appraisal.
- 2.4 The scoping stage of the process also identified four strategic objectives that were relevant to the contents of the DPD and tested them against the Council's sustainably principles. Given that these objectives directly flow from the policy coverage contained within the adopted Core Strategy (itself subject to the SA/SEA process), they were considered to remain appropriate and be compatible with the wider sustainability principles. These objectives help formed the basis for the vision of the DPD (as set above), and the policy approach contained within the DPD.
- 2.5 In 2008, the Council produced the Tenterden and Rural Sites 'Issues and Options Report' and released this document for public consultation between Friday 16th May until Friday 25th June 2008.
- 2.6 The Issues and Options Report represented the initial stage of the plans process and highlight the main planning policy issues facing the rural parts of the Borough and outlining the main options for addressing those issues. This included the publication of the main potential site allocation options that had been put forward by interested landowners at that date. No Council opinion was expressed in relation to any of the issues or options contained in this Report, and no preferred approach was identified.
- 2.7 The Council took account of the comments received on the 'Issues and Options Report' and, through the Sustainability Appraisal, began to test the assumptions and options as they emerged.
- 2.8 This process helped inform and shape the contents of the 'Publication Version' of the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD (June 2009). In effect, the 'Publication Version' of the DPD represented the Council's preferred policy approach to development in the rural areas and the approach which it intended to submit for formal examination. Public consultation at this stage, between 19th June and 11th August 2010, gave interested parties an opportunity to comment on the Plan before formal submission was made.
- 2.9 The Sustainability Appraisal was published for consultation alongside the 'Publication Version' of the DPD, as required through the planning regulations. The SA provided detailed justification for the policy approach set out in the DPD and demonstrated how this approach had evolved.
- 2.10 The Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD had two main purposes. Firstly, it sought to allocate residential development in the most suitable locations in the rural area, based on the settlement hierarchy that was established in the Core Strategy. Secondly, the DPD set out a range of topic policies that were specific to rural planning issues.
- 2.11 In relation to site allocations, the Sustainably Appraisal provided a through and extensive assessment of a variety of potential development options at a range of settlements in the rural areas. To be consistent with the adopted Core Strategy, only those settlements which were deemed suitable, in principle, to have allocated development attributed to

them were assessed in detail. However this process still led to a large number of potential sites being assessed. This ensured that a variety of options were considered and the sites put forward in the Plan were the most appropriate in the circumstances.

- 2.12 Alongside its site allocation role, the DPD was also needed to provide a range of topic based policies which were specific to rural planning issues. Each of these policies was assessed through the SA to ensure they promoted sustainable development in the rural area.
- 2.13 At the same time as the publication of the Sustainability Appraisal (June 2009), the Council also published an Appropriate Assessment, in consultation with Natural England. The Assessment was required under regulation 48 of the 'Habitats Regulations 1994' and looked at whether the DPD would have an adverse impact on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites (the Borough includes the Wye and Crundale Downs SAC).
- 2.14 The Appropriate Assessment concluded that the approach in the DPD provided no negative effects on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites by reasons of the mitigation measures set out in the Core Strategy and the DPD itself.
- 2.15 The Council then took account of comments received on the Publication Version of the DPD. It then proceeded to propose a series of 'Proposed Changes' to the Publication Version of the DPD in November 2009. In line with the planning regulations, these 'Proposed Changes' were subject to further appraisal through the Sustainability Appraisal process. Again, both the Appraisal and the amended DPD were released for public consultation.
- 2.16 The Council submitted the 'Submission Version' of the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD to Government in February 2010 which triggered the formal Examination process. The content of the 'Submission Version' of the DPD was independently examined by a Planning Inspector, with the formal hearing sessions sitting between Tuesday 22nd June 2010 and Thursday 1st July 2010. The Sustainability Appraisal was submitted alongside the 'Submission Version' of the DPD and was a key part of the evidence base which supported the Plan's policy approach.
- 2.17 The Inspector concluded, through her Report, that the Plan was 'sound', subject to a series of minor changes, and should be adopted by the Council. None of the changes proposed by the Inspector required further appraisal through the Sustainability Appraisal process, given their minor nature.
- 2.18 The Council adopted the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD on the 21st October 2010. The final Sustainability Appraisal document was published alongside the adopted DPD.

3 How opinions expressed through public consultation have been taken into account

- 3.1 The Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD was subject to extensive public consultation throughout its evolution. The comments received at various stages of the Plans progress provided invaluable feedback and helped shape the Plan as it evolved.
- 3.2 The above shows what targeted consultation took place at the scoping stage of the Plan's process. This ensured that the relevant stakeholders (see Para 2.2 above) were able to influence the Plan at the early stage in the process. The next stages of consultation are set out below, in chronological order.

Consultation under Regulation 25

- 3.3 The Council conducted a round of community workshops, held between October 2007 and March 2008, at those rural settlements which were identified in the then 'Submission Version' of the Core Strategy as suitable to accommodate allocated development.
- 3.4 This gave the opportunity for an invited cross section of the local community to discuss the issues facing their settlement and the options for any future development, at an early stage in the process. The outcomes from these workshops were reported in the 'Issues and Options Report' (released May 2008), giving the wider community and key stakeholders the opportunity to comment on their outcomes.
- 3.5 In line with the planning regulations, and the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement, the identified key LDF stakeholders were targeted and asked to consult on this 'Report'. Overall, the Council received 911 representations on this document which provided useful feedback on the emerging thoughts of residents and key stakeholders which resulted in several alternative approaches being suggested that could then be subsequently tested and appraised, helping to shape the Publication Version of the DPD.
- 3.6 The Council then conducted a second round of community workshops, between January 2009 and March 2009. This was prior to the Publication Version of the DPD being published and sought to achieve a degree of consensus and understanding with the local communities as to the relative merits of the potential development sites within or adjoining their settlement that could be considered for inclusion within the Plan.

Consultation under Regulation 27

- 3.7 The Publication Version of the DPD was released for public consultation between 19th June and 11th August 2010. The Council received over 400 formal representations on this version of the Plan.
- 3.8 In direct response to some of these comments, the Council deemed it appropriate to propose to alter a small proportion of the DPD, in the form of a series of 'Proposed Changes'. The main changes proposed were in relation to an alternative site allocated at Bethersden, the removal of a proposed site allocation at Tenterden and the changes to the wording of Policy TRS12 'Tourism'.
- 3.9 In light of some of these comments the Council proposed a series of minor amendments to the DPD which the Council would invite the Inspector to make through the Examination process. These were minor in nature and therefore didn't require further public consultation or appraisal through the Sustainability Appraisal process. They mainly related to changes to sewerage requisition to response to a recent High Court ruling.

Consultation under Regulation 30

- 3.10 The Council formally submitted the 'Submission Version' of the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD in February 2010 which triggered the formal Examination process. The formal hearing sessions sat between Tuesday 22nd June 2010 and Thursday 1st July 2010.
- 3.11 Two cycles of public consultation took place after during the formal examination process. The first sought comment on the effect on the DPD of changes in June 2010 to PPS3, and the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). The second was a focused

consultation, with those most affected, concerning changes to allocated site policies CHAR1 and WYE3.

- 3.12 In addition, there were some additional changes to the DPD proposed which arose from points made in discussion with parties involved in the examination. All the changes proposed to be included in the DPD were published on the Council's website before the Examination formally closed.
- 3.13 None of these changes were deemed to materially alter the substance of the overall plan or its policies, or undermined the sustainability appraisal or participatory processes already undertaken and therefore did not warrant further assessment through the SA.
-

4 The reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with

- 4.1 The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (12) (2) requires environmental reports to examine reasonable alternatives taking into account the objective and the geographical scope of the plan or programme.
- 4.2 The adopted Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD, delivers a sustainable approach to development in the rural areas and is supported by a comprehensive Sustainability Appraisal which appraised a variety of different options. The adopted DPD is consistent with the strategic approach to rural development, as set out in the adopted Core Strategy. The DPD also fulfils the objectives established for the Plan, at the scoping stage of the process.
- 4.3 The Vision of the DPD is locally distinctive and adheres to the principles established through the Core Strategy. It gives a clear direction for the future role of development coming forward in the rural area, delivering a balance between organic rates of growth and the careful release of land over time, whilst also ensuring the countryside remains an asset for all to enjoy.
- 4.4 All of the residential site allocations, as set out in the adopted DPD, have been thoroughly assessed and found to be the best compared to reasonable alternatives. The allocated sites respect the built form of the existing settlement and are in close proximity to the local services present. This maximises the ability for linked trips, encourages walking and cycling and creates greater opportunities to use public transport, thus reducing the focus on the private car. This approach allows for organic rates of growth and stops unnecessary encroachment into the countryside.
- 4.5 The SA has also demonstrated that the topic policies contained within the adopted DPD strike the right balance between allowing appropriate levels of development in certain rural locations to allow the rural area to remain active and vibrant, whilst ensuring that the countryside is protected from inappropriate development.
-

5. The measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.

- 5.1 Annex 1 (i) of the SEA Directive requires that significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Plan are monitored.

- 5.2 The DPD recognizes this and seeks to monitor new development activity closely, over the DPD period. The indicators are intended to be monitored yearly through the Annual Monitoring Report. The findings will subsequently help inform a review of the Core Strategy, and a formal review of the Plan itself, in due course.
- 5.3 The indicators set out below should not be treated in isolation and should be viewed alongside the already established Core Strategy indicators. Combined these indicators provide a wider monitoring umbrella for the rural area. The DPD seeks to monitor:

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Target
Number of net additional dwellings completed per annum within rural windfall sites	Local	2006 to 2015 = no allocation 2016 to 2021 = 35 dwellings p.a.
Number of net additional dwellings completed per annum within allocated rural sites	Local	865 additional dwellings for the period up to 2021 Phasing : 2008 to 2016 = 74 dwellings p.a. 2017 to 2021 = 54 dwellings p.a.
Number of net additional dwellings completed per annum in windfall sites within the countryside	Local	To minimise development in the countryside
Gross affordable completions within the rural area Amount of Local needs housing provided within the rural area	Local Local	No rural target. <i>Borough Target: 1400 additional affordable dwellings for the period 2006-2011 within the whole borough</i>

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Target
Total amount of additional employment floorspace completed in the rural areas by type i. B1a ii. B1b iii. B1c iv. B2 v. B8 vi. A2	Local	No rural target. <i>Borough Target: A total of 592,000m² of net additional employment floorspace (A2, B1, B2, and B8 uses) should be provided in the Borough between 2001 and 2021.</i>
Amount of frontage subject to changes of use from Class A1 uses to non-A1 uses permitted within the areas of Tenterden town centres two primary shopping frontages	Local	The non-A1 uses should not cumulatively amount to more than 35% of the length of either of the defined primary frontages.
Number and distribution of facilities in the rural area, including: village shops, post offices, schools, GP surgeries	Local	(1) Maintain number of parishes scoring 20+ on the rural sustainability matrix. (2) Minimise number of facilities lost