

# The Sustainable Development of Dispersed Settlement in the High Weald AONB



*Furthering understanding of one of England's Finest Landscapes*



**Final Report to the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee and English Heritage**

**By Countryside & Community Research Institute  
University of Gloucestershire and the  
University of the West of England**

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The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee provides guidance to local authorities and other bodies on implementing the statutory AONB Management Plan and on how local and government policy objectives can be accommodated without damaging the outstanding character of the nationally important landscape.

# The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's Research Programme

*Furthering understanding of one of England's Finest Landscapes*

The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's management aims and priorities for the AONB are firmly based on an understanding of the fundamental and defining character of the whole area – that is, those components of natural beauty that have made the High Weald a recognizably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years and that will continue to define it in the future. It develops its understanding through undertaking work itself, through its specialist team, the AONB Unit, or by commissioning independent reports from others.

The primary purpose of its research programme is to better understand the components of natural beauty. The key components are:

- **Geology, landform, water systems and climate:** deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east-west and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to and influence, a local variant of the British sub-oceanic climate.
- **Settlement:** dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads, hamlets and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
- **Routeways:** ancient routeways (now roads and Rights of Way) in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. The droveways are often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.
- **Woodland:** a great extent of ancient woods, gills and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.
- **Field and heath:** small, irregularly shaped and productive fields, often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows and small woodlands and typically used for livestock grazing. Small holdings and a non-dominant agriculture. Distinctive zones of heaths and inner river valleys.

By researching the key components – their history, development, distribution, special qualities, deterioration, damage and loss – we can develop an evidence base for the AONB Management Plan and other AONB policy and guidance.

The JAC's secondary purpose is to better understand how the High Weald landscape can contribute to society – food, energy, water provision, flood protection, recreation, biodiversity and fisheries – without damage to its natural beauty.

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# The Sustainable Development of Dispersed Settlement in the High Weald

The project was commissioned by the High Weald AONB in partnership with English Heritage and took place in September and October 2007.

The stated aim and objectives of the project agreed between client and contractor were as follows.

## Project Aim

To explore the sustainability of dispersed settlement in different parts of Europe and to note examples of good practice for consideration in the High Weald

## Project Objectives

- To identify areas of dispersed settlement for which spatial planning / rural development policies have been adopted in different parts of Europe
- To identify examples of seemingly good practice in those policies for securing sustainable development in dispersed settlement
- To indicate the kinds of criteria that might be used for assessing the sustainability of dispersed settlement in spatial planning / rural development policies for the High Weald AONB

## Interpretation of 'dispersed settlement' used in the project

The interpretation of 'dispersed settlement' to be used in the project and agreed with the clients is: *'An area – at the minimum scale comprising an individual township or parish, but more commonly at the level of larger character areas – historically dominated and sustained by scattered, isolated hamlets, dwellings and farmsteads'*.

The project team is grateful to **Sally Marsh** and **Andrew Shaw** from the High Weald AONB and to **Jeremy Lake** and **Graham Fairclough** of English Heritage for their constructive contribution to the completion of the project.

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## Summary of Main Findings

### Key points

- Some of the highest densities of historic farmsteads and pre-17th century buildings are concentrated within landscapes defined by dispersed farmsteads and ancient patterns of fields and boundaries, such as in the High Weald
- Dispersal is a 'normal' feature of some valued historic settlement patterns and landscapes. Those landscapes have already proven their sustainability over centuries; they have endured
- An understanding of character and the processes which have shaped the settled landscape to date should form an important component of a new approach to achieving sustainable rural settlements
- It is important to see farm-buildings and building patterns as an asset for the countryside and to acknowledge the contribution farmsteads can make towards achieving a sustainable future for valued landscapes like the High Weald
- English Heritage and the High Weald AONB, believe that good design and sustainable solutions for rural settlements should recognise and grow out of the inherited patterns observable in the wider landscape, and in the wide range of farmstead and building types, materials and detail

The High Weald AONB Management Plan identifies the need for greater understanding of, and protection for, the distinctive settlement pattern of the High Weald, characterized mainly by the isolated farmsteads and hamlets that are typical of areas of dispersed settlement throughout England. English Heritage and the High Weald AONB Unit have an ongoing programme to identify and characterize historic farmsteads. This brief project attempts to throw just a shaft of light on the challenges facing the application of that understanding, first, by exploring dispersed settlement in the context of policies for sustainable development in rural areas within the UK and, second, by looking at examples in other European countries where sustainable development policies have been deployed in areas of dispersed settlement.

Over the past fifty years or so in the UK there have been increasing pressures to adapt or, in some parts of the UK, even demolish historic farmsteads, including changes in rural economies, in agricultural policies and in planning policies. The challenge is to manage these pressures for change so that we protect those characteristics of the landscape that we value but also guide the evolution of rural settlements so that they perform better against a broad range of sustainability criteria.

For the past 60 years rural planning policies in England have been restricted to variations of key settlement policies, whereby development has been concentrated in larger villages and small towns. In some parts of England this policy has already distorted the inherited settlement pattern, and created new landscapes. Such fixed and narrow policies have had negative effects on the sustainability of those rural communities/localities not identified as having key functions, and in effect has led to non-nucleated clusters becoming denser and in some cases to their infrastructure (e.g. roads) becoming overburdened. In the past five years central government has focused on the notion of sustainable communities as a principal driver of policy, but ironically, this is working to the disadvantage of some smaller rural communities / localities. An exclusive focus on reducing CO2 emissions threatens to relegate other crucial aspects of sustainability, particularly the social, economic and cultural sustainability of rural

communities, but also other characteristics of environmental sustainability – specifically the historic character of dispersed settlement and the local distinctiveness of different places.

A sustainable development framework for a spatial planning / rural development policy would encompass the following key dimensions:

- reduced carbon footprint,
- sustainable consumption of resources and relationships with the natural world,
- improvement in environmental quality,
- development of community empowerment ,
- decent services and facilities and access to basic necessities and opportunities,
- a diverse economic base
- locally distinctive surroundings.

Within such a framework there are probably three kinds of sustainability criteria that need to be addressed in preparing and implementing spatial planning / rural development policies for an area of dispersed settlement:

- ‘generic’ sustainability criteria that should be addressed in *all* public policy,
- sustainability criteria that derive from a ‘type’ of situation or setting,
- ‘local’ sustainability criteria that are specific to an individual community / locality.

Spatial planning / rural development policies need to combine the most appropriate mix of criteria from each of these three sets. In ‘special’ or even unique settings such as the High Weald it might well be appropriate for the criteria to be more weighted towards the ‘type’ criteria than would be the case in most policy situations.

These type criteria might be organised under a number of sub-headings:

- origins and evolution
- settlement pattern
- landscape character
- buildings in their setting
- building form
- land management practice
- characteristics of the local community.
- traditional skills

One of the key challenges to safeguarding the characteristics of landscapes of dispersed settlement such as the High Weald is to register the significance of these characteristics in the statutory planning system. In this respect it is important to emphasise that dispersal is a ‘normal’ feature of some valued historic settlement patterns and landscapes. The characteristics of dispersed settlement might be most effectively addressed in the form of sustainable development criteria within development plan documents and / or supplementary planning documents as part of the reformed English planning system.

A first step in attempting to get these important ‘type’ criteria onto the national agenda as sustainable development criteria might be to arrange discussion of the subject by representatives of areas characterised by valued dispersed settlement. Further, matters relating to historic or cultural aspects of built or natural environments rarely figure in national lists of ‘generic’ criteria and there is an urgent need for matters relating to the built environment – and specifically to its historic and cultural attributes - to attain a higher profile and be accorded greater weight at the UK national level. This might also

be addressed through concerted action by representatives of historic landscapes, such as the High Weald AONB.

Within the very limited time available the project sought to explore examples of other areas of dispersed settlement in different parts of Europe. This was attempted through the use of questionnaires administered to academic and practitioner contacts in most EU member states. Inevitably the findings were dependent on, and constrained by, the responses that could be secured within a very short time. Further, it was perhaps optimistic to expect that meaningful examples of good practice relevant to the High Weald could be drawn from other countries. It seems that there are very few examples where spatial planning / rural development policies have, as yet, explicitly addressed the issue of dispersed settlement in the context of trying to secure sustainable development.

Nevertheless, some useful insights were gained from the study that might be of value to the clients and beyond.

- The attempt to achieve an overview of the European experience of dispersed settlement for which spatial planning / rural development policies have been adopted in different parts of Europe is a great challenge that requires a more thorough study than has been possible within the confines of the present project. Such a study needs to be carefully designed, with clear objectives and a robust methodology.
- The concept of 'dispersed settlement' has different interpretations and connotations in different countries and among different disciplines, even within England. This renders a 'European view' almost impossible at this stage. The production of a single definition is perhaps undesirable, although it would be important to achieve a better understanding of the different interpretations and uses of the concept across Europe and of the diversity of inherited patterns.
- The context within which the issue of dispersed settlement needs to be addressed varies in accordance with the degree of urbanisation and the prevailing planning systems in any given country. What is encompassed by interpretation of the term 'dispersed settlement' in policy formulation differs widely between different countries, ranging from a focus on the problems attaching to the containment of urban and suburban sprawl through to the need for constructive but sensitive rural development.
- A number of European countries have areas of dispersed settlement in a similar sense to that of the Higher Weald. However, in order to obtain further meaningful information on policies for securing sustainable development in areas of dispersed settlement, further translation work needs to be undertaken on policy documents from the different countries as this information is very rarely available in English. Inevitably, this translation work will take time.
- The most explicit example found of specific spatial planning policies that are intended to secure sustainable development in areas of dispersed settlement was from County Kerry in Ireland. The settlement strategy for County Kerry operates on different levels, with the intention of enabling each individual settlement to capture its unique features in a way that complements the

development of other settlements and the 'rural areas', whilst also supporting the region's competitiveness. However, the deep-seated antipathy to dispersed settlement that underpins this strategy could be seen as eschewing a positive and constructive approach to protecting or reinforcing the 'unique features' of such a settlement pattern.

- It is useful to have an example from another country where settlement pattern and farm buildings are seen as resources in their own right in rural development policies. The proposal for a Rural Development Program for Sweden suggests the importance of seeing farm buildings and building patterns as an asset for the countryside and acknowledges the development potential of farm buildings for the countryside as an intrinsic part of landscape values - and through that emphasises the connection to the tourism and recreation industries.
- Landscape is increasingly seen in different countries in Europe as having importance both as a resource and as a locational factor in regional development. A landscape perspective is also now being seen as an important element in debates on the issue of sustainability.

## SECTION A: THE UK CONTEXT

*“Dispersed settlement of farmsteads and hamlets is such an unusual and key feature of the High Weald, that we need to work together to consider how we can protect and enhance this characteristic in the context of broader rural sustainability”*

*Ashley Brown, Chief Planner, Wealden District Council (cited in the High Weald AONB Management Plan, 2004)*

### 1: Introduction – the High Weald policy context

1.1. The project is set within the context of the High Weald AONB Management Plan, which identifies as the first of five issues for settlement: the need for greater understanding of the dispersed settlement pattern of the High Weald, and the connections between settlements and the countryside. Objective S2 of that Plan is to protect the historic pattern of settlement, the rationale behind this objective being to protect the distinctive character of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, and to maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation, density and distribution) between such settlements that contribute to local identity.

1.2. The High Weald is an anciently-enclosed medieval landscape of mostly small-medium and irregular fields with shaws and hedgerows. Its dispersed settlement pattern comprising isolated farmsteads and hamlets has given rise to comparatively high numbers of historic farmsteads, including of pre-1750 buildings. Dispersed settlement, comprising isolated farms and hamlets sometimes intermixed with villages, is characteristic of western and parts of eastern and south–eastern England (Roberts & Wrathmell 2000). Areas of complex and often ancient enclosure are associated with landscapes of dispersed settlement, perhaps or sometimes relating to the clearance of land from woodland, moor and marsh, and the need to manage more intermixed landscapes of arable and pasture (Lake, 2007). Dispersed settlement patterns based on isolated farmsteads appears to have been present across Europe in the later prehistoric and earlier post-Roman periods. Recent research in south west England, north-west France and East Anglia suggests that the present type of dispersed settlement originated in the early middle ages from a conscious response to new local needs and agricultural techniques. In some parts of England, dispersed settlement is a post-medieval phenomenon, replacing medieval villages, but it is today particularly common and distinctive in areas where medieval communities practised particular types of farming, such as those with a strong pastoral base, in woodland/ heathland/wood pasture areas characterised by a diverse mix of non-agricultural employment and in rich mining areas such as Cornwall. Some of the highest densities of historic farmsteads and pre-17th century buildings are concentrated within landscapes defined by dispersed farmsteads and hamlets and ancient patterns of fields and boundaries, such as in the High Weald of Sussex and Kent (Lake and Edwards 2006a; 2006b).

1.3. The AONB Management Plan 2004 identified the dispersed pattern of settlement – farmsteads, hamlets and late medieval villages - as a fundamental component of AONB character. Dispersed settlement is a valued feature of the High Weald and other areas displaying similar characteristics. It is worthy of retention and, in the context of the present project, consideration as a criterion of sustainability, but hitherto the role of the settlements in AONB character (as of many aspects of human modification of the land)

has been underplayed compared with other factors such as landform and vegetation. One of the purposes of this research is to redress that balance and contribute to wider understanding of historic farmsteads and their relationship with landscape in order to inform policy and interpretation. The clients of this research, English Heritage and the High Weald AONB, believe that good design and appropriate solutions to re-use issues should recognise and grow out of the inherited patterns observable in the wider landscape, and in the wide range of farmstead and building types, materials and detail. Policies implemented to address the issue should be alive to variations in the strength and coherence of local character, and an understanding of individual locales in their regional and national context (Lake, 2007).

1.4. Over the past fifty years or so there have been increasing pressures to adapt or even demolish historic farmsteads. These pressures have included changes in rural economies, in agricultural policies and in planning policies (for a full account, see Gaskell and Owen, 2005). In the light of these contextual changes a large number of 'traditional' buildings or entire farmsteads have become redundant for agricultural purposes and consequently they have been demolished, neglected or altered to the detriment of their historic character. It is even arguable that all farmstead working buildings more than 50 years old are functionally obsolete so radical has been very recent agricultural change (e.g. animal welfare regulations, machinery size, new crops etc). The future of these buildings in new use is thus part of a very much broader debate about the character of future rural life, how far modern rural settlement is actually 'peri-urban' in function and, increasingly, in form.

1.5. There are significant pressures from reasonably wealthy people to move from towns to the countryside – or to have second homes in the countryside. This has been accelerated by the widespread ownership of private cars and more recently, by the growth of 'home-working. More widely, this blanket response from the planning system in the application of restraint policies that prevent *new* housing in the countryside has also had the effect of focusing demand on the reuse and adaptation of *existing* buildings. In turn, the most prevalent planning policy response to this refocusing of demand has been to prevent the reuse of traditional farm buildings except for 'economic' use. In the event, however, over 80 per cent of planning permissions for the reuse of these buildings have been for residential use. While there are benefits to the building stock – and to traditional settlement patterns – to be gained from managing the conversion of historic buildings through careful design guidance, many conversions have been disappointing. The challenge is to bring historic farmsteads – and dispersed settlement - into viable use without destroying their character and without diminishing their wider sustainability while at the same embedding policies about buildings in policies and strategies for maintaining (sometimes, creating) dispersed settlement..

1.6. Overall, the challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to manage pressures for change so that we protect what is valued but also guide the evolution of rural settlements both within their specific historical trajectories and so that they perform better against a wide and carefully considered range of sustainability criteria. Spatial planning / rural development policies in the UK - and most other parts of Europe - are now framed in the context of, and with the express objective of achieving, sustainable development. One of the key issues for the High Weald, and other areas with similar dispersed settlement characteristics, is to register those characteristics as a significant criterion for sustainable development that should be deployed in the formulation and implementation of rural policies. An understanding of character and the processes which have shaped the

settled landscape to date should form an important component of a new approach to achieving sustainable rural and even peri-urban settlements.

## 2: Sustainable communities / localities in the UK – an overview

2.1. While the principal focus of this brief project is on the sustainability of dispersed settlement in different parts of Europe, there is value in contextualising the discussion by first examining – in outline only - some of the generic issues relating to sustainable communities / localities in the UK.<sup>1</sup> This initial discussion concludes with a ‘conceptual diagram’, which attempts to explain the relationships between the different kinds of sustainability criteria that might guide the preparation of spatial planning / rural development policies for an area of dispersed settlement.

2.2. For the past 60 years rural planning policies in England have been restricted to variations of key settlement policies, whereby development has been concentrated in larger villages and small towns, thereby overlooking strong regional distinctions and taking no account of the character of settlement in dispersed regions. Such fixed and narrow notions, and correspondingly singular policy responses, have had negative effects on some rural communities / localities that have not been identified as having key functions. These negative effects have included pricing people on lower incomes out of the local housing market, eroding local services and preventing development that might provide employment for local people. In the main it has led to rural settlements in dispersed areas (and smaller settlements in nucleated areas) becoming progressively *less* sustainable both socially and economically as restraint policies have compounded problems of:

- lack of *employment* opportunities for local people;
- lack of *affordable homes* for people on low incomes;
- erosion of *local facilities and services* in villages, including shops, health care, child care and training, particularly for those young and elderly people who are socially and physically isolated. (see, for example, Shorten, 2001; Owen, 1996)

Such an approach can also conflict with the aim of reinforcing locally distinctiveness - specifically the protection of dispersed settlement patterns - and of promoting high-quality and locally-sensitive development.

2.3 With specific relevance to the present project, ‘village-centric’ planning policies implemented since 1947 have already distorted the inherited settlement pattern and created new landscapes and new settlement patterns in some parts of England. While in ‘Midland England’ this policy might have had relatively restricted negative impacts - by and large simply making ‘villages’ into larger villages - in dispersed areas it has converted loose clusters into artificial nucleation without addressing consequential issues such as infrastructure, settlement hierarchy and, indeed settlement function. One consequence of key settlement policies in dispersed areas, for example, has been a ‘densification’ of non-nucleated clusters and thus an overburdening of their infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> Although most government policies refer to sustainable rural communities, for the most part these policies are also addressing localities since the two are often, but not always, coterminous (Owen, 2002). Throughout the above discussion the term ‘communities / localities’ is used to encompass both.

2.4. Despite this, planning policy at a national and local level continues to encourage the concentration of development in service centres and settlement cores. Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas introduced in 2004 re-emphasises the key settlement approach based on the premise that building close to existing services is sustainable because it improves access to those services. However research has shown that people are strategically disobedient (Shorten, 2004; 2006). Proximity does not determine use of services. People have connections and loyalties to services and places that are independent of the settlement in which they live.

2.5. But it is important to note here that key settlement policies, which have determined rural settlement policies and their resultant patterns throughout the UK since the Second World War, were not originally introduced as a means to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, or even to cut down on travel by motor car, but rather to reduce the costs of supplying services and utilities to rural settlements. It was assumed, for example, that the unit costs of infrastructure such as electricity and water would be reduced if housing and employment development were concentrated in larger settlements such as market towns.

2.6. In the past five years central government has focused on the notion of sustainable communities as a principal driver of policy in many fields. In 2003, the Communities Plan (Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future) set out a long-term programme for delivering sustainable communities in both urban and rural areas (ODPM, 2003). Specifically, in 2004, government introduced Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, which called for “policies to sustain, enhance and, where appropriate, revitalize country towns and villages (including the provision of affordable housing) and for strong, diverse, economic activity, whilst maintaining local character and a high quality environment” (ODPM, 2004).

2.7. Ironically, this welcome advance in the importance of sustainable development in rural policies, is working to the disadvantage of some smaller rural communities / localities. These smaller communities are generally considered by planners to be ‘unsustainable’, despite the fact that there is now strong evidence for:

- smaller more remote settlements and networks of settlements being able to perform better against a range of sustainability indicators;
- employment growth in rural areas being double that in urban - rural districts now outperforming and also converging with urban areas;
- much of this growth being part-time and self-employed, driven by home-based workers;
- more positive and locally-attuned policies and strategies seeking to inform rather than react to change;
- rural settlements having a tendency to do better against long term sustainability criteria such as food and energy security.

2.8. A particular problem for smaller rural settlements is that the recent international concern about the effects of climate change has galvanised central governments across Europe – including the UK Government - into adopting policies that reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as a priority above all others. While this is clearly an extremely important aspect of sustainability, an exclusive focus on reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions threatens to overwhelm and relegate other crucial aspects of sustainability, particularly the social, economic and cultural sustainability of rural communities, but also other characteristics of environmental sustainability –specifically the historic character of dispersed settlement

and the local distinctiveness of different places. To be effective in promoting sustainable rural communities / localities, rural policies must take an holistic and integrated approach to the pursuit of sustainable development.

2.9. There is currently no agreed definition of what a rural sustainable community / locality is; indeed, the pursuit of such a definition might well be a fruitless endeavour. Instead, it might be more appropriate to answer the question: 'How might continuous improvement in the sustainability of existing, specific rural communities / localities be secured?' This might well yield diverse community / locality-specific policy responses. Such an approach might be more relevant to the problems actually experienced by rural communities than the potentially monolithic response that might result from the quest for the utopian notion of 'the sustainable rural community'.

2.10. In October 2005 the Commission for Rural Communities, the body charged with advising Government on sustainable rural communities, commissioned five consultants (Banister; Bryden and Bryan; Levett; Owen; and Shorten) to prepare separate papers addressing the question: "what do we mean by `sustainable rural communities?` from different perspectives. The following conclusions from the work are relevant to the present project.

- Sustainability is a multi-faceted concept and it is unlikely that all such facets could be encompassed within a single definition. The core idea of sustainability is simultaneously to make life better for people and maintain the planet's life support system, noting that the aim is to achieve both, not just to trade one off against the other.
- The narrow focus on reducing CO2 emissions and concentrating new development in larger settlements has led to *reduced sustainability in some rural communities*. Such policies are based on the assumption that they will create the conditions whereby more people will be closer to jobs and services and so reduce the need to travel. But this policy has failed, mainly because cheap motoring has enabled people to be far more mobile.
- The environmental sustainability of rural communities continues to be reduced as the environmental burden of contemporary lifestyles is potentially greater than that of urban communities. Increased car usage is one of the main causes of environmental 'unsustainability' and there is a close link between private mobility and declining public services and affordable housing.
- National criteria for sustainability such as those contained in the 45 'Quality of Life Indicators' produced by the Audit Commission (2005) or the 68 indicators of sustainable development produced by the UK Government (HM Government, 2005) provide a checklist for measuring progress towards sustainability. However, the criteria / indicators are not particularly relevant to the assessments of sustainability made by individual rural communities. They are difficult to apply because (a) they impose a `one-size-fits-all` checklist on all localities and (b) they give undue weight to quantifiable indicators and fail to provide a measure of the more qualitative facets of sustainability that are important to rural communities. Remarkably neither makes any explicit reference to the quality of the built environment or the historic value of built and natural environments.

2.11. In recent years the CCRI has undertaken several research contracts with a direct bearing on the concept of sustainable rural communities / localities. One such contract, for Defra, involved the development of a scenario for the delivery of services to rural

communities in 2015 (CCRU, 2005). A major finding with implications for the present study was that by 2015 there will have been a process of even (!) greater polarisation between the majority of people in rural communities (with good incomes, good health, personal transport and home-based access to the Internet) and the minority (with lower incomes, poorer health, no personal transport, and without access to the Internet). At the inter-parish scale there will be considerable unevenness in service delivery reflecting their variable endowment of social capital and community leadership. Clearly, this implies that some rural communities will have become *less sustainable* by 2015 and might well need targeted support.

2.12. Drawing on these and other studies, a sustainable development framework for a spatial planning / rural development policy would include consideration of the dimensions – or variables - set out in Figure 1.

- **reduced carbon footprint**, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficient buildings, reduced travel by car, opportunities for locally generated renewable energy
- **sustainable consumption of resources and relationship with the natural world**, conservation of natural resources, valued habitats and special features, promotion of biodiversity and connectivity, minimised waste production at source and increased opportunities for reuse and recycling within settlement
- **improvement of environmental quality**, including water quality, air quality etc
- **development of community empowerment**, building up social capital for self governance, active community-led planning and development, including opportunities for active participation by under-represented groups – based on communities with a diverse social structure and mix of age groups
- **decent services and facilities**, including access to affordable homes, education, health and social care, exercise, arts and recreation, shops, etc.
- **diverse economic base**, with local employment opportunities, with support for people on low incomes unable to take advantage of employment opportunities
- **locally distinctive built / natural surroundings**, including improved design quality, and locally, as well as nationally, valued history and culture

Figure 1: Dimensions of a sustainable development framework for rural policy

2.13. This framework should not be viewed just as a list; it is important to stress the need to address the connections between these variables of sustainable development in preparing and implementing rural policies. And it is important, particularly in the context of the present project, to recognise that the relative significance of these dimensions of sustainability will differ between different rural communities / localities and might well change through time.

### 3: Towards identifying criteria for sustainable development in areas of dispersed settlement

3.1. So much for a general overview of the broader issue of the sustainability of rural communities / localities; how might this relate to the pursuit of sustainable development in areas of dispersed settlement, such as the High Weald, through spatial planning / rural development policies?

3.2. Figure 2 attempts to show diagrammatically the relationship between the different kinds of criteria that might be applied in such policies. It is important at the outset to acknowledge the importance of identifying consistent dimensions or variables of sustainable development - essentially to agree the *scope* of sustainability. For this to be meaningful in public policy terms there must be agreement about what falls within that scope, otherwise it would be impossible to secure agreement to policies from a wide range of interested parties; different interests in policy making and implementation cannot choose what they believe should be included within – or excluded from - the scope of sustainability. And that scope should be interpreted holistically in two senses; it should include social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions of sustainability and it should look for the connections between these dimensions.

3.3. There are probably three kinds of sustainability criteria that need to be addressed in preparing and implementing spatial planning / rural development policies for an area of dispersed settlement.

1. First, there are sustainability criteria that should be addressed in *all* public policy. These 'generic' criteria might be derived from national / government policy statements such as the 'Quality of Life Indicators' promulgated by the Audit Commission in 2005 (and set out in outline in Appendix 1 as an example), recognising that most such statements are selective and partial. Clearly, if they are to be applied in all situations there must be a substantial degree of common agreement about their validity and appropriateness. But they might also need different application in different English Regions, even before the local factors captured by the following two kinds of criterion
2. Second, there are sustainability criteria that derive from a 'type' of situation or setting, whether a type of locality, such as an area of dispersed settlement, or a type of community, such as former coalmining communities. These will implicitly be responding to the historic trajectory / attributes of an area or community, such as the woodland industry / transhumance / farming trajectory of the High Weald. Logically, these criteria should be consistent across each type.
3. Third, there are 'local' sustainability criteria that are specific to an individual community / locality. They might respond to the particular characteristics and culture of the built or natural environment of that locality and / or to the needs and aspirations of members of the local community.

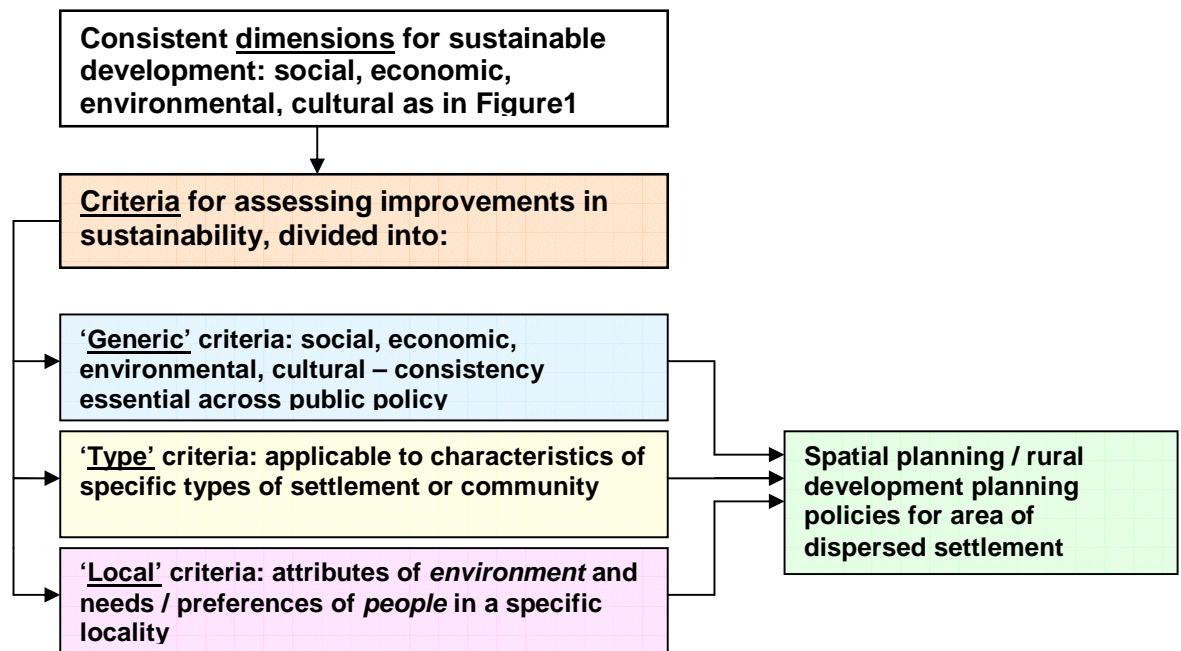


Figure 2: 'Model' of sustainable development criteria for application in spatial planning / rural development policies for a landscape of dispersed settlement

3.4. In the formulation of any spatial planning / rural development policy, the challenge is to combine the most appropriate *mix of criteria* from each of these three sets. In 'special' or even unique settings such as the High Weald it might well be appropriate for the criteria to be more weighted towards the 'type' criteria than would be the case in most policy situations.

3.5. In recent years it has become common practice for public policy to make reference to - indeed, in many cases to be founded on - what are termed here 'generic' criteria for sustainability; the identification and application of these criteria has been the subject of extensive research and practice. It is a well-trodden field and the present project does not pursue the examination of these criteria further. It is important to re-emphasise, however, that matters relating to historic or cultural aspects of built or natural environments rarely figure in lists of these national criteria. The UK Sustainable Development Strategy (HM Government, 2005) lists 68 indicators (see Appendix 2) of progress towards sustainable development, yet not one of them refers explicitly to the built environment, let alone to any historic or cultural aspects of the built environment. This might be considered surprising in the context of the 10 guiding principles for sustainable spatial development adopted by the Council of Europe's Member States, one of which was: 'Enhancing the cultural heritage as a factor for development' (European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning, CEMAT, 2002, [www.coe.int/t/e/cultural\\_co-operation/environment/cemat/gpssdec/rec\(2002\)1\\_e.pdf?L=E](http://www.coe.int/t/e/cultural_co-operation/environment/cemat/gpssdec/rec(2002)1_e.pdf?L=E)).

3.6. There is an urgent need for matters relating to the built environment – and specifically to its historic and cultural attributes - to attain a higher profile and be accorded greater weight amongst sustainable development criteria at the UK national

level. This might be addressed through concerted action by representatives of historic landscapes, such as the High Weald AONB.

3.6. To a much lesser extent, the identification of 'local' criteria specific to an individual community / locality is also beginning to be incorporated into policies. This is being achieved most noticeably in predominantly rural areas through the preparation of community-based plans, such as Parish Plans of which some 1,500 have been prepared in recent years. Techniques for identifying the needs and preferences of the local community are being honed all the time and a great deal of research has been conducted into the development and application of these techniques. It is important that policies recognise the diversity and specificity of individual rural communities / localities and avoid a 'one size fits all' or national / county / district stereotype approach.

3.7. Local distinctiveness should be fostered as a criterion of sustainability and, within a district or county-wide framework, policies and proposals should be tailored to the needs of specific communities / localities wherever this is appropriate. There is a need, therefore, to have a place-specific perspective that encompasses aspects of sustainability peculiar to real, individual places. Coverage of historic or cultural aspects of built or natural environments is more commonplace amongst these 'local' criteria than amongst 'generic' criteria, but tends to be patchy and dependent on the interests and motivations of the leaders of the various initiatives. Again, although the identification of these local criteria is a crucial issue and should be addressed in a future research initiative, it is beyond the scope of the present project. One important matter that must be noted in relation to sustainability criteria that derive from local communities is the tendency of those communities to select criteria different from, and sometimes in conflict with, criteria applied by policy makers and interest groups (such as, for example, English Heritage or AONBs!). The identification of 'self-determination by local communities' as a criterion for sustainability is a double-edged sword.

3.7. Here, instead, we focus on providing pointers towards the identification of 'type criteria' that can be derived from specific types of setting, namely in this case areas of dispersed settlement; an approach to identifying this kind of the sustainability criteria seems to be almost entirely undeveloped. These kinds of criteria must be based on careful appraisal of the character of specific types of community / locality. To provide such pointers the present project examines in outline the particular characteristics (social, economic, environmental and cultural) of dispersed settlement in different parts of Europe that could form the basis for the development of sustainability criteria. It draws attention to examples where such criteria to have been incorporated into spatial planning / rural development policies and identifies a small number of instances where seemingly good practice in this respect has taken place.

3.8. It is not possible within the confines of the project to undertake a detailed analysis of what might be included as 'type' criteria for an area of dispersed settlement – or to construct a meaningful typology of such criteria. However, the criteria might be organised under a number of sub-headings as set out in Figure 3.

- **Origins and evolution** – the historic processes of change and continuity by which land use and dispersed settlement has reached its current form
- **Settlement pattern** – the type, spatial distribution and density of buildings and groups of buildings throughout a defined area, including the size and hierarchy (both morphologically and functionally) of hamlets, villages and small towns
- **Landscape character** – the physical, archaeological, historic, visual and other experiential attributes of landscape, such as its geomorphology, soils, natural vegetation cover, field patterns, settlement patterns, roads and communications, territorial patterning, boundary features such as hedgerows, etc.
- **Buildings in their setting** – the functional, spatial and visual relationships between buildings and their landscape
- **Buildings** – the consistent attributes and characteristics of individual building types and the layout of groups of buildings, including function, style, construction, materials and architectural details
- **Land management practice** – types of agriculture and woodland management practised, past and present,,
- **Characteristics of the local community** – the changing socio-economic profile of the inhabitants, visitors and other users of the area
- **Traditional skills** related to the particular characteristics of the landscape and land management practices

Figure 3: Possible sub-headings for 'type' criteria for sustainable development in landscapes of dispersed settlement

3.9. Work already undertaken in landscape character assessment (see, for example, [www.countryside.gov.uk/lar/landscape](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/lar/landscape)), historic landscape characterisation (see [www.english-heritage.org.uk/characterisation](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/characterisation)) and the characterisation of historic farmsteads (see, for example, Lake and Edwards, 2006a) provides some indication of how the development of such 'type' criteria might be initiated. It is crucial to emphasise, however, the difference between (a) criteria and (b) the description of characteristics of an area. Criteria must be capable of being used in evaluation and decision-making; this means that they must be expressed in a form that embodies value judgment as well as a descriptive element. Recent attempts have been made by local planning authorities to develop criteria-based guidance using landscape character assessment, for example:

- High Peak Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council and the Peak District National Park Authority worked with the Countryside Agency to translate the principles of the Derbyshire's Landscape Character Assessment into detailed and practical guidance that has been adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document;
- West Sussex County Council and its partners in the Character of West Sussex Partnership aim to translate landscape character into criteria-based policies and guidance from sub-regional to local levels in Local Development Frameworks.

3.10. One of the key challenges to safeguarding the characteristics of landscapes of dispersed settlement such as the High Weald is to register their significance in the

statutory planning system. The High Weald AONB Management Plan, a statutory document under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000 produced jointly by local authority partners identifies the dispersed historic settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets as a fundamental component of character but this is yet to be reflected in relevant LDFs. The nub of the issue here, though, is the established antipathy to dispersed settlement in British planning practice, but also arguably in wider British culture. It is important to articulate clearly and persuasively the observation that dispersal is a 'normal' feature of many historic settlement patterns and landscapes across relatively large regions, not merely in local areas; contrary to 20<sup>th</sup> century public perceptions, it may even be *the* norm.. Those landscapes have already proven their sustainability over centuries; they have endured (although admittedly until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of their relationship to traditional agriculture; the challenge now is for dispersed settlement to maintain its resilience in the context of new rural lifestyles).. In order to safeguard their character, their characteristics might be most effectively addressed as sustainable development criteria – 'type' criteria – within development plan documents and / or supplementary planning documents as part of the reformed English planning system. The rhetoric attaching to the recent reforms of the planning system promise a 'spatial planning' approach that is more integrated and more flexible and, at least theoretically, more capable of delivering improvements to sustainability interpreted as an holistic concept. This should provide a more fertile seedbed for the development of a more reasoned and sympathetic consideration of the continuing value of historic forms of dispersed settlement. We are still waiting to see, though, whether this rhetoric will be matched in practice.

3.11. A first step in attempting to ensure that these important 'type' criteria are introduced into the national agenda as sustainable development criteria in their own right might be for the clients to arrange discussion of the subject by representatives of areas characterised by valued dispersed settlement.

## **SECTION B: THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE**

### **1: Introduction**

1.1. The aims of this brief review of European experience are:

- to identify dispersed settlement for which spatial planning / rural development policies have been adopted in different parts of Europe;
- to identify examples of seemingly good practice in those policies for securing sustainable development in dispersed settlement.

1.2. The review of European experience was carried out by an initial e-mail questionnaire addressed to members of two European landscape researcher's networks, EUCALAND, <http://www.eucaland.eu/> and members of the Landscape Planning Working Group of LE:NOTRE <http://www.le-notre.org/>. The focus was on their knowledge of dispersed settlement in EU member countries. Questions were also addressed to regular delegates at the Council of Europe's workshops concerning the implementation of the European Landscape Convention. Following this, literature searches and Internet searches were carried out. Examples were gleaned principally from Ireland (Western Europe) and Sweden (Northern Europe) with further examples from the Alpine regions of Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Slovenia.

### **2: Understanding the term 'dispersed settlement' in a European context**

2.1. Although the definition of dispersed settlement has been agreed within the frame of this particular project, it is important to emphasise that the concept is not always clear amongst the wider European audience. In communication with persons from different European countries and when reading texts, particularly those translated into English - or presented by writers who are not using English as first language - it is evident that the two terms 'scattered settlement' and 'dispersed settlement' often are used interchangeably. Although there might be a distinction between the connotations of these expressions in an English context, it is difficult to make the same distinction at the European level, and therefore the terms are used here as synonyms. However, it is also clear when addressing a wide range of landscape academics and specialists that the term 'dispersed settlement' (and even 'scattered settlement') has different connotations among different landscape disciplines, and they are not always related to the notion of historic settlement. One not unusual interpretation of the term 'dispersed settlement' that has come to light in the present project is the contemporary process of dispersed urbanisation and new sprawl in semi-urban areas. An example of this, mentioned in a response to the first e-mail query, can be seen in Flanders, Belgium (Gûlink, pers. comm., 2007). Similar examples of dispersed settlements, linked to the notions of urban and suburban sprawl, were also given by respondents from Greece and Bulgaria. In Ireland, the term 'dispersed settlement' is used for a historically strong, established settlement pattern as well as contemporary 'one-off rural houses' (County Kerry, 2007).

### 3: Responses to the initial e-mail questionnaire<sup>2</sup>.

The responses to the first question were summarised in a brief overview and submitted to the clients as an interim note. Some of the more representative countries that were clearly mentioned as having areas with dispersed settlement patterns are listed below.

- Germany: particularly areas in Bavaria such as Bayerischer Wald, Frankenwald, and Fichtelgebirge (at the Eastern border with the Czech Republic) were mentioned as areas of dispersed settlement, as well as Danube-Isar hill country, and Isar-Inn hill country (Gnädinger, pers. comm., 2007). The main issue in dispersed settlement in Germany mentioned in the survey is that people are moving to the cities and hence the areas of dispersed settlement are being abandoned. Infrastructure in small rural settlements is not maintained, leading to even more people leaving. The problem is most prevalent in the eastern states of Germany; the former GDR, and in the highlands from North to South, as well as in the Black Forest (Bruns, pers. comm., 2007).
- Italy: South Tyrol: many alpine valleys, except the biggest (Gnädinger, pers. comm., 2007).
- Hungary: with special priorities for 'outskirt farms' on 'the Great Plain' (Ónodi, pers. com., 2007). The area is focus for a research institute based at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre for Regional Studies 'The Great Plain Research Institute' for "comparative and regional studies of the environmental, economic, settlement and social transition of the Great Plain" - and among this the "transitions of the scattered farms and villages, the system of rural tourism and second homes, the character and quality of the relationship between villages and towns, urbanisation and suburbanisation in the characteristic Great Plain urban network".(Hungarian Academy of Science, 2007).
- The Netherlands: In most regions in which dispersed settlement (i.e. dispersed farms) are characteristic, non-agrarian villages have developed as centres for services. As the Netherlands is a very densely populated country, there are few problems of rural depopulation. In general, these regions are not seen as problematic, and therefore very little research or political activity relating to dispersed settlement is occurring (Renes, pers. comm., 2007).
- Romania: scattered settlement exists in various mountainous areas of Transylvania, e. g. the Hungarian part between Tirgu Mures, Miercurea Ciuc and Sighisoara (Gnädinger, pers. com., 2007).
- Slovenia: "The scattered villages are most common settlement pattern in many Slovenian regions. As the whole national territory is planned (covered by spatial plans) all such villages have got some type of care and developmental stimuli. Several countryside development projects have been carried out as well as a specific policy elaborated for this type of settlements. Development of rural tourism has been one of the issues introduced as developmental policy in the areas of single farms (Pohorje region and Savinjske Alpe region). It has been partly successful. Farms are active to an acceptable level. Rural tourism together with wine roads is another developmental policy with some success in vineyard areas. Some of them have traditional scattered development. But, the increase of wine quality could be much more important factor of rural development of these

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<sup>2</sup> Respondents to the first survey have kindly agreed to send more information, translated from original languages, on policies for securing sustainable development in dispersed settlement in the mentioned examples. However, this material is not yet available. It will be passed to the clients when it is received.

- areas (which was not a result of formal or official policy but rather result of individual initiatives of wine producers). The subsidies are higher for agricultural production (based on the size of farmland) over 600 m above sea level. The majority of the settlements in these areas can be defined as scattered. Besides, there are special funds for subsidizing activities (people) in demographically endangered areas. People still live in quite remote areas. The situation has changed very much in last 20 years. Before (in the times of Socialist Yugoslavia), a so called 'polycentric developmental policy' had been introduced that had established small industries into some quite remote places. Besides, quite all remote settlements (and scattered farm houses) have been paved (asphalt) roads. Many of those industries have gone (they were closed down) in the last years. Now, people are driving down to bigger settlements every day where employment possibilities still exist" (Marusic, pers. comm., 2007).
- Scotland: the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting is engaging proactively with crofting communities and others with an interest in sustainable rural development in the crofting counties and other areas of Scotland where crofting may have a role to play:
    - the nature and impact of European and domestic programmes of public sector support for rural Scotland;
    - the realities of existing, and likely future, funding levels;
    - the constraints imposed by European law, European Community rules and the reserved powers of the UK parliament and government;
    - the economic contribution of crofter agriculture to the local economy, and the significance of current public support in that contribution;
    - the extent to which occupiers of small farms and crofts generate income from sources other than primary agricultural production, and the availability of financial assistance to encourage that;
    - the demand for, and availability of affordable housing generally in the crofting counties, and the role of croft house grants in contributing to local housing supply; and
    - the market for crofts, in particular their availability for exploitation by young people and new entrants (Gateway for Information and Services on Rural Communities in Scotland, 2007) ;

#### **4: Sustainability criteria for dispersed settlement in spatial planning / rural development policies in Europe**

The focus in this sub-section is on two particular examples of sustainable development policy responses in areas of dispersed settlement: Ireland in Western Europe and Sweden in Northern Europe. The example from County Kerry in Ireland is one of the most explicit examples found relating to specific spatial planning policies for dispersed settlement pattern, but illustrates the almost inherent 'British' hostility to the very notion of 'dispersed settlement', whereas the example from Sweden emphasises the idea of valuing settlement pattern and building form as an asset. There are then briefer references to the Alpine regions of Austria, France, Germany, Italy Switzerland and Slovenia. It is important to emphasise that the historic character of dispersed settlement does not feature significantly in any of these examples.

### a) County Kerry, Ireland<sup>3</sup>

In the countryside of County Kerry there is a strong, established pattern of dispersed settlement. This integrated into a hierarchy of towns and villages that have served as employment, market and service centres for their rural hinterlands. There has been a recent variation in population change, with large centres and their immediate rural hinterlands generally increasing in population. Similar growth has occurred in many rural areas with a strong economic base of tourism. Ongoing decline was experienced in other areas, and in particular areas traditionally considered as having a strong agricultural economy. In recent years there has been an unprecedented trend towards permitting one-off rural housing throughout the county. It is considered that this existing trend cannot be continued in the long-term, particularly at its current rate, as it is contrary to the 'proper planning and sustainable development' of the county for a number of reasons including:

- the inefficient use of energy, transport and natural resources,
- the inefficient use of already committed resources,
- the danger posed to groundwater throughout the county,
- the impact on the landscape of the county.

The principles of Sustainable Development include protection of the landscape, which is of particular importance for the county. It is one of the primary assets that Kerry possesses and contributes significantly to its tourism potential; as well as its natural amenity value, it must be regarded as one of its prime economic assets.

Policies are based on the assumption that the proliferation of one-off rural houses does not strengthen – indeed it weakens - rural communities in the long-term. It is suggested that the strengthening of rural communities would be achieved in the long-term through the provision of employment opportunities and by making the settlements more attractive places to live. It is recognised that there is a need to maintain and strengthen rural communities throughout the county and to provide for the needs of local people to live in their own community and, where possible, on their own land. The development of a range of 'complementary' settlements that work together to the benefit of the region and all of its inhabitants, including those in the rural areas, can only occur in planned way.

The main tool of achieving this in County Kerry is a settlement hierarchy that, supposedly, enables the sustainable development of towns, villages and 'the rural' through:

- enabling the region to accommodate growth in a sustainable way that will benefit all settlements and the rural areas;
- providing a range of choice especially with regard to location, for jobs, services and homes;
- enabling each settlement to capture their unique features in a way that complements the development of other settlements and the rural areas and reinforces the region's competitiveness;
- guiding the provision of infrastructure so that it can be provided in a planned way, supporting the goals of the strategic planning for the region;
- providing clear guidance to planners, developers and investors with regard to the areas for development and investment;

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<sup>3</sup> The following text is derived and shortened from Kerry County Council Planning Policy Unit (2007). Settlement and development strategy. Chapter 3. Settlement strategy.

- helping develop strong communities and local economies, including the rural economy;
- reducing the need to travel and promote travel by sustainable transport modes;
- promoting the economic development of the region as a whole with the benefits being reaped by the settlements and the rural areas.

The development of the settlement hierarchy has been influenced by:

- the historic role and function of the settlement,
- the existing role, function and level of service provision of the settlement,
- size of settlement and catchment population,
- location and in particular level of isolation,
- *the unique features of each settlement and surrounding rural areas,*
- the interaction (complementary role) of each settlement with other settlements and the surrounding rural areas,
- the potential for future growth, especially if it will bring economic and social benefits to the surrounding area,
- any constraints to development, including the ability to provide essential infrastructure, and the sensitivity of the surrounding environment,
- the response of the Council to the National Spatial Strategy public consultation process, which identified the need to create a development corridor for the county in order to promote an area which will act an economic driver for the region.

The Settlement Strategy for the county has been prepared to accommodate the needs of local people as well as promoting the strategic economic and social development of the county in a sustainable manner. The Strategy aims to:

- ensure that development throughout the county is carried out in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area;
- promote the development of the Tralee-Killarney Corridor in order to provide the impetus for the future development of the county;
- strengthen towns and villages throughout the county, improve the services and infrastructure provided within them and make them more attractive places in which to live;
- provide for the needs of local people to live in their own area in order to maintain vibrant rural communities;
- make local area plans for identified settlements throughout the county that will promote these objectives;
- provide adequate holiday home accommodation within or adjacent to existing settlements in order to promote sustainable tourism within the county while respecting the existing culture and character of the area.

Amongst the policies in the Settlement Strategy intended to achieve this sustainable development are the following:

- development along National Primary and Secondary Routes will not be permitted for traffic safety reasons and to maintain the carrying capacity of these routes which are of strategic importance to the economic development of the county;
- the preservation of outstanding scenic landscapes and views of special importance should be recognised;

- the integration of one-off housing into the landscape should be emphasised, through good design, appropriate site selection, location of a dwelling within the site and use of appropriate building materials;
- the site should be suitable for sewage disposal and drainage in a manner which is not prejudicial to public health or likely to give rise to a deterioration of surface waters and ground waters; and
- the rehabilitation of derelict houses should, in certain instances, be encouraged as a more sustainable option than the construction of new dwellings.

In considering development in rural areas, the following criteria will be applied:

- establishment of applicant's need to reside in the rural area;
- provisions in relation to development on National Routes;
- the conservation and protection of the environment including the archaeological, architectural and natural heritage and including the conservation and protection of European sites;
- compliance with Ministerial Guidelines and Directives as in sections of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

This lengthy account of the policy response to dispersed settlement in one European country – Ireland - serves to emphasise the antipathetic stance taken more generally in the British Isles to dispersed settlement. There is now an underlying assumption in both Ireland and England that dispersed settlement is 'unsustainable', an assumption based largely on the domination of reducing CO2 emissions and, correspondingly, reducing travel by motor vehicle as the principal criterion for achieving sustainable development. Ireland differs from England, though, in that there has been a history over the past fifty years or more of the Irish planning system permitting new, isolated dwellings in the landscape. This has led in more recent years to a backlash against the effects of this 'lax' policy on the grounds *inter alia* of its detrimental visual effects on the landscape. And whereas the rhetoric of the policies reflects an holistic and integrated approach to generating criteria for sustainable development, the substance of the policies is firmly founded on the simplistic notion that dispersed settlement is 'A Bad Thing'.

It is interesting to note that in Ireland it is recent dispersed settlement that is judged to be undesirable and to be detrimental to landscape quality. By contrast, in the High Weald dispersed settlement is an historic phenomenon and is judged to be desirable and to contribute to the attractiveness of the landscape; this acceptance (even, welcoming) of dispersed settlement, however, seems not to extend to the idea of new dispersed settlement. This implies, therefore, that it is not dispersal itself that is attractive and worthy of protection in the High Weald but rather the specific characteristics attaching to the components of that dispersal. In turn, this suggests that if the retention or even the reinforcement of those characteristics is to feature as a criterion for sustainable development in planning policies, they must be carefully appraised and justified in terms of their intrinsic values.

## **b) Sweden**

Compared to England, Sweden is a sparsely populated country, but with an increasing urbanisation of the population. A majority of the population lives in urban areas or in rural areas near towns or larger population centres. Increases in population are found particularly in the countryside areas near towns and larger cities. A great part of rural

settlement in Sweden is organised in a dispersed form, a system that originates from several historical land consolidation processes. In the north of the country there are large areas that are very sparsely populated.

The Proposal for a Rural Development Program for Sweden from 2007 to 2013 has a very comprehensive scope covering rural population, land use, rural economy and production, and a range of environmental, social and cultural issues (Regeringskansliet, 2006). In Sweden there is no particular policy for dispersed settlement at the scale of, for example, the High Weald in England. However, the Rural Development Program for Sweden is briefly noted below with reference to sustainability criteria that might be applied to areas of dispersed settlement in rural development policies. The Program aims:

- to attract young people to live in the countryside;
- to provide good communications;
- to provide more work opportunities such as small enterprises, as well as rural production (agriculture, forestry, fishery etc.);
- to promote renewable energy;
- to promote education and human capital;
- to promote services and infrastructure.

New rural enterprises such as the growing horse-economy and farm tourism are pointed out as examples of growing income sources for rural economy (p. 33). Further on, and with specific relevance to the present project, it is argued that: "A sustainable use of (nature) resources should take place in a landscape perspective and through the implementation of the European Landscape Convention." p. 43.

Rural settlement pattern and building traditions in Sweden have shown big regional variations over centuries. These variations are partly a response to their natural context, but they are also products of various criteria such as types of agrarian production and different building traditions. Through time, the need for buildings to accommodate different uses has changed and, as in England, some farm buildings have as a result become redundant. This situation has exposed the majority of rural buildings to the risk of being demolished. Different studies have showed that the opportunity for new or alternative uses is the most important criterion for the ability to preserve and maintain the buildings. "It is therefore important to see farm-buildings and building patterns as an asset for the countryside and to acknowledge the development potential of farm-buildings for the countryside as a part of the landscape values and through that the connection to, for example, the tourism and recreation industry" (p.35).

A refreshing aspect of this Swedish example is that it emphasises that settlement pattern and farm buildings can be seen as resources in their own right in rural development policies. This notion of pattern or form as an asset might well feature as the basis for generating sustainable development criteria for deployment in the framing and implementation of spatial planning and rural development policies in England.

## **5: Regional Development and Cultural Landscape Change: the example of the Alps evaluating and adjusting EU and national policies to manage a balanced change**

The remaining examples are drawn from REGALP, a research project funded by the European Commission under the 5th Framework Programme, Quality of Life, Key Action 5, Sustainable Development of Rural and Other Relevant Areas. The overall aim of REGALP was to investigate the interrelation between regional development and cultural landscape change and to evaluate necessary adjustments to existing political instruments. Although not addressing dispersed settlement issues explicitly, the project, covering Alpine regions of Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Slovenia where dispersed settlement is common, has significant relevance to the present study. The project has the following mission statement: "The landscape issue is of increasing importance as a resource and locational factor for regional development. In the medium term, European regions and landscapes are facing extensive changes. The interrelation between regional development and cultural landscape change has not yet been comprehensively examined. Existing policy instruments do not take account of these interrelations sufficiently. Therefore they have to be adjusted to meet future requirements with regard to sustainable development" (REGALP, 2002).

The REGALP project was organised in six parts (work packages) that were carried out between 2001 and 2004. They were:

1. identifying the relevance of the landscape issue in regional development policies on EU and national level;
2. analysing the interrelation between regional development and cultural landscape change in the Alps;
3. evaluating public policy contributing to the interrelation between regional development and cultural landscape change;
4. developing integrated cultural landscape scenarios in the Alps for the year 2020;
5. making public the view of locals;
6. proposing adjustments to EU and national policies.

The first work package focused on determining the extent to which the landscape issues are part of regional development policies at the EU, national and regional levels Atmanagara, J. *et al.*, (2002). This, as well as results from the second work package, shows that landscape matters are beginning to be integrated into policies at all these levels, especially in cross-sectoral policies as part of spatial planning and or regional development (Pfefferkorn, W., Musivic, Z., 2003).

The exhortation in the mission statement of this project and the focus of its six work packages offer the kind of context that might inform similar strategic planning in the UK.

## **6: Reflections**

Because the study of other European countries was conducted within such a short timeframe the findings are inevitably superficial and fragmented. They can offer no more than an insight into practice elsewhere. A substantial research initiative would have to be undertaken to yield information of a sufficiently authoritative nature to influence the development of policy in the High Weald AONB with any confidence. Nevertheless, the

following points provide useful reflections on the exercise and might inform the development of any future research endeavour in this area.

The attempt to achieve an overview of the European experience of dispersed settlement for which spatial planning / rural development policies have been adopted in different parts of Europe is a great challenge. It would require a more thorough and sustained study than has been possible in the present project in order deal with the subject in more detail. Such a project would be eminently worthwhile.

The concept of 'dispersed settlement' has different interpretations and connotations in different European countries and among different academic and practitioner disciplines. This renders a 'European view' almost impossible – and probably undesirable in the light of the pursuit of local distinctiveness.

The context within which the issue of dispersed settlement needs to be addressed varies in accordance with the degree of urbanisation and the prevailing planning systems in any given country. What is encompassed by the term 'dispersed settlement' in policy formulation differs widely between different countries, ranging from a focus on the problems attaching to the containment of urban and suburban sprawl through to the need for constructive but sensitive rural development.

A range of countries have areas of dispersed settlement in a similar sense to that of the Higher Weald – albeit their forms and origins are different from the High Weald – and usually from each other. However, in order to obtain further meaningful information on those policies for securing sustainable development in areas of dispersed settlement, further translation work needs to be undertaken on policy documents from the different countries as this information is very rarely available in English. Inevitably, this translation work will take time.

The most explicit example found of specific spatial planning policies that attempt to secure sustainable development in areas of dispersed settlement was from County Kerry in Ireland. This document identified a settlement strategy on different levels, with the declared intention of enabling each settlement to capture its unique features in a way that complements the development of other settlements and the rural areas. This sounds to be very promising, but the antipathy to dispersed settlement that underpins this strategy could be seen as eschewing an approach that encourages a positive and constructive approach to protecting or reinforcing such a settlement pattern.

It is useful to have identified an example where settlement pattern and farm buildings are seen as resources in their own right in rural development policies. The proposal for a Rural Development Program for Sweden suggests the importance of seeing farm buildings and building patterns as an asset for the countryside and acknowledges the development potential of farm buildings for the countryside as an intrinsic part of landscape values. This is a stance that would improve the overall approach to securing sustainable development in rural areas of England.

Landscape is beginning to be seen to have increasing importance both as a resource and as a locational factor for regional development in some European countries. A 'landscape perspective' is also now being seen in some of those countries as an important element in debates on the issue of sustainability.

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## **Appendix 1: The Audit Commission quality of life indicators**

Explicitly within the context of the 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy (HM Government, 2005), the Audit Commission, together with ODPM, Defra and MORI, produced a national set of indicators, embracing social, economic and environmental issues, to measure the quality of life in local areas in order to help local communities become more sustainable. These indicators make no distinction between urban and rural communities. The set includes 45 key measures that help to 'paint a picture' of the quality of life in a local area. They are arranged under 10 headings.

### **People and place**

1. Priorities for improvement in the local area, as defined by local residents.

### **Community cohesion and involvement**

2. The percentage of residents who think that people being attacked because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion is a very big or fairly big problem in their local area.
3. The percentage of residents who think that for their local area, over the past three years, community activities have got better or stayed the same.
4. Election turnout.

### **Community safety**

5. The percentage of residents surveyed who said they feel 'fairly safe' or 'very safe' outside a) during the day and b) after dark.
6. a) Domestic burglaries per 1,000 households, b) Violent offences committed per 1,000 population, c) Theft of a vehicle per 1,000 population and d) Sexual offences per 1,000 population.
7. The percentage of residents who think that a) vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles, b) people using or dealing drugs, and c) people being rowdy or drunk in public places is a very big or fairly big problem in their local area.
8. The number of a) pedestrian and b) cyclist road accident casualties per 100,000 population.

### **Culture and leisure**

9. The percentage of the population within 20 minutes travel time (urban – walking, rural – by car) of different sports facility types.
10. The percentage of residents who think that for their local area, over the past three years the following have got better or stayed the same a) activities for teenagers, b) cultural facilities (for example, cinemas, museums), c) facilities for young children, d) sport and leisure facilities and e) parks and open spaces.

### **Economic well-being**

11. The percentage of the working-age population that is in employment.
12. a) The number of Job Seekers Allowance claimants as a percentage of the resident working age population and b) percentage of these who have been out of work for more than a year.
13. a) The total number of VAT registered businesses in the area at the end of the year and b) the percentage change in the number of VAT registered businesses.
14. Job density (number of jobs filled to working age population).
15. The proportion of the population living in the most deprived super output areas in the country.
16. The percentage of the population of working age that is claiming key benefits.
17. The percentage of a) children and b) population over 60 that live in households that are income deprived.

### **Education and life-long learning**

18. The percentage of half days missed due to total absence in a) primary and b) secondary schools maintained by the local education authority.
19. The proportion of young people (16-24 year olds) in full-time education or employment.

20. The proportion of working-age population qualified to a) NVQ2 or equivalent and b) NVQ4 or equivalent.
21. The percentage of 15-year-old pupils in schools maintained by the local authority achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C or equivalent.

### **Environment**

22. The proportion of developed land that is derelict.
23. The proportion of relevant land and highways that is assessed as having combined deposits of litter and detritus.
24. Levels of key air pollutants.
25. Carbon dioxide emissions by sector and per capita emissions.
26. Average annual domestic consumption of gas and electricity (kwh).
27. Daily domestic water use (per capita consumption).
28. The percentage of river length assessed as (a) good biological quality and (b) good chemical quality.
29. The volume of household waste collected and the proportion recycled.
30. a) The percentage area of land designated as sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) within the local authority area in favourable condition and b) the area of land designated as a local nature reserve per 1,000 population.

### **Health and social well-being**

31. Age standardised mortality rates for a) all cancers, b) circulatory diseases and c) respiratory diseases.
32. Infant mortality.
33. Life expectancy at birth (male and female).
34. The percentage of households with one or more person with a limiting long-term illness.
35. Teenage pregnancy, conceptions under 18 years, per 1,000 females aged 15-17.

### **Housing**

36. The total number of new housing completions.
37. Affordable dwellings completed as a percentage of all new housing completions.
38. Household accommodation without central heating.
39. The percentage of residents who think that people sleeping rough on the streets or in other public places is a very big or fairly big problem in their local area.
40. The percentage of all housing that is unfit.
41. House price-to-income ratio.

### **Transport and access**

42. The percentage of the resident population who travel to work a) by private motor vehicle, b) by public transport and c) on foot or cycle.
43. The percentage of the resident population travelling over 20 km to work.
44. The percentage of residents who think that for their local area, over the past three years, that a) public transport has got better or stayed the same and b) the level of traffic congestion has got better or stayed the same.
45. Estimated traffic flows for all vehicle types (million vehicle km).

## Appendix 2: The UK Government Sustainable Development Indicators

Sub-headings for the 68 indicators of progress towards sustainable development

1. Greenhouse gas emissions	35. Demography
2. Carbon dioxide emissions	36. Household and dwellings
3. Aviation and shipping emissions	37. Active community participation
4. Renewable electricity	38. Crime
5. Electricity generation	39. Fear of crime
6. Household energy use	40. Employment
7. Road transport	41. Workless households
8. Private vehicles	42. Economically inactive
9. Road freight	43. Childhood poverty
10. Manufacturing sector	44. Young adults
11. Service sector	45. Pensioner poverty
12. Public sector	46. Pensioner provision
13. Resource use	47. Education
14. Energy supply	48. Sustainable development education
15. Water resource use	49. Health inequality
16. Domestic water consumption	50. Healthy life expectancy
17. Water stress	51. Mortality rates
18. Waste	52. Smoking
19. Household waste per person	53. Childhood obesity
20. Bird populations	54. Diet
21. Biodiversity conservation	55. Mobility
22. Agriculture sector	56. Getting to school
23. Farming and environmental stewardship	57. Accessibility
24. Land use	58. Road accidents
25. Land recycling	59. Social justice
26. Dwelling density	60. Environmental equality
27. Fish stocks	61. Air quality and health
28. Ecological impacts of air pollution	62. Housing conditions
29. Emissions of air pollutants	63. Households living in fuel poverty
30. River quality	64. Homelessness
31. Flooding	65. Local environment quality
32. Economic growth	66. Satisfaction in local area
33. Productivity	67. UK international assistance
34. Investment	68. Wellbeing