



Spatial Policy Section

Appendix B

Rural Service Centre Workshop for Core Strategy

February 2010

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Maidstone Borough Council needs to develop a settlement hierarchy for the Borough as part of the work being undertaken for its Core Strategy. One of the Council's primary goals in pursuing this objective is to maintain the distinctive character of the Borough's environment whilst meeting local needs. This has proved challenging in the past because land use planning has traditionally approached smaller settlements in a relatively limited way, with a focus on containment in order to protect the openness of the countryside and reduce the need for travel, rather than focussing on sustainable development and understanding how rural settlements function.
- 1.2 For rural areas in particular, the roles and relationships between settlements are extremely complex and dependent on a number of factors. For example, the physical proximity and accessibility of settlements, the type of activity being considered and the choices people make. In such circumstances, in order to develop appropriate and sustainable policy approaches, it is necessary to develop greater understanding of the needs and issues in the rural areas at the local level.
- 1.3 Local Planning Authorities need to determine the relative merits of settlements when deciding how and where to allocate development. Characteristic data only provides information about what is available in terms of services, but fails to provide any information as to how people use those services, employment or public transport. People often do not use local services where they exist, or prefer to use services in neighbouring settlements.
- 1.4 To truly understand the functionality, network and relationship between settlements, there needs to be a comprehensive understanding at a local level as to how settlements relate to each other. This can be achieved by complementing characteristic data with functional data, i.e. how people use settlements for employment and services and the extent to which they use available public transport. Maidstone's approach to establishing a settlement hierarchy is outlined below.

2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 The Core Strategy will contain an overarching spatial policy for Rural Service Centres (RSCs). To date, the Council's approach to this challenge has been two-fold: liaison with the Parish Councils to develop a services and facilities audit for every rural village in the Borough (explained in Section 2.2); and a settlement hierarchy workshop for those villages previously designated as RSCs in the Core Strategy Preferred Options DPD (namely, Headcorn, Marden, Lenham, Staplehurst and Harrietsham) with the addition of Coxheath, which has experienced steady growth in recent years and featured strongly in the recent audit.
- 2.2 The services and facilities audit involved gathering characteristic data from each rural settlement, i.e. health services, transport information, convenience

shopping options, and displaying the information in spreadsheet format. The information gathered was sent to the Parish Councils for verification, and any discrepancies and omissions were amended where necessary.

- 2.3 The main focus of the settlement hierarchy workshop, held in November 2009, was to gain a better insight into how rural communities use the services and facilities available to them, as well as to identify and examine issues affecting those rural settlements that were the subject of assessment. Following the workshop, each Parish Council agreed the facilitators' notes ensuring that all the important topics and issues discussed on the day had been captured. The notes from the workshop are compiled in the Appendix (A) to this report.

3.0 **The Workshop**

- 3.1 The first two stages of the workshop focussed on gaining a better insight into how rural communities are served, as well as identifying and examining the issues affecting these rural settlements.
- 3.2 The final stage focussed on Maidstone's need to distribute a maximum of 800 dwellings in rural areas between now and 2026, and how this development could be accommodated in the most sustainable manner. Two likely options were considered at this stage:
- Option A – An urban extension to Maidstone accommodating a higher level of dwellings, so rural settlements across the rest of the Borough can accommodate a total of 265 dwellings.
 - Option B – An urban extension to Maidstone accommodating a lower level of dwellings, so rural settlements across the rest of the Borough can accommodate a total of 790 dwellings.
- 3.3 Each workshop discussion involved the use of a base map covering the settlement area, together with post-it notes to record comments. This helped participants to visualise the issues they were discussing in relation to each of their respective settlements. The base maps were also used as a pinboard to capture any other comments either written on a post-it note or on the map itself. Use of the maps for this purpose was voluntary so, where only a few comments were posted, facilitators sought to incorporate comments into their final written notes.
- 3.4 The feedback gathered by each facilitator for the six parish groups in attendance on the day was passed back to each group for final sign-off (i.e. agreement that the notes were accurate). Final amendments were made to take into account any comments received from the parish groups and are documented in Appendix A.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 The Council's next step is to process the local needs and aspirations information gathered from the workshops and to combine it with further research into the functionality of rural settlements. This will help the Council to develop a clear definition of what constitutes a Rural Service Centre in Maidstone Borough, which will inform the Council's settlement hierarchy policy in the Core Strategy.
- 4.2 The Council will hold further workshops with the rural settlements that are subject to assessment or arrange meetings on a one-to-one basis, as appropriate, to discuss any particular issues that arise from the ongoing research and consultation with infrastructure providers.
- 4.3 Following the establishment of those villages that fall into the RSC category of the settlement hierarchy, the Council will begin further research and liaison with other settlements.

Appendix A: Workshop Notes

COXHEATH

Facilitator: Fiona Fraser-Boulton

Workshop 1: The Vision

What makes Coxheath special?

- People want to stay in the village once they move there – move in with young families and stay until OAPs
- Self-sufficient in terms of local shops and services – a good range of shops
- People come in from a wide surrounding area to use medical facilities and local shops
- Optimum size – doesn't feel too big (so as to lose its sense of identity) or too small
- It isn't a dormitory commuter settlement
- Village hall very well used – clubs/societies & local businesses
- Good bus network to Maidstone town
- Twinned with village in France – active organisation

What needs to change in Coxheath now?

- Strong sense of community identity let down in part by poor physical identity – poor design of houses
- Remove or replace current traffic calming measures
- B2163 takes significant levels of traffic – rat-run to avoid western side of Maidstone town
- Significant lorry movements through Coxheath – satnav errors? Some to local distribution centres at diversified farm locations
- Roads not suitable for heavy articulated lorry traffic
- Lack of open space – below accepted standards
- Poor overall use of public/community-owned buildings – vacant buildings/floors
- No direct bus links between Coxheath and Maidstone Hospital – requires a change of buses in town centre
- Poor car parking facilities, especially for medical services (doctor, dentist)

How do we make Coxheath a better place to live?

- No more large-scale housing development – already taken around 200 houses. Needs time to settle
- Meet local housing needs only – though this is significant with a local housing needs survey identifying need for 20-30 dwellings
- Gained Village Green status for land under threat from development
- Doctors' surgery very well used - has outgrown site. New medical centre needed to cater for current demand and likely future increase as population becomes older
- Retain good levels of bus provision to Maidstone town centre
- Direct bus links to Maidstone hospital

- Improved open space provision with better public rights of way links across and around Coxheath
- Need to keep physically separate from other settlements – anti-coalescence
- Better co-ordinated approach to development meeting local needs and open space provision

Comments on Map – The comments have been edited to avoid duplication with above

What makes Coxheath special?

- Good bus service (No.89 every 20mins)
- Good network of footpaths
- Good range of shops

What needs to change in Coxheath now?

- Lack of youth facilities
- Improve local employment
- Lack of local needs housing
- Traffic calming (remove/replace)
- Poor utilities infrastructure (services/water/sewerage)

How do we make Coxheath a better place to live?

- New family centre promised
- Social/recreational centre with associated facilities (sports/nature walk/country park)
- Enhance shopping centre – make more attractive (more of a 'village character')
- Allotments
- SE sector of the village is preferred for limited commercial development and local needs housing

Workshop 2: Behaviours and Connections - The what, why, where and how people live and use services in your rural settlement

What are the patterns of use between various user groups and the location/accessibility of services?

User/Population Groups

- Good mix/range of families
- Significant elderly population (& growing)
- Certain level of disaffected youth (anti-social behaviour has been a problem)
- Significant number of migrant fruit pickers live/work at local farms & caravan site

- Small local Gypsy & Traveller population. Local needs considered to be met. Generally live on small sites around village. Some support for family extension where site is appropriate
- Negative overall perception of G&T provision due to poor enforcement of landscaping conditions on permitted/allowed sites; what is seen as general abuse of the planning system – public antagonism against G&T provision in general
- Ambulance call centre - ~50 employees commute in
- Some daily outward commuting – not seen as particularly significant

Patterns of use

- Poor direct public transport to Maidstone hospital
- Wide catchments for doctors' surgeries (as far out as Yalding/Teston)
- Poor perception of local primary school (even if good Ofsted report) - a lot of outward-movement to schools in surrounding area
- No community sheltered housing (can't get a warden)
- Some private sheltered housing
- Very little nursing/residential care in village (elderly/infirm ultimately have to leave village for care)
- Community youth forum recently set up (2-3months): community youth warden beginning to get support from youth
- Some youth facilities available in village but not tended to be used.
- Football Club very active and well-supported – a lot of interest from outside of village
- Migrant fruit pickers support local shops and library IT facilities
- No business forum to date – interest increasing. Looking to form a forum based on Marden model
- Poor understanding of how the local rural economy operates
- A lot of lorry traffic through village – inappropriate infrastructure to support this type and level of use. Related to farms diversifying into wider distribution centres (doesn't necessarily support local community directly)
- Good core range of facilities in Coxheath – use of a car not necessarily a limiting factor for those in Coxheath
- Big food shop tend to be directed to out-of-town sites – Aylesford (Sainsburys), Sutton Road (Morrisons), Tovil (Tesco)
- Comparison good shopping (clothes/shoes not high street/young fashion) - focus on Bluewater & Thurrock
- White goods shopping – Upper Stone Street & Aylesford
- Bus users will go to Maidstone: car users will go elsewhere (reflects poor parking provision at Maidstone)

Map Comments-The comments have been edited to avoid duplication with above

- Elderly migrate out of village to hospitals etc – rely on public transport
- People come to village to use village medical facilities

Workshop 3: Facing up to the Challenge - Core Strategy Issues – local solutions and responses to the challenges faced by Coxheath

- Coxheath has reached optimum size – already recently had ~200 units. No further market housing wanted. Want to focus on providing for local needs housing and employment
- Poor experience of past s106 agreement processes. Redevelopment of Linton Hospital site: funding secured for improvement to medical facilities but they weren't ringfenced for Coxheath. Funding subsequently given to Staplehurst. Developers offered £600,000 to go to local service provision, including school. Coxheath were not consulted, only service providers themselves (KCC). Offer turned down. Parish now facing requests from the primary school for funding
- Concerned that Growth Point funding going outside of Maidstone urban area
- Lack of s106 engagement at pre-application stage. Lack of co-ordination between planners and Parish Council as to how money should be spent. Parish want to have more say in how money is spent
- 'Sussex Model' may work for Coxheath (approach being undertaken in Sussex area including a standard s106 agreement set up for village & Parish Council holds identified s106 budget)
- Coxheath currently on the way to completing a Parish Plan. See the main element as being the Action Plan – propose to actively review on an annual basis. Web-based with small print run
- Could use PP Action Plan as location for s106 wishlist – help to ensure Parish views are included as a fundamental element of pre-application talks
- Highways a particular issue – KCC will not defend an objection at appeal and so weakens Parish Council position if they have highway concerns
- Better teamwork needed – accept that Parish Council not 'professionals' but they do have the local knowledge of the area
- Shopping facilities in Coxheath primarily retail at present. Modest commercial development may be acceptable to encourage local employment (and increase overall sustainability of settlement)
- Concern that roads are already over-capacity
- Existing traffic issues and measures across Borough need to be factored in
- Question why bulk of rest of Borough development should be focussed on the RSCs – making big places bigger? Coxheath began as a small settlement: services followed housing as demand increased. MBC should look to spread the rest of Borough housing across a wider area (ie Option B)
- Coxheath happy not to be a RSC. Wants to focus on addressing local needs. Taken a significant level of housing already. Local needs housing should be supported by an appropriate level of commercial development to support local employment (and expand business base of core beyond current retail focus)

Map comments -The comments have been edited to avoid duplication with above

- Sussex Model recommended (s106)
- Ltd warehousing/light industrial uses to encourage local employment

Workshop Notes contd...

HARRIETSHAM

Facilitator – Sue Whiteside

Workshop 1 – The Vision

What makes Harrietsham special?

- Rural setting
- Access to London and Europe
- Active and strong community (A20/railway not seen as a barrier to community cohesion)
- Community Hall provides key focus for the village and offers a comprehensive range of activities for all ages
- Past growth that has led to improved networks, and newcomers have integrated well into the community – growth therefore viewed as a benefit
- Important that future growth secures the right type of development, in consultation with the community

What needs to change in Harrietsham now?

- Additional play facilities required to serve the community to the west of the village
- Retention of existing facilities and green spaces important (e.g. cricket club/grass tennis courts)
- Need to develop an equipped play area for all ages on land to the north of the village that is within the Parish Council's control
- Extension of the Community Hall necessary

How do we make Harrietsham a better place to live: Challenges?

- Anti-social behaviour, partially caused by the need for youth facilities (currently being explored by the Rural Warden) and the lack of integration of social housing
- Level and speed of traffic on the A20, compounded when "Operation Stack" is in place
- Car parking

Workshop 2: Behaviour and Connections - The what, why, where and how people live and use services in your rural settlement

What are the patterns of use between various user groups and the location/accessibility of services?

Shopping

- Limited retail facilities available
- Local shop or garage supplies bread/milk/papers (village shop subject to anti-social behaviour problems), plus 3 churches, a vets, post office,

medical centre, primary school, mobile library, post office and hairdressers that serve the community

- The village has the same shops it had 20 years ago, which were struggling to survive then and are still struggling now, despite growth of 200+ dwellings in the village
- Community looks to Grove Green (Tesco), Ashford (Sainsburys) or Tesco Direct for convenience shopping, particularly the middle-age user group
- Some residents shop in Lenham, which can offer a much wider range of food shops, especially the elderly because there are good bus links between the villages
- Residents look to Bluewater (Greenhithe) or McCarthy Glenn (Ashford) for comparison goods with easy motorway access
- Community does not tend to shop in Hempstead Valley because of poor access – the Kent Downs acts as a barrier to facilities that might be on offer to the north of the village

Education

- New village primary school serves Harrietsham and surrounding villages
- For secondary education, the community travels to Lenham (Swadlands) or Maidstone

Employment

- Limited local employment available – there is some degree of local employment but there are no large local employers
- Residents travel to Maidstone or London for employment needs
- 1/3rd of economically active residents commute to London
- Limited travel to the Medway Towns or Ashford for work

Leisure

- Residents look to Ashford for the cinema
- Lack of facilities for the elderly

Harrietsham Village services used by neighbouring villages

- Church (particularly for weddings)
- Vets
- New Primary School
- Otherwise, village facilities tend to serve the local community

Workshop 3: Facing up to the Challenge - Core Strategy Issues – local solutions and responses to the challenges faced by Harrietsham.

Focus of the discussion was whether Harrietsham should maintain its RSC status. Please see the letter from Harrietsham Parish Council below, which explains Harrietsham's interest in maintaining RSC status

- Village has good infrastructure in place: A20, M20 motorway, railway, buses, with good links to London, Maidstone, Ashford and the coast
- Primary school has room to expand as the village grows
- Water supply and waste facilities have capacity to accommodate some growth
- Disadvantage is the lack of facilities, particularly shops
- Some future growth will be required to secure land for replacement almshouses (40 units over the next 18 months), additional play facilities and allotments
- Local needs housing survey recently updated, confirming the need for 21 units, but site selection has been constrained by the SHLAA
- Some growth in the right place and in consultation with the community was considered necessary
- Important that any growth upholds settlement separation to retain village identity, recognises the constraints of the Kent Downs AONB, and maintains good access to the existing transport networks

Letter from Harrietsham Parish Council Re Maintaining RSC Status

Chairman: Cllr Stephen Morris
Clerk: Mrs Amanda Broadhurst

Tel: 01622 850089
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c/o 16 Merivale Grove
Walderslade
Chatham
Kent
ME5 8HP

26th November 2009

Mrs S Whiteside
Team Leader
Planning Policy
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
King Street
Maidstone
Kent
ME15 6JQ

Dear Sue

RE: Rural Service Centres

With reference to our conversation at the Rural Settlements workshop yesterday, I wish to confirm that the subject of Harrietsham maintaining its status as a Rural Service Centre was discussed at last night's Parish Council meeting. It was decided by Councillors that Harrietsham is similar to the other Rural Centres with the exception of limited retail units, but the benefits of remaining a Rural Service Centre outweigh the negatives.

It has to be clearly stated that this agreement to stay as a Rural Service Centre is not an open invitation for the purpose of building 400 homes in Harrietsham but as a means to fulfil our objectives of our Parish Plan to provide Local Needs Housing and a replacement Almshouse unit within our village, plus limit development to enable our key objectives to be met.

As explained at the Rural Workshop, the provision of houses has to be provided somewhere within the Borough, Harrietsham Parish Council are keen to continue to work with Maidstone Borough Council's Planning department in achieving the desired development within our village for the benefit of the sustainability of our Community.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Amanda Broadhurst
Clerk to Harrietsham Parish Council

Workshop Notes contd...

HEADCORN

Facilitator – Michael Murphy

Workshop 1 – The Vision

What makes Headcorn special?

- Village offers a good range of facilities – has all the essentials
- Village centre is attractive – conservation of shop fronts and built heritage has been good
- The community hall is excellent and is used extensively – not just by residents of Headcorn
- Headcorn is a compact settlement with numerous services at its core, the village centre is easily accessed and is within walking distance for most residents
- Public transport is good – bus and rail – a number of people travel to Headcorn to get the train to London or Ashford
- Access to secondary education is adequate
- Good community spirit, good sports clubs/facilities
- Headcorn attracts a number of tourists because of its attractive village centre, range of shops and cafes, close proximity to the Aerodrome etc

What needs to change in Headcorn now?

- Primary school is at capacity and will need expansion if there is to be more development in the village. Unfortunately, the primary school resides on a flood plain and has experienced flooding in recent years
- Flooding is an issue in certain areas - existing surface water and foul sewers struggle to cope at present
- Headcorn also suffers from poor drainage due to soil type and the fact that the village is quite low lying
- There is not enough local employment in Headcorn, very few opportunities for smaller businesses (entrepreneurship). Mostly low-wage jobs (service sector) at present. Commuting to higher paid jobs (London & elsewhere) is common
- Gypsy & traveller sites are at capacity – there should be no more sites allocated in Headcorn

Other Issues Highlighted

A four-storey residential development has been granted permission on an ex transport depot in Headcorn. There is concern that such a development is too urban in character for a village setting, and may set a precedent for similar developments in future. Therefore, it is important that future growth secures the right type of development, in consultation with the community.

Also, it was highlighted that any industrial sites that become available (due to businesses relocating etc) should be kept in industrial use rather than allocated for housing. There is a need to keep business and employment in the area.

How do we make Headcorn a better place to live?

Making Headcorn a better place to live centers on sustaining the good points mentioned above i.e. retain core services in village centre, attractiveness of village centre for shoppers and tourists etc. Better healthcare services are desirable also. It has been noted that the village can accommodate a slow rate of growth over a sustained period, but any future development would need to be linked to supporting infrastructure and utilities.

Workshop 2: Behaviour and Connections- the what, why, where and how people live and use services in your rural settlement.

What are the patterns of use between various user groups and the location/accessibility of services?

- Headcorn draws visitors from Ashford, Tunbridge Wells, Cranbrook, Tenterden, Maidstone etc. The village relies on visitors to support the local economy
- Headcorn residents use the village for convenience shopping but tend to travel to the bigger service centres for comparison shopping. The attractiveness of the village for convenience shopping is helped by the fact that most other settlements are a number of miles away
- The train station is very popular and is used by commuters to London (Charing Cross) or Ashford
- There is a lack of leisure facilities in and surrounding the village. For example, a number of residents travel to use swimming pool or gym facilities
- For young people, apart from sports clubs, the entertainment options are limited and most travel to Maidstone for shopping and leisure.
- For secondary education – there are many options i.e. residents of Headcorn travel to Lenham, Tenterden, Ashford or Maidstone. For primary education, there is a primary school in the village but it is currently at capacity
- Most industrial use surrounding the village doesn't support local employment and can be considered low-wage. There is a need for higher order businesses in Headcorn
- The Aerodrome is used for tourism and leisure and provides employment also

Workshop 3: Facing up to the Challenge - Core Strategy Issues – local solutions and responses to the challenges faced by Headcorn.

- There is potential for small scale growth in Headcorn throughout the Plan period. This is considered necessary to sustain shops and services in the village
- Further growth will require improvements in infrastructure. For example, an extension to the primary school may be necessary, along with improvements to drainage, foul sewer and flood defence mechanisms. Also, as the population of Headcorn grows, there will be a requirement for junction improvements, new pavements, lighting improvements etc, in areas surrounding any new development
- During workshop 3, there were 5 sites identified as potential brownfield sites for housing in the village. Also, the SHLAA sites to the north east of the village were considered far more suitable for development than any other accepted sites

Workshop Notes contd...

LENHAM

Facilitator – David Terry

Workshop 1 – The Vision

What makes Lenham special?

- Lenham has an identifiable village centre – the 'heart' of the village is vibrant
- The community centre and medical centre are excellent
- Infrastructure – transport links are good for rail and bus. Also, the A20 provides fast access to Maidstone and Ashford. Lenham is just 7 minutes from the M20
- There are good local employment opportunities in Lenham – 2 big firms provide approx 30% of local employment and small industrial units also employ local people
- There is an adequate variety of housing in the village

What needs to change in Lenham now?

- There is an issue regarding schooling for local children. For example, some primary school places are being taken by families who don't live in Lenham
- More play areas are needed for children – particularly in Douglas & Foord Road areas of the village
- Provision of financial services is an issue – there are fears that the Bank in Lenham may be lost as the NatWest Bank is for sale. Residents desire a full bank for the Post Office

How do we make Lenham a better place to live?

- Need to provide more housing opportunities for younger people. Housing facilities for older people are adequate
- A youth centre at Swadelands Secondary school is required
- A small level of growth in the right places would help towards maintaining the thriving village centre and local businesses in general. The village has to maintain current shopping and business standards at the very least between now and 2026

Workshop 2: Behaviour and Connections - the what, why, where and how people live and use services in your rural settlement.

What are the patterns of use between various user groups and the location/accessibility of services?

- The small village shops are used extensively for small-scale convenience shopping. However, the 'weekly' shop requires a trip outside the village – Ashford or Maidstone

- There is interaction between Harrietsham and Lenham for certain services like shopping or the doctor
- Sports and societies in Lenham are excellent and are widely used

Workshop 3: Facing up to the Challenge - Core Strategy Issues – local solutions and responses to the challenges faced by Lenham.

- Based on the two Options discussed by Michael Thornton, for a small amount of rural housing development (Option A), SHLAA sites 015 & 017 would both be suitable and could accommodate approx 23 dwellings between them. Both sites are currently just outside the village boundary
- Regarding Option B – which would result in more housing in RSC's – Lenham believe that a site in close proximity to the Community Centre (labelled site C on Session 3 map) is suitable for approx 70 dwellings because access and services are excellent surrounding this site.
- Lenham have identified a further site (labelled D on map) for potential employment use.
- Lenham Parish Council would like to see the village boundary extended to include the community centre and the adjoining potential housing sites (labelled A, B & C on map).

Workshop Notes contd...

MARDEN

Facilitator – Andrew Connors

Workshop 1 – The Vision

What makes Marden special?

- Marden has an industrial estate which provides local employment
- Business Forum present with 130+ members
- Direct train service into London
- Good selection of retail outlets and restaurants for the local community
- Good mix of housing
- Extensive social amenities and sports activities available
- Kent Air Ambulance is based in Marden

What needs to change in Marden now?

- More frequent public transport services are required - for bus and rail
- There are issues with parking around the industrial estate, which causes problems
- Speeding is an issue on Pattenden Lane. Traffic calming measures are required
- House prices are too high, which directly impacts on affordability for local people
- Drainage service needs to be reviewed

How do we make Marden a better place to live?

- More affordable housing is required in Marden
- Future growth will require consideration given to local infrastructure
- New or extended community facilities such as schools, community centre etc

Workshop 2: Behaviour and Connections - the what, why, where and how people live and use services in your rural settlement

What are the patterns of use between various user groups and the location/accessibility of services?

- Local people go out of the village for leisure centre facilities (i.e. swimming)
- Local people commute to London via the train service which runs through Marden
- Local residents go to Cranbrook, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Ashford for shopping
- Bowls club attracts not just local residents, but people from across the borough

- Good range of sporting facilities easily accessible and used by all ages (i.e. Cricket, Football, Tennis, Hockey)
- Restaurant (Curry House) is frequently used by local residents and people from outside the parish
- The school is over-subscribed
- The Business Forum is used by local businesses in Marden and has 130+ members
- Good range of general activities and services for all age ranges in the parish
- Main areas of influence are seen as Cranbrook, Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Ashford

Workshop 3: Facing up to the Challenge - Core Strategy Issues – local solutions and responses to the challenges faced by Marden.

- Areas for potential growth identified on accepted SHLAA sites are above the threshold for providing affordable housing, but will not be restricted to local people in perpetuity, like a stand alone exception site. So the delivery of exception sites to meet the identified local housing need should still be considered important
- Existing infrastructure is not capable of dealing with future growth and development. Consideration therefore needs to be given as to how additional housing will impact on the parish. Future development needs to be in the right place, and sustainable
- Access issues to and from sites needs to be considered, along with traffic and parking
- Consideration should be given to the moving of existing communal open spaces to alternative locations, to free up land which has development potential, as alternative options to accepted SHLAA sites
- Design and quality of development should fit in and be in keeping with the surrounding area, and be sympathetic to the local environment
- Consideration for perhaps mixed use developments, rather than just residential housing, would help with local infrastructure and help the development and local community. This would be more sustainable in the long term
- Would be useful to know the total number of potential dwellings each accepted SHLAA site could provide, in order to properly determine the level of growth the parish would like to see within their settlement
- Preferred option B in terms of future growth proposals for rural settlements, but with appropriate consideration given to local infrastructure requirements to ensure economic growth, prosperity and sustainability

Workshop Notes Contd...

STAPLEHURST

Facilitator – Jim Boot

Workshop 1 – The Vision

What makes Staplehurst special?

- rail commuter connections
- Some were positive about a strong village community
- Village is in the Cranbrook School catchment area

What needs to change in Staplehurst now?

- road connections are poor
- as a large village, Staplehurst only has small village facilities
- It doesn't have the infrastructure to support the population increase/development that has taken place. Development has happened without improvements to infrastructure
- The A229 is a limit on development but also an existing problem i.e. lack of crossings for pedestrians and level of traffic
- There are only limited leisure facilities
- The primary school may need to change to improve
- Future development would be constrained by the size of the shopping parade and village (community) centre
- Car parking is an issue around the station (particularly adjoining residential roads) and the shopping parade
- Development has happened in the past without adequate infrastructure improvements and that needs to change for the future

How do we make Staplehurst a better place to live?

- Before any substantial development (particularly housing), Staplehurst would need new access roads that won't impinge on the A229 and Marden/Headcorn road (quarter orbitals)
- A new indoor sports facility should be sought
- A229 needs traffic management and road safety improvements
- Car parking at the parade of shops and station needs improving and improvements for cycling and walking – although it was pointed out that the A229 isn't currently safe enough for this
- Secondary school provision would need consideration

Workshop 2: Behaviour and Connections - the what, why, where and how people live and use services in your rural settlement.

What are the patterns of use between various user groups and the location/accessibility of services?

- For shopping, people use Paddock Wood, Tonbridge and Ashford (if travelling by train), and Cranbrook, Tenterden, Sutton Road (Maidstone) and supermarkets in Maidstone if travelling by car or bus
- For education they use Cranbrook (as Cranbrook school is considered a 'plus point' when considering moving to Staplehurst), Angley, Cornwallis, the Maidstone Boys' and girls' Grammar Schools, and St Simon Stock (the only Catholic faith school). All these are accessible by school or service buses. Additionally some scholars travel to Bennett Memorial (T Wells), Judd (Tonbridge) and Ashford which are accessible by train. All these have the disadvantage of involving considerable travelling time
- Cranbrook also for banking and building societies
- Majority of people are working outside Staplehurst but local businesses tend to employ people from outside the area. The cost of housing means that people have to commute out of Staplehurst to get higher paid jobs. Local jobs, although may be employing a second income earner in the household, tend to be lower paid
- The primary school is also an attraction – the school is an integral part of the village
- The older population is growing – there are a number of care homes in the village and services such as the Age Concern Lunch Club, Weald Club for the Disabled but there is no drop in centre, working mens' or bowls club. There are limited facilities compared to a larger town. Not adequate for the future
- Families with young children - with 3 pre-schools and two parent and toddler groups are well catered for
- People like it here and they don't move
- Although there is a youth club and plenty of organised youth activities, a small minority don't attend these and may cause trouble
- There are poor facilities for young single people. They would be very dependent on having their own transport

Key considerations

- Residents are forced out for shopping, secondary education and higher paid employment
- Young families are catered for
- There are limited facilities for the elderly
- Teenagers are an issue and poorly provided for outside of organised activities
- Lack of shopping, lack of infrastructure and secondary education are all issues
- However, these need to be balanced with the positives

Workshop 3: Facing up to the Challenge - Core Strategy Issues – local solutions and responses to the challenges faced by Staplehurst

- Why should there be a presumption that Staplehurst should take the lion's share of development – "the largest opportunity"?

- The general view of the group would be to support Option A – large extension to Maidstone town as this would limit development in the villages
- There should be no more development without the infrastructure to support it
- Transport is the key restraining/constraining factor