

Neighbourhood Planning Policy Workshop (Countryside) 26th November 2012

There were 11 attendees at the workshop.

These notes comprise 3 parts

1. Overall post-meeting summary
2. Transcribed Post-It notes
3. Notes from meeting discussion after PostIt workshop

1. Overall Post Meeting Summary

Many useful details of different aspects of our surrounding countryside were collected through the PostIt note exercise which will be useful as we later flesh-out the plan.

Two key points were highlighted in the discussion – see details in Section 3....

- a. The future risks in terms of lost food-production capable farm land in the vicinity to poorly or inappropriately managed extended garden or “buffer” areas around properties in the countryside. The same message applies to woodlands which would have been managed for a fuel crop traditionally and as a wildlife habitat.
- b. The importance of retaining employment opportunities and locations but the preference for appropriate types of businesses to use them – ie related to the land / woodland / countryside

2. Post-It Notes transcribed

Attendees added PostIts with “pluses” and “minuses” under various Countryside topics as follows...

Footpaths/Bridleways

Pluses

Great area for walking

Good number of footpaths

Connecting villages to adjacent settlements

A good range available

Lots of walks where there are no official footpaths ie The woods

Vistas opening up – variety / sense of space

Minuses

Not enough bridleways that go anywhere

Some could be made cycleable not currently usable as safe cycle routes

Bridlepaths – There are almost none in the Parish

Bridleways should be made up and not allowed to become areas where horses are unable to walk

Barriers erected to deter access

Tightly enclosed footpaths

Footpaths kept unenclosed where possible

New fences to allow only small path width

4x4 spoiling paths through the woods

Need wellies

Footpaths – can be very slippery & muddy – a feature of High Weald

Badly drained sections of paths make passage difficult

Footpaths – Finche Field footpath wet and bumpy. To sandy lane wet and leafy

Deep mud on footpaths eg Gravetye Woods across to Chiddingly

Lack of linking footpaths across roads

Incomplete/inconvenient network eg Highbrook-WH

Lanes/Lanescapes

Pluses

Overhanging trees on the lanes

Forest feel to many of our lanes

Lanes retain their rural informal style

Country Lanes

Natural location for roads on ridgeways with good views due to historic unmetalled roads

Lanes without pavements

Tunnel-like tree canopy over lanes in cuttings

Narrow cuttings- steep banks

Lined with trees and hedgerows / colours in Spring and autumn / “tunnels”

Informal edges – no manicured | “lawns”

Simple, reasonably sized gateways

No yellow lines

Minuses

Sides of lanes spoilt by lorries

Too much traffic

Too much traffic destroying edges of lanes

Roads / lanes are being widened by wider vehicles passing eg Hook Lane, Hammingden Lane, The Hollow with no obvious Highways policy

Increased traffic volume esp large vehicles

Too much speeding traffic not allowing safe walking / cycling / horse-riding

High close-boarded fences and gates (and cypressus hedges)

Straightening for “road safety” – speed increase

Poor passing places

Used at “rat-runs”. Bus stops in wrong places

Biodiversity / Wildlife

Pluses

Deer – great to see

Deer, foxes, badgers

Sights of deer, badgers, squirrels etc

Can hear and see range of wildlife

Wildlife – sight / presence/markers(?) / sounds

Variety of birdlife

Reasonably good mixture of habitats

The deer, particularly, are a feature of this area. However, they are threatened by a few people (NOT farmers) who feel they are a damaging or destructive force.

Minuses

Deer – need culling

Deer over-population (destroy hedgerows)

Moles on unused farmland

Landscape – Fields / Woods/Ponds/Streams

Pluses

Field pattern varied

Visible landscapes

Lone / groups of trees in fields

Good mixture of woodland / forest and fields

Informal woodland areas

Lots of lovely woods

Fungi-rich woods

Free-running streams in vallies

Ponds / streams very distinctive features

Ponds should be allowed to become natural not dominated by field pollution (nutrients)

Good streams through woods

Hedgerows

Vistas

Farming

Minuses

Fields -> "Parkland"

Woodlands managed for shooting at the expense of woodland management for wildlife/timber/coppice

Woodland that used to coppiced is no longer

Landscape not cared for as in past times. Hedgelaying, coppicing, ditching not carried out, neglect

Road drains / winter flooding – trapped in Parish!

Keeping hedges "see-able-over"

Tree growing up and blocking views – Finche field North and South)

Lot of woodland inaccessible

Ponds – not natural features but manmade & need to be maintained

Poor maintenance of ponds loses valuable amenity

Ponds / streams not accessible

Sensory Experience

Pluses

Smells of wild garlic by streams

Sounds of Bluebell Railway

Bluebell railway sounds and smells

Bluebell railways. Deer calling in October. Bird song. Church bells

No artificial light

No light pollution

Fresh Air

Minuses

Gatwick flight path noise + do we know if we are "fuel dumped"

Gatwick flight path + fuel dumping by planes

Lights along driveways

Too many security lights

Speeding, noisy motorcycles and cars

Traffic noise. Dogs barking

Background noise on B2028? M23?

Noise from traffic through Sharpthorne

Sewage works smell if wind in wrong direction

Fewer animals in fields, less farming activity. More traffic

Leisure businesses – loud activities 4x4s, motorcross

More shooting than there used to be

Private helicopters (noise)

Development in the Countryside

Pluses

Appropriate leisure businesses within the parish in the countryside

Plawhatch Farm's steady evolution

More families

Minuses

Threat of Fracking

Unknown future of claypits / brickworks

What will happen to brickworks site?

Less huge homes

Little to encourage local food growing for local consumption ie to enable smaller growers

Land owners of big houses no longer keeping animals or caring for land

Dairy farmers no longer here – less animals

Empty homes in WH owned by someone

3. Notes from meeting discussion after PostIt workshop

Concern about loss of farmland

Can new small holding be encouraged perhaps with landowners renting them out or small co-operatives setting up?

Concern that people are buying properties with land and only want to use the land as a “buffer” between their property and other properties. However they do not know how to manage the land properly.

Issues with local farm and woodland management

Redundant farm buildings - would wish to encourage re-use as smallholdings or for use in rural activities not for industrial/residential use.

The countryside round the parish is farmed therefore want to safeguard farm land for future farming use

Employment opportunities

Don't want to see any further industrial use. Differentiate between rural businesses (which could be within countryside) and office use (which should be in the settlements or home offices).

Commercial developments should be appropriate to what happens in the countryside.

Tourist lets. Agreed this should be encouraged but not to be kept empty for large proportion of the year. Aware of new developments elsewhere with well-appointed lodges to be let all year round. This type of initiative could be appropriate here.

Highbrook Woodyard – appropriate use

Countryside locations needing focus/policy

Finche Field

Gravetye Woods

Selsfield Common

Bluebell Railway

Hook Lane Cricket ground plus woods and land below

Brook House Cricket Ground

Highbrook Old Playground

Land behind Sharpthorne Club

Brickworks

Philpots Quarry

Rabbit Field opposite Finche Field by toposcope

Note: there are within the parish privately owned pieces of land with public amenity value – a policy is needed to recognise and retain these (Rabbit field, Ashurst Woods, land below Hook Lane cricket ground)

Note: there are areas within the parish used for sport and recreational purposes that need to be retained for these purposes (Hook Lane Cricket Ground, Brook House cricket ground, Highbrook playground, etc.)