

SITE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

DECEMBER 2013

One of the main aspects of the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is the need to consult as widely as possible and this was the underlying approach with regard to the site identification process.

The Wealden Local Plan includes a housing allocation of 50 houses to Maresfield to be built in the period between now and 2027. The NDP Steering Group (SG), with advice from their retained Planning Consultant, statutory consultees and WDC officers, may ultimately identify that the allocation of specific sites for development is the correct approach to be taken when delivering the NDP.

Over the years Wealden District Council (WDC) has had a number of applications by owners of land in Maresfield, to have their land considered for housing development. In 2009 WDC carried out a Strategic Housing and Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) in which each site was assessed for either its suitability or unsuitability for development and WDC issued a short summary of the reasons for its decision.

We are now 4 years on from the SHLAA exercise and some of the reasons for classifying a site as unsuitable for development, such as access, may no longer be valid. The NDP SG considered that all the sites submitted to WDC for assessment should be re-examined along with further sites that have subsequently become available. This decision was guided by advice from its Planning Consultant.

In keeping with this decision the SG invited each of the Landowners to a meeting so that the Landowner could outline any specific plan for development and, where WDC had classified the site in 2009 as unsuitable, put forward the Landowner's view as to how WDC's objections could be overcome.

Some Landowners had a very clear idea of how they would like to see their land developed whereas others had no specific plan but were happy to build what the community wanted.

Notes were kept of each meeting and, in each case, the WG appointed to investigate sites explored whether any additional benefits for the village resulted from the Landowner's plan. Benefits could include a gift of land for

community use, land made available for allotments, additional green space, provision of footpaths and cycle paths, additional parking facilities or land for any other community requirements identified during the consultation process, depending on viability.

A brief summary of the outcome of these meetings is shown separately on this website under the heading of Landowner's Summary.

In tandem with this work an NDP Survey and a Housing Needs Survey were undertaken by Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) and the results of these Surveys will inform the SG as to the actual need for housing in the Parish.

Both the SG and the WGs believe that decisions as to where the houses should be built and the type of housing to be built should be decided by the community at large thereby putting into practice the powers laid down in the Localism Act which came into force in 2011.

However, it is important that the sites are properly assessed by the SG for both deliverability and sustainability and the next stage in the process is to carry out appropriate tests, using information received via the two Surveys, so that only sites where an appropriate level and form of development could realistically take place are presented to the community. A methodology will shortly be worked up, based broadly around Wealden's SHLAA methodology, which will ensure the technical assessment of sites is both objective and appropriate for the parish.

Further reports will be posted on the website in due course.