

Core Strategy Issues and Emerging Options Topic Papers

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEWES DISTRICT

Background and Aims

The Introductory Topic Paper provides the background to the Local Development Framework (LDF), the progress made on the Core Strategy for Lewes District to date and how the content of all the Topic Papers has been formulated. This included engagement with District Councillors and representatives from Town and Parish Councils.

The aim of this consultation stage is to present the emerging work on the Core Strategy and seek the views of the public and key stakeholders on the various elements of this work. The consultation will last **8 weeks**, running from the 21st May 2010 to the 16th July 2010. At the end of this paper there are a number of questions that we are keen for individuals and organisations to respond to. Details on how to respond can also be found in this part of the paper.

Purpose of this Topic Paper

One of the first tasks that needs to be undertaken in preparing a Core Strategy is to identify the current characteristics of the area that will be covered by the plan, which in this case is Lewes District. This stage of the plan preparation is often known as creating a spatial portrait. Developing a spatial portrait for the plan area enables a number of the key issues, which the Core Strategy needs to address, to be identified.

In developing a spatial portrait of the District, information is obtained from a variety of sources, which includes evidence base documents that are specifically undertaken to help inform the Core Strategy document. Hence, the spatial portrait identified in this paper will be added to, altered slightly, or expanded upon, as and when an evidence base document has been prepared.

This Topic Paper identifies the spatial portrait of Lewes District, with key characteristics that apply to the District as a whole identified first, followed by characteristics that apply to individual areas of the District.





General Characteristics

- Lewes District is located within East Sussex, in the South East region of England and around 60 miles south of London.
- The District covers an area of 292 sq km, extending from the English Channel coast through the South Downs and into the countryside of the Sussex Weald to the north.
- The total population is 95,615 (2009 mid-year estimate), 77% of whom live in the five urban areas of Lewes, Newhaven, Peacehaven, Seaford and Telscombe Cliffs/East Saltdean. The remainder of the population live in 23 predominantly rural parishes.
- Just over one half of the District lies within the South Downs National Park, which came into effect on the 1st April 2010. The population of this area is approximately 22,500.
- The city of Brighton & Hove is located on the south-western boundary and exerts a strong influence on the life of the District, providing employment, shopping, leisure opportunities, together with other services and facilities.
- The towns of Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill in Mid Sussex District abut the north-western boundary, with the more rural District of Wealden located to the east, beyond which lies the coastal resort of Eastbourne.
- The District benefits from good access to the trunk road network, with the A27/A26 linking Lewes and Newhaven to neighbouring Brighton and Eastbourne and the nearby A23/M23 providing access to London, Gatwick and the M25.
- The A27 carries an average daily traffic flow of 57,000 vehicles through the District and by 2026 the volume of traffic on the Falmer section is expected to exceed available road capacity (Highways Agency Regional Network Report 2008).
- In addition to the trunk road network, the District is served by a number of key A roads. This includes the A259, which links the coastal communities, and the A272 and A275, which are key routes through the northern part of the District.
- Lewes, Seaford and Newhaven are linked by rail connections to London, Gatwick, and towns along the Sussex coast and beyond.
- The port of Newhaven provides cross channel passenger and freight services to Dieppe in Haute Normandie, France.

Environmental Characteristics

- The landscape and historic environment of the District is highly valued by both residents and visitors. There is a diverse and attractive countryside, including chalk cliffs, shingle beaches, downland, heathland, river valleys, flood plains and areas of ancient woodland.
- The high quality natural environment is emphasised by the high level of environmental protection in parts of the District, including the National Park, 16 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, two Special Areas of Conservation, two National Nature Reserves, five Local Nature Reserves, and three Wildlife Trust Reserves.
- Of the 2,437 hectares of land designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, over 42% are considered by English Nature to be in an adverse condition.

- The District has a rich built heritage including 35 Conservation Areas, ranging in size from the historic core of Lewes town to small villages and hamlets in the Sussex Downs and Weald.
- There are 1,760 Listed Buildings and 109 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, together with numerous sites of archaeological interest and four historic parks included on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens. There is also one historic battlefield site in the District (Lewes 1264).
- Significant areas, including the towns of Lewes and Newhaven, are at risk of flooding from the River Ouse and its tributaries, or inundation from the sea. In addition, there are many parts of the District that have areas prone to surface water flooding and ground water flooding during times of excessive rainfall.
- Generally air quality in the District is good, but an Air Quality Management Area is in operation in Lewes town centre, with motor vehicles comprising the main source of pollution. Another area of concern, in terms of air quality, is the area beside the A259 in the centre of Newhaven, where the levels of nitrogen dioxide are close to the national limits.
- Large parts of the District benefit from a highly peaceful and tranquil environment, with minimal light pollution, that is much valued by residents and visitors.

Social Characteristics

- The District has a significantly higher percentage of residents over 65 years of age (23.6%) compared with the national average (16.7%). By contrast, it has a smaller proportion of residents aged 15-29 years (14.7%) compared with the national average (20.2%).
- In 2001, 97.9% of the population were white, compared with 91.3% in England and Wales, with the remainder coming from a wide variety of ethnic groups, the largest of which are Bengali's and Cantonese.
- The population of the District is growing steadily, due to inward migration rather than natural increase (i.e. births exceeding deaths). The population is projected to grow by 5,721 between 2006 and 2026, a 5.5% increase that will take the population to 99,185.
- The number of households is expected to grow by 10% over the same period (from 41,296 to 45,560 households), mainly due to a continued decrease in household size.
- The 65+ age group is expected to increase by 43% between 2006 and 2026, as those born in the 'baby boom' of the 1950s and 1960s reach retirement age. In the same period the numbers of very elderly (aged 85 and over) are projected to rise from 3,556 to 6,435, an increase of 75%.
- By 2026, single person households are expected to comprise 41% of all the households in the District, compared with 33% in 2006; over 11,000 of these single person households will be pensioners.
- Over 21% of households in the District do not have access to a car, and a high proportion of these householders are pensioners.
- The mean household income is £35,671, which is higher than the mean for East Sussex or Great Britain, but still well below the South East region's mean of £39,231.





- Overall levels of deprivation across the District are comparatively low, although there are small areas within the coastal towns that fall within the worst 30% in England, when measured against the Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- Most of the population is active and in good health compared to other parts of East Sussex and although there is a higher than average number of retired people, life expectancy is above the national average. Nevertheless, there are significant pockets of ill health, particularly in the coastal towns, where a relatively high proportion of households contain one or more people with a limiting long-term illness.
- House prices are relatively high, driven by commuting and the District's status as a popular retirement location. In 2007 average house prices in the District were more than 9 times average earnings and despite a more recent fall in house prices due to current market conditions, long term pressures of housing supply and affordability remain.
- 2,345 households are currently on the Council Housing Register, with 49 homeless households in temporary accommodation (as of April 2010).
- Considerable variation exists in the price of dwellings across the District, with a corresponding difference in the level of household income necessary to buy, with higher levels in Lewes town and the rural parts of the District compared with the coastal towns.
- Access to recreational facilities is good compared to the national average, although there is a general shortfall in the provision of children's play space and tennis courts across the District.
- Community life is a strong and distinctive feature of the District and residents identify closely with their towns, neighbourhoods and villages.

Economic Characteristics

- Lewes District is generally prosperous with unemployment levels below the national, regional and East Sussex rates.
- There are around 31,900 jobs in the District, predominantly in public administration, education and health (36.7%), distribution, hotels and restaurants (21.3%) and banking, finance and insurance (14.5%).
- Small companies of between 1 and 10 employees account for 88% of all local businesses.
- Self-employment is a significant feature, representing 18% of the economically active population, compared with 14% in the South East.
- Lewes town accounts for almost half the District's employment, the high level of public sector employment protecting it from job losses in traditional manufacturing.
- Newhaven, which is relatively dependent upon manufacturing employment, has suffered significant job losses and has not shared in the wider economic prosperity of recent years.
- Jobs within the District are relatively poorly paid, with average weekly earnings well below the national or regional average, although marginally above the average for East Sussex.
- The District has significant levels of out-commuting to jobs elsewhere, particularly Brighton & Hove, the Crawley/Gatwick area and London.

- Sussex and Brighton Universities are located adjacent to the District boundary, together with the Sussex Innovation Centre.
- A high percentage of residents in the coastal towns have no skills qualifications.
- The rural parts of the District have undergone major change as agricultural employment has contracted and been replaced by a growth in remote home working and rural tourism. These parts of the District include a number of rural industrial estates, often on farms. Within the District, tourism now supports approximately 2,200 full time equivalent jobs (6.9% of all employment).
- The southern half of the District is within the Sussex Coast sub- region, identified in the South East Plan as a priority area for economic growth and regeneration.
- Many employment premises in the District are ageing and do not meet modern business requirements. An exception to this is the recently opened Newhaven Enterprise Centre, which has a 100% occupancy rate.
- Employment land is under pressure from higher-value competing land uses, particularly residential and retail.

Lewes town

- Lewes is the county town of East Sussex with a population of 16,647. The town is within the South Downs National Park.
- It is located on the River Ouse at the point where it flows southwards through a gap in the South Downs. Significant parts of the town are at risk of flooding from the river and there was a severe flood event in the town in October 2000.
- It is considered to be one of the best preserved small market towns in England, with significant artistic and cultural heritage.
- The town contains the remains of Lewes Castle and the medieval priory. In addition it has a rich and varied architectural heritage with 508 listed buildings.
- The historic core of the town comprises three individual settlements – Lewes High Street, Southover and Cliffe – each preserving its own identity. Beyond these areas are a number of well preserved Victorian and Edwardian suburbs.
- Lewes is an important administrative centre, containing the Crown, County and Magistrates Courts, prison, and headquarters of the County and District Council, Sussex Police, Ambulance Service and local NHS Trust. Other notable establishments and companies include Sussex Downs College and Harvey's Brewery.
- 44% of jobs in Lewes are within public administration, education and health.
- There is a thriving town centre and strong sense of community. The town has a strong tradition of bonfire celebrations on the 5th November.
- Transition Town Lewes was launched in April 2007. Around twenty Transition Groups have formed around issues such as energy use, transport, food and housing.
- The town has the largest retail centre in the District with a number of local specialist shops.
- The town has unusually good public transport connections with direct rail services to London, Gatwick Airport, Brighton, Eastbourne and Seaford. The town is also the hub for local bus services.





Newhaven

- With a population of 12,241 the town of Newhaven is located at the mouth of the River Ouse, on the English Channel coast.
- The town has had a harbour for sea-faring vessels since the 16th century. Today the main services operating from the harbour are the cross-channel ferry to Dieppe and commercial trade in aggregates and scrap metals. There is also a commercial fishing fleet.
- Although there are a number of derelict and under-utilised sites that are near to, or adjoin the harbour, there has been significant recent water-front redevelopment at West Quay and Harbour Heights. There is also 12 hectares of land at Eastside, which is allocated for business development, but has yet to be implemented.
- Newhaven Fort, built in the 1860s to defend the growing harbour, is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- The town has a concentration of heavy industry and a range of facilities involved in waste management. Due to such uses on a number of sites, including those that are derelict, there are a significant number of sites that are contaminated.
- Denton Island has recently seen an upsurge in economic activity with the successful establishment of the Training & Enterprise Centre.
- Retail offer within the town centre is declining with a number of vacant units.
- The town has two functioning railway stations offering direct train services to Lewes, Seaford and Brighton.
- A high proportion of jobs in the town (37%) are in manufacturing.

Peacehaven & Telscombe

- The settlement has a population of 20,875 and is located on the cliff edge between the sea and open downland. Coast defences protect the majority of the cliff edge from erosion by the sea.
- The settlement is generally a 20th century, mainly low density residential development, characterised by a rigid grid street layout. Coast defences protect most areas of cliff top development.
- The A259 coast road is the only vehicular route in and out of the urban area and suffers from congestion at peak periods, particularly in the Brighton direction.
- The Meridian Centre provides shops, library, leisure and other public facilities. Other retail outlets and services are scattered along the A259.
- Despite its large residential population, Peacehaven only provides 5% of the total employment in the District. As a result of this most residents have to travel out of the town to work, particularly in Brighton.

Seaford

- The town is the largest settlement in the District with a population of 23,694. It is located between the sea and the Downs on the eastern edge of the Ouse Valley.
- The historic core of the town is set back from the modern seafront where a wide shingle beach is maintained as a sea defence.
- The town contains significant post-war residential estate development, which absorbed the three downland villages of Bishopstone, Chyngton and Blatchington.
- Immediately adjacent to the town are the dramatic cliffs of Seaford Head, which act as a significant visitor attraction. Further along from Seaford Head are the famous landscapes of the Seven Sisters and Cuckmere Haven. Despite these attractions the town's visitor economy is underdeveloped.
- The town's railway station offers direct train services to Newhaven, Lewes and Brighton.
- 30% of the population are aged 65 or over, which is significantly higher than the national average of 17.6%.
- A high proportion of the jobs in the town are in the health and education sectors.

The rural area of the Low Weald

- The rural area of the Low Weald is an intimate landscape characterised by an irregular field pattern enclosed by thick hedgerows and shaws and areas of ancient woodland, together with extensive areas of protected heathland at Chailey Common.
- Villages in this part of the District are small (less than 2,000 population), with the exception of Ringmer (the population of the village is 4,609) which has a range of facilities and services including a secondary school.
- House prices in the Low Weald area of the District are generally higher than in the rest of the District.
- The vitality of villages is being undermined by a shortage of affordable housing, high levels of out commuting, a decline in the number and range of local services, and limited public transport.
- The non-farming rural economy has seen considerable growth in recent years, due to farm diversification, the growth in knowledge dependent businesses and increasing levels of self-employment and home working.
- Due to the nature of the terrain and clay soils, parts of this area are prone to localised flooding.





The rural area of the South Downs

- The rural area of the South Downs is a, relatively, very accessible countryside, offering outstanding recreational opportunities, with Ditchling Beacon and Mount Caburn amongst some of the best recognised attractions.
- The area contains a range of iconic places and views that are part of the national consciousness, from Cuckmere Haven and the views of the Seven Sisters to the internationally renowned opera house at Glyndebourne.
- The area has a number of small villages and hamlets of the highest architectural and historic quality, most of which retain a sense of seclusion and tranquillity despite their proximity to major transport corridors and urban areas.
- Despite the area's rural nature there are a number of key facilities and establishments that are important to the wider area. This includes Plumpton Agricultural College.
- As with the Low Weald area, the vitality of villages is being undermined by a shortage of affordable housing, high levels of out commuting, a decline in the number and range of local services, and limited public transport.
- The landscape character and natural beauty is vulnerable to continuing development pressures along the south coast, which are leading to additional demands on groundwater resources, localised recreational pressures, increased traffic and visually intrusive developments.

Sources of information

The facts and figures that have been quoted in this Topic Paper have been predominantly obtained from the East Sussex in Figures website (www.eastsussexinfigures.org.uk).

This is your opportunity to shape your local area and input on how the District develops over the next 15 years. The Council would appreciate and value any comments you have on this document. With regards to this Topic Paper we would particularly appreciate your answers to the following questions:

- ***Has this Topic Paper captured the characteristics that are relevant to Lewes District, or not?***
- ***Have any of the characteristics been misinterpreted?***
- ***Do you have facts and figures relevant to Lewes District that we could identify in our characteristics section?***

Obtaining additional copies of the Issues and Emerging Options Topic Papers

- Downloading it from www.lewes.gov.uk/corestrategy
- Emailing ldf@lewes.gov.uk
- Visiting Lewes District Council at Southover House
- Telephoning the Planning Policy Team on **01273 484417**

How to respond to the Core Strategy Issues and Emerging Options Topic Papers

Views are invited to the questions that are located at the end of each of the Topic Papers. You need only reply to any part of the questions that are of interest to you, or you may introduce other comments.

Comments may be sent to the Council by:

By email to: **ldf@lewes.gov.uk**

By Fax: **01273 484452**

By post to: Lewes District Council
Planning Policy Team
Southover House
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Comments must be received by the 16th July 2010



This leaflet can be made available in large print, audiotape, disk or in another language upon request.

**Please telephone 01273 484141 or
email lewesdc@lewes.gov.uk**

LDF

Local Development Framework

Topic paper number

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