

Minutes of a meeting of the Crowborough Neighbourhood Plan **Commercial Group** held in the
Town Hall, The Broadway, Crowborough on Wednesday 29th July 2015 at 7.30pm

Present:

Michael Cooke
 Peter Ellefsen
 Chris Lawson
 Tony Fullwood – Planning Consultant
 Caroline Miles – Crowborough Town Council

Apologies:

Charles Tankard
 Greg Rose
 Matthew Street

Topics and Decisions	Action
<p>1. Apologies for Absence As recorded above.</p>	
<p>2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed.</p>	
<p>3. Matters Arising There were no matters arising from the minutes except those already included as agenda items.</p>	
<p>4. Matters from Members of the Public There were no matters from the general public.</p>	
<p>5. Report from the Steering Group Meeting – Wednesday 10th June 2015 Mike Cooke reported to the group that the first draft of the housing needs survey has taken place and has been distributed for comments. The Steering Group also agreed in principle to the recommendation of a 10% increase in town centre car parking spaces. It was also recommended that the Commercial Group investigate a site for additional railway station parking and to enable the provision of tourist accommodation in the town. It was also recommended that the Commercial Group investigate other sites for industrial use besides that of Sybron Way.</p>	
<p>6. Update on Mapping and Storing Information on Cloud Training on the use of the mapping software took place on the 29th June in the Town Hall. Both Mike Cooke and Graham Callard attended from the Commercial Group. Mike Cooke has uploaded his reports onto the Cloud File.</p>	

7. The changing nature of the High Street – A brief report by Chris Lawson

Chris Lawson stated that the continual rise of internet shopping is changing the demand for High Street retail units. Units that do sell are generally from businesses that would not work via the internet. These businesses are service related; for example nail bars and hairdressers, low-cost, second hand, or charity shops, or those that are specialist and sell niche products. There is also a rise in coffee shops and restaurants. Trading on the High Street has changed, and footfall had reduced in the High Street and had moved to Croft Road over the years because of the High Street's narrow pavements and two-way traffic. The expected result is that rents will fall; they have already fallen in some of the High Street premises. This may result in landlords selling shop units for conversion to residential units. Business rates are a big factor as they are comparable to rent. It is not certain what the impact will be of the re-evaluation of business rates which will take place in 2017, though it may be that rates will fall, making shops more attractive to potential renters. It is also possible that many units that are currently shops will become residential units; particularly shops that are currently situated on the fringe areas of a High Street.

8. High Street Mapping Update

Mike Cooke distributed maps of the High Street that had been colour coded in relation to A1 - D1 use.

It was agreed that the maps were a good basis for understanding the current make-up of the Town Centre and showed the spread of different types of retail businesses. They form a good basis for the Neighbourhood Plan. It was suggested by Tony Fullwood that landmark names are added to the map as it would be difficult to name every unit individually.

9. Future Recommendations for the High Street

Chris Lawson stated that Crowborough has always suffered from being too close to Tunbridge Wells. The main shopping area is now the area between The Cross and Croft Road. Footfall has moved from the High Street to Croft Road. The only remaining incentive to walk along the high street is to visit the banks (and possibly the Crowborough Cross public house. Free car parking is felt to be essential for the survival of Crowborough's shops. The size of the town centre units is only suitable for small independent retailers rather than the big names. A plan to change the High Street in terms of one way traffic in order to widen the pavement would help. This would encourage more

<p>specialist shops as is evident in other towns that have done this.</p> <p>It was noted that the Wealden District Council report undertaken in 2010 stated that in terms of projected need, and taking into account internet shopping, Crowborough would need to accommodate another 1,000 gross sq.m. of convenience food shopping. The study also revealed a need for a further 7,500 sq.m. gross floorspace for comparison goods such as clothes, furniture etc. The study projected ahead to 2027 and was carried out in Nov 2010 by a national consultant using recognised methodology and up-to-date data. An allowance had been made for the increase in internet expenditure. Chris Lawson pointed out that the report is now out of date, as there have been a lot of changes regarding shopping habits since then, notably the rise of internet shopping. It was agreed that the issue of additional convenience shopping should be opened up to the other groups for discussion.</p> <p>It was also pointed out that there is 800 sq.m. of unused retail space in the Fernbank Centre; since it continues to be empty, it raises the question as to whether indeed more space is actually required.</p> <p>Tony Fullwood asked the group to conduct a site visit to look at the future shape of the town centre. In particular, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - define a draft boundary of the Crowborough Town Centre (drawing the boundary around the rear curtilages of properties) - determine the Town Centre Primary Shopping Area (where the retail is and should continue to be focused) - identify retail opportunity sites where further retail could potentially be located in the longer term, and add boundaries to these areas to a map and to consider whether, if the shopping area were to be limited to the area from The Cross to The Broadway and Croft Road, it would allow change beyond the Cross for residential units? He also suggested that the entire working group discuss whether to accept, and plan to accommodate, Wealden's projected increase in retail space, or to present in the Plan convincing reasons to challenge it. 	<p>Mike Cooke to contact the chairmen of the working parties.</p> <p>The group will conduct a site visit and will present their ideas for the shape of the town to the next meeting.</p>
<p>10. Future Recommendations for Industrial Sites.</p> <p>Chris Lawson stated that there is a need for additional industrial units in Crowborough. Businesses that want to expand are moving out of Crowborough and their work force with it. It was agreed that there would be no opportunity for inward investment for Crowborough without additional industrial space.</p> <p>A discussion took place about the possible expansion of Sybron Way towards Palesgate Lane, but it was noted that there is an issue with large lorries being unable to access the site from Crowborough Hill due to the low railway bridge; access would have to be via Western Road which is already struggling to</p>	

<p>accommodate traffic.</p> <p>It was agreed that Crowborough camp could be a preferable site due to access from the A26, though there are soil contamination issues from the adjacent timber-treatment plant, and planning consent would be unlikely given its proximity to the Ashdown Forest SPA.</p> <p>Another site considered to have potential for industrial use was the land on the A26 to the east of the leisure centre.</p> <p>Tony Fullwood asked the group to look at the draft housing needs survey as this will determine the size of the future work force in Crowborough.</p> <p>It was agreed that the group would conduct a site visit to investigate the possible industrial sites within the boundary. Tony Fullwood suggested that the WDC Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment - Call For Sites might be used to assist in locating possible sites.</p> <p>Following discussion regarding a recent industrial development in Maresfield Mike Cooke indicated that a similar floorspace of 20,000 sqm of industrial space may be required for Crowborough within the next 20 years. Tony Fullwood advised that it would be advisable to understand the outcomes from the Housing Needs Survey which had information on where people from the town currently work. In addition, there is a need to understand potential future housing provision to help determine any growth to the local labour force. For these reasons, Tony Fullwood advised that the search for business sites should await the outcomes of the HNS and be conducted alongside the search for housing sites should this take place as a result of the HNS. Tony Fullwood suggested that it would be worth referring to the Wealden Employment Land Review which assesses the future of business sites.</p>	<p>The group will conduct a site survey and will present their findings.</p>
<p>11. Report on Car Parking Survey in Jarvis Brook and Future Car Parking.</p> <p>Mike Cooke circulated a report of a survey carried out using number plate recognition. Vehicle registrations were noted to determine which vehicles had entered and left Jarvis Brook between 5am and 10am. A chart attached to the report showed a total of 331 cars entered, and stayed in, the area, 131 of which used the car parks and 200 on the roads. The chart showed that there was still capacity at the Railway Station car park although it was noted that this could be because commuters are using alternative stations whilst work is being carried out at London Bridge. The chart also showed that commuters are using roads, notably Farningham Road where they cause an access nuisance, and Sybron Way, in order to avoid parking charges at the Station car park.</p> <p>It was agreed that taking the chart into account the group should be looking to accommodate an additional 150 car parking spaces in the area. It was noted that the group should also take into account the additional demand due to longer trains and additional homes.</p>	<p>Mike Cooke will rename the column titles to assist understanding of the data</p> <p>The group will conduct a site survey and present their findings at the next meeting.</p>

<p>It was agreed that a site survey would need to take place to ascertain possible sites. Land ownership details can be obtained from the Land Registry.</p>	
<p>12. Report on Discussions with Network Rail South East on Station Car Park. Mike Cooke reported to the group on his discussion with John Coleman. Network Rail and Southern have investigated the proposals for additional car parking space. They have stated that the cost of stabilising the ground formation to support the station car park surface would not make the project viable. Network Rail has said that it will investigate an alternative site should one become available.</p>	
<p>13. Report by Greg Rose on requirements for registering Assets of Community Value. It is hoped that the report will be available for the next meeting.</p>	<p>Greg Rose to provide a report</p>
<p>14. Any Further Recommendations by Tony Fullwood on the Work of the Commercial Group. Tony Fullwood stated that the group is working very well and congratulated them on the evidence gathering.</p> <p>Tony Fullwood suggested that the group produce a site survey proforma which could be used when gathering evidence on site visits, and that the proforma should contain the key factors in selecting a site and would be different for each of the site searches i.e. car park land, housing sites, business sites. He offered to assist the groups with this to guide site assessments. Once site surveys have been carried out options for various sites could be presented for consultation.</p>	<p>Site survey proforma to be drawn up and used when making site surveys visits. Observations of site surveys to be available for the next meeting.</p>
<p>15. Date of next meeting The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 23rd September.</p>	

The meeting closed at 9.45pm