

# **Housing Capacity Study**

**Bethersden  
High Halden  
Rolvenden  
Woodchurch**

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November 2006

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Settlement Selection**

Ashford Borough Council (ABC) commissioned Tony Fullwood MRTPI (Planning Consultant) in September 2006 to undertake a Housing Capacity Study for four settlements within the Borough: Bethersden; High Halden; Rolvenden and Woodchurch.

These villages are identified in the Ashford Borough Core Strategy Submission Document as part of a group of larger villages which, because of their sustainability and role as local service centres, are identified for further study and consultation regarding their suitability for small scale allocated growth. This study is intended to inform that consideration which will be carried out in detail during the production of the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to provide advice to ABC on the housing potential of the named four settlements.

As with all housing capacity studies, the identified capacity indicates what may be possible and not what will ultimately be developed on the ground. Consequently, neither the sites identified, nor the estimated capacity, represent actual housing allocations.

## **1.3 Approach**

This study supplements the Rural Settlements Housing Capacity Study (February 2005) by Halcrow Group Ltd. who were commissioned to review nine other rural Ashford settlements. In order to achieve consistency, the broad methodology used in the 2005 Study has been followed. This means identifying the housing sources, identifying the potential yield and discounting as set out in 'Tapping the Potential – Assessing Urban Capacity: Towards Better Practice' (DETR, 2000) and 'Assessing Urban Housing Potential: A Good Practice Guide' (Baker Associates, GOSE and SEERA, 2004).

## **2 Background**

The Planning policy framework is similar to that used in the 2005 Study and is not repeated here.

### **PPS 7**

Within the rural area, emphasis is placed on PPS7. Major sites have not been evaluated within Rolvenden which is situated within the designated Area of Outstanding Beauty where the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should be given great weight. Major development proposals should be demonstrated to be in the public interest and would be required to assess:

- (i) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
- (ii) the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
- (iii) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.

### **Draft PPS3**

Since the 2005 Study, advice on housing sites is being reviewed. Draft Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) (DCLG 2006) states that local planning authorities should allocate land that is developable. To be considered developable, a site should meet the following criteria:

- available – the site is available now or is likely to become available for housing development and be capable of being developed within five years from the date of adoption of the site allocation development plan document;
- suitable – the site offers a sustainable option for development and would contribute to the creation of sustainable urban and rural communities; and
- viable – housing development is economically viable on the site.

In common with the 2005 Study, this study examines whether sites may be suitable for development. Further assessment would be required concerning availability and viability before any sites identified in this study are allocated in a Development Plan Document.

PPS3 confirms the priority for development is developable brownfield land but in rural areas where this is either insufficient or not available, developable greenfield sites may need to be used subject to the provisions of PPS7.

PPS3 also sets out indicative densities for suburban areas of 35-55 dwellings per hectare and in rural locations 30-40dph and there is a presumption of a minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare.

Non-housing allocations within High Halden have been reviewed in accordance with advice in PPS3 and consideration has been given as to whether some of this land might be more appropriately used for housing or mixed use development.

## **SOUTH EAST PLAN**

Since the preparation of the 2005 Study, the South East Plan has been submitted to Government. Policy H3 (The Location of Housing) seeks at least 60% of additional housing on previously developed land across the region and individual Local Development Documents should contribute to this regional target by encouraging housing development on previously developed land, having regard to local circumstances. However, the policy acknowledged that in rural areas some housing development will be needed in order to meet identified social or economic needs and provision should be set out in policies in Local Development Documents. Brownfield sites have formed the major part of this study.

## **Ashford Borough Core Strategy**

Since the 2005 Study Ashford Borough Council has submitted the Core Strategy to Government.

Policy CS6 - The Rural Settlement Hierarchy proposes the allocation of 170 additional dwellings between 2006 and 2021 (80 dwellings: 2006 – 2013 and 90 dwellings: 2014 and 2021) between nine villages including Bethersden; High Halden; Rolvenden and Woodchurch.

Although the Core Strategy remains to be confirmed as sound and adopted by the Borough Council, the potential scale of allocations at the villages has influenced this study.

## **3 Study Approach**

### **3.1 Methodology**

The approach to site selection has been to include all potential sites to avoid any arbitrary exclusions. The following steps outline the methodology.

#### **Definition of the Study Area**

The study area for each of the villages was agreed with ABC to include primarily the built up area and, with the exception of Rolvenden for reasons set out in Section 2, some immediately adjoining sites.

#### **Desk Top Site Identification**

Using a desk top study of 1:2500 maps of each village, sites were identified based on potential housing sources identified in 'Tapping the Potential – Assessing Urban Capacity: Towards Better Practice' and 'Assessing Urban Housing Potential: A Good Practice Guide'; Local Plan allocations and designations and site submissions and development control inquiries identified by ABC.

In order not to exclude consideration of all options, the initial identification did not set a minimum site threshold and included a range of sites (such as playing fields, public open space and allotments) where no change of use was likely to be acceptable.

#### **Site Survey**

All four villages were surveyed on a street by street basis to ensure all potential sites were examined including any not identified from the desk top study. A pro forma was completed for all sites providing details of potential suitability for housing development. For consistency this was based on that used for the 2005 study. The criteria used for retaining or excluding sites remain relevant and have already been agreed by ABC. The criteria employed are included in Appendix 1. All sites failing to meet at least one criterion were removed from inclusion of the capacity estimate.

However, as neither the 'brief development viability study' nor the 'accessibility density capacities' seemed to make a significant difference to the outcome of the housing potential of a site within small scale villages, this did not form part of this study. Rather, comments were recorded concerning any potential difficulties with the suitability of a site.

Site capacities were estimated with reference to PPS3 with a minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare applied. Where mixed use potential is identified at High Halden (sites HH1 – HH3), it has been assumed that half of the site would be developed for housing and half for employment uses. However, before sites are allocated, it is recommended that a more detailed assessment of site capacity is undertaken based on specific site constraints, contextual analysis and a design appraisal of the site's potential.

### **Maps and Spreadsheets**

All sites identified were mapped and entered into an Excel spreadsheet using unique reference numbers relating to the settlement as follows:

Village Name	Prefix
Bethersden	BE
High Halden	HH
Rolvenden	R
Woodchurch	WO

The outputs from this study are contained in the Appendices to this report as follows:

#### **Appendix 1 Housing Potential Matrix of All Sites**

#### **Appendix 2 Site Areas**

#### **Appendix 3 Maps of all Identified Sites (Retained and Removed)**

## 4 Housing Capacity Estimates

From the sites retained the following potential estimates are summarised.

Settlement	Number of Dwellings
Bethersden	0 <sup>1</sup>
High Halden	50
Rolvenden	10
Woodchurch	50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>

The objective of this exercise was to provide Ashford Borough Council with an overview of the housing capacity of four of the borough's larger villages. The information provided should be used as a guide to future allocations but it is recommended that before allocating any sites in future Development Plan Documents:

- in accordance with draft PPS3, site availability and viability are checked, and
- more detailed design assessments are carried out
- the comments set out for each site in Appendix 2 are taken into account with regard to phasing.

It is apparent that there is capacity in the four villages studied to accommodate some of the potential development identified in the Submission Core Strategy.

Unsurprisingly, there is very limited capacity at Rolvenden due to its location within the Area of Outstanding Beauty and the extensive conservation area designation.

Bethersden has limited capacity due to the conservation area designation and the morphology of the village. Should development be sought at Bethersden, there may be some long term capacity at site BE3.

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<sup>1</sup> Site BE3 represents an opportunity for long term development

## **Appendix 1 Housing Potential Matrix of All Sites**

## **Appendix 2 Site Areas**

**Appendix 3 Maps of all Identified Sites (Retained and Removed)**