

HORSMONDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ‘ISSUES AND OPTIONS’ WORKSHOPS

Workshop 1: Landscape & Environment and Design & Style

Sat 15 June 10.00am – 12 noon, Horsmonden Primary School

Introduction

This was the first of a series of three workshops taking place over the summer and early autumn:

1. Landscape & Environment and Design & Style, 15th June
2. Housing & Development and Community Leisure and Recreation, 13th July
3. Access & Movement and Business and Employment, September (date to be confirmed)
4. Masterplanning, October (date to be confirmed)

In addition, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) will be convening a Local Plan workshop in Horsmonden during the period of their draft Local Plan consultation: 20th September to 1st November (although it may be possible to combine this with the Masterplanning workshop).

The purpose of the workshops is for the Horsmonden Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) Working Groups to present the issues they have identified through their work and present a number of potential options for addressing those issues in the HNP. These will then be turned into planning policies that will be included in the draft HNP in the autumn.

Update on HNP and TWBC Local Plans

Jim Boot, Community Planner who has been advising the parish on the HNP gave a brief overview on the plan’s progress. Since the winter 2018/19 residents’ survey, six working groups have been established, received training in their respective areas (see above) and carried out investigations or assessments to bring together in one place information on:

1. National Planning Policy and emerging Tunbridge Wells Local Plan
2. Existing evidence from Tunbridge Wells and High Weald AONB Unit
3. Questionnaire results
4. Working group’s assessment and options or ‘reasonable alternatives’

This workshop is an opportunity for the working groups to feedback to the community on their findings.

Lindsay Frost, Planning Consultant who has also been advising the parish then gave an update on the TWBC Local Plan progress. These are set out in a separate set of slides but the main points are reported here:

- Biggest planning issue facing TWBC is accommodating housing growth in a sustainable way, given the strong pressure for development - and the many environmental and infrastructure constraints - in the area
- Past and future housebuilding rates –**average annual completions**

Period	TWBC
2001-2006 *	313
2006-2011 *	372
2011- 2016 *	257

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2016- 2036 **	675
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* Net actual completions ** Implied future build rate in new Local Plan

- Local Plan will provide 13,500 new dwellings over 2016-2036 period
- Around 4,500 already completed or have planning permission
- This leaves the Local Plan to find another 9,000
- TWBC intend to provide about 6,000 in Capel and Paddock Wood areas, leaving 3,000 in other parts of the Borough
- Draft plan will be in public arena in early August 2019 , with formal consultation from 20 September -1 November 2019 (we are waiting to see proposals for Horsmonden)
- Further consultation in summer 2020
- Plan submitted to Sec of State late 2020
- Formal examination by independent inspector in spring/summer 2021

It would be fair to say that there has been considerable delays in TWBC publishing their draft Local Plan (originally scheduled for May) which makes it harder for the HNP to make progress – particularly as TWBC have yet to make public their proposed housing allocation for Horsmonden and other TWBC parishes. It had been hoped to have a draft HNP by the end of the summer for consultation with residents and stakeholders in the early autumn. This is now unlikely to be ready until late autumn.

Landscape and Environment Working Group Presentation

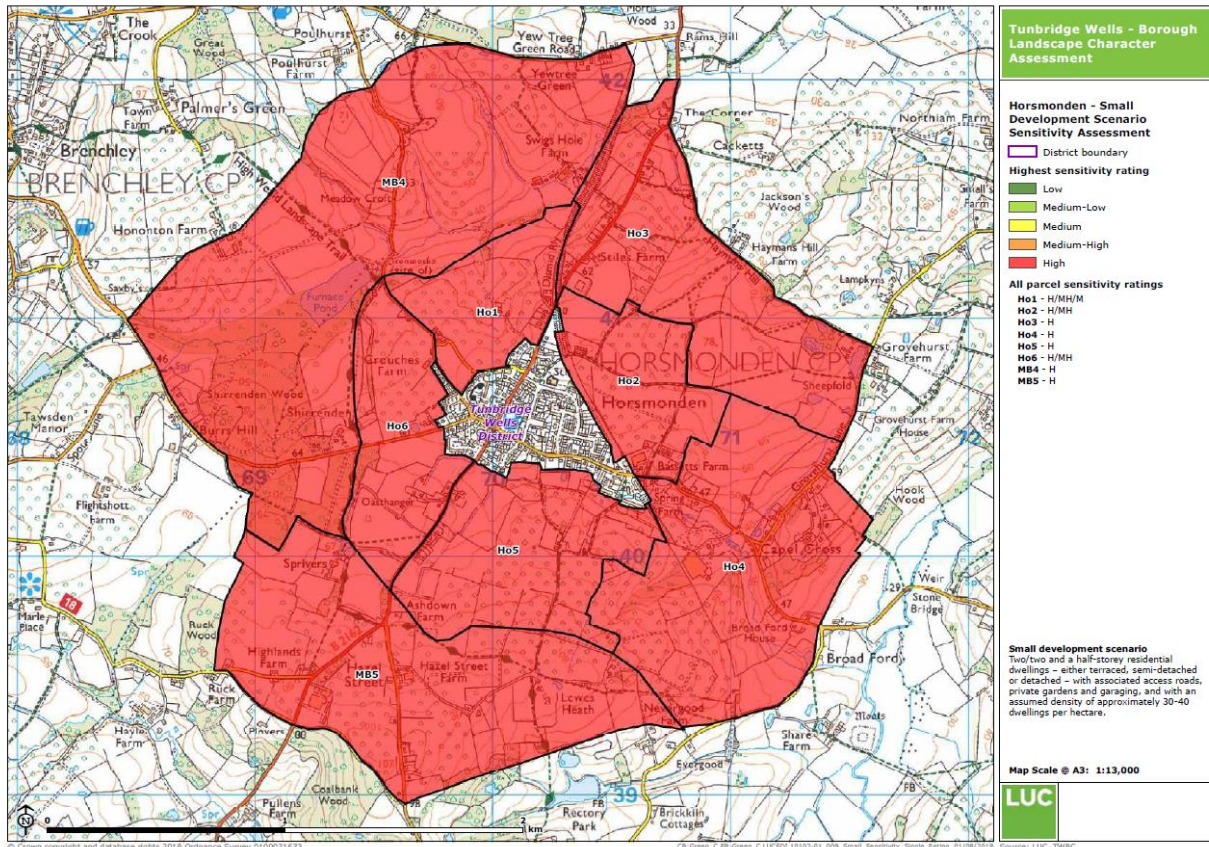
National Planning Policy

The first part of the presentation focussed on the government’s National Planning Policy Frame which states paragraph 172: ‘Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.’ While the southern part of the parish is inside the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the main settlement is just outside the AONB boundary.

Existing evidence from Tunbridge Wells and High Weald AONB Unit

However, a recent Landscape Sensitivity study commissioned by TWBC for their draft Local Plan shows that all the farmland, orchards and woodland around Horsmonden was considered to have a High sensitivity rating for even small-scale developments.

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Questionnaire results

The working group next presented the findings from the residents' questionnaire including:

- The main reason for living in Horsmonden was its rural environment 70%.
- Percentage of people who regularly used public green spaces 83%, footpaths and bridleways 82% and Sprivers 73%.
- Importance of preservation of the existing landscape was 'very important' to 88% of respondents.
- A series of views have been assessed and are proposed for protecting from development in the draft HNP:

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Photo	Description
Haymans Hill Horsmonden	If you stand at Haymans Hill farm at the top of the hill, you can see north into the distance for miles. It is a spectacular, unspoilt view and should be preserved.
N/A	Swiggs Hole Farm
Hazel Street Farm towards village (x 2)	Standing on higher ground you can see Brenchley to the left with Horsmonden nestling unobtrusively like a hamlet in lower ground allowing fantastic views over the rooftops of the Weald and orchards beyond and further to the right is Goudhurst. Surrounded by the most wonderful wildlife and birdsong.
Aerial photos of village (x 2)	The village outline is clear, and if Horsmonden is to remain a village, there is very little scope for additional development.
Behind Millstone cottage towards Castle Hill	Behind Millstone cottage towards Castle Hill
Destruction near Goudhurst Road	The first makes me sad. Total destruction of landscape and wildlife habitat, allegedly because some of the trees were unsafe, however there are a number of unsafe, leaning trees further up the path, but they have been left!
Orchards at Hazel Street Farm	Picture two makes me happy as this farmer invests in the future and enhances the environment
Alley from Goudhurst Road to Hazel Street Farm	Picture three is the path to peace for me, the footpath from Goudhurst Road up to the orchards and hop gardens. Radox for the soul
View towards Goudhurst from near Lewis Heath	Taken from public pathway running from behind Hilltop
Bassetts Hill towards Hazel Street Farm x 2	View from EE mobile area at top of Bassetts Farm, looking towards Hazel Street Farm
Sledging Field	View from Farmer Richard's sledging field towards the village
Brenchley Road to Furnace Pond	View from Footpath running alongside Shirrenden from Brenchley Road towards Furnace Pond
Furnace Pond to Brenchley Road	View from Footpath running alongside Shirrenden from Furnace Pond towards Brenchley Road
Furnace Pond	View across Furnace Pond from footpath
Path Up from Mobile aerial	View up path running up Bassetts Farm towards EE mobile aerial
Pond at Sprivers	View across Pond from Sprivers towards Lamberhurst Road
Waterfall at Furnace Pond	View of waterfall from weir at Furnace Pond

Table-top workshop using SWOT analysis

Then followed the round table discussion, when in groups attendees discussed the issues and options relating the following four topic areas. At the end of the exercise, each group underlined their most important issue and / or opportunity for:

1. Local Green Spaces
2. Bio-diversity and wildlife
3. Landscape and views
4. Landscaping and greenspace in new developments

1. *Local Green Spaces*

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible • Well used and maintained • Safe • Inclusive • Multi-purpose uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of footpaths in South West of parish • <u>Lack of control – private ownership</u>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events 	
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Creation of outdoor activities and pursuits</u> • Better publicity for walking routes etc • More events 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encroaching development • Climate change • Overuse – lack of maintenance • Litter / dog poo

The group listed the following green spaces:

- Furnace Ponds
- Locket Green
- Sports field
- Sprivers
- The Heath
- Footpaths
- Church graveyard

2. *Bio-diversity and wildlife*

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sprivers – dormice and batboxes • Furnace Pond • Orchards, hop gardens and vineyards • Lewes Heath wildflower meadows • Species rich hedgerows • A really beautiful environment and views 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spraying of hop gardens and fruit orchards • “Over badgered / rabbits / crows
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant some more trees • Kell memorial garden • <u>Plant 5 (native) trees for every house built</u> • Create ponds and wetlands in new development (not culverts or pipes) 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Hope of development results in clearing potential sites</u> • Traffic ie Furnace Lane Development • Intensive farming ie chicken farm • Threats to views

3. *Landscape and views*

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the edge of the AONB • Well maintained public places • Good footpaths, well maintained • Surrounded by orchards and farmland 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining farming • Selling agricultural land
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Redevelop areas eg Bassetts farm in a sensitive way by development</u> • To develop parts of the Hop Pickers Line as an amenity – cycling, walking • Opportunity to apply for AONB status • Ring fence attractive sites / views 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection reduced as only small parts in AONB • <u>Pressure to use parts of village green as parking</u>

4. Landscaping and greenspace in new developments

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<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting mental and physical health 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of spaces
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protected tree planting: flooding 'red', carbon 'red', shade, temperature cooling, biodiversity survival • Community groups to manage wild and natural spaces • More native trees and plants (resistant and adaptable) • Improve pedestrian connectivity • Seating 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High density – out of character • Loss of agricultural land (future food supply, jobs, biodiversity) • Not necessary to have new developments to achieve opportunities

Design & Style Working Group Presentation (to follow)

1. National Planning Policy and emerging Tunbridge Wells Local Plan
2. Existing evidence from Tunbridge Wells and High Weald AONB Unit
3. Questionnaire results
4. Working group's assessment and options or 'reasonable alternatives'

Table-top workshop using SWOT analysis

Then followed the round table discussion, when in groups attendees discussed the issues and options relating the following four topic areas. At the end of the exercise, each group underlined their most important issue and / or opportunity for:

1. Attractive design
2. Energy efficient housing
3. Modern design
4. Parking

1. *Attractive design*

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive design draws people to village • Public support for good design • Maintains character and feel of village 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Pattern book' or catalogue pick and mix • Face 'Disney' styling
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of sloping land to add character • Attractive bungalows for older people • <u>Specify design codes</u> • Reduce running costs through good design • Reinforce village character 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good design [may be perceived] is it more expensive – may be not • Trying to please everyone

2. *Energy efficient housing*

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to exceed government environmental targets • More local eg centralized energy supply • More efficient homes – lower bills for households 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developers claiming too expensive • Not a legal requirement •
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking pride in being a low emission village 	
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Ability to market houses with eco-credentials and lower bills</u> • Building from ‘ground up’ to accommodate environmental initiatives • Lower level and underground houses do not disrupt street scene • Gives the village and identity 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of maintenance and support • <u>Cost [upfront]</u> • Technology becomes obsolete

3. *Modern design*

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable style consistency. Good starting point for developers • Attractive forward looking image for the village 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging technology not ‘tried and tested’ • Opposition to modern designs • Economies of scale could be difficult
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability credentials for modern designs • <u>Affordable designs</u> 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban design in a rural setting

4. *Parking*

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None! 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient safe parking around Heath • Lack of parking for doctors’ surgery
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Create ‘green’ parking areas on:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maidstone Road ○ Lamberhurst road ○ Goudhurst Road • Utilising parts of the Heath if necessary • Adequate parking in new developments for residents and visitors 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Poor parking is a safety issue</u> for both persons and property

Conclusion and recommendations

As numbers were lower than expected this event had more of a feel of a focus group – a sounding board for the working groups to test their initial thinking. And some very useful ideas and a strong steer came from the table top sessions.

A. LOCAL GREEN SPACES: There was a concern over a lack of control or private ownership of LGS. In terms of the legislation around designating LGS – one of the primary powers of neighbourhood plans – this isn’t a barrier to designation but it is important to consult with landowners prior to designating. An opportunity was identified for ‘creation of outdoor activities and pursuits’. While it would be hard for the HNP to directly influence this, it might be possible to include such opportunities in or near new developments including providing strong access to the countryside. The group suggested the following should be considered by the HNP to be designated LGS:

- Furnace Ponds

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- Locket Green
- Sports field
- Sprivers
- The Heath
- Footpaths
- Church graveyard

B. BIODIVERSITY AND WILDLIFE: There was a concern that so-called ‘hope’ of development (of land getting planning permission) was leading to land being cleared as preparation for development with a resultant loss of wildlife habitat. This needs to be addressed through progressing the draft Local Plan or else for the parish council (who are the qualifying body for the NP) to propose sites in the HNP for development. The NPPF provides limited protection from speculative development for neighbourhood plans that designate sites. However, this can be contentious in small communities. Positively the group recommended a condition that five trees are planted for every house built. This could be done through the creation of new community woodland or orchards adjacent to new development (see A).

C. LANDSCAPE AND VIEWS: This group were concerned over pressure to use parts of the village green for parking. Given its status as a Village Green, this seems unlikely but should perhaps be considered as an option to be tested with the wider community for instance in a village exhibition. The group recognised the proposal to develop Bassetts Farm as an opportunity for enhancing the appearance of that part of the village – but that needs to be off-set by minimising the visual impact particularly as it is in a prominent part of the landscape which may be visible from for example the High Weald Landscape Trail which runs along the high ground to the north of the village.

D. LANDSCAPING AND GREEN SPACE IN NEW DEVELOPMENT: This group didn’t choose to prioritise any one area. They supported the idea of tree planting and identified an additional opportunity to improve pedestrian connectivity – which has been identified elsewhere as very important when considering the problems of parking in the village centre (close to amenities) and the desire to create a ‘walkable village. They were concerned that higher density developments would be out of character with the existing development.

E. ATTRACTIVE DESIGN: This table prioritised specifying design codes for new developments. This is an approach that can be taken forward through the Masterplanning process. *Design codes are a particular form of design guidance. They offer detailed three-dimensional direction for development, while not actually pre-scribing the outcome, that is, they provide a detailed compendium of design instructions and advice, usually heavily illustrated with visual examples¹.*

F. ENERGY EFFICIENT HOUSING: This group identified the perception amongst developers and perhaps the public that more energy efficient homes are more expensive to build and buy but thought that this was perhaps a misconception as the technologies are becoming more mainstream and above all they recognised the ‘**Ability to market houses with eco-credentials and lower bills**’ – cheaper energy and water bills could be very attractive to house-buyers and renters, particularly those on lower incomes. It might be that the design group should research some local examples and speak to estate agents who have experience in this area to seek endorsement of this approach.

G. MODERN DESIGN: This group prioritised affordable design and were concerned over the impact of an urban design approach in a rural setting. This needs to be picked up in the Masterplanning and in other developments that might come forward.

¹ Town and Country Planning in the UK, Routledge (15th Edition) page 365

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F. PARKING: This group are concerned that poor parking [behaviour by motorists] is a safety issue and suggest some solutions including creating 'green' parking areas on:

- Maidstone Road
- Lamberhurst road
- Goudhurst Road

These have been used in other village situations most recently in Pluckley. However, the suggestion that utilising part of the Heath contradicts the views expressed in C which will need to be tested further to see if they are feasible, affordable and acceptable to the wider community.

G. OVERALL: The event format performed well on show-casing the work of the working groups, putting their ideas to the test with other working / steering group members and members of the public. A larger number at the next workshop would be beneficial but the numbers were sufficient to ensure a useful discussion, identify priorities and provide material for including in the chapters for the draft HNP. The identification of options or 'reasonable alternatives' will also be helpful if the HNP is required to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Thank you

The parish council and HNP steering group would like to thank the following for participating:

1. Paul Fleury
2. Stuart Davis
3. John Shakys
4. Eric Dixon
5. Jennifer Dixon
6. Caro Wilson
7. Adam Sutton
8. Nick Litton
9. Martin Cobley
10. Angie Jenkins
11. L Howard Williams
12. Ian Howard Williams
13. Darren White
14. Ed Hunt
15. Hannah Baxter-Smith

and next events:

- Sat 13 July 10-12: Housing & Development + Community, Leisure & Recreation

Jim Boot, Community Planner 3rd July 2019