

Rother Local Plan

Core Strategy

Adopted 29th September 2014



Rother District Council
Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea
TN39 3JX

01424 787000
www.rother.gov.uk

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Scope and Issues

- 12.1 Rother is a district of predominantly rural character, and this chapter addresses those parts of the district that lie beyond the three main towns of Bexhill, Battle and Rye. This 'rural' area contains more than 40% of the district's population and most of its land area. It comprises both villages and intervening countryside, which each have distinct, yet inter-related, issues.
- 12.2 Rother district has a high number of villages and hamlets scattered across the High Weald and coastal belt. However, despite their often picturesque nature, the vitality of villages has tended to be undermined over time by a shortage of affordable housing, high levels of out-commuting, limited access to jobs and services, a decline in community services (particularly local shops) and limited public transport.
- 12.3 The surrounding countryside and undeveloped coast is highly valued for nature conservation, heritage, culture, and as a leisure resource for both residents and visitors. Agriculture has historically formed the core of the rural economy, but this has been challenged during the late twentieth century by changing practices and economies. This has resulted in more recent changes in the way the land is farmed and greater emphasis on environmental land management.
- 12.4 Social and economic change needs to benefit rural communities, to improve quality of life and maintain environmental quality.

Objectives

- 12.5 As outlined in Chapter 6, the Strategic Objective for the Rural Areas is:

'To meet local needs and support vibrant and viable mixed communities in the rural areas, whilst giving particular attention to the social, economic, ecological and intrinsic value of the countryside.'



12 - Rural Areas

12.6 The following objectives further elaborate upon the Strategic Objective:

Rural Areas Objectives:

- i) To emphasise the significant contribution of both villages and countryside to the character and culture of Rother;
- ii) To recognise the individual distinctiveness of villages and to retain and enhance their rich cultural heritage;
- iii) To support sustainable local employment opportunities and the economic viability of rural communities;
- iv) To promote thriving rural communities with a high quality of life, a strong sense of place and broad active civic participation;
- v) To be demographically balanced and socially inclusive, particularly in terms of access to housing;
- vi) To reduce both the need to travel and reliance on the private car, by promoting the use of public transport and supporting viable and accessible services and facilities within villages;
- vii) To ensure rural communities have access to vital social, physical and green infrastructure, and realise ICT potential;
- viii) To protect the open countryside and retain its intrinsic rural character for the benefit of residents and visitors;
- ix) To respect and conserve the historic landscape mosaic, particularly in the High Weald AONB;
- x) To support agriculture and foster other land-based industries;
- xi) To promote environmentally sensitive land management in a way that supports the diversity of natural habitats;
- xii) To support sustainable tourism and recreation, including improved access to the countryside.

12.7 The objectives and policies for the rural areas overlap to a large extent with the objectives and policies of thematic chapters within this Core Strategy. Particular cross reference needs to be made to chapter 14 'Communities' (in terms of health, recreation & communities issues), chapter 15 'Local Housing Needs' (in terms of affordable housing, exception sites) chapter 16 'Economy' (in terms of tourism and the rural economy), chapter 17 'Environment' (in terms of environmental management and habitat protection and enhancement), and chapter 18 'Transport and Accessibility' (in terms of rural transport schemes).

12.8 For ease of presentation, there are separate strategies for the villages and for the countryside, as set out below. When read together these set out the overall strategy framework for the rural areas.

Villages

- 12.9 The publication of Parish Local Action Plans (LAPs), as well as the Council's [Rural Settlements Study Background Paper](#)²³, has provided evidence for the strategy by setting out the settlement patterns, and the social and economic contexts of individual settlements. This emphasis on local priorities has helped shape a distinctive agenda for each place. "Place-shaping" in this way is about promoting attractive, prosperous and vibrant villages where people want to live, work and do business. It is the responsibility of the relevant Councils and all local partners in the public, voluntary and the business sectors. Supporting vibrant and viable local village communities involves identifying and responding to community needs. Affordable housing is a particularly pressing community need in rural areas, but there are also demonstrable needs for improved accessibility, other local community facilities, as well as jobs and business provision.
- 12.10 The strategy has been developed in response to the national policy context, the Core Strategy consultation responses, and further liaison with key stakeholders such as the Parish Councils, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit, East Sussex County Council and the utilities bodies.
- 12.11 The main areas that are considered in villages are the function of settlements, housing, economy, tourism, services/community development, historic environment and accessibility.

Function of Rural Settlements

- 12.12 The Rural Settlements Study (RSS) contains more detailed investigations of the role, function and needs of some fifty rural villages across the district. As part of this exercise, the RSS also defined key 'service centres', as set out in Figure 9.

Rural Service Centres	Robertsbridge
	Ticehurst
Local Service Villages	Burwash
	Hurst Green
	Sedlescombe
	Northiam
	Westfield
	Peasmarsh
	Catsfield

Source: Rural Settlements Study

Figure 9: Rural Function of Settlements

²³ The Rural Settlements Study (RSS) Background Paper investigated and appraised over 40 villages across the District, including all of those with Local Plan defined development boundaries as well as many others. The RSS included all settlements with a population of at least 100, as well as some with smaller populations which benefitted from the presence of a key service. The RSS has helped inform the Core Strategy and define villages in terms of their role, appropriateness of development boundary and need/suitability for development.

12 - Rural Areas

Rural Housing

Overall Quantity of Housing

- 12.13 The district-wide distribution of housing in chapter 7 suggests that the villages should accommodate 1,670 additional dwellings over the period 2011-2028. While much of these dwellings have already been accounted for via existing commitments²⁴ there is a residual requirement for additional allocations for some 800 dwellings 2011-2028 (as set out in Appendix 3).
- 12.14 This level of new housing in the rural areas, which is higher than in earlier versions of the Strategy, responds to the need to maximise opportunities for sustainable growth and the further assessment of the potential sites through the SHLAA Review 2013. This level of growth is supported by the most recent Sustainability Appraisal, which also highlighted the increasing negative impacts of development on the character of both individual villages and of the wider countryside, virtually all of which contributes to the landscape and scenic quality of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Spatial Development Options

- 12.15 In addition to the district-wide spatial distribution options, various spatial distribution options for the villages were identified in the previous version of the Core Strategy (Consultation on Strategy Directions) and further elaborated upon within the Rural Settlements Study Background Paper. Following consultation, the preferred spatial development option for the villages remains 'to primarily focus on the service centres', whilst taking into account other factors. Other factors include local needs, accessibility, environmental factors, local opportunities and whether growth levels are proportionate to settlement size over the course of the plan period. Thus, the service led 'rural function of settlements' (see Figure 9) is not the sole criteria governing the spatial pattern of development. Moreover, a village's role can be fluid over time and some villages may still enjoy a reasonable level of facilities, although falling just outside the criteria to be defined a 'service village.'
- 12.16 The preferred option has been chosen since it is mindful of existing settlement patterns, of where population growth may best be served by a full range of day-to-day businesses and facilities, and where they may in turn benefit economically from increased local market and patronage. It is felt that these factors best support the overall aims and objectives for the rural area.
- 12.17 Potential site opportunities in and around villages have been investigated initially in the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), but it will be the role of the forthcoming Development and Site Allocations Plan and/or Neighbourhood Plans to allocate sites for development. There are limited opportunities for sensitive infilling and redevelopment within development boundaries. New development will need to be sensitive of the need to protect and enhance the distinctive landscape character of the district, particularly the AONB, and should reflect the prevailing landscape quality and character.

²⁴ Including unimplemented planning permissions and Local Plan allocations still considered developable

Phasing

- 12.18 In terms of phasing, it is generally assumed that existing housing allocations (provided they have been demonstrated in the SHLAA and through Housing Monitoring as deliverable) and outstanding permissions will be developed in the earlier phases of the Plan. In villages which have seen higher levels of development in the first few years of the plan period or have existing commitments in the pipeline, any new and additional allocations will normally be phased in the latter part of the plan period to ensure a balanced rate of development. It is considered that this will be beneficial to the social cohesion of existing villages. The Council will also be mindful of the need to demonstrate a '5 year supply' of housing.

Tenure and Mix

- 12.19 As background evidence such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has identified, there is a need for both affordable housing and smaller dwellings in the rural areas. With cross-reference to the Local Housing Needs chapter, these needs will be addressed by the respective requirements in rural areas for 40% affordable housing, and for 30% one or two bed properties. There is also provision for allocations wholly or substantially for affordable housing on small sites and in settlements of particular need.

Rural Economy

- 12.20 Supporting local employment opportunities is a key objective for the rural areas and one that is frequently identified in Parish Local Action Plans (LAPs). Business space serves to support the vitality of rural communities and provide accessible jobs.
- 12.21 The Economy chapter of the Core Strategy outlines a number of policies that are of relevance to all areas of the district and rural areas in particular, such as the need to retain and make effective use of existing employment sites.

Overall Quantum of Employment Floorspace

- 12.22 The occupancy rate of business space in the rural areas is comparatively high. Evidence in the form of an Employment Strategy and Land Review (ELR) suggests the need for new employment floorspace within Rother's rural areas. It is estimated that at least 10,000 sq m additional business floorspace is required in rural localities, preferably within or at least well related to existing village development boundaries.
- 12.23 This is a net requirement and should also take account of the potential loss of some existing business floorspace as a result of recent changes in permitted development rights.

12 - Rural Areas

Type of Employment Floorspace

- 12.24 The evidence shows that small workshops and office units need to be encouraged to support the rural economy. This is most likely to be achieved via sensitive expansion/intensification of existing sites or as part of new mixed use developments. The re-use or re-build of former agricultural buildings collectively provide an important source of business space in the area, and policies in the section on 'Countryside' will continue to facilitate this.

Location of New Employment Floorspace

- 12.25 The Rural Settlements Study contains further evidence on the relative need for employment within individual villages based upon a number of factors including unemployment, economic activity rate, ratio of in:out commuting, economic base and broadband speeds. Villages that appear to have a particular need for employment include the following:

Settlement	
Broad Oak	Peasmarsh
Camber	Robertsbridge
Hurst Green	Sedlescombe
Icklesham Parish	Ticehurst / Flimwell area
Northiam	Westfield

Figure 10: Villages Demonstrating a Particular Need for Employment Floorspace

- 12.26 The search for employment sites in the Development and Site Allocations Plan and/or Neighbourhood Plans will therefore particularly focus on these locations.

Mixed Use, ICT and Home Working

- 12.27 The advent of ICT and new ways of working has significantly helped reduce the potential negative impacts of employment uses upon neighbours and surroundings. High quality ICT / telecommunications and faster broadband speeds have the potential to increasingly mitigate the area's relatively peripheral location by facilitating home working and high-value creative industries. Indeed, the Census indicated very high levels of home working in the district, and the Council could look to further develop this.
- 12.28 Development of employment generating uses will therefore be encouraged alongside housing development on mixed use sites. Encouragement and support of home-working will also help support viable rural economies and is increasingly feasible, particularly within the several villages that enjoy relatively fast broadband, including most of the identified service villages²⁵.

²⁵ As of May 2011, Robertsbridge, Ticehurst, Northiam, Peasmarsh, Hurst Green and Burwash all have broadband speeds in excess of 5Mb per second, the highest of 4 speed categories defined by ESCC.

Rural Tourism

- 12.29 Tourism is an important component of the rural economy and benefits local services. Several Rother villages are popular tourist destinations due to the presence of cultural attractions, such as Bodiam Castle, Batemans at Burwash, the Kent and East Sussex Railway and the medieval town of Winchelsea. The aspiration to further develop the area as a tourist destination was an emergent theme in a number of Parish Local Action Plans. There is further scope to develop business and cultural tourism and “green tourism” particularly in the towns and the High Weald.
- 12.30 The coastal resort of Camber, with its golden sands, has long been a popular tourist destination for people from across the wider region and its summer population swells considerably. The eastern end has also become increasingly popular for extreme sports, particularly kite-surfing. Camber has potential to enhance its tourism offer and expand its role as a modern all year round leisure and tourist destination.
- 12.31 In all locations popular with visitors, there is a need to accommodate and manage tourist facilities and supporting services sensitively, in order to minimise impact upon the AONB, important habitats and wider countryside.

Rural Services and Community Development

- 12.32 Within villages, a decline in community services (particularly local shops) over the last few decades has resulted in ever more limited access for rural residents. The problems are exacerbated by limited public transport resulting in the unsustainable trend of residents driving further afield to services.

Village Shops and Public Houses

- 12.33 Survey evidence²⁶ confirms that residents generally travel to larger towns for their main weekly shopping but that they will typically use smaller village stores for secondary ‘top-up’ shopping. However, a local village shop can be a lifeline for the less mobile and those without access to a car. The lack of shops for day to day purchases is a particular concern amongst rural residents, as is the declining numbers of post offices and public houses. The Council has made proactive efforts to address this via the ‘Rother Village Shop Forum’ and the ‘Village Shops and Post Offices Working Group’. The Local Plan (2011-2028) continues to recognise the vital role of village shops, services and public houses in rural community life and protects them in policy RA1. New development will be prioritised in locations that support key local services.

²⁶ The Rother District Wide Shopping Assessment (2008)

12 - Rural Areas

Open Space, Recreation and Leisure

- 12.34 Many Parish Local Action Plans have identified a need for new leisure facilities, sports facilities and particularly a lack of activities for young people. Open Space needs have been set out in the Open Space, Sport & Recreation Study (2007) which suggests that in rural areas there is a shortage of children's play areas and amenity green space.
- 12.35 In the west of the district's rural areas there is a more localised deficit of outdoor sports facilities and allotments and in the eastern rural parishes a slight shortage of parks and gardens. The study has also produced more localised recommendations for new and improved facilities. These recommendations have been summarised in the Rural Settlements Study as they apply on a village by village basis. The forthcoming Development and Site Allocations Plan and/or Neighbourhood Plans will investigate opportunities to take these recommendations forward. Developer's contributions will be sought alongside development to address identified community needs.

Village Halls and Community Resource Centres/Hubs

- 12.36 Village and community halls also have a pivotal role to play in village community life. Policy continues to ensure their protection and the provision of new, extended or refurbished community/educational facilities in appropriate locations to meet present and expected needs. The need for specific provision of new community halls at Etchingham and Flimwell has already been identified and resulted in land allocations. Peasmarsh Parish, Crowhurst Parish and Ashburnham & Penhurst Parish have also subsequently stated within their Local Action Plans an aspiration to build new village halls.
- 12.37 There are other innovative ways to enhance rural services and community development that may become increasingly important. A handful of 'hubs' or 'information points' have already been established in the district. If fully developed to their maximum potential, hubs have the potential to provide a focus for community activities, with a wide range of services (e.g. photocopying, access to computers and meeting rooms, access to official documents, information about services, etc).

Historic Environment in the Rural Areas

- 12.38 The locally distinctive character of historic villages, buildings and settings will be protected and the design of any new development will be expected to include appropriate response to local context. This is important in villages generally, but particularly Conservation Areas where proposals for development and change will continue to be informed by Conservation Area Appraisals, including the preparation of new appraisals at Burwash, Northiam and Ticehurst. The later section within Chapter 17: Environment, on 'Design Quality and Built Environment' contains more detailed strategies and policies in this respect.

Rural Accessibility

- 12.39 It is recognised that there is considerable local feeling in villages regarding the need to improve public transport. The strategy will seek to facilitate travel by public transport, cycling and walking and acknowledges the adverse impact that traffic can have on rural villages and on the AONB. The service centre based strategy is a key part of this and the Council will continue to work closely with the County Council, bus service providers and the Voluntary Sector. Cross reference is made to Chapter 18: Transport.
- 12.40 The following policy for rural villages sets out how the objectives will be achieved.

Policy RA1: Villages

The needs of the rural villages will be addressed by:

- (i) Protection of the locally distinctive character of villages, historic buildings and settings, with the design of any new development being expected to include appropriate high quality response to local context and landscape;**
- (ii) Encouragement of high quality sustainable economic growth by the identification of sites for local job opportunities, particularly focussing on the villages listed in Figure 10. This may be achieved by sensitive expansion of existing employment sites, or new sites, particularly for small workshops and office units. Opportunities for business development, including home-working, will also be sought alongside new housing as part of mixed-use allocations where appropriate;**
- (iii) Ensuring thriving and viable rural communities, by retention of, and support for, local shops, services and public houses in villages;**
- (iv) Support for community, recreational and educational facilities that provide social and community benefits to villages (including village/ community halls and recreation areas). This may include provision of improvements to existing village halls or new halls, as well as support for further community resource centres / hubs, where appropriate;**
- (v) In order to meet housing needs and ensure the continued vitality of villages, the provision of 1,670 additional dwellings (comprising existing commitments, new allocations and windfalls) in villages over the Plan period 2011 to 2028. This will be located in accordance with Figure 12, subject to refinement in the light of further investigation via the Development and Site Allocations DPD and/or Neighbourhood Plans;**
- (vi) Improved access to basic day-to-day services, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling. In order to facilitate this, new development will be sited in close proximity to key facilities and in locations accessible via a range of transport options.**

12 - Rural Areas

Figure 12: Distribution of Rural Housing Allocations

Base Date: 01/04/13

Settlement/Area See Footnote 1	All Net Completions in Plan Period (01/04/2011 to 31/03/2013)	Current Commitments See Footnote 2	Allocations (Remaining from 2006 Local Plan) See Footnote 3	Potential New Sites See Footnote 4 & 7	Total New Housing 2011 - 2028 See Footnote 5
Robertsbridge	2	6	47 (+1)	100	155
Ticehurst	-10	6	0	87	83
Hurst Green	0	6	0	75	81
Northiam	9	61	0	72	142
Broad Oak	2	19	0	50	71
Peasmarsh	5	4	0	50	59
Netherfield	7	0	0	48	55
Catsfield	7	10	0	47	64
Westfield	24	51	0	40	115
Burwash	-7	22	0	35	50
Sedlescombe	12	29	0	35	76
Etchingham	1	22	0	30	53
Staplecross	2	10	0	25	37
Camber	47	32	0	20	99
Fairlight Cove	2	5	17	20	44
Beckley / Four Oaks	2	18	0	20	40
Crowhurst	1	1	0	20	22
Flimwell	0	1	26 (+2)	17	44
Iden	2	4	0	12	18
Three Oaks	0	8	0	0	8
Winchelsea Beach	0	8	0	0	8
Udimore	0	7	0	0	7
Pett Level	1	4	0	0	5
Pett	3	1	0	0	4
Icklesham	1	3	0	0	4
Brede	2	1	0	0	3
Stonegate	0	2	0	0	2
Woods Corner	0	2	0	0	2
Cackle Street	0	2	0	0	2
Mountfield	0	2	0	0	2
Fairlight	0	2	0	0	2
Whatlington	0	2	0	0	2
Ashburnham	0	1	0	0	1
Dallington	1	0	0	0	1
Bodiam	0	1	0	0	1
Guestling Green	0	1	0	0	1
Brightling	0	1	0	0	1
Ewhurst	0	1	0	0	1
Burwash Common	0	0	0	0	0
Normans Bay	0	0	0	0	0
Burwash Weald	0	0	0	0	0
Friars Hill	0	0	0	0	0
Johns Cross	0	0	0	0	0
Winchelsea	0	0	0	0	0
Rural Exception Sites Allowance See Footnote 6					65
Small Site Windfall Allowance in Years 5-15 (2018-2028)					242
TOTAL	116	356	90	803	1,672

1. Bold Font indicates village had a defined development boundary in the 2006 Local Plan.
2. Includes permissions and applications delegated to approve subject to S106. Full Details of all commitments contained in Part 2 of the SHLAA (page 112)
3. Subject to review and re-assessment as part of SHLAA process. Numbers in brackets indicate any revisions as part of re-assessment. See SHLAA Part 2 for details.
4. Estimated from suitable and developable (green and amber) SHLAA sites. Core Strategy policy expectation that new allocations are within or immediately abutting a village development boundary. See SHLAA Part 2 for details.
5. Individual village number may be higher as a result of additional windfalls and rural exception sites.
6. Rural Exception sites (which by definition are both locally driven by the community, and on sites that would not normally be suitable for housing) are considered separately and in response to a locally specific need. The overall rural area target is derived from the Council's Housing Strategy.
7. Including 50 from 'Broad Location' at Peasmarsh. See SHLAA Part 2 for details.

- 12.41 'Potential new sites' in Figure 12 refers to sites expected to be formally allocated via the Development and Site Allocations Plan or Neighbourhood Plans. These will normally comprise development sites accommodating 6 or more dwellings.
- 12.42 Previously unidentified large sites (6 dwellings and over) in a village gaining planning permission before adoption of the relevant Plan may be deducted from the total 'Potential new sites' that an individual village is expected to achieve, depending on the stage reached and the suitability of other potential sites.
- 12.43 Developments of less than 6 dwellings, on currently unidentified sites, will count towards the overall rural housing numbers total as 'small-site windfalls'; an estimated allowance for them has been included for years 5-15. Therefore, to avoid double counting, they are in addition to the 'Potential new sites' for individual villages.
- 12.44 Affordable housing 'Exception sites' are typically between 6 and 14 dwellings. In common with small site windfalls, they are dealt with in a separate row on Figure 12. Hence, they cannot be deducted from the 'Potential new sites' totals for villages, since to do would entail double counting. The estimated number of 65 dwellings on 'Exception sites' across the rural areas for the plan period is based upon figures derived from the Council's Housing Strategy.

Countryside

- 12.45 As a predominantly rural district, the countryside of Rother district is a defining characteristic. The district's countryside is a productive landscape and the prime function of the countryside is agriculture and the production of food; with some 70% of the area of Rother district being classed as farmed land by DEFRA²⁷. Indeed of the 35,500 farmed hectares in the district, some 60% is grass/pasture, with 25% crops and 10% woodland.
- 12.46 The countryside, including the undeveloped coast, also has high intrinsic amenity value, and is an important resource for nature conservation, leisure and tourism.
- 12.47 The term 'countryside' is used here for those areas outside of villages and includes not only farmland and woodland but also scattered development outside the main confines of villages.
- 12.48 The physical nature of the countryside today reflects both the diverse underlying geology and soils, and the human influences that have taken place upon it over a long period of time, in particular, agricultural practices and communication routes. In the High Weald, the land was traditionally used for mixed farming, pastoral and arable with the woodland being a managed and valued resource, whilst on the low-lying, reclaimed marshes the emphasis was on pasture. Much of the countryside we see today is a legacy from previous uses, resulting in historic landscape patterns which give the area its special qualities and character.

27 Agricultural & Horticultural Survey of England, June 2007, DEFRA

12 - Rural Areas

- 12.49 The importance of Rother district's countryside in terms of its high quality landscape character and high ecological value is described in more detail in the Chapter 17 'Environment'. Indeed, some 82% of the district is designated as part of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Features which contribute positively to the landscape character of the district, in particular of the High Weald AONB, include field patterns, native-species hedgerows and ancient woodland, green lanes, and watercourses, along with the undeveloped coastal character of sandstone cliffs separated by deep glens around Fairlight and Pett, and the low-lying wetland levels leading to drifts of coastal shingle around Pevensey and Rye. Such features should be retained and preserved. 'Environmental Stewardship' is the main current agri-environment scheme, which offers payments to farmers and land managers in England for effective land management to protect and enhance the environment and wildlife.
- 12.50 Approximately 10% of the population of Rother live in the countryside outside of the villages and towns, with only 1.2% of the Rother's population currently being employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing. However, the countryside also provides employment opportunities through rural business units and workshops.
- 12.51 The strategy for the Countryside seeks to balance the many diverse pressures and competing demands on the countryside, whilst ensuring the maintenance of its farming capacity and of its attractive landscape character, to create a living, working countryside.



Policy RA2: General Strategy for the Countryside

The overarching strategy for the Countryside is to:

- (i) Maintain the farming capacity of the district, and support the agricultural industry, including diversification within farming;**
- (ii) Encourage agricultural practices, land-based economic activities and woodland management, and related agri-environmental schemes, that reinforce local distinctiveness, landscape character and ecology;**
- (iii) Strictly limit new development to that which supports local agricultural, economic or tourism needs and maintains or improves the rural character;**
- (iv) Retain traditional historic farm buildings by continued agricultural use or by appropriate re-use, in accordance with Policy RA4;**
- (v) Support rural employment opportunities in keeping with rural character and compatible with maintaining farming capacity;**
- (vi) Support enjoyment of the countryside and coast through improving access and supporting recreational and leisure facilities that cannot reasonably be located within development boundaries, such as equestrian facilities, compatible with the rural character of the area;**
- (vii) Support tourism facilities, including touring caravan and camp sites, which respond to identified local needs and are of a scale and location in keeping with the rural character of the countryside; and**
- (viii) Generally conserving the intrinsic value, locally distinctive rural character, landscape features, built heritage, and the natural and ecological resources of the countryside.**

- 12.52 In applying this policy, it is important that the other parts of the Core Strategy are also referred to, in particular the opening sections of this chapter dealing with the introduction to rural areas and the villages (which deals with key services such as employment areas, ICT & broadband infrastructure, rural tourism, rural communities and services such as village shops, pubs, village halls, recreation & leisure, historic environment and accessibility). Cross-reference also needs to be made to the thematic chapters such as 15. Housing, 16. Economy and 17. Environment. Further consideration is given to development in the countryside, and specifically to the reuse of traditional farm buildings, in the following sections.

12 - Rural Areas

Development in the Countryside

- 12.53 Farming and woodland management are the predominant land uses in the district's countryside. The agricultural land is of mixed quality; mostly grade 3, but with significant areas of higher quality grade 2 towards the east of the district along the Brede Valley and East Guldeford Level.
- 12.54 Agricultural production of food and by-products is a key economic function of the countryside; the support of British farming and sustainable food production is one of the three key priorities set out in DEFRA's Business Plan,²⁸ and a number of national initiatives are in place to support this objective²⁹.
- 12.55 Changes in agricultural practices during the 20th century saw a decline in traditional land and woodland management, with a consequent decline in skills in environmentally sensitive land management. Maintaining and developing such skills, and practices, offers opportunities for local employment and has a vital part to play in maintaining the district's distinct landscape character, especially in the High Weald.
- 12.56 Meanwhile the shift towards more sensitive environmental land management over the previous 10 – 20 years has helped support the farming industry and the conservation of landscape features and ecology. DEFRA's programme of agri-environmental schemes, through a structured programme of payments to farmers, remains an important way of ensuring effective land management to protect and enhance the environment and wildlife in the district.
- 12.57 Modern farming practices often require new agricultural buildings to meet specific needs. To ensure viable farming industries, these will be supported in principle, though whilst the size and mass of such buildings is inevitably dictated by their function, care is still needed in their siting, design and materials, to minimise the visual impact on the landscape character of the countryside.
- 12.58 Development pressures in the countryside arise from a number of demands; agricultural, economic/tourism, recreational, and residential. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
- 12.59 More generally, development in the countryside must have regard to impacts on both landscape character and natural resource management. 'Natural resources' in this context includes biodiversity, water resources, water quality, floodplains, coastline, air quality and minerals.

²⁸ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Business Plan 2011-2015, November 2010

²⁹ including those supported by the Prince's Countryside Fund and the NFU 'Why Farming Matters' campaign

- 12.60 However, changing farming needs and development economics have meant that many former farm buildings, historic and modern, have become available for conversion and re-use. To support the rural economy in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, the policy presumption for such conversions is for uses which contribute to the local farming and rural economy, either by direct employment or by encouraging visitor spend. Such uses include workshops, farm shops or tourist facilities, and other employment uses such as offices. Buildings suitable for conversion should be generally in keeping with the rural character of the area in terms of scale, siting and appearance, be of permanent and substantial construction, and be capable of conversion without major or substantial reconstruction.
- 12.61 Occasionally, the replacement of such buildings for employment uses might be preferable to conversion where this would result in a development which is more acceptable in terms of landscape impact and visual appearance.
- 12.62 The range of activity operating within the district's countryside is wide; including food production, equestrianism, vineyards, horticulture, tourism and leisure, and a broad range of business activities. There is often high interdependency and mutual benefit between these industries. For example, a number of farmers markets and farm shops operate within the district, producing and supplying local foods and associated products. Vineyards, local food markets and plant nurseries help attract tourists into the district, while livery yards also offer rural employment opportunities, and help support wider industries such as vets, animal foodstuffs and also equestrian activities and events.
- 12.63 Tourism and recreation activities, such as holiday caravan and chalet developments, including the current trends for yurts and other forms of camping, equestrian facilities, and other recreational activities such as fishing, can add to the enjoyment and economic vitality of the district's countryside and rural communities, but can also lead to development and land-use pressures. For caravan and camping sites, the emphasis will be on improving the amenities of existing sites to maintain and enhance their tourism value, though consideration will be given to new small-scale provision to respond to modern market expectations, recognising environmental factors.

12 - Rural Areas

- 12.64 To protect the undeveloped and rural landscape of the countryside, new residential development, as for other forms of development in the countryside, must be limited to that which cannot be located in an urban area, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, and which positively contributes to maintaining the landscape heritage and character of the area. In particular, new dwellings may be essential for the proper functioning of land-based businesses (i.e. farming, forestry and equine-related activities). Such businesses should be demonstrably 'financially sound', which normally means that permissions will initially be on a temporary basis. Permanent dwellings will normally require the agricultural unit and activity to have been established for at least three years, have been profitable for at least one of them, be currently financially sound and have a clear prospect of remaining so. Careful consideration should also be given to the siting, size and design, as well as access. The siting of new dwellings should be well-related to existing farm buildings or other dwellings, wherever practicable. To ensure that a dwelling remains available to meet the recognised need, occupancy conditions will be applied.
- 12.65 The approach to the conversion and re-use of traditional historic farm buildings for residential use is discussed in the following section, and in Policy RA4. The conversion to residential use of modern or non-traditional farm buildings (normally considered to be post 1880) or of farm buildings requiring substantial or speculative reconstruction, would not serve to ensure the retention of features of acknowledged historic importance and value in landscape character. Therefore, this would not be an acceptable form of development in the countryside.
- 12.66 Changes to existing dwellings, be they extensions to dwellings, extensions to domestic curtilages into countryside, alterations to previously converted traditional former agricultural dwellings, ancillary works such as fences, walls and gates, or new outbuildings within curtilages, can, cumulatively, have a significant impact on the character of the countryside. It is therefore important to ensure that such proposals do not suburbanise the countryside, compromise the character, integrity or form of distinctive building typologies, nor compromise their contribution to the landscape character.
- 12.67 Similarly, replacement dwellings should not increase the visual prominence of the building in the countryside nor detract from the rural landscape character and local context of the area, and should take every opportunity to improve any existing adverse landscape impact.

Policy RA3: Development in the Countryside

Proposals for development in the countryside will be determined on the basis of:

- (i) **Supporting new agricultural buildings and other non-domestic buildings demonstrably needed to support farming, woodland and other land-based industries that are of appropriate size, siting and design and materials and directly related to the enterprise;³⁰**
- (ii) **Supporting suitable employment and tourism opportunities in the countryside, including by the conversion, for employment use, of farm buildings generally in keeping with the rural character, and by the sensitive, normally small-scale growth of existing business sites and premises;**
- (iii) **Allowing the creation of new dwellings in extremely limited circumstances, including:**
 - (a) **Dwellings to support farming and other land-based industries. Normally, accommodation will initially be provided on a temporary basis for a period of three years. Both temporary and permanent dwellings will be subject to appropriate occupancy conditions, and all applications should comply with the following criteria:**
 - i. **Demonstrate a clearly established functional need, relating to a full-time worker primarily employed in the farming and other land-based businesses;**
 - ii. **Demonstrate the functional need cannot be fulfilled by other existing accommodation in the area;**
 - iii. **Demonstrate the unit and the agricultural activity concerned are financially sound and have a clear prospect of remaining so;**
 - iv. **Dwellings are of appropriate size, siting and design.**
 - (b) **The conversion of traditional historic farm buildings in accordance with Policy RA4;**
 - (c) **The one-to-one replacement of an existing dwelling of similar landscape impact; or**
 - (d) **As a 'rural exception site' to meet an identified local affordable housing need as elaborated upon in Chapter 15 – Local Housing Needs;**

(continued overleaf)

³⁰ Conversion, replacement and extension of existing sites and premises all refer in this sense to buildings generally in keeping with the rural character of the area in terms of scale, siting and appearance, of permanent and substantial construction, and be capable of conversion without major or substantial reconstruction.

12 - Rural Areas

Policy RA3: Development in the Countryside *(continuation)*

- (iv). Ensuring that extensions to existing buildings and their residential curtilages, and other ancillary development such as outbuildings, fences, enclosures, lighting and signage, would maintain and not compromise the character of the countryside and landscape;**
- (v). Ensuring that all development in the countryside is of an appropriate scale, will not adversely impact on the on the landscape character or natural resources of the countryside and, wherever practicable, support sensitive land management.**

Historic Farm Buildings

- 12.68 Rother's countryside has a highly distinctive and important architectural character by way of settlement pattern and building typologies. The historic hamlets and farmsteads of the High Weald create a distinct and picturesque landscape, with the rolling pastureland and small ancient woodlands of the countryside interspersed with the rich clay-tiled roofs of medieval houses, barns and oasts. Building typologies reflect locally distinct historic agricultural practices, for example the distinctive brick roundels of the hop industry's oast-houses, fine timber-framed barns and modest brick cowsheds and outbuildings.
- 12.69 Traditional historic farm buildings are a vital element in defining the distinctive character of the district's countryside, as well as being a valuable economic resource. They have cultural and archaeological value, not just in their fabric, but also their location and setting, to help our understanding of the historical development of farming in the district. Traditional historic farm buildings are generally considered to be those dating from pre 1880, though there may be other pre-war buildings, either late Victorian or Edwardian that are of interest in a farmstead or landscape context and may be worthy of retention.
- 12.70 English Heritage have analysed the character of rural settlement and farming in the South East, and particularly in the High Weald, within which the majority of the district's countryside falls, in their Farmstead Character Statement³¹. This highlights the historic typical small farm sizes, leading to small 'farmsteads' of mostly dispersed cluster plans or loose courtyards, and typically consisting of just the farmhouse, one large multi-purpose barn, and perhaps an oasthouse or a small open-fronted outbuilding.³²
- 12.71 In accordance with English Heritage advice in the document 'Living Buildings in a Living Landscape: finding a future for traditional Farm Buildings', the priority uses for traditional agricultural buildings are to retain such buildings in continued farming-related uses, and secondly to convert for employment uses, including tourism.

31 Historic Farmsteads Preliminary Character Statement: South East Region English Heritage & The Countryside Agency 2006

32 Further research available in 'Farm Buildings of the Weald 1450-1750' David and Barbara Martin Heritage Marketing & Publications Ltd 2006

Scope and Issues

- 16.1 National policies for sustainable economic growth are contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. There is also a strong emphasis on addressing the County's and Rother district's economic weaknesses in the ['Integrated Sustainable Community Strategy for East Sussex'](#).
- 16.2 The economic weaknesses of the district reflect relatively low skill levels and average earnings, especially in the dominant service sectors. Also, the number of VAT-registered firms is relatively small, and has seen only marginal net growth over the last 10 years.
- 16.3 There is a high reliance on jobs outside the district, with net out-commuting of 5,484 workers (in 2011), equivalent to 16.4% of the resident workforce. At the same time, a higher proportion (17.2%) of people work mainly at or from home than in any other district in the County, and also well above the South East average of 11.9%.
- 16.4 Hastings is the centre of the labour market area covering all but the north-western part of the district (which is more oriented towards Tunbridge Wells). It is the main destination of commuting flows. However, it is particularly weak in economic terms; it is identified as one of the twenty the most deprived districts in the country, with relatively low educational achievement and skill levels
- 16.5 Further details of the condition of the local economy, workforce and jobs forecasts, and the demand and supply of employment land are contained in an ['Employment Strategy and Land Review'](#) prepared jointly with Hastings Borough Council. The original 2008 Review was updated in 2011 to take account of more recent economic circumstances and projections. A further review of employment land requirements in the light of the current housing targets was completed in July 2013.
- 16.6 Reference is also made to the new 'Rother Economic Regeneration Strategy 2010-2015' and to the information and analysis contained in the [East Sussex Local Economic Assessment](#). It is also noted that economic development of the wider sub-region is being carried forward by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership, covering East Sussex, Kent and Essex.
- 16.7 This chapter focuses on uses that are central to the economic development⁵⁵ of the district, with specific attention to business, uses⁵⁶, tourism and retailing. More spatially specific policies, including the distribution of retailing, are presented in the relevant spatial chapters, while community uses are considered in chapter 14. The potential for retail growth in each of the towns has been highlighted by 'A Shopping Assessment' undertaken for the Council by GL Hearn.

⁵⁵ Economic development is defined in the NPPF and includes that within the B Use Classes, public and community uses, and main town centre uses but excluding housing development.

⁵⁶ Business uses are those essentially within Class B of the Use Classes Order, including offices, research and development uses, light manufacturing, general industry, warehousing/storage and similar "sui Generis" uses

16 - Economy

- 16.8 Stakeholder meetings have been held with a range of businesses, with specific workshops relating to tourism and land-based industries.⁵⁷

Objectives

- 16.9 Chapter 6 puts forward as a Strategic Objective:

‘To secure sustainable economic growth for existing and future residents and provide greater prosperity and job opportunities for all’

- 16.10 This Strategic Objective is elaborated upon by the following objectives:

Local Housing Needs Objectives:

- i) To raise aspirations and improve educational attainment, where needed
- ii) To increase skill levels
- iii) To expand the business base and overall productivity, to include fostering high growth sectors
- iv) To increase the supply and range of job opportunities across the district, as part achieving a more sustainable pattern of development and activity
- v) To increase local earnings, relative to living costs
- vi) To develop key existing sectors, including tourism
- vii) To realise economic opportunities and mitigate against locational disadvantages

Providing for jobs

- 16.11 The total number of additional jobs estimated as being required over the period 2008-2028 is some 6,300 jobs within the district. This is based on workforce projections with allowances for achieving higher activity rates and a reduction in net out-commuting. While commuting will inevitably continue, and brings wealth into the area, a better balance of homes and jobs locally is regarded as desirable.
- 16.12 Labour demand forecasts suggest that the majority of job growth will be in financial and business services, other (mainly public) services, distribution, hotels and catering, and construction.

⁵⁷ Reports of these are contained in the Core Strategy 'Consultation Statement'

- 16.13 However, these are based on past trends and are not necessarily a true representation of what may happen in the future, particularly given the ongoing regeneration agenda.
- 16.14 In particular, there is considerable regeneration activity centred on Hastings that is expected to continue and have spin-offs for Bexhill and other parts of Rother. It has already had successes in developing important educational, media and eco-industries sectors. Key sectors are considered further below.
- 16.15 The main policy areas relative to these job needs are regarded as being:
- Fostering economic activity and growth
 - Business land and premises
 - Economic activity outside recognised employment sites
 - Support for key sectors
 - Tourism, leisure and culture
 - Retail development

Fostering economic activity and growth

- 16.16 It is clear that the provision of employment land and premises needs to be supported by an equally vital and complementary range of other interventions to succeed. Ensuring a better business environment includes having an appropriately skilled workforce and the necessary infrastructure, especially transport and ICT, as well as business support and training.
- 16.17 Effective utilisation of existing infrastructure and investment in IT infrastructure are vital to help compensate for the area being relatively peripheral.
- 16.18 There is a broad agreement between the key agencies to co-operate in providing businesses with the requisite support for investment and growth. The Council's own role in fostering economic development is set out in its Regeneration Strategy 2010 – 2015.

16 - Economy

Policy EC5: Support for Key Sectors

Particular regard will be given to key sectors, notably “enviro-industries”, engineering, financial and business services and other growth and knowledge-based businesses, and those that are directly related to sensitive land management, as part of the consideration of sites for employment development and determination of planning applications for employment sites.

Tourism

- 16.28 Visitors to Rother contribute significantly to the local economy. In 2009⁵⁸, tourism activity is estimated to have supported a business turnover worth some £262million and the equivalent of nearly 4,500 full time jobs. Visitors come for the area's arts and culture, history and heritage, seaside (notably Camber Sands), literary connections, events, gardens and local crafts/produce.
- 16.29 The vast majority of visits (over 5.2 million) are day trips, although there were still nearly 0.5 million staying trips made in 2009. While many overnight visitors stay with family and friends, there are still demands for both serviced and self-catering accommodation. These demands have been the subject of respective reports by tourism consultants, Hotel Solutions.
- 16.30 There is a renaissance in the UK holiday market, as transport costs, exchange rate pressures, environmental and security concerns put a brake on overseas travel. The south east, with a relatively favourable climate, and proximity to London, could be a major beneficiary of these so-called 'staycations'.
- 16.31 For Rother, a selective approach is proposed, focussing on higher quality markets and those that are related to, and support, the area's high environmental qualities. This is promoted through the '1066 Country' programme.
- 16.32 It is recognised that there can be tensions between tourism and local community life and/or environmental objectives. However, tourism development can often also provide local amenities and improve the range of leisure facilities, thereby integrating such developments into local communities. Environmental concerns may be addressed by careful consideration of the environmental impacts of tourism uses. Hence, the following policy should be read in conjunction with Policy EN1 in respect of landscape, including AONB, impacts and Policy EN5 in respect of nature conservation. Particular regard to the potential impact of tourism and recreational proposals on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites is addressed in paragraph 10.21.

⁵⁸ Source: The Economic Impact of Tourism Rother 2009

Policy EC6: Tourism Activities and Facilities

Proposals relating to tourism activities and facilities will be encouraged where they accord with the following considerations, as appropriate:

- (i) It provides for the enhancement of existing attractions or accommodation to meet customer expectations;**
- (ii) It supports active use along the coast, consistent with environmental and amenity factors;**
- (iii) It develops markets for local produce, particularly that which supports land-based industries and cultural assets;**
- (iv) It does not involve the loss of tourism accommodation, unless there is no prospect of its continued use;**
- (v) It increases the supply of quality serviced and self-catering accommodation;**
- (vi) Appropriate controls are in place that restrict occupancy to that for holiday purposes, whilst not unduly restricting operators from extending their season (subject to visual impact and flood risk considerations, where applicable); and**
- (vii) Compatibility with other Core Strategy policies.**

16.33 There are particular opportunities for suitable proposals for:

- self-catering and serviced accommodation across the district
- existing accommodation to upgrade and enhance their offer
- the expansion of country house and golf hotels
- larger self-catering holiday lets and barn conversions
- replacement of older caravan provision with log cabins/lodges and luxury camping
- both family and boutique hotels, and holiday flats, in Bexhill
- upgraded accommodation and facilities at Camber
- the extension of the Kent and Sussex Steam Railway
- development in support of activity breaks, both on the coast and inland

18 - Transport and Accessibility

Scope and Issues

- 18.1 A sustainable, functional and viable integrated transport system that serves the residents of Rother is crucial to support the economic, social and environmental aspirations of the residents of Rother, as represented in the [East Sussex Sustainable Community Strategy: Pride of Place](#).
- 18.2 The transport strategy is based on deliverable and realistic improvements to the existing transport network, and will be co-ordinated with regeneration efforts to stimulate the economy of Rother's main settlements and surrounding rural hinterlands.
- 18.3 Rother is predominantly rural with three main settlements: Bexhill, Battle and Rye, although nearby Hastings is the centre of the 'travel to work area' for much of Rother district and there are significant movements between the districts.
- 18.4 Figure 18 shows the County's main settlements with main road and rail links. In 2001 it was recorded that there are significant journey to work movements out of East Sussex⁶⁴ and Rother⁶⁵ creating pressure on the district's transport network.

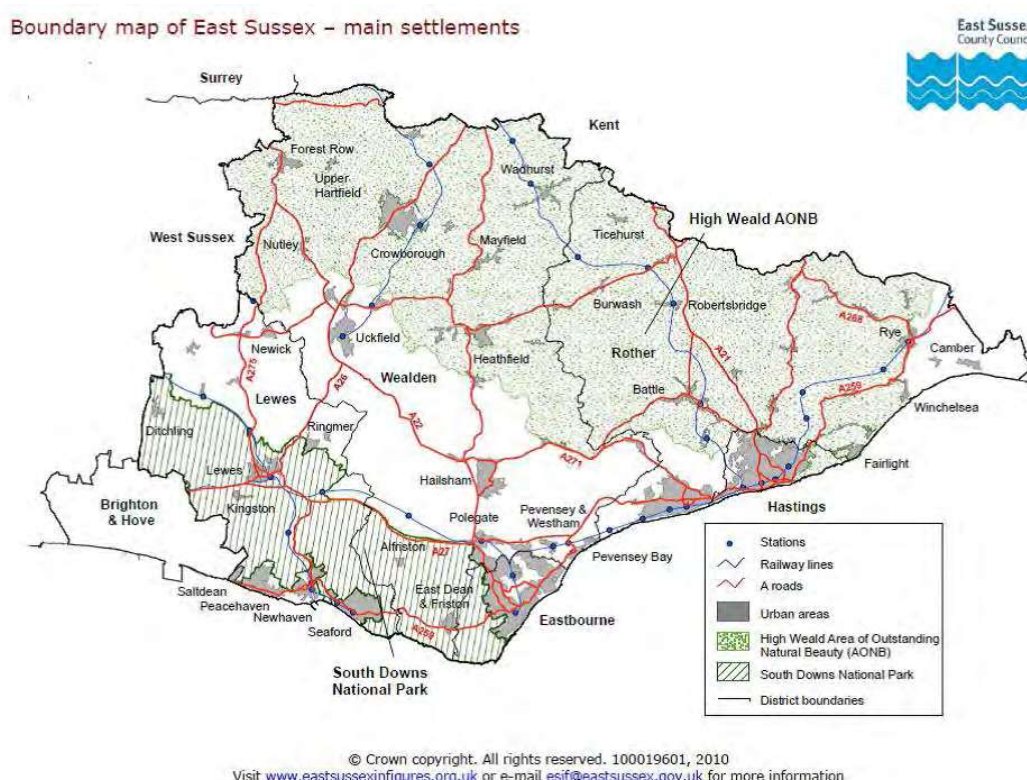


Figure 18: Map showing Main Settlements with Rail and Road Links

⁶⁴ Commuting flows in 2001 showed there was a net flow going out of East Sussex for travel to work purposes (-32,279). Source: ESIF 2010

⁶⁵ Commuting flows in 2001 showed there was a net flow going out of Rother for travel to work purposes (-5824). Source: ESIF 2010

18 - Transport and Accessibility

- 18.5 Population and economic growth will put further strain on transport capacity, and hence on achieving the development potential and desired regeneration of the area. The linkages connecting Rother with the main settlements in East Sussex and the rest of the South East currently offer unreliable and sometimes protracted journey times and are widely regarded as significant impediments to its future regeneration and growth of local businesses⁶⁶. There is also a high level of serious traffic accidents on roads in Rother.
- 18.6 The challenge will be to take a co-ordinated approach to transport, increasing capacity where it is possible, and managing constraints on the main movement arteries across the district.
- 18.7 Hastings and Bexhill need integrated strategies for sustainable regeneration to fulfil their joint role as a significant centre for commercial, industrial and economic activity, as discussed in chapter 7. However, the Six Point Plan⁶⁷ recognises that unlocking the area's full development potential as a business location will not be properly realised without investment in the transport infrastructure.
- 18.8 Critical additional capacity to alleviate congestion along the A259 Trunk Road corridor can be achieved through the completion of the Link Road between Bexhill and Hastings.
- 18.9 The Link Road was granted planning permission in 2009 and has been the subject of a public inquiry into Compulsory Purchase Orders. This scheme received provisional approval, but in June 2010, the Secretary of State announced a suspension of major transport schemes other than those under construction. However, in March 2012, the Department for Transport approved a funding contribution of £56 million, as sought by East Sussex County Council, towards the scheme. DfT announced full funding approval for the Bexhill Hastings Link Road in April 2013. Work has commenced and the road is scheduled to be completed in 2015.
- 18.10 Transport is also a significant issue for some communities in rural Rother. An inadequate public transport system makes it difficult for some communities to reach jobs or shops, or to meet appointments or to visit friends. People on lower incomes are likely to be reliant on public transport to access jobs and services.
- 18.11 The busy market towns of Battle and Rye suffer from congestion during summer months, detracting from the very qualities that make the area attractive to visitors. Many villages and rural areas suffer from heavy, fast-moving traffic volumes on unsuitable roads, making it dangerous to walk or cycle.

⁶⁶ Transport issues can be seen as contributing to the barriers to growth that some East Sussex businesses face. 19% identify journey times as an important constraint on the growth of their business over the next year, with 70% noting that this issue is likely to have "some effect" on their business. Source: Section 5. [The East Sussex Economic Study 2008 – 2009 Nov 2008](#)

⁶⁷ [The Six Point Plan](#) for the regeneration of Hastings and Bexhill (which, together, are home to nearly 130,000 residents) was developed by a special task force (Seaspace) and approved by Government in March 2002. In aiming to provide the catalyst for lasting economic, social and physical regeneration, it presents a ten-year strategy around five main themes: urban renaissance, business and enterprise development, excellence in education, broadband connectivity and transport

18 - Transport and Accessibility

- 18.12 At a countywide level the transport policy framework is currently provided by [Local Transport Plan 3](#)⁶⁸ (LTP3). LTP3 is a statutory document and will guide transport provision in East Sussex up to 2026. At a local level, there are the Local Area Transport Strategies (LATS) for [Battle](#) and for [Rye](#).

Objectives

- 18.13 The Local Plan can contribute towards re-balancing of the transport system through the preparation and implementation of policies that facilitate transport investment, provide for development in accessible locations, and promote sustainable transport choices.
- 18.14 The Strategic Objective for transport in Rother, as set out in chapter 6, is:

To provide a higher level of access to jobs and services for all ages in both urban and rural areas, and improve connectivity with the rest of the region.'

- 18.15 This can be refined in terms of seeking to:

Transport Objectives:

- i) improve connectivity between Rother and the wider South East region, both along the coast and towards London
- ii) achieve a re-balancing of the transport system in favour of sustainable modes as a means of access to employment, health services, recreation and community facilities
- iii) maximise transport choice and otherwise provide for efficient and safe movement, in both urban and rural areas



⁶⁸ Local Transport Plan 3 (adopted June 2011)