

FOREST ROW PARISH COUNCIL

RESPONSE TO

**WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS**



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LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CONTEXT

1. INTRODUCTION

Forest Row is located on the northern boundary of Wealden District, abutting West Sussex, Surrey and Kent. Because of its location Forest Row has unique cross-boundary issues in terms of transport, employment, leisure, utilities and other important services such as education and police.

The key points for the Parish of Forest Row are:

Electors:	3,670 (as per published register of electors)
Population:	5,200 (2001 census)
Schools:	1 State Primary 4 independents All state secondary schools in different towns – including the nearest one in East Grinstead in West Sussex. 2 Nursery schools/playgroups
Colleges	Emmerson College – Steiner Teacher Training
Churches:	Church of England Catholic Baptist Christian Community
Businesses:	Approximately 180, including a Post Office and two large employers
Leisure facilities:	Recreation Ground with Pavilion Football, Tennis, Cricket Golf Clubs
Youth Facilities:	An active Youth Club, part funded by the Parish Council
Facilities for Elderly:	A club funded by the Parish Council and a lunch club run by volunteers

The village of Forest Row is a vibrant community that seems to buck national trends. It boasts many local specialist shops including three butchers, a baker, a mobile greengrocer and many other shops that ensure a thriving local economy. The community also supports two organic farms. Forest Row is used as a local shopping centre for the nearby villages of Ashurst Wood, Colemans Hatch, Upper Hartfield and Sharpthorne/West Hoathly.

Whilst the majority of the population is static, there is a large minority that is transient – moving to the village for the flagship Rudolph Steiner School and the Scientology School (Greenfields). Many of these people come from abroad and, whilst some return home after a few years, many stay on to create a very unique and mixed community. There is also a student population for Emerson College. However the majority of the population have lived in the village all their lives and their families go back many generations.

The village lies within the High Weald AONB and is adjacent to Ashdown Forest, an area with national and European protection. To the north of the village is a tributary of the river Medway creating an area designated as 'flood plain'. The old railway line (East Grinstead to Tunbridge Wells) also runs to the north of the village, now the Forest Way, part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network

Forest Row is designated as a 'Large Village Local Service Centre' with potential for some growth. However the 'growth' seems to vary in the report from 10 units to over 200.

The Local Development Framework as it would affect Forest Row needs to be considered in the above context.

2. SERVICES

- 2.1 Health** – No consideration seems to have been given to Forest Row directly with regard to the capacity of the Forest Row Health Centre in the event that additional houses were built. We have contacted the senior practitioner at the health centre and they report that the present premises would not be able to cope with additional numbers. The parking at the Centre is already severely inadequate.
- 2.2 Education** – The existing primary school would be unable to cope with any additional housing in excess of 100 units. Any expansion of housing will need to address this capacity problem. A separate report from the headmaster is attached (Appendix B)
- 2.3 Youth Services** – This very important aspect of community life hardly seems to get a mention. Whilst the Parish Council heavily subsidises this service, there is a very real need for a dedicated building for youth activities, since the destruction of the old building by fire in September 2008. If there were to be a substantial increase in the number of dwellings in Forest Row, some consideration would need to be given to this aspect.
- 2.4 Libraries** – The current provision of a library in the Community Centre building is subsidised by the Parish Council. It is not a shared facility and there is scope for extra capacity should the space be found for this increase in the Community Centre.
- 2.5 Community Centre and Playgroup** – the current premises are only just adequate to cope with the present usage. Any further increase in the population of the village would require additional space in order to provide the necessary services to the village.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE

- 3.1 Transport/Traffic** – This aspect has many cross-boundary issues.
- 3.2 A22** – This main road is the main road connecting communities in Surrey, West Sussex and East Sussex. The road is already at capacity in terms of vehicular movements. The centre of Forest Row has already been optimised with respect to the current levels of traffic and there are no further mitigating measures to alleviate further increases in traffic numbers. There is always concern about any increase in traffic on the A22 and this is particularly relevant to any major development in East Grinstead. Opinion is divided on the best solution, but the LDF needs to recognise and take into account this major issue and its effect on Forest Row.
- 3.3 Public Transport:** The nearest mainline railway station is in East Grinstead (3 miles). The buses serving the village offer a reasonable service area, but the glaring omission is the lack of any public transport to Crowborough, where the District Council offices are located.
- 3.4 Utilities** – Unfortunately the provision of the statutory utilities to this part of the District barely gets a mention. It is an accepted fact that these services are currently overstretched and that an additional burden on them would have a detrimental impact on the area. It is also accepted that the provision of water is a perennial problem (notwithstanding the current problems with flooding) and that the existing reservoirs would find it very difficult to cope with the supply of many additional houses. Here again, the supply of these essential services cannot be considered on a 'district' only basis. Many, if not all, of them cross county boundaries and to give scant regard to these critical services in the LDF with respect to Forest Row is to ignore the most important aspect of any future growth in the region.
- 3.5 Flooding** – Forest Row is surrounded to the south by a designated flood plain and the proposed location of the additional houses could be critical in this regard.

4. LOCAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1** As mentioned before, Forest Row is on the boundary with West Sussex, Surrey and Kent.
- 4.2** Forest Row is a 'service centre' with a hinterland that includes Hartfield, Sharpthorne, Ashurst Wood, and Nutley. Many people from these communities come to Forest Row to work or to access the many varied shopping opportunities and alternative therapies. The Youth Club actually has members from as far afield as Nutley, Chelwood Gate and Fletching.
- 4.3** Car parking is already at capacity and additional housing would mean that more car parking would need to be found. This, and other infrastructure aspects need to be in place before additional housing is considered.
- 4.4** The Parish Development Boundary is long overdue for a re-assessment and we have undertaken some work on examining this. The Parish Council believes a number of houses would be possible within an increased envelope which would go some way towards the total number envisaged for Forest Row within the LDF. In addition to a re-assessment of the Development Boundary the Parish Council would wish to look at those areas designated for Commercial Use as it is our belief that some of the areas so designated could be used for housing following a full assessment of community needs. We do not however believe that the Community could absorb a large percentage of units.

The above is the background that we submitted in August 2007 as part of our response to the Core Strategy – Issues and Options, with some minor amendments to bring the information up to date.

5. PARISH COUNCIL'S CONCERNS AT PROCESS

5.1 BRIDGING TEMPLATE

In July 2008 Forest Row Parish Council completed the 'Bridging Template' as requested. We were asked for our three key priorities under the various themes. This we did, but to extrapolate from this exercise that **'A responding parish did not comment on this category'** in relation to:

- Flooding and Drainage Issues
- Transport and Access Issues (in fact definitely commented on)
- Scale of Development
- Limit Housing Development
- Housing for older/vulnerable people
- Facilities/Activities for Young People. (again, definitely commented on)

Because it was not in our top three key priorities, does not mean that we did not comment on specific issues, given that we were not asked to comment on any specific issues. To conclude the negative from that is unacceptable.

We attach a copy of the Bridging Template for information.

5.2 MASTERPLAN

We were advised, indeed encouraged, to undertake a Parish Masterplan Survey, along the lines of those undertaken by the towns. We were asked to complete this within a very tight timeframe and worked extremely hard to accomplish this. However, we are extremely concerned that none of the results of this exercise have been taken into consideration in your consultation documents.

5.3 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Surveys show that there is an acute need for affordable housing in Forest Row (figures.....) It is recognised that more development would need to be accommodated if even a small percentage of the need is to be fulfilled. The Masterplan results show that residents would be happy to take up to 200 new houses, recognising that some growth is necessary for a community to remain sustainable and vibrant. We were also asked to consider potential sites for future development. This we have done, we took strict local criteria such as flood plain into consideration. We were told that this information would be sought during the consultation, but see no opportunity to submit the results of this carefully thought through exercise. However, we are doing so again, in order that you can see conclude for yourself that some development can be accommodated in Forest Row.

All your options except Option 1, show 10 houses for Forest Row. This we feel is too low. However we comment on the various options below in the next section.

As your own Matrix shows, in terms of services, Forest Row acts as a hub for local communities and we would like this to continue.

5.4 S.106 POLICY

We have, as a Parish Council, been arguing the case for a more robust and beneficial S.106 Policy. We were told that this would be examined in the context of the LDF and find that there is no mention of this. Unless there is another consultation exercise planned for this purpose, we would like to reiterate our concern at the lack of clarity of the process involved and the apparent inability for smaller councils to gain any tangible benefits for their communities in view of the deminimus of 15 dwellings. We sent you the scheme that Horsham District Council had in place for S.106 and have yet to see any change of policy at Wealden District Council addressed through the LDF.

RESPONSE TO SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

The Parish Council considered all the options contained in the consultation document together with the associated sustainability appraisal. We would comment as follows and use the format of your questionnaire for consistency.

1. Please tell us which of the housing options is the most appropriate for Wealden

Option 1 Option 2 Option 3 Option 4 Option 5 Option 6

Reasons

2. If you do not agree with any of the suggested housing options, please tell us how you would like to see housing growth distributed

Please give reasons for your proposed distribution

3. Please tell us which of the employment options is the most appropriate for Wealden.

Option 7 Option 8 Option 9 Option 10

Please give reasons for your choice

4. If you do not agree with the suggested employment options, please tell us how you would like to see employment growth distributed.

Please give reasons for your proposed distribution.

5. Is there anything else you wish to tell us about our vision and strategic aims or suggested spatial options?

6. Are there any other matters we should be addressing as part of the Wealden Core Strategy?

