

## Annex A

<b>Workshop</b>	<b>MDE DPD Issues and Options Report</b>
Date	22 <sup>nd</sup> April 2008
Time	2:00pm – 4:30pm
Location	Committee Room, Gibson Building
Attendees	Matthew Balfour (TMBC) Brian Gates (TMBC) Bruce Stewart (TMBC) Nigel De Wit (TMBC) Jenny Mentz (TMBC) Philip Woodcock (Church Trust/Styletech) Anne Rillie (British Horse Society) Janice Browne (Tonbridge Civic Society) Susan Tipping (KCC) Brian Lloyd (CPRE Kent) Brian Pearson (Kings Hill Allotments) Susan Bowen (CPRE Tonbridge & Malling) Harry Rayner (CPRE Tonbridge & Malling) John Devine (Invicta Gospel Trust) Mike Bull (St Johns Ambulance)

### Agenda

Welcome

Introduction and update on the LDF

Officer-led group discussions on:

1. Local Character/Quality of Life
2. Development in the Countryside
3. Natural Environment
4. Historic Environment
5. Climate Change
6. Open Space

Q&A

Thankyou

## **Local Character/Quality of Life**

- **Q1 – What are the key local character features of the places where you live/work and how do they influence your quality of life?**

Summary of Group Discussion

- Noise pollution.
  - Light pollution.
  - Air quality.
  - Traffic on urban and rural roads. (x5)  
(congestion, volume, speed, noise, emissions, car parking.)
  - Important and attractive countryside, green spaces, trees and gardens. (x6)
  - Views from the North Downs.
  - Wildlife.
  - Role of biodiversity contributes to the quality of life.
  - Quality of development, including Conservation Areas. (x2)
  - Interesting and appropriate architecture.
  - Tranquillity. (x2)
  - Close knit communities.
  - Rural atmosphere that is inclusive of all.
  - Scope for quality community facilities, including rural facilities.
  - A lack of a civic “heart”.
  - Litter, fly-tipping, graffiti.
  - Poor repair and maintenance of roads
  - New development should not overwhelm small village street scene.
  - Family housing with gardens for children.
  - Easy access to the countryside.
  - Easy access to Places of Worship.
  - High crime and disorder (in selected areas).
- **Q2 – Should Borough-wide Character Area Assessments be undertaken or, as at present, simply identify particular areas of character?**
- There was some consensus on particular areas of distinctive character, but dependent on the level of detail.
  - There was more consensus on the preparation of Borough-wide Character Area Assessments, similarly dependent on the level of detail.
  - Is a new theme, “Development in Urban Areas” required to guide, manage and control development in the urban areas, to complement the theme Development in the Countryside?

## **Development in the Countryside**

- **Q1 – What development pressures are being faced in the countryside?**

Summary of Group Discussion

- Farm Diversification. (x7)  
(support agriculture, rural tourism, employment, re-use of buildings, horses/stables, temporary accommodation/immigration, traffic)
- Lack and loss of core rural services. (x5)  
(retail, transport, employment, temporary accommodation/immigration)
- Maintain the protection of AONB, MGB and SSSI's. (x2)  
(retain the openness of countryside, enforce TPO's)
- Making the Countryside accessible. (x3)  
(create more Country Parks, transport access)
- Urbanisation. (x2)  
(sports uses, population density, traffic)
- Protection of Wharf and Riverside Goods Handling Sites.

- **Q2 – Do the same issues apply Borough wide?**

- Generally, the same countryside situation applies throughout the Borough, there is no real differentiation. The countryside is an important asset and needs protection.
- The countryside needs to be protected, and development in the countryside and/or farm diversification, needs to be carefully managed and controlled.
- There is support in principle for the careful management of development in the countryside and/or farm diversification, especially if it supports economic growth.
- There is a need for proper, or better, enforcement of development in the countryside.
- The primary activities in the countryside should remain agriculture/farming.
- The countryside should have a diverse character and not be a "museum" and therefore too "tidy".

## **Natural Environment**

- **Q1 – What elements constitute the natural environment?**

Summary of Group Discussion

- The natural environment within the built-up, urban areas. (x2)
- Retaining the quality of, and not degrading, the rural scene, including hedgerows, woodland, natural habitats, landscapes, wildlife and country walks.

- Access, including legal access, to the natural environment. (x2)
  - The separation of settlements by “green wedges”.
  - Water resources and the preservation of water space. (x2)
  - The protection of areas that do not have a local designation.
  - Dealing with climate change.
  - The use of and support for coppice woodland management.
  - Biodiversity, being important to ensure connectivity between habitats. (x2)
  - Too much emphasis on biodiversity can stifle development on sterile sites.
  - Too much tidiness can mitigate against biodiversity.
- **Q2 – How can we best protect these areas?**
    - Private gardens in the urban area also form part of the natural (open) environment and need protection or development in a sympathetic way.
    - All natural environment sites, combined together, in the form of “green corridor” network, is the way forward. This can be a long term project, in that a network is built up over time.
    - A multi-functional approach that creates a vibrant, living and diverse countryside will help to achieve a green corridor network.
- **Q3 – What approach should we take towards the natural environment?**
    - General agreement that multifunctional spaces will help to meet a range of agendas including health, access, biodiversity.
    - Recognition that some area will need to be protected for purely biodiversity value due to particular species and habitats.

### **Historic Environment**

- **Q - Do we need anything more than current guidance?**
  - Special places and/or distinctive areas outside designated protected areas need protection.
  - The historic environment is tied with “local character” and may be addressed by Character Area Assessments.
  - Consideration needs to be given to “Local Listings”.
- **Q - Should we consider a series of Local Listing?**
  - Many urban areas fall outside of designations such as Conservation Areas, yet they still may have a ‘special character’. We should try and protect these areas locally as they are not given protection under national heritage guidance.

- Support for the idea of local listing of buildings of historic interest. Civic Societies and other organisations would probably be able to help the LA identify possible candidates.
- Clarification sought as to whether the proposed changes to the listing process (pending Heritage Bill) would supersede existing methods of listing buildings or if it would supplement it. The group was informed that local listings would be in addition to the existing structure. General consensus on pursuing local listings, as the group was unable to identify any negative impacts of such an approach. Seen as a possible way of fostering civic pride. CPRE operates a Historic Buildings Committee that carries out similar work already.
- There is a need to understand the relationship between guidance, Village Design Statements, local listings and the pending Heritage Bill.
- Concerns expressed that the protection of the historic environment must also apply to utility companies who, in maintenance and repair works, sometimes do not respect the setting of the historic environment.

- **Q - Is there a role for contemporary architecture in the historic environment?**

- General consensus that there is a role for contemporary architecture in the historic environment provided it respects the surrounding character. Some concern over the impact of tall buildings, particularly in the urban areas. Interesting is good, shocking is bad.
- Recognition that the Borough is not a museum and there is room for innovation, particularly when meeting the climate change agenda.
- Opportunity for new high profile developments such as headquarters buildings, to embrace contemporary architecture and act as a flag ship.

- **Other issues:**

- Character Area Appraisals may also help to identify potential candidates for local listings.
- Query as to how Village Design Statements would feed into or relate to any Character Area Appraisal work.
- Concern over utilities and highway works to historic areas when surface materials are damaged or removed during the works, but then replaced with standard tarmac rather than reinstating the original material. This is an ongoing issue and it was felt that it would be beneficial to have a mechanism for address this issue whilst enhancing an area's character.

## Climate Change

- **Q - Are the thresholds for renewable energy generation appropriate?**
  - A combination of both adaptation and mitigation measures are needed.
  - General consensus that if there is a high proportion of small developments coming forward, then a threshold lower than 10 units should be sought.
  - General consensus that we should be striving to deliver the highest environmental standards possible in new developments. The approach should be stepped to allow for the forthcoming changes to the Building Regulations, but that we should be seeking to implement more stringent measures as soon as possible rather than waiting for Building Regulation changes.
  - Developers will always find a way of continuing to develop and they will have to adapt to accommodate climate change measures in new developments, regardless of the cost.
  - The development of a flag ship property to illustrate what measures can be implemented may help.
  
- **Q - Should be encouraging winter water storage?**
  - Need to ensure sufficient water flow to cope with sewerage outputs to water courses.
  - General support for winter water storage but concerns raised as to the possible negative impacts on biodiversity in any areas of proposed water retention.
  
- **Other issues:**
  - Need some guidance on retro fitting renewable energy technologies and measures to existing properties to improve their energy efficiency.
  - Some uncertainty in relation to the impact of biofuels of biodiversity and the landscape.
  - Need to be flexible and allow habitats and species to adapt to changing climate.

## Open Space

- **Q - What to you enjoy most/value about open space?**

Summary of Group Discussion

  - Meeting other users – walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
  - Tranquillity, quietness and fresh air. (x6)
  - Access to, and views of, the wildlife in town and countryside. (x4)

- Flora and fauna (wildflowers and trees). (x2)
  - Open space does not need to be well manicured, but can also be “wild”.
  - Respite gaps *for the mind* (to take the mind?) off the built environment.
  - Town squares.
  - Play areas immediately adjacent to family housing.
  - The quality of the open space should be welcoming.
  - Pleasant views and vistas, including in the built up areas. (x6)
  - Open space enhances the parish community.
  - Security in an environment free from fear of crime.
  - Accessibility.
  - Good quality.
  - A wide range of formal and informal recreation and leisure to encourage healthy activities. (x3)
  - Walking along corridors.
  - Large areas of open space should be protected for their habitat and/or biodiversity value.
  - Important to have countryside within the town.
  - Although open space may look untidy, it may be a haven for wildlife and act as an ‘adventure’ playground for children.
  - Consensus that too much tidiness of open space can be detrimental to biodiversity.
- **Q - What is the role of the urban/rural fringe?**
    - Mixed views on the role of the urban/rural fringe, but general consensus that it should remain ‘rural in feeling with limited incursion for soft uses such as leisure. Where a need is identified for facilities, sites should be allocated specifically.
    - Multifunctional spaces in keeping with the character if the area would be the most appropriate way of looking at it.
    - There should be a clear-cut differentiation between the urban area and the adjacent rural countryside.
    - There should be access links between the urban area and the rural fringe to encourage their connectivity.
    - A soft approach to urban area expansion through the “spread” of the urban area into the countryside should not be permitted.
    - The consensus reached supported the view that there should be a clear distinction between the urban area and the adjacent rural area but facilitating links to and from the urban area into the countryside.
- **Q - What should be done with Low Quality/Low Value open space?**
    - Get the KWT to survey these LQ/LV sites as they may have biodiversity value worthy of protection.
    - A long-term view of open space is required, not just a snap-shot at a particular point in time.
    - It is necessary to understand what the original intention of the open space was.

- The local community needs to be consulted to see if the open space still has value.
- Open space unused by people may have an important use for wild animals.
- Open space unused by people may help create open space corridors and linkages.
- A preferred option for unused open space may be to use it for other “community” needs.
- Allotments have an open space function, but may currently, and temporarily, be out of fashion.
- Only release unused open space unless all other options have been exhausted.