

Housing numbers revised

The number of new homes proposed under the next stage of the Wealden Local Plan has been reduced by the Council's Local Plan Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee, meeting on Monday 13 March, agreed with the lower of two growth modelling figures after taking into account the results of the latest nitrogen deposition monitoring that has been taking place in Ashdown Forest.

The number of new homes to be included in the draft Proposed Submission Wealden Local Plan will be 11,456. As 7,392 of these have already been built or granted planning permission since 2013, the total number of new homes to be built by the end of the 2028 will be 4,064.

Councillor Ann Newton, Cabinet member for Planning and Development, said:

“The majority of housing will be distributed away from Ashdown Forest to the south of the District. The revised plan continues to provide the employment opportunity to support both existing housing and new homes so that fewer people have to travel outside of the District to work.

“The Draft Submission will include 38,600 square metres of employment opportunities centred about the A22 which is already becoming an attractive location for new and growing businesses.”

“New housing development will still be planned for towns and villages in the north of the District where resultant traffic can access Tunbridge Wells using alternative routes to the A26.”

Three years of monitoring carried out in the Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation has shown that the amount of nitrogen deposition from motor vehicles is already exceeding levels that can cause ecological damage to the heathland.

To meet national and international legal obligations, the Wealden Local Plan has to show that additional levels of nitrogen deposition linked to new development will not cause further damage. Natural England suggests that a further nitrogen deposition of below 0.1kg N to per hectare per year across

the Forest will have a neutral effect on the heathland habitat. The 21,000 new homes identified for testing following the Council's earlier *Issues and Options and Recommendations* document would, according to the monitoring results now available, have led to an additional 0.19kg N/ha on average being deposited across the Forest each year, and possibly much more in certain locations.

The 2017 draft Proposed Submission document includes two housing scenarios. The larger one, proposing an extra 14,101 dwelling by 2028, would still result in additional average of 0.12kg N/ha/year. Only the lower housing number proposal of 11,456 homes keeps the additional nitrogen deposition rates at an acceptable level. This is the recommended approach.

Even at levels of an additional 0.1kgN/ha/year average across the protected area, there is still the likelihood that some 700ha of Ashdown Forest's 2,729ha of Special Area of Conservation could be affected by higher levels. In view of this, the Council is looking to establish compensation measures to ensure overall levels of lowland heathland habitat remain unchanged. Until the compensation measures have been approved, any new planning applications within the District will need to show that they will not generate any additional vehicle movements in order to be considered for approval. This will not affect developments which have already been approved.

Monitoring of the air pollution around Ashdown Forest will continue and there may be further adjustments if evidence suggests they are required.

Under the Draft Proposed Submission document endorsed by the Local Plan Sub-Committee, the new lower housing numbers would be distributed across Wealden as follows:

Hailsham	2,420
Polegate & Willingdon	108
Stone Cross	833
Berwick Station	32
Ninfield	85
Horam	344
Heathfield	191
Wadhurst	51

The draft Proposed Submission document outlining Wealden's growth proposals was also considered by a Joint meeting of Wealden's Planning Committees. It will go to Full Council on 22 March. If approved, the document will go out for formal representations in early May.

These representations will be taken into account to create a final draft document which will go forward to an independent Planning Inspector for Examination in Public later this year.

Note to Editors:

The draft Proposed Submission Local Plan reduces the period of time for which the Local Plan is to run from the 2037, used in the *Issues, Options and Recommendations*, to 2028 which is in line with the preference for shorter time periods in other recently approved local plans.

For further information:

Cllr Ann Newton
Cabinet Member for Planning and
Development
Wealden District Council.
Tel: 01825 890103
Email: cllr.ann.newton@wealden.gov.uk

Or Jim van den Bos,
Communications Officer,
Wealden District Council.
Tel: 01892 602745
Email: jim.vandenbos@wealden.gov.uk

Marina Briggshaw
Head of Planning Policy & Economic
Development
Wealden District Council.
Tel: 01892 602498
Email:
marina.brigginshaw@wealden.gov.uk