

# Top of the Weald

A vision for Crowborough 2010 - 2030



May 2010





# Foreword



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**Vision Group Chairman**  
Crowborough Town Council

**Crowborough, to put it succinctly, is a nice place to live. For those of us who have grown up here, have moved here, or work here we know this. We all know how lucky we are to have such outstanding areas of natural beauty right on our doorstep, to feel a real sense of our heritage every time we walk through the town and to be able to take such pride in our community.**

We also see things everyday that we'd like to change such as, a lacklustre High Street, traffic problems and anti-social behaviour. These are all areas we need to improve on.

I want to see Crowborough succeed. I want Crowborough to thrive and to achieve its potential. But this will not happen overnight.

Over the last few years, we've been working with local people and local organisations to create a road map for the Crowborough we want to see develop over the next twenty years. Starting with the town's Health Check, and then through further consultation with our residents, we've shaped a Vision for Crowborough to 2030.

This document represents your aspirations for Crowborough over the coming years – it is unashamedly ambitious. Crowborough's future is certainly a challenging one, but the challenge is worth it! I hope you read on, share our Vision and help to make it a reality.

### Our 8 aims for Crowborough are:

- 1.** A thriving and dynamic town centre
- 2.** Protecting our natural and built environment
- 3.** A vibrant visitor destination
- 4.** Effective and sustainable transport
- 5.** Supporting business and enterprise
- 6.** Engaging with our young people
- 7.** Delivering affordable housing
- 8.** Focusing on the future at Pine Grove





# A forward thinking town



### What is 'A Vision for Crowborough' and why do we need one?

Across Wealden a hugely important debate is underway, in which Crowborough has a significant voice. Wealden District Council is preparing its Local Development Framework (LDF) which will determine where and what type of development can take place in the district.

This is Crowborough's chance to bring about the changes we all want to see. Our response has been shaped with local people by the Crowborough Partnership, which represents a broad cross section of organisations committed to Crowborough.

This document sets out a clear, long-term vision for Crowborough, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the community. It aims to act as a guide to the LDF and other local plans which follow.

By taking this long-term view, we can help to ensure that future growth and change is sustainable.

This vision is important for everyone who wants to see Crowborough thrive, whether they are residents, involved in business, serving the community or visitors to the town. Essentially it shows how we can make the most out of Crowborough.

This document represents the combined work of many organisations. Although not an exhaustive list by any means, they include:

- Crowborough Town Council
- The Crowborough Partnership
- Wealden District Council
- East Sussex County Council
- Crowborough Community Action Group
- Crowborough Business Group
- High Weald AONB Forum
- Churches Together
- Wealden Federation of Voluntary Organisations
- The Sussex Downs and Weald Primary Care Trust
- Sussex Police



# Crowborough today

### How has this Vision document come about?

Crow borough's vision has evolved through many stages of consultation involving local residents, businesses and community groups, as well as stakeholder groups and public representatives from the town, district and county councils.

The Crowborough Healthcheck Report and Action Plan of December 2005 started the Vision process by identifying the key issues facing Crowborough. It pointed to the need for a set of definitive aims and ambitions for the town.

One of the strengths of the Healthcheck was the level of community involvement in shaping its conclusions. There were three separate consultation days in the summer of 2005, door-to-door delivery of questionnaires, on-line surveys and specific workshops with groups such as young people and the elderly. This has also been at the core of the Vision process.

In early 2008, Crowborough Town Council began refining the findings of the

Healthcheck into deliverable aims for the town. Detailed consultations took place in January 2009 which established the principles for our Vision document.

In April 2009 a series of workshops were held to give fresh focus to views emerging from the consultations. These workshop exercises encouraged participants to explore what they wanted more of and less of, what specific improvements should be made, and possible solutions to transport and housing issues.

In November 2009 the Crowborough Vision Group agreed on the aims, themes, timings and areas that merited further research.





### Crowborough: an opportunity for a brighter future.

Crowborough has come a long way since it was developed as a Victorian New Town at the end of the 19th Century. The town's purpose then was as a fresh air resort in combination with Tunbridge Wells' role as a spa town.

Post World War II the town expanded rapidly, multiplying from 7,000 residents to the 20,000 we see today.

### Why do people choose Crowborough?

Crowborough's location in Wealden District, surrounded by an area of outstanding beauty, makes it an ideal location for those wishing for a community with a small town 'feel', with access to outdoor activities, low levels of crime and accessible transport links to London.

Promoting tourism has not been actively pursued by the town, but Crowborough's location offers excellent recreational opportunities with Ashdown Forest, Bluebell Wood, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and several Sites of Special Scientific Interest nearby.

Characters from Crowborough's history, such as Sherlock Holmes author Arthur Conan Doyle and the Victorian naturalist Richard Jefferies, also play an important role in the town's identity. The Victorian New Town heritage and listed buildings add to the feeling that Crowborough's history is still part of everyday life and something to be proud of.

For residents, being surrounded by idyllic countryside with easy access to modern amenities makes it a great location to raise a family. Excellent local schools, good health facilities, easy food shopping and low unemployment add to the reasons for choosing Crowborough as home.





### What could be better?

Some aspects of Crowborough are less than ideal, recent developments such as the proliferation of new supermarkets and the piecemeal refurbishment of parts of the town make it essential to have a clear Vision to steer future development.

The High Street lacks the retail offer of other nearby towns of similar size, and these problems can be associated with the opening of three large supermarkets in rapid succession. Existing shops are often in various states of disrepair and the number of now empty shop windows following closures further discourages residents and visitors.

Crowborough's location on a hill creates a reliance on cars which exacerbates the sometimes unpleasant feel of the High Street and highlights the poor public transport options. This is discouraging for those, such as Crowborough's young people and the elderly, who do not have access to vehicles.

Options for young people are limited and there is a desperate need for more recreational activities. The limited youth offer is also an issue with few employment opportunities for those under 18 and an absence of graduate jobs for those wishing to return to Crowborough after completing higher education.

Crowborough's many assets have become overshadowed by these developments, the town now needs a distinct sense of direction to guide its future.





## Our Vision

**By 2030 Crowborough will be...**

*“A vibrant, attractive and inviting town with a strong community spirit at its heart. A town in touch with its past, looking to the future and protective of its outstanding heritage and natural surroundings.”*

The Vision for Crowborough will be delivered by the whole town, including the Town Council, residents, businesses and community groups, through the following working aims:

1. A thriving and dynamic town centre serving the needs of the community and appealing to visitors
2. A commitment to preserving and enhancing Crowborough's natural and built environment
3. A distinctive visitor destination with a wealth of accessible cultural treasures
4. A high quality, integrated transport network for the town
5. A confident and resilient business community working in partnership with the wider community
6. A town that meaningfully engages with, and is supportive of the needs and aspirations, of its young people
7. Delivering high quality and affordable housing"
8. A new focal point for the town at Pine Grove

These aims will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.



In addition to our aims, two themes run throughout our Vision for Crowborough:

### Sustainability

Our Vision seeks to preserve what is best about Crowborough while improving less desirable aspects of the town.

It is a Vision that will necessarily result in change and development.

We fully embrace change for the better but it is vital to protect what we have, whether that is our fantastic natural resources or our unique heritage.

That is why one of our key principles is to create a sustainable town, one in which the social, economic and environmental factors that constitute life in Crowborough are protected.

### Developer contributions

In order to meet our sustainable Vision for Crowborough, potential developers will be expected to undertake early and meaningful engagement with the local community and the Town Council on any important new proposals.

" We will work with Wealden District Council to ensure that new development in the town makes its proper contribution to the infrastructure it requires.



We will encourage the District Council to provide firm guidance on the nature and extent of future developer contributions. We will work with our partners to seek funding from all potential sources to support a wide range of town improvements.

Some improvements identified for further funding include:

- Improvements to the town centre – tree planting, green spaces, public art, new signage
- Funding for youth programmes
- Improvements to the area in the vicinity of Crowborough Railway Station
- Enhancing community facilities in Crowborough
- A Shop Front Improvement Grant





# AIM 1 – A THRIVING AND DYNAMIC TOWN CENTRE

### What do we want to achieve?

A thriving and diverse High Street for Crowborough that serves the needs of the community, appeals to visitors and draws tourists to the town.



### What will we prioritise?

#### SHORT TERM (1 – 4 YEARS)

##### *Pedestrianising the High Street*

The use of shared space between cars and pedestrians or pedestrianisation of the High Street will be trialled with a view to reducing traffic congestion.

##### *A Town Centre 'Makeover'*

To make Crowborough town centre a safe, clean and attractive environment, with new tree planting, street lighting, pavement-widening and public art. It is a central aspiration that a Shop Front Improvement Grant be made available by the Town Council to encourage businesses to renovate their premises.

#### MEDIUM AND LONG TERM (5 – 20 YEARS)

##### *Regenerating the High Street*

To reverse the decline of the town centre by supporting and incentivising new and existing businesses on the High Street. The vitality and diversity of Crowborough's economy will be nurtured by the Town Council in partnership with other organisations.

##### *Creating a Night-Time Economy*

Improving the night-time economy of the town centre, by bringing new evening activities to Crowborough. This will provide sources of employment for the future and benefit local residents and visitors alike.

##### *A Regular Weekend Market*

A regular weekend market in the town centre in a permanent location. This will benefit both the local community and visitors to Crowborough.

##### *A Community Meeting Point*

A town centre with an attractive communal meeting space, with planters, town information, maps and clear directional signage. It will be a place to relax and absorb life in Crowborough.



## AIM 2 – PROTECTING THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

### What do we want to achieve?

A balance between the development planned for Crowborough and the intrinsic value of the natural environment around the town. The importance of sustainable development will be reinforced through policy and decision-making



### What will we prioritise?

#### SHORT TERM (1 – 4 YEARS)

##### *Recording What We Have*

A 'Local List' of all of Crowborough's heritage assets will be completed along with an inventory of existing green spaces within the town.

##### *'Greening' Crowborough*

An increase in the amount of green space within Crowborough with existing hedgerows and parks preserved. The town centre will benefit from new tree planting.

##### *The Wealden Design Guide*

All development will need to reflect the character and 'country town' atmosphere of Crowborough, as set out within the Wealden Design Guide.

#### MEDIUM AND LONG TERM (5 – 20 YEARS)

##### *Protecting Our Natural Environment*

A clear programme to value, protect and enhance the outstanding natural environment found around Crowborough. This is fundamental to sustaining the town's future.

##### *Protecting Our Heritage*

A commitment to protecting the original Victorian New Town heritage of Crowborough. Just as we must value our natural environment, we must cherish Crowborough's historical past for the benefit of future generations.

##### *Crowborough's Carbon 'Footprint'*

A concerted educational campaign to reduce carbon emissions and promote recycling within the town, with the overall aim of making Crowborough more sustainable.

##### *Maximising Land for Recreation*

An active strategy by the Town Council to increase the amount of land available for recreational uses through purchases, grants and bequests. This will be alongside the retention and re-provision of lost recreation or amenity land



### AIM 3 – A VIBRANT VISITOR DESTINATION

#### What do we want to achieve?

By 2030 we want Crowborough to be a thriving visitor destination, celebrating its unique position on 'top of the Weald'. We want the town to attract visitors from around the world to enjoy both its location and its rich historical heritage and vibrant culture.

With so much to offer, tourism will become an essential industry within Crowborough, boosting investment and the economy. Crowborough's status as a place to visit will be a source of pride for its residents, strengthening local ties and community self-confidence.



#### What will we prioritise?

##### SHORT TERM (1 – 4 YEARS)

###### *Promoting and Branding Crowborough*

Crowborough will be much more intensively promoted, with the town branded as the centre for exploring the Weald. An independent-led marketing and branding strategy will seek to take full advantage of Crowborough's position 'On Top of the Weald'.

###### *Accessible Tourist Information*

Crowborough's current tourist information service will be upgraded with regular, informative and easily accessible visitor-focused guides, maps and handouts, available in hard copy and online.

###### *Better Signage*

A strategy to create a welcoming and attractive first impression to those entering Crowborough – enhancing the main gateway points to the town and signposting points of interest within and around Crowborough.

###### *Celebrating Our Town*

Strong support for existing festivals and events (such as the farmers market, Summer Fete and Christmas Fun Day) with new events encouraged.

##### MEDIUM AND LONG TERM (5 – 20 YEARS)

###### *New Tourist Accommodation*

A mix of new, high-quality tourist accommodation will be actively promoted within appropriate locations in Crowborough.

###### *Building on existing tourist assets*

Crowborough will look to build on existing visitor attractions in and around the town. This will include historical, recreation and natural assets.

###### *Capitalising on Conan Doyle*

Exploring the potential for a new Conan Doyle or Sherlock Holmes-themed attraction in the town.





## AIM 4 – EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

### What do we want to achieve?

A fully integrated and efficient public transport network for Crowborough by 2030 with a more effective traffic management plan.



### What will we prioritise?

#### SHORT TERM (1 – 4 YEARS)

##### *A Traffic Management Plan*

A comprehensive plan will be created to help with movement in and around the town. This will specifically address known trouble spots.

##### *Greater Accessibility Within the Town*

A new emphasis on increased accessibility within Crowborough. Topics for consultation will include the removal of large haulage vehicles within the town, cycle routes, a park and ride system for the train station and town centre pedestrianisation/'shared spaces' trials.

##### *Improved Town Signage*

Directional signage for all transport users will be improved.

##### *Promoting Public Transport and Walking*

Public transport options will be promoted to counteract an increasing reliance on the car in town. Pavements, footpaths and twitten networks will be improved.

#### MEDIUM AND LONG TERM (5 – 20 YEARS)

##### *Better Links to Destinations Outside the Town*

Rail and bus routes and timetables will be restructured to better suit the needs of Crowborough. Better public transport links to London, regional destinations and local tourist sites will be championed.

##### *Improved Car Parking*

Continuing efforts will be made to seek to ensure that Wealden District Council do not implement car parking charges within the town.

##### *A New Central Bus Station*

A full investigation into a potential new transport hub close to the town centre. This will reduce congestion within the town centre, freeing up space for other uses, and will improve access around Crowborough.

##### *The Railway Station*

The Jarvis Brook area around Crowborough Station will be improved to provide an attractive and functional gateway to the town.



### AIM 5 – SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE

#### What do we want to achieve?

Crowborough will promote existing businesses while pressing for further sustainable business development within suitable locations. The town council will seek partnerships with other organisations to develop business activity within Crowborough.



#### What will we prioritise?

##### SHORT TERM (1 – 4 YEARS)

###### *Supporting Small Businesses*

Small businesses, in the High Street and beyond, are characteristic of life in Crowborough. The town will incentivise new businesses to start up in the town or to relocate to Crowborough. Those wishing to create social enterprises will be fully supported.

###### *Employment for Young People*

The town will prioritise the creation of new employment opportunities for the young people of Crowborough.

###### *Crowborough as a Business Destination*

Crowborough will seize every opportunity to attract new businesses that match the needs and character of the local area. Building on and expanding the existing Crowborough Business Network, the town will drive forward new business while supporting existing businesses within the town.

###### *New Business Spaces*

The town will investigate creating a 'business centre' with advisory services and spaces for use by businesses. The Town Council will explore the potential for a new business park off the A26 to the south of Crowborough.

##### MEDIUM AND LONG TERM (5 – 20 YEARS)

###### *A Service Centre for the Weald*

Crowborough will build on its unique position within the Weald to become a service centre for the local area. Tourism will become an enduring source of employment as the abundant local attractions continue to draw people into the town.

###### *Sustainable Development*

All new development - of any scale - should contribute to the creation of a sustainable community in Crowborough.



### AIM 6 – ENGAGING WITH OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

#### What do we want to achieve?

We want a town that engages with young people, involves them in the decision-making process and motivates them to take a stake in the future of Crowborough. We will retain more of our young people as they leave education and enter employment, strengthening the local community.



#### What will we prioritise?

##### SHORT TERM (1 – 4 YEARS)

###### *A New Youth Council*

There should be a new Youth Council for Crowborough, to mirror the activities of the Town Council, and empower young people to use their energy and creativity to improve Crowborough.

###### *Improving Existing Facilities and Activities*

Present facilities and activities for young people will be improved and better publicised to encourage youth involvement.

###### *Youth Safety*

Crowborough will prioritise the safety of young people within the town, via safe routes to school and town centre management. The town will work closely with the Police to tackle anti-social behaviour.

##### MEDIUM AND LONG TERM (5 – 20 YEARS)

###### *Fundraising*

Funding will be sought for the creation of a new independent youth club, unattached to a school or church, and the retention of existing youth outreach programmes such as Clued Up. This will be a priority for the town.

###### *New Activities for Young People*

The town will encourage new developments that will benefit young people in particular, such as leisure and recreation services, a cinema, bowling alley or internet café.





## AIM 7 – DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

### What do we want to achieve?

By 2030 we want Crowborough to achieve a level of affordable housing that is consistent with the sustainable Vision for the town. A greater level of affordable housing will help families and young people stay in Crowborough, strengthening the community ties and spirit in the town.



### What will we prioritise?

#### SHORT TERM (1 – 4 YEARS)

##### *Identifying Those in Need*

The Town Council will consider the results of the recent Wealden District Council local housing needs survey (Jan 2010) to identify those most in need.

##### *Enforcing Design Standards*

New housing will reflect the character and rural identity of Crowborough as well as conforming to established 'best practice' guidance (the Wealden Design Guide). All new developments will need to provide adequate amenity space.

##### *New Housing Sites*

Public consultation has identified that areas to the east and south east of the town could be the most appropriate locations for future housing.

##### *Engaging with Developers*

Early and meaningful engagement between potential developers and the Town Council will be encouraged. Developers will be expected to engage with the local community and consider their feedback to ensure all significant development - not just housing - is beneficial to the town.

##### *Exploring Potential 'Exception Sites'*

There will be a review of 'exception sites' around Crowborough. These are areas outside of the town's planning boundaries that could be used to provide new affordable housing.

#### MEDIUM AND LONG TERM (5 – 20 YEARS)

##### *New Affordable Housing*

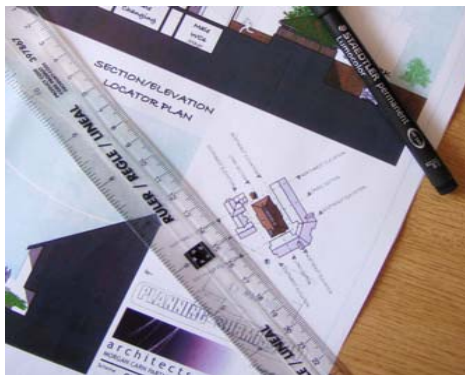
Crowborough will achieve a level of affordable housing consistent with the future sustainability of the town. This will include high-quality new housing in both the rental and sale sectors.



### AIM 8 - FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE AT PINE GROVE

#### What do we want to achieve?

A new 'heart' for Crowborough centred at Pine Grove to create a greater sense of community through a new community centre and other civic buildings and amenities.



#### What will we prioritise?

##### SHORT TERM (1 – 4 YEARS)

###### *A Pine Grove Masterplan*

The town will confirm and establish a definitive masterplan for the Pine Grove site through consultation and the Wealden LDF. This will develop a new heart for Crowborough based on improved civic and public services co-located with community, leisure, business and tourism uses.

The masterplan will be agreed by the Town Council, with Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council and will include existing buildings within the overall development area.

###### *Creating Enterprise and Business Space*

There will be detailed assessment of the potential for social enterprises and small businesses within Pine Grove. Developments of this kind will be supported through providing small, flexible business units, possibly combined with residential accommodation as 'live / work' units.

###### *A New Community Centre*

A new community centre with a hall capacity of up to 300 seats will be built at Pine Grove as a focal point for the Crowborough community -

[www.crowboroughcentre.org.uk](http://www.crowboroughcentre.org.uk)

##### MEDIUM AND LONG TERM (5 – 20 YEARS)

###### *A Prestige Location*

Rigorously applied design standards, supported by the Wealden Design Guide, will ensure that Pine Grove becomes a high quality, prestige location within Crowborough.

Public access and pedestrian links to the town and to public transport will be improved with a transport hub nearby.

###### *A Focal Point for Crowborough*

Landscaped open spaces will be established to create new community 'green lungs' in the centre of the town.

###### *A Living Centre*

Crowborough needs both social rented and intermediate affordable housing (Wealden Housing Needs Survey 2009) and the town centre needs residential development located on sustainable town centre sites. Opportunities for the development of affordable housing at Pine Grove will therefore be actively explored and promoted.



### Delivering the Vision

The Vision for Crowborough, developed through extensive consultation with the community, will be presented to Wealden District Council as the town's Vision for future sustainable growth. This will then be considered by Wealden as it prepares its spatial development strategy for the town.

The aims outlined within this document are ambitious and their delivery will pose real challenges for the town. We know that for those involved this will not be an easy process, but we also know that if we get it right Crowborough has huge potential to be 'Top of the Weald'.

#### What next?

We want to ensure that Wealden Council's development plans support our vision as far as possible. The Town Council will continue to work with Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council, and our other partners, to further these aims. An important opportunity will arise over the next few years with the finalisation of Wealden's Core Strategy and then the preparation of a master plan for the town

Consultation is central to reaching consensus on our priorities. Consultation is the key to community involvement and ownership of the Vision – making it the property of all of us, not simply the Town Council, Wealden District Council, the Crowborough Partnership or other organisations.

We will agree on areas of our Vision that are most critical to Crowborough and identify "champions" to drive these aims forwards. Once we have reached a consensus, we need to identify where funding and other resources will come from (eg. time and staffing) we will need to deliver our priorities.

We acknowledge that this will be a long process, so we need to continue to build momentum and develop even more interest in the project. We also know that changes will occur locally, regionally, and nationally that we will need to take into account. Therefore the Vision will be reviewed annually by the Town Council and updated to meet any new challenges.

**We look forward to delivering our Vision for Crowborough together!**

