

East Grinstead Community Partnership Meeting 18th February 2008

Regarding Mid Sussex Core Strategy

Attendees

Bobby Hamilton Chairman, EGCP
Heidi Brunsdon EGTC / MSDC
Alan Lord Vice-Chairman EGCP, Age Concern
Dale Bulbrook EG Chamber of Commerce
Paul Johnson EGTC
John Bridle EG Society
Diane Quelch-Varley local business Charlwoods Industrial Estate
Roger and Margaret Martell, local business
Carol Everest local business & EGBA
Russell Shenton local business and EGBA
Andrew Brock EGCP, EGTC, MSDC
Chris Parker local business & EGBA
Christine Hardisty EGCP
Steve Tilbury MSDC
Claire Tester MSDC

(NB Responses to the Core Strategy can be made on-line at the MSDC website www.midsussex.gov.uk - follow the links fro the Core Strategy Consultation or go direct to www.midsussex.gov.uk/corestrategy and then the link to the on-line form)

BH welcomed everyone and introduced the agenda for the evening.

ST & CT gave a presentation on the Mid Sussex Core Strategy (slides attached).

HB said that she was pleased about the proposed infrastructure audit, which she had not known was to be carried out. She said that the Town Council demanded that the Core Strategy provide a better way forward. She was at the meeting to listen to the group's views so they could inform the Town Council's response. A public meeting was planned for 28th February at 8pm at the Meridian Hall. The Town Council considers that the Core Strategy fails East Grinstead because it does not provide a holistic view of the town's needs, is not based on robust evidence, and does not address the underlying issues such as traffic congestion. It is particularly disappointed by the inclusion of the 1,500 home contingency proposal. There also needs to be an employment evidence base specific to East Grinstead. However, the Town Council commits to working constructively with the District Council and the business community to improve the Core Strategy. A Three Tiers Group will be set up, including community partners, to ensure that it achieves the aspirations of the town. At the moment it is too generic and dismissive of the issues for East Grinstead.

ST said he welcomed and shared the Town Council's wish to work together constructively and that every effort would be made to follow this approach as the Core Strategy is progressed over the coming months.

AL pointed out that the Queen Victoria Hospital was looking to expand, including extra staff, and that this should be taken into account in the employment evidence. There was also the potential to locate a medical centre for the town on the hospital site. Businesses need traffic relief, and junction improvements are not enough. The relief road is needed, but it should not transfer the problem to Forest Row. Half the

job with half the houses was not acceptable. He commented that even if the proposed houses were not built in EG, traffic relief was needed.

HB asked if a business audit had been conducted. HB asked how we could encourage new businesses to locate onto allocated employment land, and what types of businesses would they be?

ST said the Employment Land Review had involved the consultants talking to local businesses. They identified a desire for existing businesses to stay in East Grinstead, and new ones to locate there. However the environment needs to be right for them. The infrastructure audit would flag up the issues.

HB queried why the Core Strategy consultation was being done now when the Employment Land Review is out of date.

ST said the Employment Land Review is not out of date, the main report was published in 2005, and it was extended to 2026 in 2007. This is the first stage of public consultation, and provides an opportunity for the community to air issues so MSDC can judge whether further evidence is needed. The Council particularly wanted to hear the views of the business community, which had not always been forthcoming in the past.

JB agreed with HB, and confirmed that the East Grinstead Society wished to see quality development. He asked:

- Whether the figures in the Peter Brett report showing the impact on individual roads would be included in the Core Strategy? The Peter Brett figures suggested that the 1st option would lead to an increase in traffic.
- Whether the windfall figures would be taken account of in transport evidence?
- Whether MSDC would be providing any incentives to businesses to locate in East Grinstead?

ST responded that MSDC had in the past carried out promotional work for all three towns as locations to do business as part of its wider role in economic development. However, that role had since diminished and this type of activity is not currently being undertaken.

Several in attendance made detailed comments regarding highway issues, the findings of the various transport studies etc. While noting the concerns expressed, ST and CT acknowledged that they are not sufficiently expert in such issues, and it would be necessary to look into this aspect further.

CT confirmed that a Mid Sussex Strategic Transport Study had just been commissioned, and that windfall figures would be taken into account by the consultants even though these couldn't be planned for in the first 10 years of the Core Strategy plan period.

HB felt that MSDC was expecting people to comment on the 2,500 home scheme and the 1,500 home scheme with no information about the traffic implications. She referred to the recent position statement, and the doubt this cast on the deliverability of the full scheme. She also referred to the possibility of locating the development at Crabbet Park, near Crawley. She pointed out that the provision of the relief road was linked to housing.

AL said that the relief road was fundamental to the future of EG and was need now, regardless of any future housing development.

CT said that the town needed to consider the implications of not taking development, and the Crabbet Park option would not bring any infrastructure benefits to East Grinstead.

RM stated that if the town doesn't grow it would die. The relief road had been discussed since 1929, and we should just get on with it. Forest Row wants the scheme to fail. Businesses need the extra population, additional business growth and the relief road. Business success is currently jeopardised by the continual fudging of the issue. Small shops cannot justify the high rents, are struggling and will close without action being taken to achieve growth. Businesses prefer freehold interests. The congestion in the town is dreadful and the relief road is needed. It won't happen unless it is paid for by developers.

HB said the transport studies condemn the proposals, and there is no point having the development if the infrastructure is not available and it doesn't reduce congestion.

RM preferred the relief road option that extends to the Dukes Head / West Park Road, although a partial relief road would be better than none. If it forces traffic into Forest Row then East Sussex will have to bypass it. The Doves Barn proposal won't work- no-one will use it and it will not pick up existing rat-running traffic. Thornfields think they can get 90% of residents shopping in the town. This is unachievable, but it could be improved. However, it needs the population growth to attract the retail multiples. East Grinstead has always resisted development, and the newest residents resist the hardest. Business is jeopardised by fudging of the issues.

CP was appalled by the difficulty he found in understanding where MSDC was coming from. There was no vision for businesses, no target for expansion and no strategy to achieve it. There needed to be a coherent vision as to the types of businesses wanted. There was the same problem with the traffic issues – the traffic figures needed to form part of the discussion.

ST explained that the recent Employment Land Review clearly sets out the basis for the amount and location of future business growth and it is not correct that there is no evidence base for this issue. However, he agreed that perhaps the vision with regard to employment growth needs to be more clearly spelt out. MSDC has an Economic Strategy, but it is now 5 years old and there are no current plans to update it. The Employment Land Review contains information about the types of businesses needed, but this needs to be distilled into a vision in the Core Strategy.

HB said that there was no confidence that the Core Strategy would work.

There was a general view that the issue of the impasse with East Sussex over the route of the relief road should be taken to Westminster. CT and ST explained that the District Council had already sought the involvement of GOSE, the DfT and others to seek a solution. The position of Wealden DC would have to evolve in future as the Mid Sussex plans and their own Core Strategy progress in the future, in the way that Tandridge's position has altered over time.

BH referred to the educational strategy that seeks to ensure that Imberhorne and Sackville Schools progress or grow at around the same rate rather than one jumping ahead.

AL feels that section 106 money needs to come to the area as some has been returned to developers because it wasn't spent in time. It also needs to come to the area where the development takes place.

AB pointed out that the Structure Plan did contain a strategy, and that the East Grinstead Action Plan contained a vision for the town, which is paraphrased in the Core Strategy. The AAP is only an action plan for the strategic development, not the whole town. The Core Strategy proposes a second best plan for East Grinstead and does not get anywhere near delivering what is needed in EG. In fact, there is not a proper plan for EG.

RM said that businesses will move to Crawley if the development goes to Crabbet Park.

JB said that fuller figures on traffic congestion needed to be in the Core Strategy.

AL thought that including a contingency meant that there would be less effort put into achieving the 2,500 home development.

BH referred to the possibility of a link from the A264 to Imberhorne Lane and thence to Wych Cross, and thought that the environmental impacts of road options had not been mentioned. He thought that GOSE should be involved in the cross boundary issues. He also said that the environment is not mentioned in the paper, and only GOSE can take up issues relating to the environment.

CT said that GOSE had been very active in trying to resolve cross boundary issues, and that the modifications to the South East Plan may help, as East Sussex is not obliged to conform to the West Sussex Structure Plan, but will have to abide by the provisions of the South East Plan.

HB referred to Wealden DC's Core Strategy being behind Mid Sussex's, which meant that they were not under pressure from GOSE to be in conformity with the South East Plan. This meant that the AAP can't be delivered for 3 years, and this also affects the soundness of the Core Strategy. She questioned whether this was the right time for the consultation.

AB felt that there was not a satisfactory contingency for East Grinstead, and the group should just say that.

HB said that MSDC cannot have a Core Strategy that cannot be delivered.

ST agreed that deliverability was a key issue and the Core Strategy needed to show how it would address difficulties in delivering strategic sites.

CP felt that housing should relate to new jobs and be justified on that basis. If there are not jobs available in the area then perhaps the houses should be moved elsewhere.

ST said that the Employment Land Review did show a match between the new homes, the amount of new employees they would house and the amount of new jobs to be created.

RS queried the type of new businesses. Phase 3 of the Birches was occupied by big sheds with low employment. These are favoured by commercial agents because they pay high rents and don't mind the transport difficulties because of low levels of movement. There are no small units and nothing to encourage small businesses.

ST said that planning can influence the size of units, but not who occupies them. The authorities most successful at encouraging new businesses are those who have some involvement in the development sites themselves, but this demands significant resources. Left to the market the big users will tend to prevail at the expense of the smaller units. The AAP mentions the need for a mix of units as does the Core Strategy.

BH asked JB what the East Grinstead Society thought about the amount of affordable housing proposed.

JB didn't think that this was an issue.

CP thought that the Core Strategy needed a compelling business strategy.

ST suggested that the group should say what this strategy should be. It should look at places like Burgess Hill and see what they offered that East Grinstead didn't.

CP thought that East Grinstead would want to do it their way.

BH asked whether the rail companies had been consulted.

HB said that Thames were intending to increase capacity.

ST confirmed that contact had been made with all utility operators, but that the rail companies were notoriously slow to respond.

DB agreed with CP's comments.

PJ referred to LOC1 without the appendices, not what was wanted. Development should be in Crawley / Gatwick.

DQV was desperately seeking premises in East Grinstead for 40 office staff. She said that if premises did not become available she would have to move out of EG.

BH asked her to write to the Partnership as this was important evidence.

ST referred to the Commercial Property Register of vacant premises, and emphasised that MSDC needed the business community to talk to them as they were traditionally a 'hard to reach' group.

RS referred to the need for the Birches to have its own feeder road from the north (Cophorne Road) to avoid congesting the Imberhorne junction, and stop competition with the school.

HB pointed out that there were cross-boundary issues because this would mean going into Surrey.

ST agreed that Surrey CC had been very resistant to any proposals to increase traffic onto Copthorne Road. WSCC were happy that the existing access on to Imberhorne Lane could accommodate the traffic from the business estate.

CH asked for more details of the Infrastructure Audit.

ST said it would start very soon, and would involve wide consultation. It was likely to be led by Ian Moody and Ed Lancaster and would cover what is there now, identify the gaps and assess the need for provision to meet future needs.

BH pointed out that the schools have to produce a 'deficiencies report' every year. (Since clarified that this is the building bulletin of which details can be obtained from Peter Proudley of WSCC).

HB said that the Town Council is looking for the Partnership groups to provide them with information to feed into their response as well as making their own representations.

BH asked ST and CT to feed back with outstanding issues on background figures, and where answers had been sketchy.

ST said that this would be done where answers were available, and asked that the group identify where there were gaps in the evidence.