

Rother Local Plan 2020 – 2040 Consultation

I wish to provide the following response to the consultation.

It is important that any development that takes place is sustainable, supported by suitable infrastructure and protects and wherever possible enhances the local environment. Working with parish councils to ensure planning priorities are supported by local communities is key, and Neighbourhood Plans are central to this.

Whilst it is important that we provide new homes that local people can afford to buy locally, affordability and supply concerns should not override everything else. Similarly, eco-friendly design should not be the sole consideration- beauty and a design code in keeping with existing design elements are also important.

I note that 'delivering district-wide and neighbourhood infrastructure to support growth, and strengthening the sustainability of settlements and communities' are identified as key planning issues. It is essential that the local transport infrastructure and services fully support these ambitions, if they are to be achieved.

I support the Council's vision that future development should support biodiversity wherever possible.

To alleviate flooding risk and support bio-diversity net gain, application assessment, monitoring and planning enforcement are as, if not more, important and require greater resources going forward.

Please find below some specific concerns and issues I want to raise regarding housing, the environment and sustainability, infrastructure and services, stakeholder and community engagement, as well as some final economic considerations.

1. Distribution of Housing

There appears to be a heavy concentration of new housing developments in certain areas, such as Bexhill North, while the Urban environment appears to have a lower housing growth potential. This may lead to overburdened infrastructure and services in certain areas, while others remain underdeveloped.

2. Affordable Housing Provision

The plan sets a target of a percentage affordable housing. I welcome the Plan's commitment to ensure "that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations". However, consider:

Affordable Housing targets: The plan mentions the provision of affordable housing, but specific numbers and how they align with actual need (e.g. population growth) need to be clearer.

Viability and Delivery: The plan allows for financial contributions in lieu of on-site affordable housing under certain circumstances. This could lead to fewer affordable homes being built in practice, as developers might prefer to pay contributions rather than integrate affordable units into their projects.

3. Environmental and Sustainability Concerns

Several allocated sites involve greenfield land, raising concerns about environmental impact and sustainability. As the proposal notes, it may be necessary to develop on some greenfield land to meet targets, however redevelopment of existing brownfield sites should be prioritised.

The importance of local beauty: As stated above, while eco-friendly design is undoubtedly crucial, it should not be the only consideration in our planning process. It is equally important to ensure that new developments adhere to a design code that emphasizes local beauty, aesthetic appeal and harmony with existing architectural elements. This will preserve and enhance the unique character and beauty of our communities.

Impact on Green Spaces and Agricultural Land: Some site allocations may involve the development of greenfield sites. This might conflict with some sustainability goals and local opposition from communities valuing these green spaces. Likewise, it is necessary to make sure that adequate infrastructure, connectivity and services exist for further development in these areas.

4. Infrastructure and Services

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan identifies the need for significant investment in transport, education, health, and utilities to support the new housing developments.

There may be insufficient planning for the necessary infrastructure (e.g., roads, public transport, schools, healthcare) to support the new housing developments, particularly in areas seeing significant growth. The Plan acknowledges the needs of older people and individuals with disabilities, so the link between housing and infrastructure provision in local development need close attention.

5. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The document acknowledges the need for ongoing consultation with local communities and stakeholders to refine site allocations and development plans. However:

Expanding community Involvement: The process of site allocation may not always have met community expectations of involving local communities and stakeholders, leading to decisions that do not fully reflect local needs and priorities. It would be ideal for the proposal to outline the specifics of how consultations regarding new housing will be carried out to maximise the input of local communities.

Transparency and Justification of Choices: The criteria and rationale for selecting specific sites over others may not be clear to local communities, leading to potential criticisms of bias or insufficient justification. This may cause undue concern in local areas, where residents may feel they are excluded from decision making but have the most impact.

6. Economic Considerations

Economic Viability and Job Creation: While the plan includes employment floorspace, it is crucial to ensure that these developments will genuinely lead to job creation and economic benefits for the local population. There should be a clear link between housing growth and employment opportunities. The housing strategy could detail the steps taken to improve employment opportunities in local areas; which would mean residents have shorter commutes and thus less strain on the transport network.

I also welcome the Plan's support for diversification of traditional rural businesses as basis for development in our countryside and planning aims.

Finally, consideration should be given to further ensuring a diversity of employment types are supported e.g., higher skilled/technical opportunities as part of this.

These points highlight potential areas for further scrutiny and discussion to ensure the local plan is comprehensive, balanced, and meets the needs of all community members effectively.