



FUTURE EAST GRINSTEAD

**A VISION FOR THE TOWN
TO 2026**

April 2011

Forward

This Vision draws on the extensive work done by the Town's Councillors and relevant Officers at all three levels of local government since 2003 on development options for the Town. A lack of consensus has resulted in a lack of delivery and a lack of a clear way forward for the Town's future. This must change and the Town Council wants to play its part, which we believe to be a vital one, in taking the initiative to move things forward in a way that can build a local consensus.

A draft of this document was put out to a limited public consultation, primarily with the Town's residents groups. We have sought to flavour that in this Vision. We will take the more detailed comments forward to the next stage in this process. A key issue raised with us was the need for clarity about the purpose of the document and the definition of next steps. The document needs to deal effectively with the challenge of not raising false expectations, of not being prescriptive, and of not offering solutions without a firm evidence basis. It must be realistic and chart a clear way forward.

Accordingly, we clearly characterise this document as a **position statement**, a reflection of existing Town Council policy and priorities regarding the Town's future development and an indication of how these policies and priorities need to be updated. As such, the key role of this document is to help the new Council in May to move the process forward. To facilitate this, the Vision offers some new ideas to take the debate further and highlights the questions that need answering in that debate and the evidence that needs to be gathered. It also proposes a process for moving forward, noting the need for necessary expertise and partnership with the Local Planning Authority, and engaging with the Town.

So this is a Vision, and not a plan. It seeks to offer an informed account of the key developmental priorities for East Grinstead over the next 16 years, priorities that can capture and reflect the Town's unique identity. It has been developed with the belief that continued community engagement is vital even during the current period of uncertainty regarding strategic planning. It is not set in stone but designed to provide a context for debate, a structure that will be fleshed out as we move in due course into the more formal strategic planning phase.

We are doing this because we believe that, despite the current uncertain climate, it is right to seize the spirit of the times and work to shift the agenda away from top down planning to planning that is locally and community based. In doing this, we acknowledge the Coalition's commitment to 'give local people and communities far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which they live' and 'develop proposals to empower local communities to bring forward neighbourhood plans through the structure of.....a parish council.' (DCLG Business Plan 2010)

The document consists of five sections: an introduction setting out a context followed by sections on the local economy, traffic, housing and infrastructure issues and concluding with an account of the intended forward process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our Vision is for a Town that is sustainable, maintains a distinctive character and identity and vibrant local economy, a Town with high quality facilities in all respects: a truly attractive and welcoming place to live, work and visit.

Policies are necessary to deliver the vision. We propose policies to deliver a Town of character and quality with more local jobs, a regenerated Town Centre, less traffic congestion, more affordable housing a Town with necessary infrastructure improvements, a Town that attracts visitors in growing numbers. We propose a process that ensures these policies can be tested through a comprehensive scrutiny and evidence – gathering process.

The Vision considers the promotion of economic growth is of fundamental importance to the maintenance of the Town's identity as a distinct retail and commercial hub. It identifies tourism as a key component in this and proposes exploration of new ideas based on exploiting the Town's current centres of sporting and academic excellence, all within a context of sound environmental policies. It also recognises the need for engagement with Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC), the newly formed Local Enterprise Partnership and the East Grinstead Business Association (EGBA) on the development of an economic growth strategy.

It recognises the challenges facing our Town from infrastructure pressures, from an ageing population, from traffic and from the need to create more housing for our young people and more local employment. It recognises the need for realism to underpin aspiration.

The Vision is the first step towards the development of a Strategic/Neighbourhood Plan for Future East Grinstead. Work on this stage will commence as soon as the final shape of the planning process to be engendered through the Localism Bill is clear. At such time the Town Council will make clear the outline process it intends to follow in drawing up the Plan, which must reflect the Vision, be soundly evidence-based, be fully costed, draw on wide input and consultation, and earn the support of the people of East Grinstead.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Policy Context

This Vision proposes a set of policies. These are not set in stone but intended to stimulate debate when we commence work on the Strategic Plan for East Grinstead, and indicate the areas where we shall need to compile and assess the evidence base.

- The local economy – how can this be kept strong and expanded to keep Town viable?
- Traffic congestion – what can realistically be done to ease this?
- Housing numbers – what does the Town need in terms of new housing, where should the houses be sited and what level is sustainable?
- Infrastructure priorities – what are the priorities on addressing the Town's infrastructure deficit – and how can they be funded?

1.2 Local Economy

The Town depends on a vigorous, and growing, local economy to maintain its character and prosperity. Local jobs need to be encouraged to maintain that vitality and limit commuting. In doing this the Town faces challenges in overcoming the current poor transport infrastructure but has clear opportunities from enhancing its tourism offer. A vibrant and attractive Town Centre is a key strand in this. Currently the Town lacks an economic growth strategy. This is essential to provide the evidence-base necessary to drive the eventual Strategic/Neighbourhood Plan, and depends on close co-operation with agencies such as MSDC, the Local Enterprise Partnership and EGBA.

1.3 Traffic Congestion

The relevance of traffic conditions to the consideration of East Grinstead's future development is fundamental. West Sussex County Council (WSCC) concluded many years ago that the A22 was already 'at capacity'. Since then there has been significant infill development in the town which has put further pressures on the road network, pressures that have not been alleviated by any significant enhancements. The Mid Sussex Local Plan issued in 2004 stated that East Grinstead should take no further large-scale development because of infrastructure limitations, especially roads. The need for constraint in the absence of effective traffic relief was reinforced by WSCC in Appendix B of the Structure Plan.

1.4 Housing

So it is recognised that congestion, as well as the Town's setting in an area of development constraint, sets a limit on growth. Yet the Town must have growth to provide affordable housing (both rental and shared equity) for our young people, to fund infrastructure improvements and provide a basis for the expanding local economy that is key to the Town's future.

1.5 Infrastructure

The Town has an acknowledged infrastructure deficit. Our Vision is clear: this must be addressed during the time span of the Strategic/Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan must not only list necessary improvements: it must also make clear how much they will cost and how they are to be funded.

2. MEETING THE TOWN'S ECONOMIC NEEDS

2.1 Context

The provision of local jobs to match housing growth is a key principle within our consideration of housing development as commuting is not desirable on either community or sustainability grounds. The Town Council looks to co-operate with MSDC in developing strategies to encourage this necessary growth in local jobs. It is certainly necessary to allocate new employment land in this development Plan, but this is not sufficient by itself. There must be a realistic strategy to attract businesses to create jobs both for existing residents and to meet any future increase in the local population. Further work is necessary on a detailed evidence base to show not only how much land space will be required for new employment in East Grinstead but, more importantly, how that land use will be filled, by what types of employment and how many new jobs will be created. In this MSDC is urged to work closely with business organisations and, most specifically, EGBA.

2.2 Local Jobs

East Grinstead should not rely for jobs for its new residents on Gatwick Airport or on the service industries that surround it in the greater Crawley area. This is particularly important, as whilst airport workers are encouraged to use public transport this is not currently practical from East Grinstead, and hence there is no prospect of increasing the uptake significantly – this was extensively evidenced in the transport reports produced for the 2006 Area Action Plan. Accordingly there is a great need to create jobs within East Grinstead itself and this must reflect the specific skill sets of the area, the needs of existing business that may need to relocate and/or expand and the importance of ensuring that zoned business/industrial areas do comprise a mix of freehold and leasehold. This will require a proactive approach from all local authorities towards the Town's economic development, which is essential to achieving the necessary growth in local jobs.

We regard the growth of tourism to the Town as a potential engine for jobs growth, with the consequent development of catering, retail and accommodation, as further discussed in section 2.5

2.3 Types of Employment

Subject to the gathering of a proper evidence base there should be an expansion of land allocated for commercial and industrial use. It is important that future commercial development should provide for a range of suitable sizes and types of business premises, appropriately located, which might, for example, include high tech and knowledge based industries.

2.4 Town Centre Revitalisation

We need a better Town Centre with a wider range of shops, in particular fashion-led and high quality departmental stores to supplement the Town's already wide variety of

independent stores. This needs to be based on a partnership to sell the Town's benefits to investors and addressing any issues that impede that investment. The proposed Town Centre Forum should provide a basis for working with MSDC to progress appropriate initiatives.

We aim to make East Grinstead Town Centre not merely a place to shop but a culturally and socially desirable destination across all age ranges.

We will promote the use of the High Street as a centre for cultural and social activity. We will support the staging of cross-generational music, arts, and entertainment events in the High Street so that it becomes a magnet for social enjoyment and a catalyst for Town Centre rejuvenation. We will link with Chequer mead, Meridian FM and other existing cultural resources to share in this project.

2.5 Tourism

The retail sector should also be underpinned by an expanding tourism sector. East Grinstead's historic centre combined with its location close to Gatwick Airport and convenience for Ashdown Forest and the High Weald creates a unique opportunity for becoming the gateway to the surrounding countryside and its heritage.

Tourism to the Town should be boosted significantly by the extension of the Bluebell Railway to East Grinstead, expected 2012 or soon thereafter. We will link websites between Bluebell, the Town and other local attractions to make East Grinstead's tourist offer among the best in the South.

The Bluebell Railway will bring an injection of interest, visitors and spending power to the Town Centre. In particular, we wish to see a transport shuttle operating between the Station and Town Centre and will seek to identify a cost-effective solution in partnership with the public and private sectors.

It is important that planning policy facilitates this. This should include support for a new station and revitalised station quarter, and for an enhanced gateway and approach to the Town through Railway Approach to attract Bluebell visitors to use the Town Centre. The reports commissioned by the Town Council in 2008 and 2010 from Colin Davis and Optimum Consultancy respectively should provide a basis for this. It will also require careful planning of infrastructure related issues such as car parking that are not currently available, or easily provided for, in the locality.

2.6 Centres of Sporting and Academic Excellence

East Grinstead possesses centres of excellence in its Sports Club and the Queen Victoria Hospital. These should provide the basis for evaluating the possibilities for developing further their resources. East Grinstead should also be considered for any proposed extension of tertiary education within the Gatwick area.

2.7 Development and the Green Agenda

We wish to see policies adopted which encourage new developments to be carbon neutral and energy self reliant. I.e. solar pv, solar thermal and ground source, and we would wish to see evaluated opportunities to develop a town wide bio-mass facility and provision of ultra high-speed fibre optic broadband, which would encourage home working. We consider there may be potential for East Grinstead to become known as a Green Town that recognises community partnership green initiatives.

3. ADDRESSING TRAFFIC CONGESTION

3.1 The Current Position

WSCC evidence shows that there would be a major deterioration in traffic conditions in East Grinstead by 2021 if no improvements are made to the highways network and that some internal solutions including improving key junctions can help to ease congestion delays in the Town. This reflects a lack of investment by WSCC in the Town's roads over a number of years. The Town Council believes the scale of this lack of investment is such that it may not be fundable solely by developer funding but might also require resources from WSCC as the Highway Authority.

Thus the issue of housing numbers and the ability of the road network infrastructure to cope, given existing congestion and the adverse impact that additional housing will have on this, is clearly of critical importance.

3.2 Need for Junction Improvements

The immediate priority must be to complete the junction improvements that were initially planned in the 1990s but, which were not undertaken on grounds of cost and as, at that time, the County Council did not consider that they would give sufficient capacity benefit. The County Council no longer takes that view and accordingly work to relieve congestion at key junctions on the A22 must commence as a priority. This work should be synchronised as part of a wider traffic management plan through an urban traffic control system to ease traffic flows through the Town. We list in Appendix A areas for priority action.

These will give some congestion relief for north/south traffic on the A22 but would do little to ease the congestion for east/west traffic across East Grinstead that already exists. Proposals are required to improve dramatically the existing road network to help achieve this. Clearly the costs of any enhanced road network, including some new build sections would require some housing to provide the necessary infrastructure levy to meet the costs associated therewith and all new housing in the Town will need to contribute towards these costs.

3.2 Other Transport Considerations

Coupled with work on improvements to the road network in and around East Grinstead there must be enhancement in public transport provision. It is recognised, however, that

any modal shift arising from such investment is unlikely to be significant. However focus on public transport, walking and cycling, street scene/public realm design, smarter choices, and parking are all likely achievable either through developer contributions or as an alternative to these in respect of the transport element.

4. MEETING THE TOWN'S HOUSING NEEDS

4.1 Context

Housing growth for East Grinstead should be evidence-based growth: it must meet local needs and not act to the detriment of the existing population and environment. Given the existing infrastructure deficit, the planning authority must be vigilant and robust in ensuring that developer agreements are entered into, are used locally and do require financial contributions in accordance with approved policies. To secure integrated and sustainable growth, developers must be required to contribute to improved infrastructure and services, including community needs, to support proposed development and remedy existing deficiencies.

4.2 Development Principles

This means future housing growth must meet the following principles:

- be needs based and sustainable;
- bring with it all necessary infrastructure: there should also be a requirement for all sites to contribute towards infrastructure costs according to a formula to be agreed as part of the revised strategic planning document governing Section 106 agreements and/or the proposed new Community Infrastructure Levy;
- provide a significant level of affordable housing: all new developments must be required to provide affordable housing in accordance with evidence-based MSDC policies appropriate for East Grinstead: this should be a mixture of rental and shared equity properties, with an emphasis on providing homes for local young people;

respect the existing built environment and the historic nature of the town at its hub, and not impact adversely on strategic gaps, and in particular the importance of Imberhorne Lane as a natural border for the Town to the west, and fundamental, as such, to the preservation of the Town's separate identity;
- not encroach into the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and development restraint that surround the town on all sides;
- not damage the natural habitat of Ashdown Forest;
- development on brownfield land should, as a fundamental principle, always take precedence over greenfield sites;
- not result in gridlock on the Town's roads, and.
- provide high standards of design, climate change, reasonable densities, and minimum room sizes that accord with Mid Sussex District Council planning policy requirements and that provide adequate parking to meet West Sussex County Council standards.

Specific issues within some of these Development Principles are considered below.

4.3 On Street Parking

It is clear that East Grinstead Town Centre on-street provision is now at capacity. There can be no further developments approved on the expectation that West Sussex County Council residents parking permits would be made available to the occupiers of the new units. To do otherwise would be seriously detrimental to existing residents who already experience major problems of finding parking spaces close to where they live. Accordingly it must be understood and recognised in approved planning policy that if developers expect to build new accommodation without providing any dedicated off-street parking they do so on the strict understanding that the new residents will not be eligible for on-street parking permits and the properties must be marketed on that basis.

4.4 Development Briefs

All sites allocated through the Plan will be subject to a full planning or development brief and all sites for development of more than five units will be subject to a development brief whether or not they are allocated through an SPD. It is also considered that a proportion of these homes should be specially built to meet the needs of home workers and that 10% of all developments above 50 units should have land specifically set aside for “self build” for first time buyers.

5. MEETING THE TOWN'S INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

5.1 Context

Infrastructure is not only about roads. It must cover the full gamut of services including the road network, leisure, community, culture and education. It needs to reflect the needs of what is an ageing population. A key principle throughout this document is the need for infrastructure improvements. These improvements are required to make up the existing deficit and are fundamental to determining the level of future house building activity.

5.2 Required Enhancements

It is essential that adequate utility infrastructure is provided - in particular to the needs for water and sewage infrastructure to service development for the town and to avoid unacceptable impacts on the environment and the amenity of existing users.

At a local community level, initial evaluations suggest the following infrastructure enhancements are required:

- Solutions to address traffic congestion, which have been referred to previously in this document, including enhancements to the roads network, public transport, cycling, smarter choices and parking management.
- Upgrading of local education, fire and rescue and library infrastructure..
- Public realm enhancements, including as priority enhancements to Railway Approach to improve the street scene between the Town Centre and East Grinstead Railway Stations for Network Rail and the Bluebell.
- Better day care facilities for the growing elderly population, confirming the action plan requirement first identified in the 2003 Town Health Check and the subsequent commitment of the Town Council, supported by Mid Sussex District Council, to prioritise a future affordable solution.
- Leisure facilities (indoor and outdoor) as identified through the emerging Mid Sussex Leisure Strategy.
- A new cemetery site towards the end of the Plan period, with consideration for a natural, eco-friendly burial section..
- New allotment facilities as a short/medium term priority

5.3 Costing

The costing of items identified in the Infrastructure audit is an essential component of this work in order to understand whether the full range of requirements identified is affordable and deliverable. This must be a central pillar of the Strategic/Neighbourhood Plan: housing and employment growth must be complementary to the provision of necessary infrastructure.

6. NEXT STEPS – TOWARDS A STRATEGIC PLAN

6.1 Context

The Vision is the first step towards the development of a Strategic Plan for Future East Grinstead. Work on this stage will commence as soon as the final shape of the planning process to be engendered through the Localism Bill is clear. This Plan must reflect the Vision, be soundly evidence-based, draw on wide input and consultation and earn the support of the people of East Grinstead.

6.2 Timetable

We cannot define a definitive timetable in this document due to the uncertainties around the detail of the Government's Localism Bill, and in particular the powers to be made available to a Town Council in drawing up a Strategic/Neighbourhood Plan. However, this Vision anticipates a major role for the Town Council in drawing up a Strategic Plan whatever the detail of the interface with the Local Planning Authority.

6.3 Process Map

Thus once the position is clear on the extent of the Town Council's role is clear. a detailed process map will be developed for the way forward. This will include:

1. A timetable
2. Provisions for business and community involvement
3. Identification of necessary external consultancy and advice and a budget for this.
4. Identification of a work plan, with initial focus on necessary evidence gathering.
5. Early discussion with Officers from MSDC and WSCC to agree their roles within the process.

6.4 Governance

Although this is a Town Council process, it is essential that District and County Councillors are involved in the debate on such a fundamental document. A Three Tiers Group, with membership from all three levels of local government, was set up to develop approaches to the now defunct MSDC Core Strategy and this will provide the main forum for regular challenge, debate and direction of the emerging Strategic/Neighbourhood Plan.

6.5 Questions that Need Answering as part of the Developing Plan Process?

Arising from the work undertaken to date it is clear that there is still a shortage of real evidence to support critical planning recommendations on house building and other development, and which would give confidence in any future Neighbourhood Plan that may be developed locally and which will require conformity with the Local Development Framework and achieve wide community support. In this regard some of the questions that will need addressing as the Plan takes shape, include the following:

Section 2

What are the costs of the junction improvements?

How much relief will these provide?

What are the costs of any other essential highways improvements?

How will these be funded and what additional house building will be required to fund these improvements?

Section 3

What is the demand for affordable housing, how robust is the data, and what additional needs assessment work is necessary here?

What is the profile of the current housing stock and how appropriate is this for the community's needs?

Section 4

How much employment land is available and where?

How will that land be filled, by what types of employment and how many new jobs will be created?

Section 5

What other deficits in (non-highways) infrastructure provision must be met and at what cost?

How will these be funded and what additional house building will be required to fund these improvements?

All Sections

Who will take ownership of the evidence gathering, how will this be tested, and how will the costs of this be funded?

APPENDIX A

TRAFFIC RELIEF – AREAS ALREADY IDENTIFIED FOR PRIORITY ACTION

- A264 (Moat Road)/A22 (London Road)/A22 (Station Road)
- Lingfield Road with London Road, including widening over the redundant railway bridge and the installation of a pedestrian walkway on the outside of the bridge parapet;
- Imberhorne Lane/London Road;
- A22/A264 at Felbridge (this will require a cooperative partnership approach with Surrey County Council in whose boundaries the junction lies);

In addition there are three key locations where it is felt that a one-way road network would help ease congestion relief. These are as follows:

- Maypole Road and Garland Road;
- Windmill Lane/Highfield Road/onto Lingfield Road.
- Queens Road