



Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council

# NEWSLETTER

Special Issue

August 2013

## LONG TERM PLAN FOR 155 HOUSES IN ROBERTSBRIDGE

Major decisions will soon be made affecting the future of housing in Robertsbridge. This supplementary Newsletter describes the background. You have two chances to comment on the plans. **The first ends on 27 September i.e. SOON.** The second chance will probably be next summer. Details at the end of this Newsletter.

Under the new planning laws the Government specifies to Rother District Council (RDC) the number of new houses to be accommodated by 2028. RDC does not have to build these houses – but it does have to designate suitable sites for them *now*. These requirements are being incorporated in a new RDC Local Plan.

Also under the new planning laws Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish Council (S&RPC) can choose to make its own Neighbourhood Plan (NP) or to go in with RDC as part of a Rother-wide plan. An NP would have to designate sites for housing to 2028 in numbers that would be forced on us by RDC. Making an NP requires enthusiasm, a lot of work collecting evidence, expertise, time, and quite a lot of money. In our case if we did make an independent NP we would, as the Planning Authority, have to fight developers (of the Mill Site, for example) who have much greater resources than your S&RPC could muster. (At the Mill Site enquiry five years ago both the developers and RDC were represented for four days by QCs.) So the S&RPC has decided to go in with RDC. At present, only two of the 30+ Parish Councils in Rother are making their own NPs.

Groups of residents with particular concerns will, rightly, promote their particular localised views. But S&RPC has a duty to seek *the best outcome for the village as a whole*. The S&RPC is therefore in active discussion with RDC planners in a joint effort to get the best solution possible.

The new Local Plan 2011-2028 has three elements that affect us all.

(1) The Core Strategy. The text explains the problems and solutions suggested by RDC planners. It contains the target number of houses to be built by 2028, and some key management policies. This plan was at an advanced stage, having been out for consultation three times. At that point the Government withdrew the Southeast Plan on which housing numbers had been based, and replaced them with larger numbers. For Robertsbridge the Core Strategy now specifies 155. This large number is partly because we have had so few houses built during the previous Local Plan period, and partly because we are a 'service village' with rail and road links, bus services, a surgery, dentists, post office, shops, schools, churches, and so on. That the village has absorbed about 200 new houses in the previous two to three decades has carried no weight. (We now have about 1000 households.) The reworked Core Strategy is now available for comment (see later).

(2) The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). This is required by Government and shows for each parish all the *possible* sites, assembled from a variety of sources, where houses *might* be put with, crucially, an argued assessment of the *suitability* of each site for housing. The SHLAA does NOT itself designate any area for housing, merely assesses its suitability or otherwise. The SHLAA is also published (see later). It works through Rother district, parish by parish. Robertsbridge is at pages 81 (map) and 82 to 84 (assessment of suitability). On the map some areas are bounded by red (judged unsuitable), some by orange, and some (judged suitable) by green.

(3) The Development and Site Allocation Plan. After the Core Strategy has been agreed by a government Planning Inspector, the formal designation of some sites from the SHLAA for housing development will be made. Some sites are already designated in the previous Local Plan and will remain so: the Country Crafts site (was Westridge, on the west of George Hill), the Mill site, the site beyond Culverwell's, the Grove Farm site (east of George Hill towards the bypass). If these are not sufficient, then one more suitable site may be needed. (The Grove Farm site was originally designated as 'In reserve'. The reservation, NOT the site, has since been withdrawn.)

It is still necessary for a developer to submit a planning application for a development. *Any individual or group can comment on such proposals.* The S&RPC will be able to *recommend* acceptance, modification, or plain refusal to RDC, who will take the actual decision about what to do. There is legal provision for RDC to negotiate with a developer for works for the Parish good (such as a new surgery for example) that the developer would not willingly have planned to do. S&RPC has discussed possibilities with RDC planners, using the results of the survey of opinions when the Mill site was being considered. Once a site is designated, nobody can prevent the owner applying for permission to build on it. Neither RDC nor the S&RPC can decide *when* a particular designated site will be developed.

Here are the *provisional* times of the stages in getting the Local Plan 2011 - 2028 in place:

<u>Public consultation</u> on revised Core Strategy	<u>August/September 2013 (NOW)</u>
Inspector's examination reopens	December 2013/January 2014
Inspector's Report	March 2014
Adoption (RDC Full Council)	April/May 2014
RDC consideration of Draft Site Allocations	May 2014
<u>Public consultation</u> on Site Allocations	<u>June/July 2014</u>
Formal consultation for representations	November-December 2014
Inspector's examination	April 2015
Adoption (RDC Full Council)	July 2015

Sources. Start with <[www.rother.gov.uk](http://www.rother.gov.uk)>. The website is complex, and confusing.

For the Core Strategy. Click on 'Core Strategy Main Modifications' (the second 'Hot Topic'). Then click on 'here' at the end of the first paragraph. Find the third bold heading: '**Main Modifications**'. Count 7 lines up and click on 'Proposed Submission Core Strategy', or look for the 9<sup>th</sup> item in the right hand list of 'Related Downloads'. You get a PDF. For the modifications go back to the '**Main Modifications**' heading. On the line below click on 'Main Modifications' or 'here'. That produces another PDF. To see the bits relevant to us find 'MOD 12.1' (a long way down) and work down the policy changes. MOD 12.5 lists housing numbers and their replacements. To comment on the modifications to the Core Strategy, go back to the page you got the PDFs from and go to the section '**Making Representations**' and follow instructions there. *Note that the grounds for comment are severely restricted.* A comment that '155 is too many houses' will just be ignored. All comments are to be submitted to RDC, by email or letter. All relevant ones will be passed on to the Inspector, who may wish to invite some individuals for further discussion.

For the SHLAA its easier: On the Rother home page use the SEARCH box top right to seek for 'SHLAA'. Then take the first item offered.

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