

## **Wealden Local Plan Update**

Wealden District Council, together with partners, have been working hard to move to the next stage of the review of the Wealden Local Plan – the representation stage – as soon as is reasonably possible and have been aiming for our Full Council on 23 November.

In working towards this date we always knew that a number of the studies we have commissioned, to produce our evidence bases, would be delivered to tight timescales. A number of the studies are complex and interrelated and together with the high demand nationally for the specialist skills required there was always a risk that delays to the studies would impact on our proposed timetable.

This has proved to be the case. The iterative nature of the studies means that there are areas which are not yet complete and for which we require further work. We need to complete this work to ensure we have the full picture before progressing with the next stage of the plan.

For example, one of the key pieces of evidence which is not yet complete is that relating to the impact of development on Ashdown Forest. We have been monitoring levels of nitrogen deposition on the Forest alongside receiving regular ecology reports. These, combined with traffic modelling work we are undertaking in conjunction with the County Council, will give us a comprehensive picture of what development will be possible across the district whilst continuing to protect the Ashdown Forest. As we have flagged from the start, this modelling will need to reflect highways improvements across the district and beyond, for example improvements to the A27, and is therefore a complex piece of work.

It is critical that the proposed plan is sound. Given this evidence base requires further work before it is complete we consider that the most appropriate action is to delay moving to the representation stage of the WLP process. Our aim is to get the work completed as soon as possible with a view to progressing with the representation stage in the first quarter of 2017. The option of proceeding now with incomplete information would be counter-productive and would only extend the overall timescale.

Whilst disappointing, this delay gives us an opportunity to share elements of the plan more widely as they emerge over the next few months rather than all aspects coming together immediately before publication. We anticipate that our overall timescale for the plan will still be within the 2018 target and we will continue to progress the plan as quickly as we reasonably can.

Nigel Hannam

28 October 2016