Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

Local Plan Review

Gateway 1: Self Assessment Summary

October 2026

Introduction

In June this year the Council published its Notice of Intention to commence plan preparation, along with a Local Plan Timetable setting out the key stages in the plan making process.

The timetable identifies that the Council will publish this Gateway 1 Self-Assessment summary on the 30 October 2026, following which the key 30 month plan making period begins.

How we got ready to prepare a new local plan

We started preparing a new local plan for Tunbridge Wells Borough on the 30 October 2026, when Tunbridge Wells published this Gateway 1 Self-Assessment document.

Government policy says we should adopt the new plan within 30 months of this date. This is to help ensure we have an up-to-date local plan that responds to the needs of the area and our communities.

This page explains what we did to get ready to meet the 30-month timeframe. It also has links to further information and where you can get updates. The Council considers that it has made sufficient progress across all five Gateway 1 themes and is ready to commence the formal 30-month plan preparation process.

There are specific pages on our website about the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan Review, found here Tunbridge Wells Local Plan Review 2029.

These provide an explanation of the new Local Plan and will be updated throughout the new plan-making process.

We have published a timetable for preparing the plan

The timetable shows when we expect to carry out the different stages and activities for preparing a plan. It helps us check if and how we can adopt the plan within the 30-month timeframe. The timetable will be regularly reviewed and updated.

The Timetable for the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan Review can be found here.

The timetable has been prepared in accordance with new plan-making regulations that came into force 25 March 2026, and national guidance on Creating a Plan Timetable. It sets out the key stages in local plan production, including dates for the following key milestones:

- When we will make our notice of intention to commence plan preparation available
- When the scoping consultation will start and end
- When we will publish our Gateway 1 self-assessment summary (this document)
- When the consultation on the proposed plan content and evidence will start and end
- When observations and advice will be sought for Gateway 2

- When the consultation on the proposed plan will start and end
- When observations and advice will be sought for Gateway 3
- When we will submit the plan for examination
- When we plan to adopt the new Local Plan

The Local Plan Review Timetable has been published alongside the publication of two separate files called our plan dataset and plan timetable dataset. These have been published on our website here.

The Timetable shows how plan preparation is due to commence at the start of November 2026, with adoption of the Local Plan programmed for April 2029.

We established project management and governance arrangements

Preparing a local plan is a complex process involving officers, elected Members and a range of organisations and stakeholders. Establishing project management and governance arrangements at an early stage helps ensure progress is monitored, risks are managed and decisions are taken in a timely manner.

Good progress with project management and governance has been made. On 25 June 2026, the Council's Cabinet approved the Local Plan Timetable and Notice of Intention, together with governance arrangements for preparing the Local Plan Review (see Item CAB12/26). Details of the approved arrangements are available in Item CAB12/26 and Appendix C.

Appropriate decision-making and delegation arrangements have been established for the key stages of plan preparation, ensuring that decisions can be taken efficiently whilst maintaining Member oversight at important milestones.

Suitable project management tools have also been established. Officers have used the Government's Gateway 1 Readiness Checker and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Project Initiation Document (PID) to monitor progress towards Gateway 1. Microsoft Planner is being used to manage workstreams and programme delivery. Staff resources have been considered and will be kept under review to ensure we have the resources in place to deliver the plan within the timetable.

Regular updates are provided to the Council's Planning Policy Working Group and the Portfolio Holder for Planning. Potential risks to plan delivery, including land availability, resourcing, procurement and programme slippage, have been identified and are monitored through the PID, with mitigation measures kept under review.

We are satisfied that these arrangements provide an effective framework for preparing and adopting the Local Plan within the expected 30-month timeframe.

We planned how we'll consult on the plan

Public consultation is essential to ensuring the Local Plan reflects the needs and aspirations of our communities. By planning engagement at an early stage, we can ensure that residents, businesses, stakeholders and statutory consultees have opportunities to help

shape the plan from the outset.

We undertook a Scoping Consultation between 14 July and 11 August 2026, in accordance with our published Local Plan Timetable. The consultation sought views on what the Local Plan should contain and how people would like to be engaged throughout the plan-making process. The Scoping Consultation included two consultation documents comprising the main Scoping Consultation Document and also a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report. A total of 218 responses were received.

We have used the consultation responses to prepare an Engagement Strategy (https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-review-2026/local-plan-review-consultations), which sets out how we will consult and communicate with communities and stakeholders throughout plan preparation.

We have planned a mix of consultation and communication approaches to get more people involved. This includes:

- Use of digital/electronic means of engagement
- In-person stakeholder events/exhibitions
- Sending letters out by email or by post
- Engagement/briefings with targeted groups

We will promote the use of a digital response form to help us analyse consultation responses more efficiently, and will work proactively with stakeholders and community groups, including parish councils.

Feedback from the consultation is also helping to inform the emerging vision and measurable outcomes for the Local Plan, alongside future high-level options and policy development.

Further information about consultation activities is available on our Local Plan Review webpages and updates will continue to be provided through our website, consultation database and social media channels.

We began scoping the content of the plan

Scoping includes considering how well the existing plan is working and gathering baseline information about the area. This helps to identify our future needs and ambitions. Starting this early means we can begin preparing the new plan with a clear vision, making it quicker and easier to consult on the plan and make decisions about it.

Having adopted the current Local Plan in December 2025, we already have a good understanding of baseline information relating to the Borough.

Officers have reviewed the Evidence Base prepared for the adopted Local Plan, to identify what is still relevant, what can be used with updates, and what is required to be a completely new piece of evidence. We have had regard to national planning advice in the National Planning Policy Framework about evidence for plan-making (see Plan-Making Policy PM8: Evidence for plan-making).

We have set up a Procurement Framework to help ensure procurement can take place in a more streamlined and efficient way when commissioning consultants, and we have begun some evidence base work.

To gain an understanding of the development needs for our area, we have looked at the existing evidence about our area, and our current local plan to see how well it has delivered for our communities and what may need changing.

Using the information we have gathered along with responses to the Scoping Consultation we have:

- begun to draft a vision for the area along with ‘measurable outcomes’
- started to understand the development requirements for our area
- started to think about draft high-level options to enable us to begin thinking about the type of development approaches available to help us to meet the growth needs of the borough
- started to look at what new planning policies and information or data we’d need for decision making about new developments

We will consult on these as part of the consultation on plan content and evidence base.

We began a Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a legal requirement of local plan preparation. It helps identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of the Local Plan and reasonable alternatives, ensuring environmental considerations are integrated into decision-making from the outset.

The Council commissioned consultants to prepare a Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report in July 2026. The report identifies the key environmental issues affecting the borough and establishes an evidence-based framework for assessing the emerging Local Plan.

The SEA Scoping Report was published alongside the Scoping Consultation undertaken between 14 July and 11 August 2026. A total of 13 responses were received on the report and these are being reviewed to inform the next stage of the SEA process.

In addition, the statutory SEA consultation bodies, namely the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England, were consulted in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Responses received will help inform future SEA work.

The SEA process will continue alongside plan preparation, helping to inform the development and assessment of options, policies and site allocations as work progresses. Details of the assessment framework, baseline information and consultation documents are available within the published SEA Scoping Report.

Gateway 1 Self-Assessment Documents Available

In getting ready to prepare a new Plan under the new 30 month process, the Council has completed a gateway 1 Readiness Checker and a Project Initiation Document (PID). The Readiness Checker and a summary of the PID are available on the Gateway 1 webpage here.

Other work we've done

We have started a Call for Sites, inviting residents, landowners, developers and other stakeholders to suggest sites for assessment as part of the plan preparation process.

The main purpose of this is to enable land to be submitted to the Council for assessment to establish whether it could be a potential site allocation in the Local Plan Review. Suitable sites are needed to assist in meeting the development needs (including new homes, new jobs, supporting infrastructure and other land uses) of the borough going forward.

How to stay up to date

A specific Local Plan Review webpage has been set up, which has been and will continually be updated as work on the Local Plan progresses.

As the Council prepares the new plan through months 1 – 30 (beginning November 2026), the Council will also provide updates to anyone included on the planning policy consultation database. The planning policy consultation database consists of individuals, organisations and interested bodies who are kept informed of emerging policy formulation. Anyone who wishes to be kept informed of Local Plan updates and upcoming consultation activities can be added to the database or their existing details amended by contacting the Planning Policy team on 01892 554056 or by email at planning.policy@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

All data stored and published will be compliant with the Council's Privacy and Data Protection policies.

As explained above, the Scoping Consultation asked for feedback on how people wished us to engage with them during the plan-making process. Responses received have informed the Engagement Strategy.

Follow us on social media to see our progress in preparing the local plan.

If you require this document in another format, please contact:

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