



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **It didn't work last time we tried to introduce a Neighbourhood Plan for Headcorn, why will this time be different?**

Headcorn Parish Council is convinced that having a Neighbourhood Plan in place is the right thing for Headcorn Parish. It therefore hopes that the new Neighbourhood Plan will succeed where the old one failed. To achieve this it needs the support of the whole community to make it happen.

Headcorn Parish Council first began work on preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for Headcorn in 2012 and reached this stage (the Regulation 14 Consultation) in 2015. The draft Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan was hugely popular with residents, and the work that went towards it led to some big wins for the Parish such as:

- persuading Kent County Council that Headcorn Primary School needed to expand to cope with student numbers in the parish and that it should do so on its existing site in the centre of the village, rather than moving it to the edge of the village as Kent County Council initially proposed.
- persuading Southern Water to upgrade the sewerage system, so that sewage did not emerge from the manhole on Moat Road every time we had heavy rain.

Despite its popularity, the previous draft Neighbourhood Plan did not pass at examination. Why was that? There were two main reasons:

- Significant delays in the examination process meant that the goal posts had shifted by the time the Plan was finally examined, meaning it no longer met the criteria. The draft Plan had been submitted to Maidstone Borough Council to run the pre-examination consultation (Regulation 16) and submit to the examiner in November 2015. However, there were significant delays in the examination process: one examiner had to pull out, so the examination hearing did not take place until October 2016; the second examiner then fell ill, so did not issue his report until March 2017. During this time Maidstone Borough Plan had made significant progress in introducing a new Local Plan for Maidstone, which completely changed its approach to development in Headcorn and therefore the rules Headcorn needed to abide by.
- Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan had tried to reflect the preferences of the local community by seeking to limit not just the size of individual developments, but also the total number of houses that could be built over the Plan period. There were good reasons for wanting to do this on sustainability grounds, and legal reasons to think that it was an acceptable approach. It was also consistent with the Development Plan for Headcorn that was in place when Headcorn Parish Council started its work on the Neighbourhood Plan. However, over the period Maidstone Borough Council had shifted its approach and was looking to allow significant development in Headcorn, so the policy limiting the total number of houses to be built on large developments in the Parish was deemed to be too restrictive and a compromise alternative could not be found.



Despite this setback, Headcorn Parish Council remains convinced that having a Neighbourhood Plan is helpful. Neighbourhood Plans allow local communities to shape development in ways that better reflect their needs, and ensures that they also gets more say on what infrastructure is provided alongside new development.

Headcorn Parish Council has therefore adapted its approach, including in the light of the changes to planning policy at a national and local level, and consulted the community again through the 2021 Residents' Survey to learn what is important. The revised Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan builds on the old one - it has the same Vision to underpin the Plan, namely that Headcorn will continue to thrive as a friendly, rural community, evolving gradually over time and supported by the right infrastructure. However, the new Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan does have some key changes:

- it has condensed the 34 policies in the previous plan down to 6 core policies. These policies broadly cover the same issues (and employ similar policy wording), but this change will make the Plan simpler and easier to use;
- it has dropped limits on the total number of dwellings that can be built over the Plan period, which was the most controversial part of the previous Plan and would not be compatible with the Maidstone Local Plan that was introduced in 2017. However, the Neighbourhood Plan retains limits on the total size of individual windfall developments (ie developments that are not on allocated sites in Maidstone's Local Plan), albeit allowing for exceptions where it can be demonstrated that a larger development would bring considerable benefit to Headcorn itself;
- it has introduced Design Guidance to support the Design Policy, reflecting the greater emphasis on good design in planning policy; and
- it has changed the approach to setting policy for gypsy and traveller development. Rather than having separate, but effectively identical, policies for the settled and gypsy and traveller communities, it applies the same approach to all new dwellings.

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