

FoL Planning Policy

Development in Lewes is a quasi judicial process controlled by the planning system. Planning policy is determined by Government by means of legislation and planning policy statements whilst they use targets to measure a local authorities effectiveness. Part of the funding which Government makes available to local authorities will be determined in the future by the number of new units of housing for which they have given planning permission in a given year.

The South East Regional Plan sets the overall policy scene for development in the south-east. It currently states that LDC must provide some 4,400 new houses, or 220 per year, in the 20 year period 2006 – 2026. However the plan has not yet been agreed by Government and it is possible that this figure may be increased.

The allocation of land for new housing is currently determined by the Lewes District Local Plan, on which the Society made a major input whilst in its draft stage. This plan will eventually be superseded by a Local Development Framework which LDC is currently drafting and on which there has already been consultation on specific aspects. One of those aspects was to what extent and how the North Street area of Lewes should be re-developed. In addition, after a significant contribution from the Society, LDC has produced a Conservation Area Appraisal and this should be used to determine how well new developments in this area will fit into their surroundings.

For any proposal in an area likely to flood, developers have to produce Flood Risk Assessments which involve fully determining the risks, and then showing how these will be avoided, managed or mitigated by their proposals.

Planning applications can be made at any time and are considered against the policies in force at that time which includes a presumption that permission will be given unless the development will cause demonstrable harm. LDC must deal with them within prescribed timescales and cannot ask for them to be deferred to enable an overview of potential development in the town to be taken. In considering them and making comments the Society assesses the issues carefully in relation to the overall background. Objections can only be made on planning grounds and, similarly, LDC can only refuse applications on planning grounds. The Society recognises that rejection of plans by LDC can result in the Government overturning the decision on appeal with possibly worse results than if amendments to plans had been sought and agreed. It has found from experience that early discussion with developers about their proposals is more likely to result in changes being made to their plans than waiting until the formal consultation stage.

The Society's existing policy on new development starts from the premise that Lewes needs to remain an economically vibrant town and that development is part of retaining that vibrancy. It also recognises the demands which Government have placed on LDC to provide new housing and realises that the town of Lewes must take a proportion of the number which the District must provide. However, the Society has a firm policy that new build must not be on green-field land. It follows that any development in the town must take place on brown-field sites. But it must respect the character of the town, be sensitively designed, use appropriate materials and satisfy the Environment Agency on the measures being taken to avoid flood risks. In

addition developments within the Conservation Area must be consistent with the Conservation Area Appraisal. Height and density of development are factors that the Society considers on a case by case basis bearing in mind that the town already contains some high buildings and dense development.

Over the years the Society has built up a reputation for acting in a responsible and professional way and if its comments are to be taken seriously in the future it must continue to act in that way. In June 2008 it therefore confirmed its existing approach, which is shown below, in relation to planning issues:-

1. To consider and comment on all policy documents affecting Lewes and the immediate surrounding area to ensure that the character of the town, particularly the conservation area, is maintained and, as appropriate, enhanced;
2. To accept that once these policy documents have been adopted by the relevant authority, it is necessary to work within them to achieve the same objective as listed in 1. above;
3. To oppose any major development on green-field sites especially those in the AONB or National Park, when established.
4. To encourage prospective developers to talk with the Society prior to submission of planning applications so that they can, if willing, amend their plans to take account of points made.
5. To object to development that is inconsistent with policy documents such as the District Local Plan or the Conservation Area Appraisal, if relevant, unless good reasons are provided for any departure from these documents.
6. To normally accept the views of the Environment Agency in relation to flooding issues.
7. To continue to assess individual applications as they are made and base detailed comments to LDC on the appearance, height, materials and effects on traffic or infrastructure. Such comments should refer to specific provisions of the policy documents where proposals are inconsistent with them.
8. To keep LTC informed of Society views on planning matters.
9. To make representations to LDC's Planning Applications Committee or any Public Inquiry where appropriate.
10. To lobby LDC to be more robust in relation to conservation area matters.
11. To report any unauthorised development or development not being undertaken in accordance with planning conditions to LDC so that enforcement action can be taken.
12. To continue to act in a responsible and professional way maintaining good relations with public authorities whilst not necessarily agreeing with them.