HEATHFIELD AND WALDRON PARISH COUNCIL

VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE AREA

As part of the Local Development Framework process, the Parish Council have been invited to prepare a Vision which will form part of the Preferred Options phase of the LDF.

Introduction

It must be remembered that Heathfield and Waldron Parish is the largest in England. This means that although Heathfield is the central market town of the parish, there are the satellite villages of Waldron, Cross-In-Hand, Broad Oak, Cade Street, Old Heathfield and Punnetts Town, which have been considered as part of this Vision with needs and hopes similar to Heathfield.

After various consultations with residents and businesses in the area, together with discussions within the Parish Council, it was felt that the priority objectives should be as follows, in order of importance.

Promotion of Business

The survival and development of Heathfield and its environs depends on the continued promotion of business development and the widening of job choice. Inherent to this is ensuring that there is enough available space for small businesses and for other businesses to expand. To ensure a mixed and balanced population, young people need to be encouraged to stay in the area.

Central Weald Position

Efforts need to be made to keep Heathfield as an attractive and vibrant community so that it maintains its prominent and central position within the High Weald. This needs to be an important principle in any future Vision. The area is unique with its borders surrounded by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Although this causes extreme pressure upon land available for development, the AONB must be protected as far as possible.

Landmarks of Heathfield

The market town of Heathfield has its own characteristic features which need to be preserved. Edwardian Landmark buildings and places such as the State Hall should not give way to new development. Areas such as Mutton Hall Hill have seen the loss of many fine old single dwellings in favour of multi-occupation sites which lack character and identity. Trees have been removed and hedges replaced by fencing. The necessary measures should be imposed to ensure that the verdancy of Heathfield is not lost for future generations.
**Service Centre**

To maintain Heathfield’s prominent position it must continue to be a service centre for the surrounding area, especially the satellite villages, most of which have already lost their shops and post offices. Residents for miles around need more specialist shops as well as professional services such as doctors, dentists, banks, solicitors and accountants. Hence the retention of free parking will continue to be essential to encourage economic sustainability for employers, their employees and customers. It is also hoped that the central location will ensure the retention of the fire and ambulance services in the town but hopefully in more modern facilities, perhaps on a shared site on the outskirts of Heathfield. The situation of these services is vital to the outlying villages.

Even more essential is the presence of really visible, sound and effective local policing unit so that the parish is seen as a very safe place in which to live, bring up children, work, relax and grow old.

**Community Facilities**

To encourage a vibrant community, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the provision of leisure facilities. The top priority for the area is an indoor swimming pool, on a site already identified next to the Heathfield Community College and Leisure Centre. There is now no public swimming pool within a catchment area of 25,000 residents, including the Community College with 1500 pupils and eight feeder primary schools with a total of 1800 pupils. Such a facility is essential to encourage good health in the local population, for young and old alike and the Parish Council have already helped fund the feasibility study and design work.

There is now an increasing demand for allotments in the Parish and it has not been possible to identify additional land to meet the existing waiting list for plots. It is anticipated that additional housing will increase still further the pressure to provide allotments and arrangements need to be put in place for developers’ contributions towards the provision of allotments, on a rising scale according to the size of proposed developments.

The Parish Council also recognise the importance of maintaining general community facilities by giving grants to help with village halls as well as Scout and Guide halls and have given grants towards projects undertaken by Heathfield Youth Centre, which is considered to be an essential facility for young people.

**Affordable Housing**

It is recognised that the area will have to have its share of the new housing required in the Wealden district. As most of the recent development in Heathfield has been in the form of luxury apartments, there is a real need for affordable housing to keep young people in the area. Apart from being for those in need, local people should also have priority, which will encourage families to stay nearer each other and hence help to create a more cohesive community.
New housing developments will need to be supported by an appropriately increased infrastructure. This includes improved and enlarged health services, educational provision, public transport and recreational facilities. The Parish Council have already recognised the need for an additional burial ground and has set aside funds for this, and a suitable site is being sought. Physical elements such as energy resources, roads and drainage will require serious consideration.

Public Space Preservation

As Heathfield is on the A265, the appearance of the High Street is very important and work should continue to complete the enhancement of the pavements and street furniture and improved accessibility which has taken place in recent years. There is also a need to preserve the attractiveness and existence of public places around the town, including facilities such as the Jubilee Park, Millennium Green and Darch’s Wood which are either directly funded by the Parish Council or to which grants are given. In conjunction with Heathfield businesses, the Council also contributes towards Christmas Lights and provides floral displays and hanging baskets in the summer. Hopefully this will continue.

Improved Bus Services

As mentioned above, an element of the town’s infrastructure which needs to be improved is public transport. It is hoped that services will be enhanced between Heathfield and the other major towns of the Weald as well as the satellite villages. With its central location and importance as a service centre, this will encourage workers, commuters and visitors as well as being more environmentally acceptable.

Traffic Impact

Improved bus services and better roads in the wider surrounding area need to be encouraged to reduce the detrimental impact of through traffic in Heathfield and the villages. With its central position many roads have become rat runs where heavy goods vehicles cause speedy deterioration of the roads. There also needs to be active policing of illegal parking, particularly in the High Street, where traffic jams make it unpleasant for pedestrians.

Cycle Route Extension

An added advantage to the locality would be the extension of the National Cycle Network 21, which would provide a route north for users of the Cuckoo Trail. Dependent upon the route chosen, this should benefit local businesses as well as increase the health and leisure facilities for the community.
Conclusion

By maintaining open spaces, playgrounds and pitches the Parish Council does a great deal towards keeping the Parish of Heathfield and Waldron as a very special place in which to live in “England’s green and pleasant land.

Our Vision is to continue to live in a green, vibrant and safe community.

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