

Vision and Objectives

1. National planning policy identifies local authorities as “place shapers” and the development plan system is now firmly focused on the concept of local spatial planning. That is, producing a locally distinctive vision for a place or series of places and co-ordinating public sector resources and providing a framework for private investors to meet the needs of those places.
2. The organisations representing the community within Wye support this concept and have sought throughout the preparation of this DPD to engage with Ashford Borough Council and other stakeholders to investigate the needs of the local community and to use the DPD to help deliver community aspirations.
3. In the preamble to the 2007/2008 community workshops, the Borough Council stressed that the DPD would not focus exclusively on housing. However, the DPD as submitted is overwhelmingly concerned with allocating sites for housing and does not reflect the range of other spatial considerations that were raised and debated in some detail, and indeed encouraged at both of the Wye community workshops. In Wye, these needs were first identified and quantified in a parish-wide land-use survey undertaken as phase 1 of a Parish Plan exercise in 2007. The Parish Council designed this project to inform the rural DPD, and gave the results to the Borough Council. Before doing so the Parish Council's independent auditor approved the methodology and checked the data. Questionnaires were delivered to all households in the parish and were collected by hand. Nearly 60% of households completed the questionnaire. There were more than 4200 separate comments in response to the questions that invited views and suggestions. As intended, the phase 1 Parish Plan findings have formed the consensual basis for all subsequent discussions and underpinned the DPD workshop process in Wye. The spatial issues identified in the 2007 land-use survey (in addition to open-market and affordable housing – their type, number and location) included the following:
 - a. Infrastructure and flood control must be adequate for any additional development. There was particular concern about road access and transport infrastructure, flood control, drainage, water and sewage.
 - b. Transport, parking, walking, pedestrian access to the village and cycling need to be addressed. For 62% of households the allocation of land for more public car parking was extremely important, to reduce congestion in the streets of Wye and to allow for more commuter parking at the railway station.
 - c. The local environment and character of Wye must be preserved.
 - d. Better community facilities and activities are needed, particularly for teenagers. Many of the 1,163 comments on this subject considered current facilities to be inadequate and identified the need for more activities. 39% of comments concerned the need for social facilities and activities, especially places to meet; 18% referred to facilities for sports, fitness and leisure; 9% to outdoor recreational activities; 9% to play activities for young children and activities for teenagers; 3% to river access; 3% to arts and cultural activities; 3% to health and care facilities. Activities for teenagers were the greatest priority, representing 44% of all comments concerning community services and facilities. Better facilities and more activities are also desired for families, the elderly and young children

- e. More small businesses and shops are needed 'to keep Wye alive'. Many households supported the allocation of land for additional businesses and employment, especially land-based businesses, shops and small-scale manufacturing. 43% of responses considered more shops to be important.
4. It is noticeable that, in relation to Wye, the DPD has omitted replacing a saved policy relating to commuter car parking. Saved policy S69 f) reserves land for a station car park at Wye. The impact of unbalanced growth on the existing station car park is easily quantifiable. This rough area of ground can only hold 22 vehicles. Yet the passenger use (the total of entries and exits) at Wye station increased by 43.5% between 2003 and 2008. In 2009 the total fell slightly from 168,867 to 157,864 entries and exits, but the increasing trend over five years is undeniable (117,691 2002-2003). (Office of Rail Regulation).
5. With regard to community facilities the Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 – 2018 acknowledged “Ensuring access to the whole range of cultural, sporting and leisure activities will also be a challenge.” With regard to the DPD the “Council’s OMAI study in 2006 identified a range of problems for rural communities in accessing such facilities; and the borough has many groups that are vulnerable to social exclusion.” By concentrating on housing the DPD has skated over the shortfall in other types of provision in the rural areas.
6. The truth is that this DPD does not present a clear vision for rural settlements within the Borough based upon a spatial analysis of all of the major needs and challenges within each settlement and the need to balance housing and jobs to establish sustainable travel patterns.
7. Instead, the vision is of a very general rural nature and only for Tenterden is there some indication of major needs and priorities based upon how it functions as a settlement. The Borough Council commissioned Rummey Design to undertake an outline masterplan for potential development to the south of Tenterden town centre. Other settlements, particularly Tier 2 villages such as Wye (which are identified as rural service centres) are predominantly seen in terms only of apportioning housing development (para. 4.7).
8. The introduction to the DPD in fact provides no indication as to how the DPD relates to other place-shaping documents, such as the Community Strategy. Links to this document are banished to appendix 2. Similarly, there is no discussion as to how the DPD links to the strategies and priorities of other public agencies involved in delivering services to rural communities.
9. The DPD contains no set of clear objectives identifying the key issues for the rural settlements and how they will be addressed. These should provide, as PPS12 states, “the link between the high level vision and the detailed strategy” (para. 4.4).
10. Whilst this DPD needs to be considered within the context of the Ashford Core Strategy and to be in conformity with it, it is important to understand that the Inspector who examined the Ashford Core Strategy made some very clear and uncompromising statements about how he saw the relationship between the Core Strategy and the future role and scope of this DPD (see the Inspector’s Report paras. 4.183-4.227).
11. In summary, the Inspector expected the Borough Council to review fundamentally the spatial strategy in so far as it related to the rural areas taking

account of a proper analysis of the role and function of settlements. In particular, the Council was expected to:

- examine the need for other forms of development within rural areas;
- examine the pattern of development within the countryside to determine whether there are any locally distinctive issues which require specific policy development beyond what is contained within national and regional policy;

and then to:

- consider how the DPD is to achieve and maintain a vibrant rural economy;
 - consider how “balanced” development in villages could be achieved;
12. The Parish Council regrets that the Borough Council has developed a DPD which concentrates on housing allocations and development management issues and considers that there has been a missed opportunity to develop a truly spatial plan for rural settlements which examines social, economic and environmental needs in a holistic manner and co-ordinates public services and private investment to truly build sustainable and balanced rural communities.
 13. In the absence of a clear vision, objectives and a wide range of positive proposals it is difficult to conclude that the DPD will be effective in meeting the needs of local rural communities. In the absence of clear objectives, it will be difficult to measure the policies within the DPD.