July 2016
Ticehurst Neighbourhood Plan

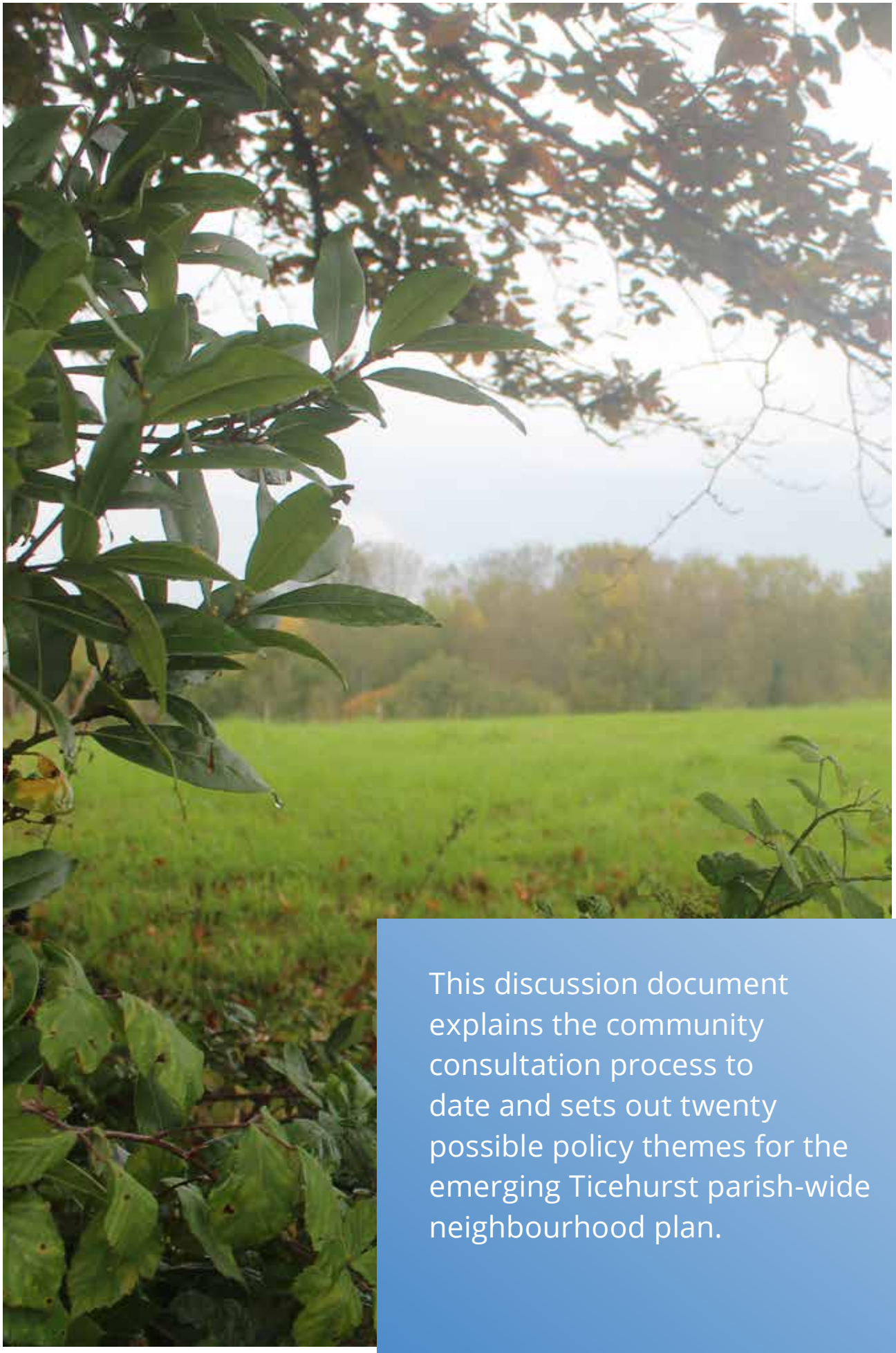
Future Policy Mix

A discussion document



feria urbanism





This discussion document explains the community consultation process to date and sets out twenty possible policy themes for the emerging Ticehurst parish-wide neighbourhood plan.

Feria Urbanism is a planning and design studio that specialises in urban design, urban planning, neighbourhood strategies, public participation and community engagement. Established in 2007, we have been involved in a diverse range of planning and design projects across the UK.

Contact for further information

- Richard Eastham
- richard@feria-urbanism.eu
- www.feria-urbanism.eu
- + 44 (0) 7816 299 909
- + 44 (0) 1202 548 676

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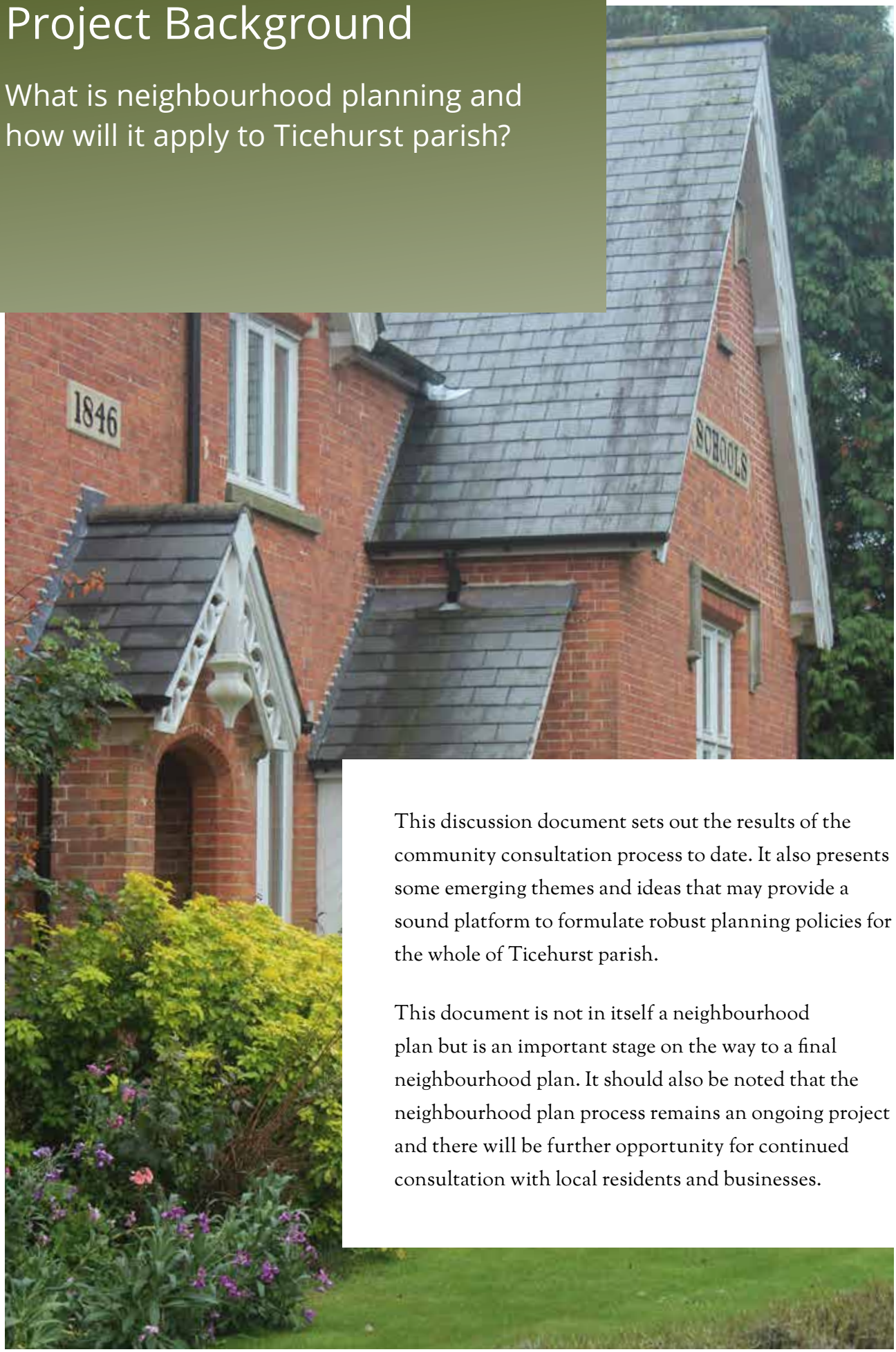
Project Background

What is neighbourhood planning and how will it apply to Ticehurst parish?



This discussion document sets out the results of the community consultation process to date. It also presents some emerging themes and ideas that may provide a sound platform to formulate robust planning policies for the whole of Ticehurst parish.

This document is not in itself a neighbourhood plan but is an important stage on the way to a final neighbourhood plan. It should also be noted that the neighbourhood plan process remains an ongoing project and there will be further opportunity for continued consultation with local residents and businesses.

What is a neighbourhood plan?

Neighbourhood planning is a community-led process introduced by Government to encourage local people to shape and influence development within the places where they live and work. They are produced by community forum groups or parish or town councils.

Neighbourhood plans are policy-based community-led plans which correspond to the Local Plan. In this case, the Local Plan is prepared by Rother District Council.

Neighbourhood plans can influence site selection or allocate new housing sites directly. They can contain design policies for allocated sites or for general development. They can also protect or identify new community facilities and identify green spaces to be protected from future development proposals.

The Government introduced the opportunity for local communities to prepare neighbourhood plans through amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Localism Act 2011 and through new regulations Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, which sets out the requirements for Neighbourhood Plans.

In Ticehurst, Stonegate and Flimwell, the preparation of the neighbourhood plan is being led by the Ticehurst Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, responsible to Ticehurst Parish Council.

Project time line so far

In the summer of 2015, Ticehurst Parish Council sought independent professional assistance to help manage the process of developing a finished neighbourhood plan for the parish. Following a formal procurement process, Ticehurst Parish Council appointed a consultant team to assist them with this work.

The parish council is still responsible for the drafting of the neighbourhood plan and for leading on community engagement and consultation but will use technical support from the consultant team on urban design, landscape and planning policy advice.

The consultant team appointed to work alongside the parish council is Feria Urbanism, a design and planning practice based in Bournemouth. The consultant team has good experience working with local community groups across the country, helping them develop neighbourhood plans. The team has also worked on some high profile public realm improvement schemes, education and training events and urban planning projects.

The community consultation process so far

The process so far has comprised site visits by the consultant team in October 2015. These site visits were followed by several key events to engage the community:

PLACE Assessment Workshops

In January 2016, a series of afternoon community workshops were held. These were held on three consecutive days on 12th, 13th and 14th January 2016 in Ticehurst, Flimwell and Stonegate respectively.

The purpose of this assessment was to provide an insight into the way the design of the built environment needs to be considered as part of the neighbourhood plan process and how the professional disciplines of planning, landscape, architecture, conservation and engineering should work together. The PLACE acronym is derived from these five professions.

The background to this PLACE assessment process was the conclusions of the "Farrell Review", a national review of architecture and the built environment, independently run by a panel of built environment experts. The Farrell Review asks for an increased focus on the civic value of well-designed public spaces, streets and amenities and the character and needs of existing communities, instead of a narrow focus on architecture.

This increased focus requires greater collaboration between the planning, landscape, architecture, conservation and engineering professions. The Farrell Review concludes that only when all five professions work together effectively can place-shaping truly happen.

This PLACE assessment has helped to provide the neighbourhood plan process with a greater understanding of the five key aspects to successful place-making and how this can positively influence the emerging Ticehurst Neighbourhood Plan.

The result of the workshops was a series of plans that recorded and mapped out the views of participants. These plans were used to inform the design forum event that followed in March 2016.

Visioning Events

Also in January 2016 was a series of three evening events, also held on three consecutive days in Ticehurst, Flimwell and then Stonegate. These events examined some of the issues in more detail and allowed representatives of the parish council and the planning team from Feria Urbanism to hear the opinions of a wide variety of local interest groups.

The events were task-based and participants were required to come prepared to share their views about what makes Ticehurst parish a special place to live, work and visit. Both the PLACE workshops and Visioning Events attracted approx. 135 local individuals. More details on the results of this event an be found in a separate report and this too was used to inform the design forum event that followed.

Two-Day Design Forum

The third key event was a two-day design forum held on 9th and 10th March 2016. This was a design-led exercise that examined how change can be accommodated, designed and planned in Ticehurst parish. The forum consisted of a series of workshop sessions

that became progressively more detailed over the two days. The aim was to develop a draft concept plan for the village by the end of the second day. This two-day event was intensive, highly interactive and collaborative. Residents who attended shared their ideas and thoughts; either based on their own personal experiences of living or working in Ticehurst, Flimwell or Stonegate or on behalf of a community group or other organisation.

The parish council appreciated that attendance throughout the two days was a big commitment so any residents that could not attend for all two days, were free to attend for just part of the time (e.g. one day, just one morning, an afternoon etc).

On the first evening, the venue was open to the public, in exhibition format, to allow them to see "work in progress" – the Feria Urbanism team were on-hand throughout to explain the outputs from that day's workshops.

The second and final evening comprised a presentation that allowed all local residents to see the results of the three-day design event. The Feria Urbanism team made a presentation explaining the process and the results of the previous 48 hours. This was a chance for those local residents and businesses that were unable to take part in the daytime sessions to see the results, hear from the parish council and the planning team and to ask questions about the emerging draft concept plan. In total, 101 local residents took part in the design forum.

More information about the design forum can be found in the extensive slideshow report, an edited and revised version of the final slideshow as used on the final evening of the forum. There is also an online video of the presentation.



The evening visioning workshops looked at a range of issues. The results provided useful baseline data for the next phases.



Independent events were held in Ticehurst, Stonegate & Flimwell (above) to ensure that the different views and opinions across the parish could be heard and recorded.

How is neighbourhood planning likely to be applied in Ticehurst parish?

Developing a Shared Vision

Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood (para. 183 of the National Planning Policy Framework). Therefore, each stage of the Ticehurst Neighbourhood Plan process to date has sought to extend the amount of common ground between local residents and businesses, narrowing down various options through a transparent and open process. This process is set to continue in subsequent work phases.

At all stages, the neighbourhood planning process will allow room for dissent and minority views but the overall aim of the process is to build a broad-based consensus.

Land Use & New Buildings

Through neighbourhood plans, communities can have a say on where new homes, shops, offices and workplaces should be built. This is why the parish council have been keen to engage the community in Ticehurst through a process of hands-on design exercises that will help to translate the shared vision (as described above) into a "spatial framework" for the parish, that in turn can be supported by policy text and associated diagrams.

Design Guidance & Policy

Neighbourhood plans can influence the designs of new homes, other buildings and the linking spaces in between. They can also express a view on streets and infrastructure, tourism, leisure and community facilities and environmental issues. These key issues can be reflected in both the shared vision for Ticehurst and the spatial framework plan before being accurately captured in well-written policy text.

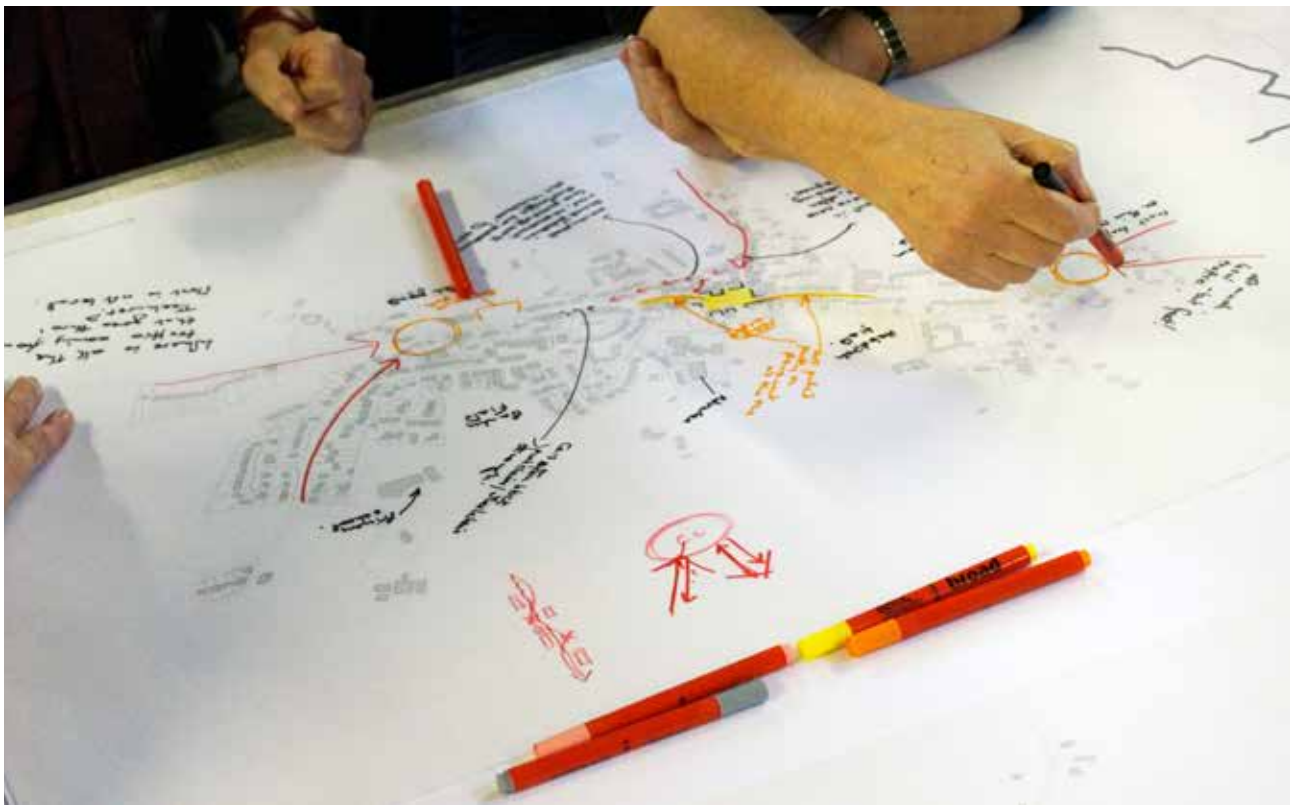
Protection of Existing Assets

Neighbourhood plans can also be used to protect existing facilities and services, green spaces and historic buildings. As part of the emerging spatial framework, the services, community and heritage assets of the parish, together with the essential green infrastructure, can be mapped and then protected through well-written policy text.

The protection of existing facilities and services in Ticehurst, Stonegate and Flimwell can therefore become a focus of the neighbourhood plan.

Legal requirements

Neighbourhood plans must meet some legal requirements as specified by law: they must have appropriate regard to national policy; must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development; must be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the local area; must be compatible with human rights requirements and; must be compatible with EU obligations.



Working in small groups, participants at the design forum looked at particular issues. In this drawing (above) the heart of Ticehurst is examined from a public realm perspective.



The design forum was keen to explore the common ground and differences between Stonegate, Ticehurst and Flimwell. A “concept plan” for the whole parish (above) was tested on the morning of the second day.

Future Policy Mix

What makes a great village?





The parish already contains three great villages in the form of Ticehurst, Flimwell and Stonegate. Nestled within some of the most attractive and special landscapes in the south of England, these living and working settlements already exhibit some of the best qualities and characteristics of village life. The consultation work in early 2016 has provided a great deal of knowledge and background. The questions now are what can the neighbourhood plan do to protect and enhance existing features? What new additions need to be proposed to ensure the parish's continued success into the future?

Set out here are 20 draft policies and projects that could deliver the right planning framework for the future of the parish. Each are categorised as one or more of the following three policy types:

— *Protection*... preventing the loss of an existing parish asset.

— *Enhancement*... making an existing parish asset better.

— *Proposal*... something new to be identified and developed.

Where appropriate, a site-specific location is suggested although some of the ideas will apply parish wide. It should be noted that these 20 ideas should be read in conjunction with slides 186, 187 and 188 of the design forum final slideshow as these slides also sets out some draft policy headings for further consideration.







1. Find yourself a truly great village square

Ticehurst village is located centrally within the parish and contains the parish's only true civic space in the form of the village square. It is already well-used by residents and visitors and is surrounded by many convenient local amenities and services, such as shops, cafes and a pub. However, the space is too often lost to car parking. Design work is already underway to provide a better balance between cars and people. If successful, this reworking of the square could create a tremendous community focus for the whole parish.

A better village square can provide the space and opportunity for community events that will encourage greater integration of the wider community. There is also potential to boost the local economy with new found spaces for farmer's markets, fun fairs and artist stalls.

— Policy Type: Enhancement.

— Location: Church Street & High Street, Ticehurst.

2. Make your high street a social and commercial focus

Linked to the village square enhancement is the protection and enhancement of the high street of shops in the adjacent areas. A varied selection of local amenities surround the village square. This mix includes restaurants, pubs, convenience stores, a pharmacy and a gallery space. There is also a car sales and servicing garage. A small colonnade on Church Street provides space for independent cafes and small shops.

This area benefits from passing trade and is already a social and commercial hub. Preventing the conversion of shops to residential and encouraging more useful services and amenities in this location should be an objective of the neighbourhood plan.

— Policy Type: Protection & Enhancement.

— Location: Church Street & High Street, Ticehurst.



3. Develop a diverse mix of housing types, styles and sizes across the parish

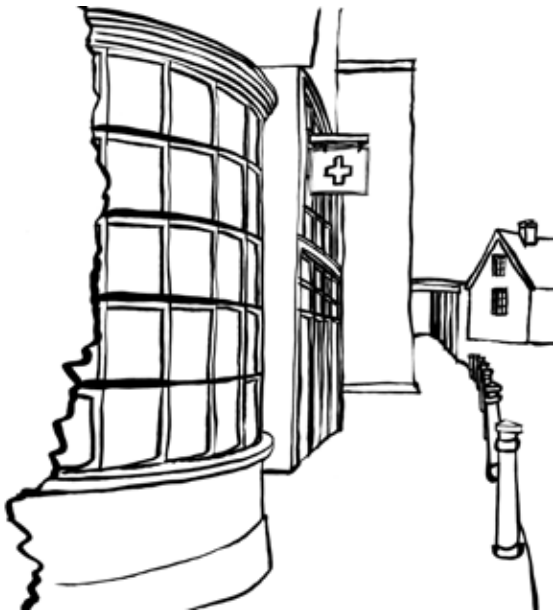
Ticehurst parish already provides a mix of properties and affordable housing but consultation work to date has revealed widespread concern and anxiety about the lack of affordable housing across the parish.

The neighbourhood plan should therefore support the development of well-designed and affordable homes for local people on sites that are accessible and well-connected to existing residential areas, shops and services.

Design quality is paramount to the acceptability of new homes by a community and new houses should be at once easily recognisable as being distinctive to the local Ticehurst area, through the use of building styles, techniques or materials and general design approaches.

— *Policy Type: Proposal.*

— *Location: Specific Locations & Parish Wide.*



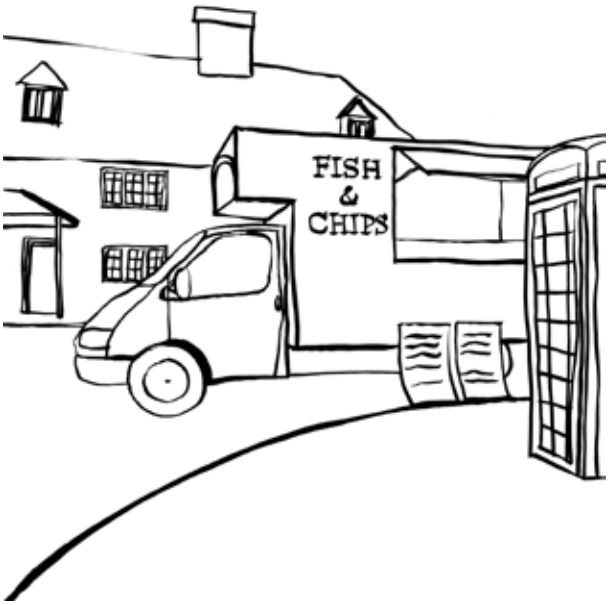
4. Protect essential services that support quality of life

Ticehurst Parish has its own surgery located within the central area of Ticehurst. It is part of a larger local medical service linked with other neighbouring parishes and consultation has revealed that it already provides a good service. There is also a local pharmacy, again situated in the centre of Ticehurst, on Church Street, providing easy access to medical care for the community.

While these two medical functions are not the only "essential services" they are used here to illustrate the key services within a parish that, if lost, would necessitate a longer trip by car to a nearby town or larger village. Keeping the essentials alive and supported should be another objective of the neighbourhood plan.

— *Policy Type: Protection.*

— *Location: Specific Locations & Parish Wide.*



5. Flexible operating hours and convenient locations

It has been noted that there are many services within the parish that often open well into the evenings. This can be very useful for those workers who may commute for work, either to nearby large towns, such as Tonbridge, or even as far as London. Several of the restaurants and pubs serve food until late into the evening and the village square also provides space for street food.

This type of convenience, based on longer opening hours or a mobile service such as the fish n' chip van, is part of a successful mix that makes village life fun and enjoyable. Capturing this and promoting a message about life in the "convenient village" could be a key ingredient in the Ticehurst plan, setting it apart from others that may often overlook this aspect.

— *Policy Type: Enhancement & Proposal.*

— *Location: Specific Locations & Parish Wide.*



6. Develop and support strong local communications and media channels

There is a regular village newsletter available to all residents in the parish. This reaches out to all residents and offers the chance for locals to read about local happenings and learn about forthcoming events. To support this, there is a well-used "notice wall" situated to the side of the post office and shop in the village square.

These off-line services in the form of the local newsletter and notice wall could begin to work with online services such as local news websites, social media streams and other communications. Keeping everybody informed will be essential to ensure support for the plan's ideas and concepts.

— *Policy Type: Protection & Enhancement.*

— *Location: Specific Locations & Parish Wide.*



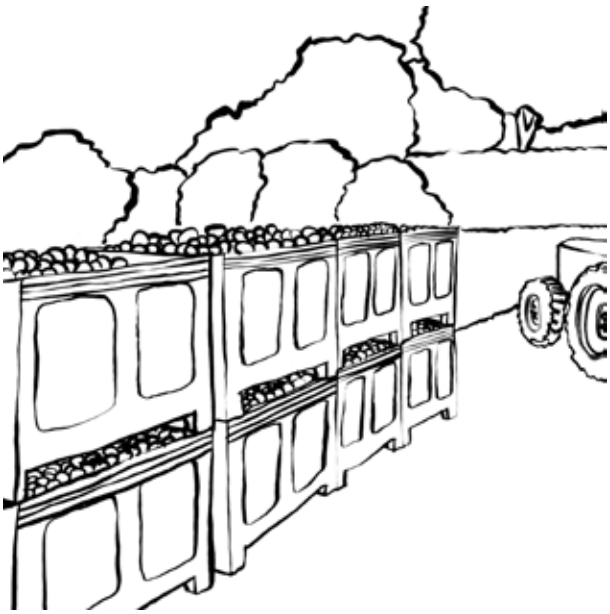
7. Design and install distinctive village signs to establish clear local identities

The parish's three settlements of Ticehurst, Flimwell and Stonegate each have their own strong identity and each provides a different experience. Generally, Stonegate is very much focused around farming and open space; Ticehurst can be defined as a community hub within the parish for its variety of services; and Flimwell is an area focused around business, innovation and education.

Signs, branding and identity could be introduced through policy hooks within the plan to reinforce these respective differences. Themes, motifs, colours and mottos could be carried over into street furniture, street signs and business branding.

— *Policy Type: Enhancement & Proposal.*

— *Location: Ticehurst, Stonegate & Flimwell.*



8. Celebrate local produce

Villages and towns throughout East Sussex, Kent and south east England are renowned for their apple orchards, hop farms and other local produce. Ticehurst, Stonegate and Flimwell are part of this tradition and have a long history of farming. The many orchards and farms that provide produce to local, regional and national markets could benefit from support and protection through the neighbourhood plan.

A vital part of the parish's working heritage they are also part of the current economic base. A living and working village will be vital for the future of the parish. Streamlining the process to convert older buildings and to introduce new facilities are examples of the type of planning help that could be offered.

— *Policy Type: Protection & Enhancement.*

— *Location: Ticehurst, Stonegate & Flimwell.*



9. Protect and support local farms and orchards

Farming is still a major employer and land use across the parish. The farms generate a range of crops and produce, from arable to livestock, meaning fresh products, meat and dairy produce can be sourced, supplied and consumed locally.

This encourages a sustainable community whilst also providing good foundations for the growth of the local economy, especially one based around an authentic tourist experience. The neighbourhood plan needs to ensure that there is continuity within the local farming community and existing and new farms and farmers receive the encouragement and support they need.

— *Policy Type: Protection & Enhancement.*

— *Location: Ticehurst, Stonegate & Flimwell.*



10. Protect and enhance rivers and wetlands

Bewl Water is the largest stretch of open water in the south east of England. Situated in the north of Ticehurst parish, the reservoir is a popular attraction with both locals and tourists. Bewl Water caters for recreational and leisure activities and sits within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

However, the consultation work to date has revealed a feeling that the parish does not necessarily make the most of this asset and more could be done to promote it as a venue for water sports, outdoor pursuits and tourism. Linked to the previous three issues of farming, local produce and local identity, Bewl Water could be another positive point of difference for both the parish as a whole and the neighbourhood plan.

— *Policy Type: Protection & Enhancement.*

— *Location: Bewl Water.*



11. Discover and celebrate local folklore and tradition

Ticehurst, Flimwell and Stonegate each have their own stories to tell, history to be discovered and folklore to be shared — or even invented!

Adding a layer of folklore will help develop an interest, character and identity to the parish that can be captured by the neighbourhood plan. It was revealed during the consultation that the inventor of the medical stomach pump once lived in Stonegate. Is a blue plaque needed? As with earlier topics, the promotion of folklore and tradition will help to create a distinctive plan with which local residents, businesses and potential investors can engage in a positive manner.

— *Policy Type: Enhancement & Proposal.*

— *Location: Parish Wide.*



12. Seek greater investment in better sports facilities and enhanced outdoor access

The green spaces and landscapes that surround the parish and weave their way in and around the built environment are a key component of the parish's character and identity.

Ancient woodland, other woodland areas and open recreational land all make up a complex mosaic of green spaces. There is also a local golf club and several dedicated sports fields and play areas. All these can benefit from protection as "locally designated green" spaces through the neighbourhood plan, once adopted. The recreation ground behind Ticehurst village hall is a good example of open public green space that could be further enhanced with improved pedestrian access to the grounds.

— *Policy Type: Protection, Enhancement & Proposal.*

— *Location: Site Specific & Parish Wide.*



13. Establish a creative and innovative community through studios, workshops and galleries

Situated within the woods in Flimwell is the Woodland Enterprise Centre, a collection of workshop spaces and an interpretation building. This provides space for meetings, education events and temporary exhibitions.

Given its size, there is potential for this site to become a main space for innovation and creativity across the parish, despite it being located on the far eastern edge. It also has good connections, being adjacent to the A21 main road. The centre may also develop strong connections with higher education in future if the redevelopment of the adjacent bird park is delivered in partnership with the Bartlett School of Architecture, as per the proposal shared at the design forum in March 2016.

— *Policy Type: Enhancement & Proposal.*

— *Location: Flimwell Innovation Hub.*



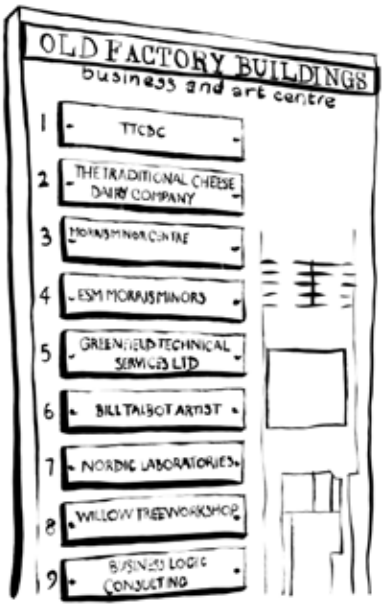
14. Support a social hot spot, such as a good pub, good library or community centre

Ticehurst parish does not have a permanent library building. However, there are several public buildings such as the Stonegate village hall that could provide space for the mobile library or regular book-exchange opportunities. Services such as these encourage social integration between residents and different demographics, as well as the opportunity to expand and share knowledge.

There was much discussion in Stonegate about the popularity of the farmer's market and how it could benefit from a permanent home. Could there be a multi-function "shell" building, connected with WiFi, that is able to host a range of social and commercial events? Will this become a magnet for community activism?

— *Policy Type: Proposal.*

— *Location: Site Specific (Unknown).*



15. Maintain affordable workshop space to host local start-up businesses and entrepreneurs

The area of Parsonage Farm and the arts centre already provide working space for mechanics, artists, small fabricators and businesses. This type of concentrated working environment encourages collaboration between trades and, in turn, allows for greater connections and opportunities. This area, and other similar areas across the parish, needs protection and enhancement.

Other suitable areas should also be identified and designated as employment land to ensure a good supply of cheap land and accommodation is on tap to keep the village working and not become solely reliant on commuting in and out of the parish.

— Policy Type: Protection, Enhancement & Proposal.

— Location: Specific Locations & Parish Wide.



16. Be a place with good connections to the outside world

Consultation revealed that the broadband service throughout the parish is continuously improving. However, the mobile signal remains patchy and needs investment. But while these technological improvements are to be welcomed, they cannot be at the expense of old-fashioned postal services. The rise of online shopping has made the sending and receiving of parcels ever more important.

The local post office is located on Ticehurst village square, within the local convenience store. The shop and the notice boards on the wall are a "go-to" point for local news and gossip. With further improvements, this area of Ticehurst could become the main zone for information, communication and postal "collect and send" services within the parish.

— Policy Type: Protection & Enhancement.

— Location: Post office.



17. Play host to a range of good guest houses, hotels and visitor accommodation

The Bell Inn, located on the High Street in Ticehurst has been recently restored and now offers modern, quirky and artistic accommodation in a series of lodges and guest rooms above the main restaurant and bar.

Although seen by some in the parish as perhaps too quirky, it remains popular and is used regularly by the locals as well as visitors. Other pubs in the parish, such as the Cherry Tree and the Bull also offer charm, warmth and hospitality. All these businesses, and others besides, need to be protected and enhanced through the plan as important community, social and economic assets.

— Policy Type: Enhancement & Proposal.

— Location: The Bell, The Cherry Tree, The Bull, The Golf Club.



18. Excellent local schools

The parish hosts two primary schools, one in Ticehurst and the other in Stonegate. Both are highly sought after by local parents as the first school for their children's education and they also provide a social focus for families and local residents alike.

Stonegate school is located on the southern edge of the parish and surrounded by rolling hills with long-distance views towards outlying areas of the parish. The building reflects the local architectural character. Ticehurst is a more modern facility, north of the village, but one that also is well-designed and fits in well.

Both sites appear to have room for potential expansion, should this be needed, and the plan should give consideration for safeguarding land for school expansion at one or both sites over the neighbourhood plan period.

— Policy Type: Enhancement & Proposal.

— Location: Stonegate School & Ticehurst School.



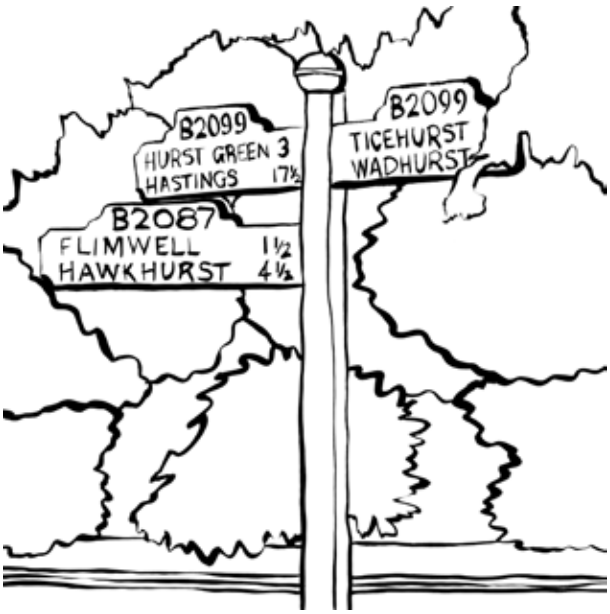
19. Good public transport connections to the wider world

Stonegate railway station offers a good commuter service, with direct trains to the south coast and to London. Introducing better pedestrian and cycle links between Stonegate village and the station will help to encourage greater use of the station without the need to drive, taking some pressure off the local road network.

Bus services are not highly regarded across the parish, as is the case in many rural areas nationally so this is not necessarily something specific to Ticehurst parish. It is not clear at this stage what the neighbourhood plan can do to influence and improve public transport provision. This is something that needs further examination.

— Policy Type: Protection, Enhancement & Proposal.

— Location: Stonegate & Parish Wide.



20. A healthy sense of rivalry

The process so far has revealed a degree of competition between the three settlements of Ticehurst, Flimwell and Stonegate.

However, this should not become a negative trait running through the plan and the process, but instead be used to the parish's economic and social advantage. The three villages should be seen as complementary to one another, each offering something the other places cannot and that only by working together will they provide a welcoming and wonderful place for future generations to live and work.

Combining forces in this way should provide formidable competition to other parishes nearby and keep Ticehurst parish dynamic and forward-thinking.

— Policy Type: Protection, Enhancement & Proposal.

— Location: Ticehurst, Flimwell & Stonegate.

Next Steps

This report has set out a series of ideas based on community consultation and engagement to date. This report is not in itself a neighbourhood plan but is an important stage on the way to a final neighbourhood plan. The neighbourhood plan process remains an ongoing project and Ticehurst Parish Council is keen to hear the views of local residents and businesses on the ideas, concepts and draft policies contained in this report and the supporting work.

The following three action points are presented here for consideration by the neighbourhood plan steering group.

1. Review and prioritise the policy ideas

This report contains 20 big policy ideas, specifically prepared in response to the consultation results so far. The design forum event in March 2016 also generated a series of draft policy headings. There now needs to be a process of sifting and prioritising both sets of suggestions to ensure those that matter most to the community get the necessary attention to develop them as more rounded policy statements that are specific and deliverable.

The establishment of specific task groups to undertake research to support a policy priority or to draw up more detailed schemes and ideas may be required. Identifying those priorities that need the most attention will be important.

The three categories of "Protection, Enhancement and Proposal" as used in this document should help focus this work as a good balance of all three is required if the plan is to conform with the neighbourhood planning regulations, and with national and local planning policy.

2. Further engagement with Rother District Council planning team

A concern and anxiety for many of those that have participated in the consultation process so far is housing development — its location, its scale, its design quality and issues of affordability. Having a clearer understanding of how the neighbourhood plan and the local plan can work together on housing issues (including site allocations, design details and housing densities) is something that needs to be established prior to the next phase of work.

3. Continued community engagement

The outcomes of the process so far have been based on a series of successful community consultation events. More such events are required to ensure the plan continues to be responsive to local needs. The parish council and its steering group will continue to communicate emerging ideas as well as seek feedback and listen to alternative suggestions.







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