**Planning the ‘Vision’ of the Local Environment**

You may have heard that Wealden District Council (WDC) are in the process of updating their Local Plan. In fact, they have been doing this for many years, but successive events have meant that this process has been delayed and delayed again. This has become a national issue and central government has now issued directions for the preparation of Local Plans to be undertaken more simply and more rapidly with an expectation that this will be undertaken within 30 months. This sounds ambitious but the Plan is expected to be reviewed every 5 years making projected outcomes less difficult to estimate and potentially less controversial. In addition, the biodiversity and environmental targets included in the new Local Plan are to be predetermined by central government with the details due to be published later this year.

The national debate around building more houses continues with some areas eg Eastbourne claiming that they do not have room for major additional houses and so other areas are coming under pressure to provide these extra houses. The Planning Authorities are required to consult with their communities in order to accommodate the needs and wishes of their residents. Danehill Parish Council will at some stage be invited to provide details of their ‘Vision’ of what should be included for in our Parish. We are a rural parish of approximately 750 houses spread across a wide area and located within the designated High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB) and a significant part of the protected Ashdown Forest. These characteristics provide restrictions on any significant development but as a community we should be in a position to consider and put forward proposals for how we would like to see our parish progress in light of the many challenges to our society today.

The challenges are indeed wide ranging such as maintaining the local school, young families, and community facilities, provision of local jobs, low-cost housing and transport links but at the same time protecting our fantastic environment and seeking ways to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and waste. The Parish Council set up a Climate Group a couple of years ago and have been encouraging WDC Planning to approve new low-cost housing on a limited scale. The Climate Group is made up of like-minded parishioners who have come together to raise the drive towards reducing our carbon footprint. They have regularly attended the Village Market to coordinate various related initiatives such as water saving techniques, waste recycling / reduction and have been actively involved with the planting of wild flowers and tree saplings and also the drafting of the Danehill Climate Action Policy which was adopted by the PC in March of this year.

The current direction of looking to reduce the timescale for preparing a Local Plan whilst taking account of the local communities ‘Vision’ will be challenging. Part of the new regulations is for Parish Councils to consider preparing their ‘Vision’ in the form of a ‘Neighbourhood Priorities Statement’ to assist WDC in the preparation of the Local Plan and use as a guide in making planning decisions. If Danehill PC decide to progress this proposal and produce a ‘Vision’ for the Danehill and Chelwood Gate community then your views on what should be included would be essential.

Preparation of Local Plans is always controversial and the need for additional housing continues to influence how and where such developments should take place. Your views on your ‘Vision’ for the needs of our community are essential to inform your Parish Council on this important issue. Please email clerk@danehill-pc.org with your suggestions.