Response from Uckfield Chamber of Commerce to Wealden District Council’s Notes on Employment and Jobs Growth and Distribution dated 31st May 2019

Wealden Local Plan Examination Matter 3 Question 57

The Chamber of Commerce notes that Wealden District Council is using the TEMPRO Government modelling source for calculating employment needs. The Chamber would suggest that, as is stated in the Briefing Note, using the 2011 Census may well be out of date. There is no information in the Briefing Note as to what allowances are used and how they are calculated to take into account population and residential growth since 2011 in the Wealden area. There has been significant development already but there has been little provision of extra employment land since 2011.

The Chamber has consistently put forward the view that the WLP is wrong to concentrate on new jobs in the south of the District particularly in the Polegate area. The writer has run a commercial estate agency based in Uckfield for 30 years and has first hand knowledge of the demands from businesses and where they are likely to locate. During that 30 year period very few businesses have moved from the north of the District to the Hailsham/Polegate area. Travel times are considered to be too great and the road network is already overburdened with traffic.

This is highlighted by the Swallow Business Park development at Lower Dicker, just to the north of Hailsham, where some 23,000 sq m of employment land has been granted planning consent some of which has already been constructed. Those transactions which have already taken place since 2017 show that the vast majority of businesses occupying this Park come from the Hastings, Eastbourne, Bexhill and Hailsham direction, not from the north of Wealden.

Wealden District Council’s Briefing Note, Items 14 & 15, suggest that new households are where new jobs are provided. This is not correct. The Chamber suggests that, if businesses in Uckfield and Crowborough cannot expand and know there is no employment land available to attract new businesses they will leave the area. The writer has first hand knowledge of this based on 30 years
trading in the area. There are numerous examples where businesses have left Wealden District completely rather than relocate to the south of the District.

Ridgewood Farm development at Uckfield has planning consent for 1,000 houses. Wimpey are already on site and the first 300 houses are under construction. Part of that development has given planning consent for 10,000 sq m of additional employment space. However, under the terms of the Section 106 Agreement the developers are not obliged to do anything about developing that employment land until the 750th house has been completed. There are also significant cost implications regarding infrastructure because a new bridge has to be built from the allocated site for employment uses to the A22.

Under Point 18 Wealden District Council states that, if there was significant job growth in the South, it would create a reduction in jobs to the North with the resulting consequences of trip redistribution. The Chamber contends that this is not correct. There can be no job growth in Wealden North because there are no sites allocated for employment growth other than the one at Ridgewood Farm. The Council goes on to say that, if there was job growth in the North, this would mean more trips from outside the District into the North resulting in additional traffic movements possibly affecting the Ashdown Forest. The Chamber has contended for some time that the Council are not thinking through this policy correctly and neither have they taken into account possible future expansion at Gatwick which is likely to result in an increased traffic generation from Wealden North across the Forest towards Gatwick. Occupants of the 1,000 houses to be built at Ridgewood Farm will need to work somewhere. Some may well commute to London but it is suggested that the vast majority will commute outside Wealden to the north. The Chamber would like to see a more balanced approach to job creation throughout the Area and believe providing more employment land opportunities in Wealden North would minimise the impact on the Ashdown Forest.

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