



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Neighbourhood Plan for?

It is in everyone's interests to have a Neighbourhood Plan.

Neighbourhood Plans are designed to allow local people to shape how development within their communities takes place. There is no set format for what a Neighbourhood Plan should look like or what sort of policies it should include, but they should shape and direct development.

Although it is not compulsory to introduce a Neighbourhood Plan, it provides a powerful tool for local communities to ensure they get the right type of development. Once adopted, a Neighbourhood Plan becomes a key consideration in deciding whether planning applications should be approved. An adopted Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the Development Plan for the area, with the same legal status as the Local Plan produced by the Local Planning Authority.

Communities with a Neighbourhood Plan in place also get a higher share of any money provided by developers to support local infrastructure and can use that money to address local infrastructure needs.

Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan aims to:

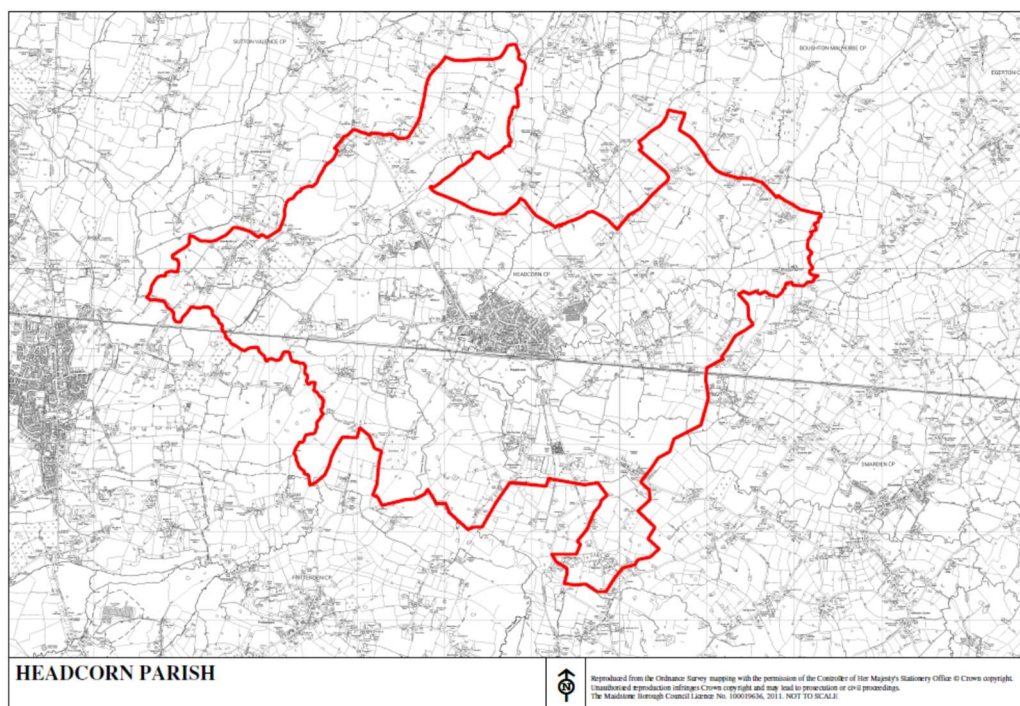
- influence the look and feel of new developments, to try and ensure that they integrate well with their surroundings;
- prioritise the right type of infrastructure for new development in the Parish that recognises the needs and experiences of those working and living in the Parish;
- improve the level of protection for the things that the local community values; and to
- influence where and what development takes place.

What is the area covered by Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan?

Headcorn Parish.

Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan covers the whole of Headcorn Parish. However, rules for the type and style of development allowed differ for development in Headcorn village itself (or immediately next to the village boundary), and development in the wider countryside.

HNP Policy Map 1: Designated Neighbourhood Area for Headcorn Parish



Source: Ordnance Survey

What policies are included in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan?

Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan contains a Vision setting the overarching strategy for what the Plan is trying to achieve, namely that Headcorn will continue to thrive as a friendly, rural community, evolving gradually over time and supported by the right infrastructure. This Vision is supported by six policies in total. Four of the policies apply to all development, including housing, gypsy and traveller, commercial and community development. These are:

1. A Design policy for Headcorn, supported by Design Guidance, which sets the overall framework governing the look and feel of developments in Headcorn, and rules to ensure that new developments will be good neighbours;
2. A policy on siting, landscaping and protecting the natural and historic environment and setting, which sets the rules to determine how developments sit within the landscape;
3. A policy on connectivity and access, which is designed to ensure that developments are safe and well-connected, and recognise particular constraints in Headcorn; and
4. A policy on infrastructure provision, which sets out local priorities for the specific types of infrastructure provision needed to help ensure developments will be successful - such as parking, broadband, water and sewerage, and promoting energy efficiency. These priorities reflect local constraints and have been informed by the Headcorn Residents' Surveys. The priorities aim to try and ensure infrastructure provision for developments in Headcorn will meet the needs of their residents, will not exacerbate existing problems and (where possible) will also contribute to improving outcomes for the Parish as a whole.

In addition to these four overarching policies, there are two policies that cover specific types of development:

5. A policy on new dwellings, which covers both housing and gypsy and traveller pitches. This policy addresses issues such as where different types of development can be located and what the mix of provision should be in larger developments. It sets a limit of 25 dwellings for individual windfall developments in and immediately next to the village, as well as a limit of at most two dwellings for windfall developments in fields in the countryside, reflecting a strong preference for smaller developments amongst residents. [*Windfall development refers to proposals that are given planning permission, but are not included as allocated sites within an adopted Local or Neighbourhood Plan.*]; and finally
6. A policy on the economy, which covers the rules governing all business development, as well as specific rules designed to support the success of Headcorn High Street, and rules governing any future development of the Headcorn aerodrome and commercial energy generation.

Does the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan allocate any sites for development?

No.

Maidstone Borough Council has just adopted its 2024 Local Plan Review, which includes an additional site for development in Headcorn. Allocating sites through the Neighbourhood Plan process as well, could lead to potential conflicts between the two plans. In addition, the allocations for Headcorn within the 2017 Maidstone Local Plan (covering the period to 2031) already included sites to provide 423 homes for the Parish, and combined with windfall development, meant that there is already planning consent for more than 500 homes in Headcorn, which significantly exceeds identified need. [*Windfall development refers to proposals that are given planning permission, but are not included as allocated sites within an adopted Local or Neighbourhood Plan.*]

For this reason Headcorn Parish Council made a decision not to allocate sites as part of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. Instead it will seek to influence development indirectly, by sharing its evidence on local preferences with Maidstone Borough Council. It will use the policies within the Neighbourhood Plan to: shape the look and feel of individual developments; determine what infrastructure is needed to support them; ensure that the approach to connectivity and access recognise local priorities; and help influence where any windfall development might take place.

What is the process for adopting Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan and how can I help make this happen?

Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan will be formally adopted, if it wins the support of over 50% of voters in a referendum on the Plan.

There are three remaining stages before the Plan can be adopted, with lots of opportunities for residents to influence the outcome:

1. **The Regulation 16 Consultation.** This is run by Maidstone Borough Council on the draft Neighbourhood Plan and residents can submit their views to Maidstone Borough Council, either by email or in writing. The documents supporting this consultation include the revised Neighbourhood Plan; a summary of the Regulation 14 responses and how these have been addressed (the Consultation Statement); and a statement setting out how the Neighbourhood Plan meets the necessary regulatory requirements (the Basic Conditions Statement).
2. **The examination.** Once the Regulation 16 Consultation is completed, Maidstone Borough Council then submits these responses, together with the Neighbourhood Plan itself, to an examiner. The examiner is responsible for deciding whether Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan meets the legal requirements for a

Neighbourhood Plan to be introduced - in other words whether it meets the basic conditions. The examiner can decide whether or not they want to hold a public hearing on the Plan to inform their decision.

3. **The referendum.** Maidstone Borough Council will then need to decide whether they are happy to accept the examiner's recommendations. If they are, Maidstone Council then organises a referendum on whether Headcorn residents want to adopt the Plan. Anyone who lives in Headcorn Parish, and who is entitled to vote in local elections, is eligible to vote in the referendum. If the majority of those who vote in the referendum are in favour of the draft Neighbourhood Plan, then the Plan is deemed to have passed.

What does the Regulation 16 Consultation mean and what do I need to do?

Residents of Headcorn have been extensively consulted during the Plan development process, including most recently through the 2023 Regulation 14 Consultation. However, the Regulation 16 Consultation gives residents and other consultees the opportunity to tell the examiner whether they support the Neighbourhood Plan and why, as well as whether they have any concerns about whether the Neighbourhood Plan adheres to the relevant legislative and regulatory requirements. The examiner then uses these responses when considering whether the Neighbourhood Plan should pass examination.

The consultation is due to run between June 24th and August 12th 2024 and details can be found at <https://localplan.maidstone.gov.uk/home/neighbourhood-planning> under the Consultations tab. **Residents are encouraged to respond to the consultation, as this will help the examiner understand whether the Plan has local support.**

How have the views of residents been taken into account in deciding what policies should be in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan?

Headcorn Parish Council has already consulted extensively with residents on the priorities and policies for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, most recently through its 2023 Regulation 14 Consultation, as well as through residents' surveys conducted in 2021, 2015 and 2013. These views have been used to shape the emerging Plan.

Examples of how residents' views have shaped policy include:

- **The Vision.** In the 2021 Residents' Survey 83% of residents supported the Vision underpinning Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan, with only 3% opposing it. This has given Headcorn Parish Council confidence that it has the right policy priorities to shape a Plan that will meet Headcorn's needs.
- **The size of potential developments.** In the 2021 Residents' Survey, almost 80% of residents wanted developments to be at most 25 dwellings. Therefore, except for strategic allocations set out in the Maidstone Borough Local Plan, under the proposed Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan windfall developments should be at most 25 dwellings. The only exception would be if the proposal can demonstrate that it brings significant benefit to existing residents in the form of infrastructure improvements within the Parish.
- **Mix of Affordable Housing.** Affordable Housing is a term used in planning policy to denote housing at below market rates. Maidstone's Local Plan proposes that 75% of affordable housing provision in Headcorn should be houses to rent. However, Headcorn's 2021 Residents' Survey revealed that most emerging households in Headcorn wanted housing to buy. Therefore, the emerging Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan specifies a preference that at least half of the affordable housing units provided in Headcorn should be for purchase, particularly for first time buyers.

- **Infrastructure provision.** The priorities for infrastructure provision set out in the Maidstone Local Plan reflect Borough-wide rather than Headcorn specific needs or constraints. Therefore, Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan has used the views of residents from the Regulation 14 Consultation and the 2021 Residents' Survey to propose reordering the priorities for infrastructure associated with development in the Parish, in order to better meet Headcorn's needs. The aim is to ensure two things happen – that the provision of infrastructure within the development itself will be enough to ensure that it does not create problems elsewhere (which has historically not been the case) and that infrastructure that supports the Parish as a whole is supported and enhanced. For example, the Regulation 14 Consultation revealed issues with water supply, so adequate water supply has been added as a top priority to the list of infrastructure priorities. Reflecting the views of residents therefore, the top three proposed priorities for infrastructure identified in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan are:
 - Utility provision, such as sewerage provision, storm drainage, water supply and broadband;
 - Education, particularly nursery school provision and continued support for the development of Headcorn Primary School in line with needs; and
 - Public realm, particularly road safety priorities, parking within new developments (including parking for bicycles), disabled access, flood defences and enhancing connections (such as footpaths) within the village.

As well as the surveys Headcorn Parish Council has run, residents will also be able to share their views through the Regulation 16 consultation, and also by voting in a referendum on whether the final Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan should be adopted.

Who owns Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan?

The Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan is issued by Headcorn Parish Council, which is the relevant plan-making body. However, in reality the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan is by Headcorn, for Headcorn. Every step of its development has been informed by the views of residents, as well as supported by a team of volunteers from the Parish.

Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan will only be adopted if the majority of those who vote in the referendum are in favour of the draft Neighbourhood Plan. Anyone who lives in Headcorn Parish, and who is entitled to vote in local elections, will be eligible to vote in the referendum. In other words, it will only be adopted with the support of Headcorn residents.

If in future circumstances change and the Neighbourhood Plan needs to change too, then it will be the views and needs of residents that will drive that change.

What is the difference between Maidstone's Local Plan and Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan?

When deciding whether to allow a planning application in Headcorn, decision makers need to weigh up whether the proposal meets the standards set by three levels of planning policy:

- national policy, particularly the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England;
- the Maidstone Borough Local Plan, covering the Borough as a whole; and
- the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan (if one has been introduced).

Importantly, once Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is formally adopted (or Made) it will be used to determine planning applications in Headcorn and will have the same legal status as the Maidstone Local Plan. Where there is a conflict between an adopted

Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan and the Maidstone Local Plan, the policies in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan will take precedence over Maidstone Local Plan policies, unless they are superseded by subsequently adopted plans.

Maidstone Local Plan is prepared by Maidstone Borough Council and covers the whole of the Borough. It includes policies on all aspects of planning policy. However, the rules are designed for Maidstone Borough as a whole, rather than tailored for just Headcorn's needs. Maidstone Local Plan allocates sites for development, including in Headcorn, and covers allocations for: dwellings, gypsy and traveller pitches and economic and commercial development.

Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan only applies to Headcorn Parish. It provides an opportunity to shape development according to the needs and preferences of Headcorn residents, with specific policies for the Parish rather than Maidstone Borough. For example, it provides an opportunity to shape the size, density and design of developments in a way that will better match the look and feel of Headcorn's built environment, as well as to shape the priorities for infrastructure provision needed to support development within the Parish. Headcorn Parish Council has decided not to allocate additional sites, as this could potentially conflict with Maidstone's proposed allocations.

Does Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan need a Strategic Environmental Assessment?

Environmental and sustainability considerations have been a key focus throughout the development of the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan and this is reflected in Plan policies. However, some Neighbourhood Plans also need to be accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment, which provides a formal assessment of how Plan policies will impact the environment and how the resulting risks will be managed.

Maidstone Borough Council has consulted with the relevant statutory consultees, such as the Environment Agency and Natural England, about whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment is needed in the case of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan. The conclusion is that a formal Strategic Environmental Assessment is not needed for Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan.

What will Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan do about parking and traffic issues?

Planning policy cannot be used to address existing problems, except where doing so is necessary to make a proposed development acceptable. The approach taken in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan is therefore to try and ensure development will not exacerbate existing issues and to encourage developers to make improvements, for example by prioritising issues such as parking provision. Draft policies propose that:

- Development will not be allowed where it would result in the loss of parking facilities in the village that support either the High Street, or key services such as the train station or Doctors' surgery. This will help protect key parking facilities.
- All new developments must be supported by adequate outside parking provision at each property. In the case of residential development this will include parking for at least one car per dwelling and a minimum of two cars for any dwelling of more than one bedroom. Garages will not count towards provision, in recognition of the fact they often get used for other purposes. This will help reduce the likelihood of new developments contributing to on road parking elsewhere in the village.

- New developments should not cause or exacerbate traffic problems, such as blocking lines of sight at junctions, exacerbating existing traffic pinch points, or causing on-street parking. This will help limit the problems caused by new development for existing residents.
- New developments are also encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to enhance road safety, for example by enhancing existing junctions that will be key access points for the development, or contributing to measures that will help reduce traffic speed.
- Public realm improvements (covering issues such as parking and road safety) will also be one of the top three priorities for infrastructure provision in Headcorn under the Plan.

How will Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan influence infrastructure provision?

Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan aims to ensure that infrastructure provision for development in Headcorn will reflect Headcorn specific needs, rather than generic Borough-wide priorities set out in the Maidstone Local Plan. The aim is to ensure two things happen – that the provision of infrastructure within developments will be enough to ensure that they do not create problems elsewhere (which has historically not been the case) and that infrastructure that supports the Parish as a whole is supported and enhanced.

The policy on infrastructure provision sets rules for specific types of infrastructure provision such as parking, broadband, water and sewerage, and promoting energy efficiency. For example, the policy looks to ensure that strategic parking provision that supports the High Street, as well as key services such as the Station and Doctors' surgery, will not be lost and that new developments will have enough parking to support their residents' needs.

The policy also sets out local priorities for ten specific types of infrastructure provision, in order to help ensure that money for infrastructure is spent where it is most needed and that new developments will be successful. These priorities reflect local constraints and have been informed by the Headcorn Residents' Surveys. Reflecting the results from Residents' Surveys and the Regulation 14 Consultation, the top three proposed priorities for infrastructure identified in Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan are:

- Utilities (particularly sewerage provision, storm drainage, water supply and broadband);
- Education (particularly nursery school provision and continued support for the development of Headcorn Primary School in line with needs); and
- Public realm (particularly road safety priorities, parking (including parking for bicycles), disabled access, flood defences and connectivity).

Where there is not enough money to fund everything, the aim is for money to always be spent where it is most needed, with the funding for lower priority needs coming from the funds remaining once higher priority needs have been addressed.

Introducing a Neighbourhood Plan for Headcorn also means that Headcorn Parish Council will receive a larger share of funding from any Infrastructure Levies on developments in Headcorn to spend on identified needs. It will do this with reference to the identified list of priorities in the Neighbourhood Plan. In exceptional circumstances, where an urgent infrastructure need has arisen, Headcorn Parish Council will be able to adjust the ordering of how it priorities infrastructure funding to reflect that.

How will Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan policies help the environment?

Sustainability and environmental considerations have informed policy choices throughout the development of Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan. Policies aim to help the environment and limit any negative impacts from development, including policies on:

- The provision and siting of electric vehicle recharging points;
- Ensuring existing wildlife corridors and stepping stones are maintained and enhanced, and that the use of impermeable barriers is avoided. For example, roadside verges and hedges, which are important wildlife refuges, should be maintained where possible;
- Delivering a biodiversity net gain, in line with national and local targets, that is focused on supporting native flora and fauna. Ideally this net gain should be within the site itself. However, where this is not possible, any offsite solutions should be located within Headcorn Parish, and ideally managed in a way that local residents will be able to enjoy;
- Ensuring development does not cause damage to local streams and rivers;
- Preventing development in flood zones, including areas where Headcorn Parish Council is aware of historic issues with surface water flooding that may not show up on flood maps;
- Ensuring developments will deal with flooding and surface water run-off from the site in a way that will not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere;
- Avoiding development in isolated parts of the Parish;
- Ensuring that any loss of hedgerows and established trees from a site in the previous five years (or as part of the development) will be balanced by the provision of similar species within the development that will help maintain and enhance wildlife corridors within and around the site. In general, mature trees and hedgerows should only be removed as an exception and existing ancient hedgerows must be preserved as part of any new development.

What approach does Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan propose for Gypsy and Traveller development?

Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate specific sites for development and therefore does not include any allocated sites for gypsy and travellers. However, it does include policies that aim to shape potential development, including the development of windfall sites. In the case of gypsy and traveller development, under Headcorn's emerging Neighbourhood Plan the same rules will apply to gypsy and traveller pitches as to other forms of dwellings. This is different to the approach taken in most planning policy, which typically sets different policies (and sometimes even uses different plans) to judge proposals from gypsy and travellers compared to the settled community. The decision to propose applying the same rules under Headcorn's Neighbourhood Plan reflects two factors:

- the desire to be fair, by applying the same rules to all parts of the community; and
- the fact that the impact of caravans and other mobile or temporary dwellings on the built and man-made environment in Headcorn can be significant, making it important that they meet the same standards as other development.

Outside strategic allocations through the Maidstone Local Plan process, the rules will limit permission for new dwellings in the countryside to at most two houses or gypsy and traveller pitches within any field boundary (where the field boundary is the one in existence in 1948) to prevent the emergence of large developments in the countryside. Developments will also need to meet the rules on things like site access and siting and landscaping, which set high standards in recognition of the fact that development in the

countryside is generally discouraged in line with national policy. Larger sites or additional dwellings may be approved, but only once they have undergone the scrutiny associated with strategic allocations through the Maidstone Local Plan process.

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 16 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 including 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.

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.