

Extension to the Tenterden and Rural Sites Issues and Options Report Consultation Deadline – Statement Issued by Ashford Borough Council

The Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD Issues and Options report was published on 16th May 2008. At this time, the Core Strategy, which sets out the overarching planning approach for development in the borough up until 2021, was still subject to the conclusions of the Planning Inspector who undertook the examination into its soundness.

We have now received the final Report from the Inspector and the Core Strategy has been found to be sound subject a number of amendments. These amendments are binding on the Council and so this means that the Core Strategy will be formally adopted by the Council shortly in an amended form.

As some of the proposed amendments relate to rural planning policies, we feel it would be prudent to extend the current consultation period on the Tenterden and Rural Sites Issues & Options Report, until 11th July 2008. **Please note that we are not seeking representations on the Inspector's amendments to the Submitted Core Strategy as these are binding on the Council.**

The key changes to the rural policies in the Core Strategy are highlighted below.

The overall housing allocation number

Policy CS6 of the submitted Core Strategy set out an overall rural housing figure of 1500 units, to be delivered between 2001–2021. Of these, at the time of Submission, 320 had been built which left a residual 1180 units to be delivered. Of this figure, policy CS6, assumed that 525 units would come forward on windfall sites (houses coming forward on land which is not allocated in the Plan for housing development), as Ashford's rural area has a history of consistently delivering a high number of housing units through windfall schemes. Taking this windfall assumption into account, a residual 655 housing units were left to be **allocated** in the rural areas up until 2021.

However, the Inspector has not supported the Council's stance on this matter and has thus reduced our assumed reliance on rural housing windfalls to deliver a proportion of the overall houses needed in Ashford's rural area. In light of this, the Inspector has deemed it appropriate to increase the number of housing units needing to be allocated. As such, the revised policy CS6 now includes a rural allocation figure of 1005 units, an increase of 350 compared to the submitted version. The Inspector has attributed this increase in numbers to the following settlements:

Changes to Policy CS6		
Phase 1 (2006-2013)		Phase 2 (2014-2021)
Tenterden	125-220	140-280
Charing	35-50	40-60
Hamstreet	35-50	40-60
Wye	35-50	40-60

The settlement hierarchy

Policy CS6 of the submitted Core Strategy set out a tiered settlement hierarchy, with the more established settlements seeking to accept higher levels of growth. Tenterden, the second largest settlement in the borough with a high service provision, sat on its own at the top of the hierarchy. Tier two of the hierarchy was made up of Charing, Wye and Hamstreet, all of which are well established rural settlements and offer an array of services.

The submitted Core Strategy also established a third tier of villages where limited residential development could be allocated. Tier 3 set out 170 units to be allocated with 80 units in phase one (2006-2013) and 90 units in phase 2 (2014-2021). It dispersed this overall 170 housing unit figure between the settlements of Aldington, Bethersden, Biddenden, Challock, Chilham, High Halden, Hothfield, Rolvenden and Woodchurch. These settlements were derived from a combination of sustainable indicators including the services they provide, the role they play as a service centre and the views of the local Parish Council.

The Inspector supported the Council's stance that a fairly broad third tier was needed to create a relatively dispersed provision of housing numbers in the rural area and that 170 units, distributed within two phases, represented a reasonable and balanced overall number to attribute to this tier.

However, the Inspector has amended tier 3 of the submitted Core Strategy, in the following ways. Pluckley, in light of the Parish Council's desire to be included and the role it plays as a service centre to the Western part of the Borough has been provisionally included. However, Hothfield, mainly due to its small size and the low range of services it provides for its surrounding area, has been removed. High Halden, in light of it being in close proximity to other service centres, principally Tenterden, and due to the recent closure of the shop / post office, has also been removed. Therefore the amended Core Strategy third tier now includes, Aldington, Bethersden, Biddenden, Challock, Chilham, Pluckley, Rolvenden and Woodchurch.

The revised Core Strategy also stipulates that this hierarchy should also be used as a basis for employment land allocations and should be considered in relation to other forms of development coming forward in the rural area.