

**RESPONSE TO CHAPTERS WITHIN THE LOCAL PLAN DIRECTION OF TRAVEL
CONSULTATION DOCUMENT – 18 JANUARY 2021
Uckfield Town Council**

CHAPTER 7 – ECONOMY

Are there any issues or challenges we have missed?

Risk of **insufficient employment opportunities** with housing targets that exceed the population requirements. It is therefore important that suitable land supply is allocated proportionately between land for housing and land for economic activity.

Paras 7.25 and 7.26 refer to the amount of land allocated for business use but the statistics quoted could actually be interpreted to show **how poorly the district is served**. Some 22.56% lower than the aspirations.

The **poor state of Wealden's roads, a poor road network and poor mobile network coverage** in areas has a detrimental effect on business. Locate East Sussex made a lot of very good points within their report. The current level and state of our infrastructure does not encourage businesses to want to come here.

There's a weakness in current policies for the **change of use** from office/commercial space to residential once permission has already been granted. For example the office spaces on the ground floor in a development in Framfield road, were designed by the developer to look residential, despite it being designated as commercial. In a few months of completion the developer claimed they were unable to let the units and it came back as a new application to change the ground floor units from business to residential units. The same happened to units in Fernley Park. Another example is the Mayhews site in Five Ash Down. Part residential and part commercial but developers persuaded Wealden DC to change to all residential.

Do you agree with the proposed policy options?

The Local Plan should include **provision for SMEs and start-ups**. This should include retail space for smaller businesses, which could be created within empty shops.

Do you disagree with any of the options?

Providing for the unmet needs of other neighbouring authorities is not sustainable.

The risk of utilising and converting agricultural buildings is that they are very often isolated and it therefore encourages an increase in car travel or limits access for workers if they don't have a vehicle. The narrow lanes leading to these rural buildings can also pose problems for deliveries and HGV access.

Are there any other options we should be considering?

Wealden DC should be **working closely with local business owners and Chambers of commerce** to identify local development needs and also carefully consider the recommendations of the Land and Premises Supply Study. We should be trying to **retain the life blood** of our high streets by providing retail space for very small businesses. A review of business rates for specific categories or businesses in the High Streets would help to keep our town and village centres thriving.

Wealden DC need to make sure that within the district, **land is allocated for commercial use and it is used as commercial use**.

Do you have any other comments in relation to how we can plan for employment within both the urban and rural areas of our district?

You must start the building of industrial estates within development sites either before or at the start of house building. It cannot be left as the last item on the list. With Covid restrictions many of our local retailers and suppliers on the industrial estate have created click and collect systems which need to be praised. With a number of large national retailers losing business and going into administration this is not a fail proof route to follow. More support needs to be given to our local small retailers to enable them to grow and provide more.

Furthermore with the impact of **Covid-19**, the way that we work is changing and the Local Plan needs to cater for this. This could include co-working spaces set up locally if a need for these is identified. A strategy for supporting the rural/agricultural economy also needs to be clearer within the plan, especially post-Brexit.

Other

The statistics used in this chapter are difficult to compare because the **comparative figures are from different years**. Hopefully the 2021 Census should help in some way.

Para 7.5 – 8,500 business units. As a figure it is meaningless in the context of the report - as a percentage of the population or area, what does it represent?