Village Concerns

Village Concerns is an East Hoathly and Halland Parish Action Group. It was formed in 2016 in response to the alarming proposals of local landowners preparing planning applications for almost 450 new homes in the Parish. Village Concerns seeks to protect the character and ambience of the Parish. It endeavours to ensure that development in the Parish is sustainable. Its aim is to monitor housing proposals and galvanise the community to either endorse beneficial developments or challenge those that are unsustainable. It strives for a housing policy based on need, not greed.

Historic Character

The Parish of East Hoathly with Halland comprises of the villages of East Hoathly and Halland as well as a range of smaller hamlets such as Barham, Davis Town and Graywood. East Hoathly has a history dating back to the 12th Century and has evolved gradually as a rural agricultural community. Halland was originally a collection of farms known as the Nursery which had a longstanding connection with the Halland House mansion of the Pelham family. This now demolished mansion was home to Thomas Pelham-Holles (1st Duke of Newcastle) who was twice the British Prime Minister in the mid Eighteenth century. It was during this period that Thomas Turner recorded local life in his detailed and colourful Diaries. The Parish is home to a range of important buildings from this period many of which are Listed and a Conservation Area that encompasses the attractive and unspoilt core of East Hoathly. The properties in the Parish cover a range of architectural styles and a significant number of Georgian and Victorian period buildings. Most of the older buildings are built in a traditional Sussex style with much use of Flemish bonded brickwork, over-fired header brickwork, hung clay tiles and weatherboarding. The construction of the A22 bypass in 1993 took traffic away from the centre of East Hoathly and returned the village to a level of tranquility not known in the previous four decades. Much of the traditional building followed the curving lines of paths, lanes and field boundaries which has resulted in a natural layout of homes with varying widths of roads, lanes and twittens.

The rich history and architecture of East Hoathly has created a very attractive village with a vibrant community and character. It is a tourist destination because of this village atmosphere, its history and the range of walking and cycling opportunities in the area. Housing developments in the last 40 years have been of disparate architectural styles and some do not sit well within the traditional vernacular. The most recent development of 76 homes in 2009 was too large for a small rural community to bear. Village Concerns aims to deter large developments that swamp the existing community and impose a sudden change in architectural style and materials. Halland does not yet have an identifiable village centre nor any community space.

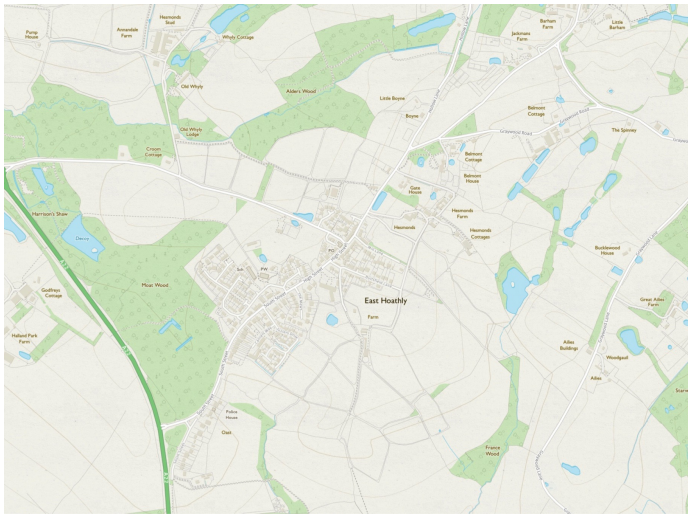
Rural Setting

The Parish is essentially a rural environment that is bisected by the routes of the A22 and B2192. The farmland is liberally scattered with woodland much of which is designated Ancient Woodland and many miles of hedgerows over 50 % of which are recorded as species rich by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. There are many large woods but also the very important Ghyll and Shaw woodlands that are in particular need of protection.

East Hoathly has wonderful green approaches to the village centre. The three roads entering the village do so on tree lined routes generally with green verges and open vistas across pasture and into woodland. This is particularly so on the London Road entrance which has a curving wide verged approach of a pastoral scene within which the Village Conservation Area and its important Listed Buildings nestle.

Biodiversity

The Parish contains a large number of ponds and waterways all draining into the catchment of the River Cuckmere to the South and the River Uck in the North. Dr Keith Corbett (an internationally known expert on Herpetology) identified this site as being central to a meta population of Great Crested Newts and of National importance.



The Parish is home to a significant number of bats. Bat sightings are currently being recorded to establish in more detail their roosts and flight lines. All of this is in addition to the huge number of important species of flora and fauna recorded in the Parish by the Sussex Wildlife Trust. Croom Cottage Meadow is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest as a wildlife meadow containing many important and rare species.

There is virtually no street lighting in the Parish and whilst this causes concern for some parishioners it is seen as a huge benefit by others. It allows a generally dark night sky to predominate allowing fabulous star viewing and also an uninhibited dark environment for nocturnal animals.

Developers work on the principal that their developments will go ahead, so they generally ignore biodiversity where they can and relocate anything with which they are forced to deal. Caring for biodiversity should not be about devising appropriate mitigation. It should be about protecting and enhancing the biodiversity. Our view is that development should be fitted around biodiversity, that nature should be enhanced rather than diminished or relocated.

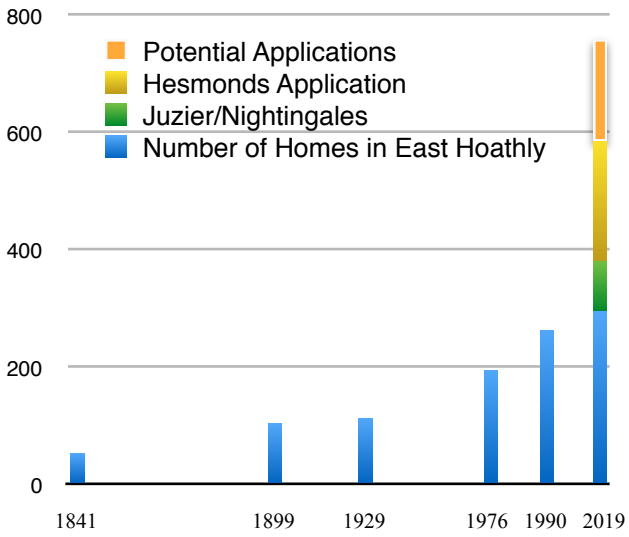
Village Status

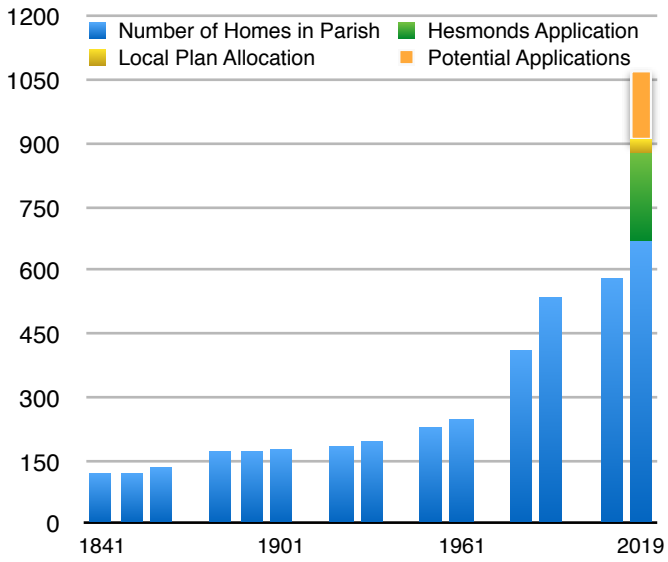
East Hoathly Church was rebuilt in the mid nineteenth century but the tower dates back 500 years and evidence has been found of Norman elements. Thus, East Hoathly village has existed for well over 500 years. East Hoathly is currently defined in Wealden's development hierarchy as a Large Village - Type 2 and a Sustainable Settlement. Village Concerns contests this definition and believes it should be challenged. Wealden states that the village has very good local facilities which is not true. Sustainability has diminished with the closure of the Foresters Arms, reductions to the Bus Service and worsening access to the Doctors Surgery in the last 18 months (details below). The current Draft Local Plan defines a very constrained Development Boundary for East Hoathly with a housing allocation of zero. Therefore there are no current sites in East Hoathly that can be considered for housing developments.

Halland has grown significantly in the past 30 years and since a boundary change in the early 1990s it now sits wholly within the Parish boundary. Halland has evolved in a linear fashion along the surrounding roads and lacks its own facilities and a cohesive centre. Halland is currently defined in Wealden's development hierarchy as a Local Settlement and as an Unsustainable Settlement with local to very limited facilities. Halland has a defined Core Area rather than a Development Boundary. The Core Area is constrained yet Halland has been allocated 30 houses in the Draft Local Plan. It is difficult to see where these houses could be allocated.

The Increase of Homes in the Parish →

It is vital that the village atmosphere is retained for East Hoathly and improved for Halland. They are desirable places to live because they have grown gradually and grown out of the local need for people to live in this place. To put housing in place beyond the need of the local community creates a dormitory that has no connection with the villages and more importantly creates traffic issues as they pursue their lives in other places for Employment, Shops, Schools and Leisure. To add large numbers of houses in a short period overwhelms people and damages the character of the community before it has had time to adapt. Housing developments should be small scale in keeping with the size of the existing community and only based on local need. In short, no housing without employment.





← The Growth of East Hoathly Village

It took 168 years for the village of East Hoathly to grow from 55 to 286 homes by 2008.

In 2009, 76 new homes were built in the Juzier and Nightingales developments.

This chart shows how disproportionate this development was and how damaging the proposed Hesmonds and other potential developments would be to the natural growth of this Village.

Employment

Most of the housing additions to the Parish since the mid 1960s have been on brownfield sites. Church Marks Lane was on the site of the Allotments, Susans Close on the site of a Garage, Thomas Turner Drive on the site of Trills Builders, Carpenters Croft on the site of Bookers Pill Factory, The Mews on an industrial site and Juzier Drive/Trug Close/Carriers Way on the site

of E&A Carriers and PB Fencing. Developments on greenfield sites include Nightingales and the extension of Church Marks Lane. Rectory Close was built on the site of the former Rectory.

Building on brownfield sites is damaging to the community as it takes employment away from the Parish whilst adding more residents in need of employment. The result is increased traffic onto the A22 and Ashdown Forest and an unbalanced community. The loss of further businesses and farmland in favour of housing would further exacerbate this issue.

Many of the current businesses in the Parish are run from peoples homes. The Parish needs better broadband service to allow this modern business practice to operate effectively. Housing that accommodates this business model would be useful.

Community Land Trust/Co-Housing

Village Concerns would strongly support some form of Community Land Trust and/or a Co-Housing project to provide rented accommodation that is affordable for local people. Village Concerns would also support some of this housing being a self-build project. Village Concerns does not generally support Affordable Housing schemes that begin as rented schemes but that allow eventual purchase of the property which then makes them unaffordable for subsequent generations.

Architecture

Village Concerns supports the concepts laid out in the Wealden Design Guide. It does not support densely packed housing that is not in keeping with the traditional style of the Parish. Some good local examples:









Infrastructure/Services

In 2009, 76 new homes were built in East Hoathly without any infrastructure improvements and the Wealden Local Plan said there should be no more housing in the village.

The East Hoathly and neighbouring Chiddingly primary schools are full and have waiting lists. There is no space for building expansion at East Hoathly School and no funding allocated.

East Hoathly suffers from regular power and water supply interruptions.

Broadband service fails several times each day and the speeds provided are very poor.

Surface water flooding regularly occurs to roadways, footpaths, fields and woodlands. The Sports Fields are regularly waterlogged and unplayable. Developers propose using Swales to store surface water but with such a shallow water table these are unviable in many parts of the Parish.

The East Hoathly Sewage Plant is at capacity. The pipe network feeding the plant is old, too small and in very poor repair. Problems occur frequently and sewage issues are a regular complaint.

The Parish has no gas supply and most homes use heating oil that has to be delivered by tanker.

The Bus Service for East Hoathly is very poor with an hourly bus (54 - Eastbourne/Uckfield) from roughly 7 am to 7 pm and the Sunday service ended in 2017. It is therefore useless for people socialising in the evenings or on Sunday. The Bus Service for Halland is sporadic, with an half hourly service (29B - Brighton/Uckfield) from roughly 9.30 am to 11 am then nothing until 6.30 pm with a service roughly every hour until midnight. The weekend service for Halland does not start until 10.30 am on Saturday and on Sunday is hourly from 10.30 am to 5.30 pm.

This community had its own independent Doctors Surgery for the past 2 centuries but this ended in 2016 when it was absorbed into the Buxted Partnership. Since then, access to the Doctor has reduced and many residents now have to travel to Buxted to see a GP (note that this is impractical by bus).

Wealden's CIL budget is effectively bankrupt. In 2015, they identified a funding gap of £73 million. This does not appear to have been updated so the current position is probably even worse. East Hoathly does not even appear in the list for infrastructure improvements for this bankrupt budget.

Security

This Parish is not crime free and has occasionally suffered examples of antisocial behaviour. However, most people, most of the time have a good sense of security in the community. They feel safe and there is a good community spirit. They manage adequately with the unlit streets and look after each other. This must be nurtured and not jeopardised by large developments.

Traffic/Car Parking

The Parish is rural and dependant on vehicles. The number of vehicles in the community is rising every year and our dependancy on them is increasing. Village Concerns notes that the Wealden Design Guide in Section 7 - Accommodating the Car, shows several examples of poor parking regimes and has clearly found it very difficult to find good examples.

East Hoathly does not have enough car parking. Much of the existing housing does not have off road car parking available and the new developments often lack sufficient parking. This forces parking onto the roads throughout the village. It has become common practice to park around the junction at the centre of the village. This causes regular traffic hold ups particularly when large vehicles try to manoeuvre around the junction. Many residents are concerned about traffic speeds generally in the village and specifically at this junction.

The narrow lanes around the Parish and roads in the built up areas with paths and overhanging trees does create problems for traffic, particularly when encumbered with parked cars. Our preferred solution is to reduce the speed of vehicles to a safe level.



Footpaths/Cycling/Bridleways

Some of the footpaths are in a poor state of repair. For example, the path along the Waldron Road is frequently covered in mud caused by vehicles mounting the grass verge. The road often floods transferring mud onto the footpath.

There is no clearly delineated footpath connecting the 2 villages. Many people feel that there should be a better footpath and possibly a cycle route between the communities.

The use of local Bridleways is an important part of Parish life with many residents and visitors using them. They should be protected and enhanced.

The use of the Parish's network of footpaths is a significant factor in attracting tourism. The positioning on the Weald Way, Vanguard Way and the historic Thomas Turner walks add significantly to this popularity and every effort should be made to retain these green lanes and not urbanise them.