

# Local Development Framework and Community Workshop in Tenterden

## Introduction

On January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008 a Community Workshop organised by Ashford Borough Council was held in Tenterden to discuss the communities view's relating to the future of Tenterden. This was attended by four members of TDRA's committee. This article describes the recently adopted procedures for planning for the future of Tenterden, the role of community participation in the process and the views expressed at the Community Workshop.

## Legal Framework for Planning

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced a new system for development planning by Local Authorities throughout England and Wales known as the Local Development Framework (LDF) which comprises a folder of local development documents prepared by district councils and unitary authorities, including Ashford Borough Council (ABC), that outline spatial planning strategy for the local area.

A key feature of the LDF process is the involvement of the community at an early stage of the plan making process. Open access to information, including publication through the Council's website, active encouragement of contributions and ideas by the local community and regular feedback of progress to the community are essential parts of the procedure

The "Core Strategy" is the central part of the LDF for Ashford Borough and was submitted by ABC to the Inspector in November 2006. It has the key role of setting the strategic vision for development in the Borough between 2006 and 2021.

## Core Strategy Policies affecting Tenterden

The objective of the Core Strategy is to sustain vital and viable communities in Tenterden and the villages that have service centre roles that serve the surrounding smaller villages and countryside. Key points of the Core Strategy affecting Tenterden include:

- Housing  
The Core Strategy identified Tenterden as the largest settlement outside of Ashford and allocated a total of 265 housing units to be built in Tenterden within the plan period to 2021, with 125 in the first phase to 2013, and 140 in the second phase. *(NOTE: See later article – Planning Inspector increased housing allocation for Tenterden to 500 houses, June 2008)*
- Employment  
Land will be allocated for additional small-scale employment proposals within or adjoining Tenterden.
- Development in the Countryside  
In designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the conservation and enhancement of their natural beauty will be given priority.

However, the Core Strategy **does not** make site-specific allocations for development in Tenterden or set out policies for individual sites. These will be discussed in the Community

Workshop and form part of the Tenterden and Rural Sites Development Plan Document (DPD).

### **Tenterden and Rural Sites Development Plan Document (DPD)**

The first stage of preparation of the DPD involved seeking the views of the community by means of a Community Workshop organised by the Planning Department of ABC. This was held at the Town Hall in Tenterden on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2008.

### **TDRA Preparations for the Community Workshop**

Prior to the planned Community Workshop (see below) some of the TDRA Committee met to discuss the potential sites and form opinions to be presented on behalf of TDRA members. The approach taken was to consider specific criteria which would be applied equally to all sites and then to take a view of each site in the light of the criteria. In selecting these criteria we made extensive use of the work by the members of TDRA and others over the last few years in contributing to the Tenterden Town and Rural Partnership Healthcheck (2005) as well as the Tenterden Town Council Wish List (2003). The TDRA criteria were sent to ABC as well as being made available to all Workshop participants. Some of the criteria were:

- A clear presumption against development in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Kent Special Landscape Area (KSLA).
- Areas that are important to the setting of the town together with “green lungs” need to be identified and protected
- The character of the entrances to the town (gradual transition from countryside to town) should be retained
- Planned open space with public access should be identified and where appropriate secured by purchase.
- Allocated housing development should be within easy walking distance of the Town Centre (900 metres / 15 minutes) ie lateral development rather than the linear development.
- A percentage of development areas should be for commercial purposes and located to facilitate “walk to work”.
- Provision for additional off-street parking should be identified.
- Site for development of larger doctors’ surgery should be identified and consideration towards inclusion of other services in a single building.
- Provision for young people, including the future of Highbury Hall, to be included in the plan. Such developments should also cater for a multi-use approach.
- Contiguous development that avoids major access road development should be given priority. Green walk-through routes should be encouraged.
- Green lungs should be incorporated into housing developments, retaining and sustaining existing natural features.

### **Community Workshop 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2008**

Some 30 representatives of local organisations were invited to attend the Workshop including elected Town Councillors, Tenterden Improved Group (including TDRA Committee Member Peter Davies), TDRA (represented by Chairman Jenny Crickmore-Porter, Aline Davies and Alan Bates), Weald of Kent Preservation Society, Rotary Club and others. The education sector was represented by the Head of Homewood School and a Governor from St Michaels

School. The health sector was also represented by the Practice Manager from Ivy Court surgery and a representative from the South East Kent Primary Care Trust. All in all, it constituted a broad group from many backgrounds but sharing a common interest in the Town and its development.

The Workshop was organised by Ashford Borough Council and attended by several officers from the Planning Department including Simon Cole (Planning Policy Manager) and Martin Vick (Development Control Manager). ABC employed a professional “Facilitator”, Keith Nicholson, an experienced town planner, to ensure that discussions were structured, constructive and that everyone had a chance to express their views. An introductory talk emphasised that the purpose of the Workshop was not merely to look at sites for future housing development in Tenterden but was intended to have a much wider focus on other issues including community facilities and employment.

The Mayor of Tenterden, Councillor John Weller, outlined the activities of the Town Council within the LDF process including the preparation of the Council’s Wish List. Highlighted issues in the Town included:

- Inadequate library facilities
- Need to reflect the high proportion of residents over 65 in the provision of healthcare facilities
- Need for all day off street car parking sites
- Outward flow of young people – was this due to unaffordability of housing?
- Need for suitable business sites
- Need to encourage tourism
- Lack of public open space

Following the introductory speeches the participants were divided into three groups to facilitate discussions on key issues. Each group included an officer from ABC Planning Department whose role was to stimulate discussion and make a record of views expressed.

The “good” and “bad” features of the town were discussed initially. Particular “good” points arising included access to the countryside and excellent retail facilities, especially the number of independent shops. Major concerns included facilities for younger people, affordability of housing for young people and accessibility of the town. It quickly became clear that long-term parking was a major issue in people’s minds in addition to housing and employment. All day on-street parking was blighting certain streets whilst there was a shortage of low cost long-term off-street parking. This latter point was of particular concern to those in relatively low paid employment such as the retail sector.

Facilities for the young were discussed. The Headmaster of Homewood School made a strong case for housing development on the school’s playing fields on Appledore Road (which are difficult to use within a congested school day) and using money from the sale of the site for upgrading the three pitches within the main school grounds to all-weather surfaces for combined school and community use.

The medical facilities within the town were discussed including the need for expansion of facilities to suit the growing population and provide an increased range of services. The morning session closed with a summing up by the Facilitator followed by a welcome lunch break!

In advance of the Workshop ABC circulated various documents to the participants including maps showing landscape characteristics and a constraints map indicating boundaries of the Conservation Areas in Tenterden and St Michaels, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Kent Special Landscape Area (KSLA). Maps showing locations of 20 potential sites, for which owners and/or developers had expressed interest in development to ABC following advertisement in the local press in July 2007, were also provided. These maps of potential development sites were to provide the focus for the afternoon's discussions. It was made clear that the 20 potential development sites were not to be regarded as the only sites under consideration – participants would be free to suggest other sites. Parts of sites could also be considered if there were objections to development of the whole of the identified site.

The development sites varied in area and location. The largest sites suggested for housing development were:

- Land between the Woodchurch and Appledore Roads (Site 18). Homewood School playing fields (Site 19) constituted an adjoining site to this area.
- Land East of the Cemetery and South of the KESR railway line (Sites 3, 7 and 8)
- Hales Place and surrounding orchards (Site 20)

A number of sites were scattered along the A28 road approaching Tenterden from High Halden (Sites 1, 2, 6, 9 and 15). The remaining sites were mostly scattered around the periphery of the town and did not seem to be favoured by the discussion groups.

During the discussion two of the groups were asked to consider an additional specific site that had been introduced by the third group, which included some of the the elected Town Councillors. This comprised land immediately to the South of the town, from Smallhythe Road through to the Leisure Centre and adjacent fields. Being very close to the High Street it was suggested that this site would minimise traffic generation as all parts of the site would be within easy walking distance of the town centre. It could accommodate a planned development incorporating car parking, residential development and a site for a new integrated health centre incorporating the Ivy Court doctors surgery and the clinic within one building, thereby freeing the present site in Recreation Ground Road for re-development.

Following the discussion session participants were invited to place stickers on the maps indicating preferences. Finally the Facilitator drew together the marked up maps from the three discussion groups. The views of the groups showed some marked differences! One group favoured development of the Woodchurch Road / Appledore Road triangle with no votes in Favour of the land East of the Cemetery. Another group took an exactly opposite view! The third group showed broadly equal support for both of the above sites. Interestingly, all groups showed significant support for the new "South of the Town" site, albeit that this was probably not the first choice of any group.

Strong feelings were apparent regarding many of the other sites, in particular there appeared to be unanimous objection to the sites along the A28 between St Michaels and High Halden.

Overall it was found to be an interesting and valuable new community approach to planning. We look forward to seeing the outcome in the draft Tenterden and Rural Sites Development Plan Document to be presented for comment in the Autumn. Following this the DPD would progress to Preferred Options stage leading to submission and formal adoption in 2009.