The primary themes of discussion were:

- Parish aspirations and LDF allocations
- The costs of neighbourhood planning
- The importance (and sometimes difficulty) of engagement with communities, stakeholders and other parishes
- Infrastructure and other constraints on development
- Design and conservation issues

Key points / questions:

- There was general agreement that the utility of neighbourhood plans will depend on the development allocated to a parish in the Local Plan, and the relationship between that allocation and the aspirations of that parish.

In some cases the allocation will meet those aspirations; in others (particularly small parishes) it was felt neighbourhood plans might be a vehicle to deliver where aspirations exceeded allocations. It will therefore be essential for parishes to know their allocations in the WDC Core Strategy, and for WDC in turn to know parishes' aspirations.

- Towns and parishes with strategic site allocations can find a summary of these on page 26 of the Core Strategy (policy WCS2: Distribution of Housing Growth 2006-2030), with further detail in the Strategic Sites Issues & Options paper (though please note the implications of the Inspector's proposed modifications, particularly with regard to Heathfield).

Those parishes which fall under ‘Rural areas’ on the above table can find a breakdown of these allocations by settlement on pages 55 & 56 of the Core Strategy (policy WCS6: Rural Areas Strategy). These allocations will be detailed in the Site Allocations DPD.

- Those parishes which do not have allocations or who have aspirations beyond their allocations would be interested in information on the housing need in their parish.

- Appendix 1 to the Core Strategy Background Paper Managing the Delivery of Housing provides a breakdown of Wealden's 2010 Housing Register by parish and of housing need as assessed by the 2009 Housing Needs Assessment.

It is worth noting that the Housing Register only identifies need which falls within the criteria for inclusion on the Register and may exclude some groups of people whom parishes might consider to have housing need (e.g. young single people, or young couples without children).

- Information on the constraints on development - e.g. the Ashdown Forest in the north, waste water treatment in the south - would also be useful.
Since the workshop, Wealden Planning Policy has written to all parishes affected by constraints relating to the Ashdown Forest - i.e. those entirely or partly within 7 kilometres of the Forest's boundaries. Within this area any development which would increase recreational and traffic pressures upon the Forest must mitigate its own impact through provision of alternative recreational green space.

More information can be found here, and in WDC's Response to the Inspector's query on this issue (pages 4 - 9).

As regards waste water treatment: Hailsham North and Hailsham South waste water treatment works both discharge treated effluent into the Pevensey Levels, and are both nearing their acceptable discharge capacity (as set by the Environment Agency). Southern Water currently have no plans to improve capacity at either treatment works.

The settlements served by these works are: Hailsham, Hellingly, Polegate, Willingdon, Stone Cross, Upper Dicker, Lower Dicker, Magham Down, Chiddingly, Jevington and Muddles Green.

In addition, Westham, Pevensey and Pevensey Bay are currently served by the Eastbourne works, but as these are also near capacity any additional development beyond small-scale infill would have to be served by the Hailsham works.

The development allocated to this area in the Core Strategy will mean there is headroom for only a few hundred additional dwellings before the works reach full capacity. Windfall sites are already coming forward in this area so there is no guarantee of capacity being available for any additional development allocated by neighbourhood plans.

Further information can be found in WDC's Response to the Inspector's query on this issue (pages 9 - 12) and in the August 2011 Waste Water Position Statement.

A map showing the 7 kilometre zone around the Ashdown Forest (the larger purple outline) and the settlements affected by waste water capacity issues is available here. The South Downs National Park, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Pevensey Levels RAMSAR site are also shown.

(Please note that the dwelling numbers on the map refer to the maximum number of dwellings possible given the potential land supply. For further information please see pages 16 - 21 of the Response to the Inspector.)

Some concerns were voiced around inter-parish communication, dispute resolution, etc. Development within one parish may have implications in another and parishes are likely to need to consult across their borders. However, parishes sometimes have a tendency toward insularity and there may be barriers if dialogue is seen as 'interference' rather than 'co-operation'. The personalities & attitudes of councillors can have a particular impact here.

Suggestions revolved around a possible 'broker' for parish conversations, with WDALC mentioned as a possibility, and around a possible protocol for intra-parish dialogue.

- Bob Standley, Leader of Wealden DC and Gill Cameron-Waller, Policy & Partnerships Manager will be attending the next WDALC Management meeting on Wednesday 16 May to discuss.
Some clerks were of the opinion that better engagement with communities and developers through existing channels could provide an alternative to neighbourhood planning. Given that parishes can recommend or object to a planning application, developers are often willing to engage with parishes prior to submission, and parish concerns or aspirations can be fed into the process at this stage.

Infrastructure issues: education provision was highlighted as a point of concern, and decisions on railway infrastructure mentioned as difficult to influence.

- WDC has worked with infrastructure providers to ascertain what infrastructure will be required to serve the new development outlined in the Core Strategy, and will be happy to share those contacts with parishes seeking to assess the infrastructure needs of any development proposed in a neighbourhood plan.

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (amended submission version here) seeks to outline the infrastructure required to service Core Strategy development, and to assess the criticality of those needs given the proposed timeframes for the various developments. It will continue to be updated with new detail and developments as the Strategic Sites and Site Allocations processes progress.

The possible cost of neighbourhood plans loomed large in many parishes’ minds, especially given the need for councils to make savings in the current austerity climate. It was noted that WDC has no identified budget for neighbourhood planning and that estimates from front runners had put the cost to a parish of a neighbourhood plan at anywhere up to £60,000.

Several clerks noted enthusiasm in their communities for the use of neighbourhood plans to ‘beef up’ conservation protections and design standards.

- The current Wealden Design Guide, which was created as a policy under the previous Non-Statutory Local Plan, will remain valid under the new Local Plan.

Confirmatory referenda: while the Localism Act is clear that it is the district council which arranges and runs these, who pays?

- This is not yet clear - neither the Act nor the current regulations to it say who should pay for these referenda.

The Department for Communities and Local Government responded to a query on this issue from Stratford District Council (fifth post from top) as follows:

"In regards to payment for referendums, the Act requires local authorities to make arrangements to hold referendums (paragraph 14(2) of Schedule 4B). As it is their function they must be responsible for paying for the referendum they arrange. We are currently developing the secondary legislation on neighbourhood planning referendums which build on the existing local government referendum regulations and which we anticipate will come into force later in 2012. The requirement will be for the local planning authority to make arrangements for the holding of a referendum into a neighbourhood plan or order."
"In regards to funding, the Government acknowledges the additional burdens the requirement on local authorities to hold referendums will create and so have committed to provide £50 million until March 2015 to support local councils in making neighbourhood planning a success, ensuring they can fulfil their legal duty to support parish councils and community groups doing neighbourhood planning. This includes organising referendums into neighbourhood plans and orders under the Localism Act."

This would seem to indicate that district councils will be responsible for paying for any neighbourhood planning referenda (notwithstanding the £50m of potential funding). However, the 'existing local government regulations' to which DCLG refer (section 36 of the Representation of the People Act 1983) entitle a district council to recover some or all of the costs of holding a parish election or poll from the parish concerned. Whether this arrangement will apply to neighbourhood planning referenda in the new secondary legislation is yet to be seen. It is also as yet unclear as to who may access the proposed £50 million, or how they should do so.

**Next steps**

WDC will continue to monitor developments (e.g. publication of referendum regulations, progress of frontrunner neighbourhood plans) and update parishes accordingly. A web page will be set up with links to relevant information.

WDC Planning Policy are preparing a briefing to provide information on neighbourhood planning and to help parishes come to a decision as to the best way to achieve their aims. The pack will include a questionnaire designed to help Parish and Town Councils to consider what they ultimately wish to achieve. Completing this will provide the initial step in allowing WDC to provide advice on the planning tools available to parishes, and will also help WDC to understand parishes' proposals so that we can engage more effectively with town and parish councils on both neighbourhood plans and local plans.

Otherwise, the WDC neighbourhood planning 'offer' has yet to be defined in detail, with roles & responsibilities still to be fully identified. Discussions are ongoing.

**Additional information**

- [Core Strategy Library & Evidence Base](#)
  Contains the full library of Core Strategy documents

- [Strategic Sites Issues & Options](#)
  Includes background documents & evidence base for specific strategic sites

- [Dawlish neighbourhood plan](#) (external link)
  This is the first neighbourhood plan to reach examination stage. Worth noting that as Teignbridge DC is not as far through the Local Plan process the NP has progressed side-by-side with Core Strategy development, unlike in Wealden where the Core Strategy is already at inspection stage.