



8. Community & Culture

Introduction

- 8.1 The Parish of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst lies within and adjacent to the beautiful High Weald AONB. As such, it is appreciated by thousands of visitors from all over the world, passing through, or staying in the area. Community responses underline the value placed on the built heritage throughout the parish.
- 8.2 Culture is a positive force enriching people's lives and contributing to the economy. Cranbrook has a rich cultural history including the Cranbrook Colony of Artists and the prominent architect William West Neve who designed several significant houses in the town¹. Sissinghurst has its world-renowned Castle and Gardens.
- 8.3 There are many active groups in the parish offering a variety of physical, mental, spiritual, cultural, and artistic opportunities. These groups need meeting spaces with appropriate facilities and enough capacity for growth. A variety of eagerly anticipated annual events take place such as:
- Cranbrook Goes Nuts in May,
 - Family Fun Day,
 - Apple Fair,
 - Sissinghurst and Cranbrook Flower festivals,
 - Sissinghurst Fete and Boot Fairs,
 - Cranbrook Art Show
 - South East Open studios.

¹ 'A History of Cranbrook' by Peter Allen 2008 *William Sessions Ltd, York, England*

Overall Policy Aims

- Enhance a sense of community within the parish by encouraging local groups' activities
- Promoting a sense of belonging which contributes to all residents' health and well-being
- Support land allocations for a community space in Cranbrook and a new village hall in Sissinghurst
- To promote Cranbrook and Sissinghurst parish as a cultural destination
- Encourage a mindset of participation and volunteering
- Encourage organisations in the parish to reach out and engage with other communities

Draft Policy CC2.1

Community Facilities

- a) **New community facilities will be supported, across the parish, where a need is identified.**
- b) **Enhancement of existing facilities to improve access and personal security will be supported.**

Policy Supporting Text

- 8.4 Although there are many groups within the parish that promote well-being, through participation and volunteering, the lack of suitable facilities for both young and older people within the parish is a recurrent theme in the evidence gathered through public consultation. School children have cited a lack of provision as a major factor contributing to persistent vandalism and anti-social behaviour, particularly in Cranbrook.
- 8.5 Currently, there is also no central flexible space, and few appropriate activities, where young people can meet safely. Any schemes brought forward to address this issue which seek to increase provision in children's play areas, youth activities and services would be welcomed.
- 8.6 It is recognised that groups such as Memory Lane Café and Well-being in the Weald are limited in their activities by lack of suitable space. Cranbrook and District Age Concern have been without a meeting place for over ten years.
- 8.7 A range of sports facilities and clubs already exists within the parish. However, it is recognised that many of them would benefit from updating and, in some cases, the provision of suitable sites may be required. Cranbrook Football Club do not have a club house or any changing facilities. Public comments were also made regarding the provision of a boxing club.
- 8.8 With a growing population there is a need to encourage provision of services that support all ages.

Draft Policy CC2.2

Provision of Health & Well-Being Services

- a) **The provision of health, dental and well-being services will be supported where they can demonstrate that they are designed in ways sensitive to the parish and landscape setting and meet sustainable travel principles to access the facilities, minimising the requirement for additional car parking.**
- b) **The replacement of existing GP practices with a single larger centralised practice with additional medical facilities will be supported, once a suitable site has been agreed.**

Policy Supporting Text

- 8.9 With a growing and ageing population, the provision of local health services to all members of the community is essential. This is a concern repeated many times at public engagements and in national and local press, particularly as the needs of an increasingly elderly population become more apparent. In recent years, awareness of mental health has increased, and it is recognised that not enough has been done to support personal well-being. Both physical and mental health services are needed within the local community.
- 8.10 The location of services and their relationship with the existing parish is an important factor in their effectiveness. Placing services in central locations, to be accessed via walking and cycling, encourages active lifestyles, and promotes a wider strategy of health. Access to services via public transport will also help alleviate the need for additional car journeys and car parking.

Draft Policy CC2.3

New Community Centre for Cranbrook

- a) **Proposals for a new community centre on Wilkes Field will be supported.**
- b) **Details of number of rooms, range of facilities, flexibility of indoor spaces, relationship to outdoor spaces, access arrangements, and likely number of storeys are to be determined by a separate consultation process.**
- c) **Proposals for the new building and associated community space and facilities should be sensitive to its built and landscape setting.**
- d) **Developer contributions to support this project will be expected.**

Policy Supporting Text

- 8.11 The availability of accessible and flexible public indoor space in Cranbrook has heretofore been limited. It is vital that the parish residents have access to such a facility in order to make the most of the local community spirit, keeping in mind the many groups which offer a variety of physical, mental, spiritual, cultural and artistic opportunities. Some local groups have indicated that they do not have the ability to grow due to their limited options for meeting space. Providing a new community centre would give these groups the facilities they need to survive and expand, while encouraging the formation of new groups which have previously been discouraged by the lack of facilities available to them.
- 8.12 A central community space will create a hub of activity within the town and wider parish, leading to enhanced social cohesion and improved mental and physical health. A revised plan for the already allocated site for a community centre in Cranbrook is being progressed in response to public consultation.
- 8.13 On 31st August 2016 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council granted planning permission on Wilkes Field and former Cranbrook Engineering Sites for the construction of a community centre and 28 dwellings.²

² Planning Decision Notice: https://twbcpa.midkent.gov.uk/online-applications/files/C83A16228714D4F2673BC0D7F72DADAE/pdf/16_503953_FULL--3623160.pdf

Draft Policy CC2.4

New Village Hall for Sissinghurst

- a) **Proposals for a new Sissinghurst village hall and linked outside space at land south of The Street (sites 51 and 159) will be supported.**
- b) **Details of number of rooms, range of facilities, flexibility of indoor spaces, relationship to outdoor spaces, access arrangements, and likely number of storeys are to be determined by a separate consultation process.**
- c) **Proposals for the new building and associated community space and facilities should be sensitive to its built and landscape setting.**
- d) **Developer contributions to support this project will be expected.**

Policy Supporting Text

- 8.1 The current village hall in Sissinghurst, St George's Institute, is old and no longer fit for purpose. The residents of Sissinghurst and the wider parish are in need of a community space to enhance their experience of living in the area, with potential for use by a wide variety of local groups. Development in the field behind the hall has provided an opportunity whereby the developer will provide and fully fund a village hall with associated parking. The trustees have considered this, and the plan will be progressed to provide an improved focal point for the community.
- 8.2 A contemporary indoor and outdoor space could be designed in an innovative and attractive manner, while remaining in keeping with the local character and environment. The well-used sports pitches and playing fields throughout Sissinghurst could be complemented by this new outdoor space, while its links to an indoor facility would allow flexibility for events all year round. This integrated addition to the village would enhance community spirit and provide for activities from a small to large scale.

Draft Policy CC2.5

Preserve and Enhance Cranbrook Library

Proposals to maintain, enhance, and encourage the greater use of library facilities will be supported, whether in the existing building or as part of the new community centre.

Policy Supporting Text

- 8.1 People in the community with hearing or sight impairment rely particularly on facilities within the local library. Literacy is key to enabling education and libraries provide a safe space to learn for all demographics, through their offer of free educational resources to everyone. Cranbrook Library could act as a useful link to the proposed adult education facilities expressed in other policies, forming a network of learning across the parish.
- 8.2 Enhancing Cranbrook Library would help boost the local economy by improving the skills of parish residents, while helping to connect communities and encourage social relations, acting as a hub within the local area. Existing links to Cranbrook Museum should be maintained to preserve local history and knowledge, both written and oral.

Draft Policy CC2.6

Performing Arts

Proposals to maintain and enhance premises and facilities that support the performing arts within the parish will be supported.

Policy Supporting Text

- 8.3 Opportunities to participate in and attend performing arts events are valued as enriching experiences by the community. This is indicated in the public consultations and evidenced by good attendance at events such as those provided by Cranbrook Film Society, Cranbrook Operatic and Dramatic Society (CODS), and many other live musical performances. There are also several thriving choirs and singing groups. These all enhance the cultural offer of the parish, while directly benefiting the participants and spectators through their chance for self-expression or immersion in art.
- 8.4 It is important that the arts are retained within the local area, to allow people to benefit from culture without the need to travel long distances. Through performing arts, people throughout the parish and from differing backgrounds can connect by sharing an experience, therefore promoting social cohesion, and an enhanced community spirit. The arts also support links with other local parishes.

Draft Policy CC2.7

Preserve and Enhance Cranbrook Museum

Proposals to maintain and enhance the museum for use by the community and for tourism will be supported, including sensitive expansion on the current site.

Policy Supporting Text

- 8.1 The community loves Cranbrook Museum and the building itself. The rich local heritage of the parish is celebrated here, through the help of its local experts on site and the many, often unique, artefacts on display to the public. The very fabric of the building enhances visitors' understanding of life in former times.
- 8.2 Teachers bring groups to the museum to enrich their curriculum, and "loans boxes" are provided for schools and for organisations, such as the Memory Café. Visitors with family links, or from other places called Cranbrook around the world, come to the museum and many use its genealogy resources.