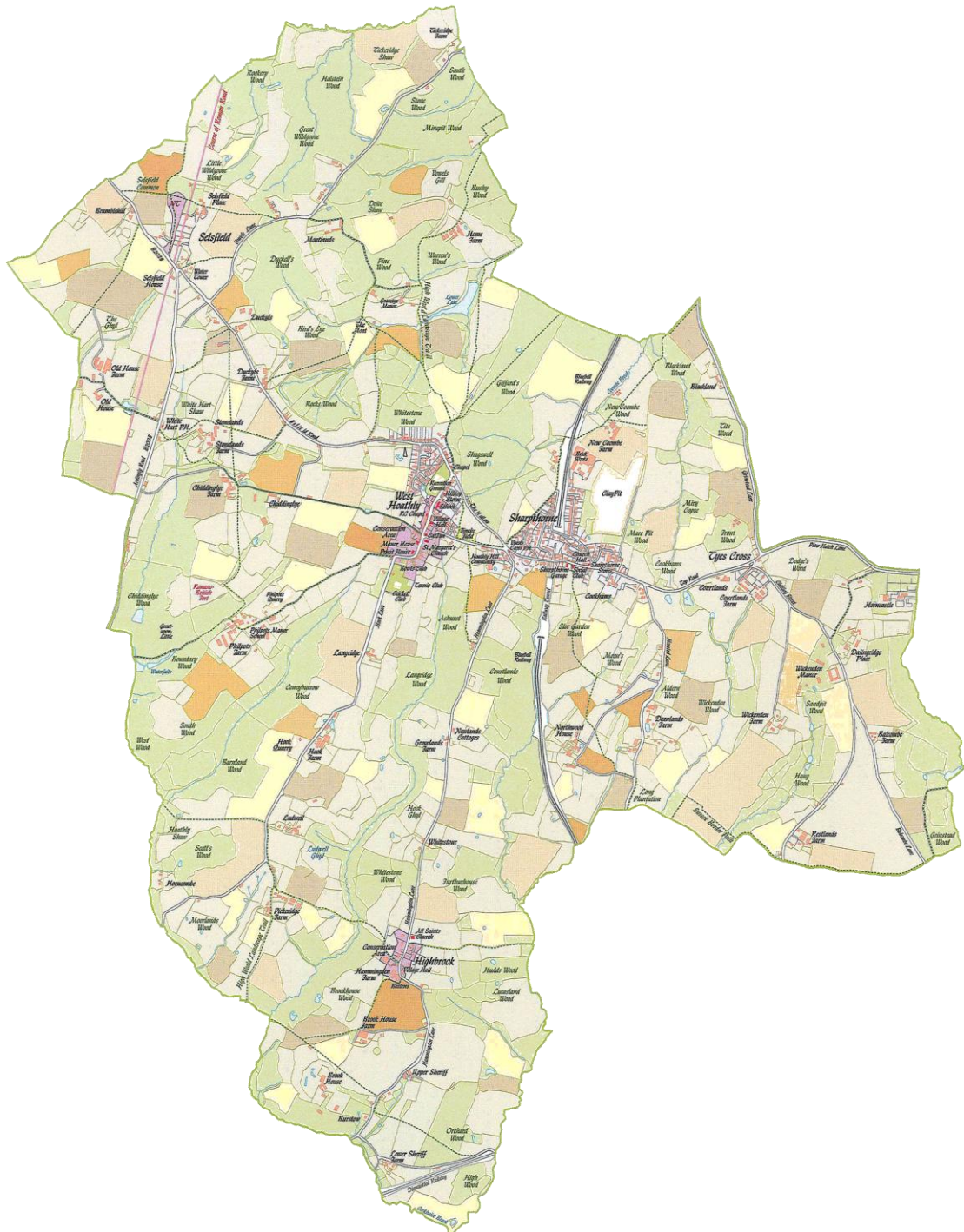


West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan

Consultation Statement



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Introduction

This Consultation Statement has been prepared to fulfil the legal obligations of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012. Section 15(2) of Part 5 of the Regulations sets out that a Consultation Statement should:

- (a) Contain details of the persons and bodies who were consulted about the proposed Neighbourhood Plan;
- (b) Explain how they were consulted;
- (c) Summarise the main issues and concerns raised by the persons consulted;
- (d) Describe how these issues and concerns have been considered and, where relevant, addressed in the proposed Neighbourhood Plan.

The aims of the West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan consultation process were to:

- Consult about the issues and challenges faced by the parish of West Hoathly and consider a vision for the parish in the next 20 years so that the Plan was informed by the views of local people from the start of the process
- Gain information from as wide a number of people as possible to inform the identification of policies
- Engage with as wide a range of people as possible, using a variety of events and communication techniques
- Ensure that consultation events took place at critical points in the process
- Ensure that information was fed back to local people and available to read (in both hard copy and via the community website) as soon as possible after the consultation events

The following events took place during the Neighbourhood Planning process:

- Background to Neighbourhood Plans
 - An initial open information session in February 2012 at the very start of the process
- Identification of Parish Issues
 - A series of workshops during February and March 2012 looking at the Issues and Challenges facing the parish and a Vision for 2030
 - Parish wide consultation on the Issues, Challenges and Vision during April 2012
- Fact Finding
 - Call for Sites during June 2012 and July 2012
 - Housing Needs Survey during June 2012 and July 2012
- Objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan
 - Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consulted on for 5 weeks from 1st July 2012
- Proposed policies
 - Workshops to start outlining draft policies during October and November 2012
- Draft Plan Initial Consultation
 - Consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan April 22nd 2013 – June 3rd 2013
 - Draft Neighbourhood Plan Feedback Sessions – 22nd June 2013 and 27th July 2013
 - Sharpthorne Community Action Group meeting – October 19th 2013
- 2nd Fact Finding
 - Call for Sites II exercise November 2013
 - Taskforce Review of Housing Requirements – December 2nd 2013
 - Taskforce Meeting re format of landowner meeting and exhibitions 7th January 2014
 - Call for Sites II Landowner meeting and exhibitions – February 3rd, 5th, 6th and 8th 2014.

- Review of Housing policies
 - Taskforce meeting to consider WHP13: Sites for New Homes policy March 6th 2014.
 - Taskforce meeting to agree sustainability criteria for site assessment March 25th 2014.
 - Taskforce meeting to agree sites assessments against sustainability criteria April 25th 2014.
 - Discussions with landowners following site assessments May 1st 2014
 - Parish Council meeting to agree site assessments May 7th 2014
- Consultation on second Draft Plan
 - Consultation on second draft Neighbourhood Plan May 2nd June 2014 – July 14th 2014
 - Drop in Sessions to discuss plans June 4th, 5th and 7th June 2014

This Consultation Statement provides an overview of each of the above stages of consultation in accordance with Section 15(2) of Part 5 of the Regulations. Full details are provided in the reports that support the Consultation Statement.

The Parish of West Hoathly has approximately 800 households with a population of just over 2,000.

Throughout the Neighbourhood Planning Process extensive use was made of the following means of communication within the parish:

- **“The Chronicle”**: the bi-monthly parish magazine which is distributed to 580 households. Since October 2011 (to June 2014) there have been 15 articles on the Parish Council page in “The Chronicle” relating to the Neighbourhood Plan and 3 editions have included full pages dedicated to the Neighbourhood Plan.
- **“The HoathlyHub”**: the local community website.

All items posted on the HoathlyHub are also added to the HoathlyHub Facebook page and Twitter account. Each week items posted on the HoathlyHub are combined and sent in an emailed newsletter to all subscribers. There are over 600 local residents who are registered with the HoathlyHub. Since February 2012 (until June 2014) there have been 43 articles on the HoathlyHub relating to the Neighbourhood Plan. There have also been 3 “Speak Out” items (items which allow registered users to add their comments about a specific topic) set up to heighten awareness of the Neighbourhood Plan and gather information.

- **The West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan (OurPlan)** has its own dedicated website <http://www.hoathlyhub.info/NeighbourhoodPlan/index.php> where all information and materials relating to the plan are available including texts and dates of all Neighbourhood Plan articles posted on the HoathlyHub or printed in The Chronicle.

Background to Neighbourhood Plan and Identification of Parish Issues

1. Initial open information session in February 2012

This was the first public event for the Neighbourhood Plan. The aim was to introduce and explain what a Neighbourhood Plan was and to explain why it was important for the parish to produce one. The meeting was attended by Claire Tester, Head of Economic Promotion and Planning, Mid Sussex District Council.

The session was promoted via an information piece and an open invitation to the meeting in “The Chronicle” and an item on “The HoathlyHub” as well as through the use of posters on local noticeboards.

This initial session was attended by 17 people.

2. Issues, Challenges and Vision for the Parish.

There were 3 workshops focusing on the issues, challenges and vision for the parish which took place in February and March 2012.

The first considered the issues and challenges facing the parish under key headings. The second considered how the parish might be in 2030 with a final workshop reviewing the output from the 2 previous workshops.

The first 2 workshops were promoted through “The HoathlyHub”, by posters on noticeboards and flyers distributed via the local primary school’s “book bag” system for sending information to parents.

The workshops were attended by 23 people (issues and challenges) and 11 people (vision workshop). The workshops were facilitated by a local resident with experience in this area.

Attendees used post-it notes to add their ideas to a number of key headings. General discussion then took place around the main topics raised.

The Issues and Challenges workshop looked at the following main categories:

- Sense of Belonging
- Crime
- Facilities for Young People/Children
- Housing
- Other Matters
- Shopping
- Facilities for Elderly People
- Roads & Pedestrians
- Public Transport

The Vision workshop looked at how the parish might be in 2030 using the following categories:

- Countryside & Environment
- Heritage
- Public Transport
- Commercial Services
- Education
- Medical Services
- Community
- Villages & Settlements
- Homes
- Roads & Traffic
- Employment
- Leisure & Culture
- Security/Crime

A final workshop, attended by 11 people, looked at the output from the previous 2 workshops and pulled it together into a form that provided the basis for a parish wide consultation.

A questionnaire booklet was prepared and distributed to all households in the parish and an initial public consultation ran during April 2012. Residents were asked to rate statements based on the Issues, Challenges and Vision as either Essential, Very Important, Quite Important, Not at All Important or Not Sure/Undecided. Opportunity was provided for respondents to add any comments of their own.

The questionnaire booklet was hand delivered to every household in the parish and residents were encouraged to respond on-line or fill in and return the hard copy booklet to the Parish Council Office, the local café or the local shop.

Responses were received from 241 people (equating to responses from about one quarter of parish households) with 710 individual comments.

All comments were reviewed and considered. Feedback on the responses was provided in The Chronicle (dedicated Neighbourhood Plan page), on the HoathlyHub website and on the [OurPlan](#) website via Documents and Links.

Neighbourhood Plan Objectives

3. Sustainability Scoping Document

Following advice from Mid Sussex District Council that a Strategic Environmental Assessment should be undertaken and that there is value in demonstrating the impact of the Neighbourhood Plan on social and economic factors as well as environmental ones it was decided to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal incorporating the required Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The Sustainability Scoping document was issued for a 6 week consultation period from the beginning of August 2012.

The document was sent to the following statutory consultees:

- English Heritage
- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Mid Sussex District Council

And also the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Scoping report was made available on the HoathlyHub website with local residents invited to send comments to the Parish Clerk. It was also sent directly to residents who had been involved in one or more of the initial workshops. The availability of the report was also advertised in the made in the August/September 2012 edition of The Chronicle.

No major issues were identified in the consultation responses. The comments were evaluated and the Scoping report updated to reflect these where appropriate.

The Sustainability Scoping Report is available on the [OurPlan](#) website via Documents and Links.

Fact Finding

4. Housing Needs Assessment

In June 2012 an independent organisation, Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS), was commissioned to carry out a parish wide Housing Needs Survey.

A Housing Needs survey was posted to every household in the parish. The response to the survey was approximately 27% of households (an average response rate for this type of exercise).

The survey asked respondents to tick boxes and was based on a standard Housing Needs Surveys format previously used by AiRS. Following the consultation AiRS produced a Housing Needs Assessment Report that was used to inform the need for some local development within the timeframe of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Housing Needs Assessment Report is available on the [OurPlan](#) website via Documents and Links.

5. Call for Sites

During June and July 2012, as recommend by Mid Sussex District Council, a “Call for Sites” was carried out.

A notice was issued on the Hoathly Hub and in The Chronicle asking landowners to come forward with information of any plans they may have for any type of development within the time period of the Neighbourhood Plan. Individual letters were sent to a list of known landowners and businesses.

Responses received were reviewed, and assessments carried out for all known development sites including an assessment against a set of Sustainability Objectives from the Scoping Report. The call for sites brought no new significant sites forward.

Preparation of Policies

6. Policy Development Workshops

During October and November 2012 policy development workshops took place. These were held in either West Hoathly or Sharpthorne to encourage attendance from all areas of the parish. The workshops were promoted via “The HoathlyHub”, The Chronicle and through posters on noticeboards.

The first workshop in October was supported by a member of PlanningAid who explained what made a good policy and what needed to be considered when starting to prepare policies.

In groups the workshop attendees looked at key policies from the draft District Plan and considered whether they covered the local parish needs or whether it was felt important that something more specific was included to address the local situation.

The workshops in November completed a review of the draft District Plan policies and then focused on 2 key areas for the Plan:

- Homes
- The countryside

These were done using a combination of group discussion and post-it note comments.

These workshops were attended by an average of 11 people.

The materials and the output from the Policy Development workshops are available on the [OurPlan](#) website via Documents and Links.

First Draft Neighbourhood Plan Consultation

7. Draft Neighbourhood Plan Public Consultation

The Draft Neighbourhood Plan consultation was launched on 22nd April 2013 at the annual Parish Assembly held in West Hoathly. A week before this session a copy of the draft plan, response form and covering letter were posted to every household in the parish. A small pad of post-it notes was included in each pack to act as a reminder to residents during the consultation period. The draft plan and response form were also available on-line via the HoathlyHub or from the Parish Office. 5 banners were set up across the parish to remind people to participate. The consultation period lasted until Monday 3rd June 2013.

Details of the draft plan were sent to statutory consultees, local businesses, and neighbouring parish and town councils.

Before the consultation and during articles appeared as reminders on the HoathlyHub and in The Chronicle.

Following the launch at the annual Parish Assembly 3 further exhibitions took place during the following week in Sharpthorne, Highbrook and West Hoathly.

The Parish Assembly was attended by 41 people, the Sharpthorne session by 21 people, the Highbrook session by 14 people and the school session by a further 9 people.

Respondents were asked to consider the draft plan and say whether they

- Supported
- Mostly supported
- Mildly opposed
- Opposed
- Had no opinion

Comments could be entered for the overall plan as well as for specific policies within it.

During the consultation period 126 response forms were completed either as hard copy or on-line of which 98 (78%) supported or mostly supported the plan with 21 (17%) mildly or strongly opposed to the plan. 7 did not express an opinion. Over 500 individual comments were received.

There were 2 policies that received the most comments:

- WHP10: the proposal to support a possible future halt for the Bluebell Railway. Most of the comments against the policy had concerns regarding the increase in traffic this may generate.
- WHP13: the proposal for a maximum of 24 dwellings at a specific site adjacent to Cookhams.

During the consultation period a petition was received with over 200 names on it. The petition “to reject the proposal (WHP13) for a 24 unit housing development on Top Road, Sharpthorne” was organised by the “Sharpthorne Community Action Group”.

8. Neighbourhood Plan Comment Feedback session

A workshop was held on Saturday 22nd June 2013 at West Hoathly School to review the feedback received. The session was led by an experienced Planning Advisor from PlanningAid.

The session was advertised through the HoathlyHub, through the parish column in the local newspaper and via an e-mail sent to all previous workshop attendees. A specific invitation was sent to the Sharpthorne Community Action Group who had organised the petition against the specific policy WHP13.

This session was attended by 31 people.

In the workshop, attendees were asked to provide further comments about any of the policies. The programme, documents to be used at the workshop and outputs are available on the OurPlan website.

The session generated a good discussion but allowing the discussion to continue meant there was no time to carry out the two proposed workshop exercises. Attendees were encouraged to take these away, consider them and feedback their comments.

The materials to be used and the feedback from the session are available on the [OurPlan](#) website via Documents and Links.

9. Neighbourhood Plan Updated Policies Feedback session

A further workshop session was arranged for Saturday 27th July 2013 to take place in Sharpthorne Church Hall. Its purpose was to:

- Review the options received in response to the exercises on housing sites and sustainability assessment
- Consider alternative text for policy WHP13

The session was again led by an experienced Planning Advisor from PlanningAid.

No attendees from the first session or other interested residents provided responses to the 2 workshop exercises proposed for 22nd June 2013 prior to this second workshop.

The Sharpthorne Community Action Group sent a letter asking for clarification on certain key points. Following a formal response to the group, the questions and responses were added to the HoathlyHub website so that all residents could see them and add their own comments to the debate.

The workshop was attended by 22 people most of whom supported the Sharpthorne Community Action Group against the development proposed in policy WHP13.

The conclusion of the meeting was that a statement would be prepared for the Parish Council meeting taking place on 29th July 2013.

The statement prepared after the meeting was read to the Parish Council and at their meeting on 29th July 2013 the Council, taking account of the feedback received about policy WHP13: Site for New Homes, agreed the following recommendation:

- Only the policy allocating a site for new homes should be considered further.
- That a group, initiated by the Sharpthorne Community Action Group, should be set up to look at the alternative sites identified by the Neighbourhood Plan and the Mid Sussex Housing Allocation and whether there is another way to allocate homes needed to meet the local requirement in the next 5 years. Any alternative needed to be viable and deliverable and have a better or similar impact when measured against the sustainability criteria.
- All meetings to discuss alternatives should be open to all residents and communications about them facilitated through the Hoathly Hub.
- Any alternative proposal should be available by the middle of October so that the next steps in the Neighbourhood Plan Process could be agreed at the October Parish Council meeting.
- Where possible, the Parish Clerk will be available to support the process and parish councillors would like the opportunity to attend meetings.

This way forward was approved by Mid Sussex District Council.

The decision was communicated to the Sharpthorne Community Action Group on 1st August 2013 and to a wider audience via the HoathlyHub and its weekly digest.

10. Consultation with MSDC planners on clarity of policy wording

On July 29th 2013 a meeting took place with a senior planner in MSDC Planning Development Control and a member of the Planning Policy team to review the policies in the West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan to ensure the policies had sufficient clarity of understanding for a planner using them when assessing an application.

Each policy was discussed and some changes were suggested to enhance the understanding for planners.

11. Sharpthorne Community Action Group meeting

On October 19th 2013 the Sharpthorne Community Action Group held a meeting to discuss the work the group had done to identify further potential sites for development. This was held in Sharpthorne Church Hall.

The meeting was advertised on the HoathlyHub and the group put flyers through some letterboxes and used the school book bags to advertise the event a couple of days beforehand.

It was attended by 45 people: 3 were from West Hoathly, 3 were from Highbrook and 39 from Sharpthorne.

The session was led by an experienced Planning Advisor from PlanningAid.

The Sharpthorne Community Action Group had contacted several landowners and in discussions landowners had indicated several sites which they were now interested in putting forward as development sites. These were presented to the meeting.

The Sharpthorne Community Action Group had prepared its own sustainability scorecard to be used at the meeting.

The materials used and output from the session are available on the [OurPlan](#) website via Documents and Links.

At the Parish Council meeting on 28th October 2013 the Parish Council agreed the following steps should be taken to move the process forward.

- A new Call for Sites II exercise would be carried out with a formal request being sent to the landowners of any land identified by the Sharpthorne Community Action Group as well as other known landowners asking for specific details of the site being proposed with minimum, maximum and type of dwelling being considered.
- Following formal confirmation from landowners Mid Sussex would be asked to carry out a formal site assessment on each of the proposed sites.
- The Neighbourhood Plan project would then run events across the parish where the information on each of the sites could be displayed and residents given the opportunity to make comments.
- Based on all the above information there would then be a full parish wide consultation on the options for the Neighbourhood Plan policy WHP13: Site for New Homes.

Review of Policy WHP13: Site for New Homes

12. Call for Sites II exercise November 2013

Landowners identified by the Sharpthorne Community Action Group and others who had responded to the first Call for Sites exercise were contacted and asked to formally put forward sites using a standard format form.

13. TaskForce to recommend wording for policy WHP13

Using the HoathlyHub residents were invited to become part of a task force to work on the next stages of the Neighbourhood Plan. The terms of reference for the Taskforce were to:

- Review the information on housing requirements
- Consider the format and materials required for the open exhibitions to be held around the parish
- Review the comments received from the exhibitions and identify new wording options for policy WHP13: Site for New Homes.

The Taskforce comprised up to 20 people from around the parish including members of the Sharpthorne Community Action Group.

A meeting took place on December 2nd 2013 to review housing requirements. With the second call for sites exercise identifying a greater number of sites it was important to revisit the housing requirements over the period of the Plan.

The Task Force reviewed the output from the Housing Needs Survey and the MSDC Housing Register focusing on those in most need with a local connection. The Task Force agreed that over the timescale of the plan 50 – 60 houses would satisfy the needs identified for smaller 2-3 bedroomed homes (for young families for older people wishing to downsize) and balance the need for affordable as well as market homes.

The materials used and output from the sessions are available on the [OurPlan](#) website via Documents and Links.

Following a Task Force meeting on January 7th 2014 to consider the format and materials for the landowner exhibitions a Landowner Presentation meeting and a series of Open Exhibitions were held.

The Landowner presentation meeting took place on February 3rd 2014 and was attended by about 100 people. Landowners or their representatives were invited to attend and asked to respond to a standard set of questions and one or two site specific questions.

Exhibitions providing information on each of the sites took place on February 5th 2014 in Sharpthorne, February 6th 2014 in Highbrook and February 8th 2014 in West Hoathly. Residents were invited to provide comments on the sites using a standard form.

Overall about 200 people attended one of more of the sessions. 184 completed forms were returned from about 51 contributors.

The materials used and output from the landowner presentation and exhibition sessions are available on the [OurPlan](#) website via Documents and Links.

An independent planning consultant, Chris Bowden of Navigus, was engaged to help the Parish Council and the Taskforce with the process of assessing the sites against a set of sustainability assessment criteria.

In a series of Taskforce meetings on 6th March 2014, 25th March 2014 and 24th April 2014 the taskforce, with the help of the consultant:

- Agreed a set of criteria for assessing sites based on the draft MSDC District Plan and the Scoping Report objectives.
- Reviewed and agreed assessments for each site against the criteria. Where consensus could not be reached by the Taskforce the individual assessment criteria were reviewed and an agreement reached by the Parish Council at a special meeting on 7th May 2014.
- The Taskforce concluded that, whilst consensus could not be reached on a few individual criteria, the overall deliverability and assessment for each site were unlikely to change.

Following the assessments, the independent consultant and members of the Task Force held follow up meetings or phone calls with landowners to clarify specific points in case they impacted the overall outcome.

Second Draft Neighbourhood Plan Consultation

At the Parish Council meeting on 19th May 2014 the council agreed that the modified Neighbourhood Plan should be issued for a second public consultation with WHP13: Site for New Homes identifying 3 development sites to satisfy the housing requirements identified for the lifetime of the Plan.

The Second Draft Neighbourhood Plan consultation was launched on 1st June 2014 with a copy of the draft plan, response form and covering letter being posted to every household in the parish. The draft plan and response form were also available on-line via the HoathlyHub or from the Parish

Office. 5 banners were set up across the parish to remind people to participate. The consultation period lasted until July 14th 2014.

Details of the draft plan were sent to statutory consultees, local businesses, and neighbouring parish and town councils.

Before and during the consultation articles appeared as reminders on the HoathlyHub and in The Chronicle.

Following the launch 3 drop-in sessions were held on 4th June 2014 in Highbrook, 5th June 2014 in Sharpthorne and 7th June 2014 in West Hoathly.

The Sharpthorne and West Hoathly sessions were each attended by about 20 people with about 4 at the Highbrook session.

Respondents were again asked to consider the draft plan and say whether they

- Supported
- Mostly supported
- Mildly opposed
- Opposed
- Had no opinion

Comments could be entered for the overall plan as well as for specific policies within it. Respondents could also record a policy opinion of Support, Oppose or No Opinion.

During the consultation period 73 response forms were completed either as hard copy or on-line. 65 of them were from local residents and the others were from statutory bodies and other organisations. Of the local residents 47 (75%) supported or mostly supported the plan with 16 (24%) mildly or strongly opposed to the plan. 7 did not express an opinion. Over 249 individual comments or policy opinions were received.

One policy WHP13c – Bluebell Woods housing allocation received the most individual policy opposition with 23 responses opposing it. 12 of these were from respondents living in Station Road and 10 from respondents living in Bluebell Lane. Within the opposing responses the most dominant themes were:

- Issues relating to traffic and parking either as to how it would directly affect Bluebell Lane or the additional load on Station Road and the junction with Top Road (the C319).
- Not wanting any development on any site
- Concerns relating to wildlife and woodland access
- Safety of bridleway users
- Issues relating to drainage
- Loss of amenity

The other site allocations policies (WHP13, WHP13a and WHP13b) had roughly equal numbers of policy specific support and opposition which mostly related to either not wanting any development within the parish or concerns about additional traffic impact.

One policy had 2 specific opposing opinions recorded and the remaining policies had either zero or 1 policy opposing opinion recorded.

As a result of the consultation comments a number of changes have been made to the draft Plan text to clarify issues about which concerns were expressed and to tighten the policy definitions in some cases.

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