



Scoping Consultation Document

July 2026

Contents

What are we doing?	3
Why are we doing it?	9
When Are We Doing It?	13
How Will We Engage? Have Your Say	15
Priorities What Do You Think The Plan Should Contain?	18
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis	22
Our Vision	31
Appendix A – Consultation Bodies	34
Appendix B – Local Plan Timetable	35

How to get involved

This consultation will run from 14 July to 11 August 2026.

You can find more information on our website, or you can respond directly online on our consultation platform at talkingpointtunbridgewells.uk.engagementhq.com or scan this QR code.



We would **prefer you to comment on this document via our consultation platform** because it means all the comments are in one place, but you can also write to us at localplan@tunbridgewells.gov.uk with your comments.

How we have prepared this document

Parts of this document were created using artificial intelligence (AI) tools and reviewed by Council staff. For more information about how the Council uses AI, please view our [Artificial Intelligence Policy](#).



What are we doing?



We are reviewing the Local Plan for Tunbridge Wells Borough

The current [!\[\]\(2bdfe261b986065ee0ac76460d6528c9_img.jpg\) **Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2020–2038**](#) was adopted by the Council in December 2025. It requires a review of the Plan within six months of its adoption (Local Plan Policy STR 1: The Development Strategy) and we are now starting the review process under the new planning regulations. The new Local Plan will be referred to as the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan Review 2029 and will cover the period 2029 to 2044.

This Scoping Consultation is part of the review process.

The Local Plan Review will build on the recently adopted Local Plan. It will take account of changes in national policy and guidance, updated evidence and other changes in circumstances. When it is adopted, it will replace the current Local Plan and will form part of the Council's Development Plan (together with 'made' [!\[\]\(e78f798d4ea5c530c9db49e7d26e6b95_img.jpg\) **Neighbourhood Development Plans**](#) prepared by parishes across the borough, and the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan prepared by Kent County Council).

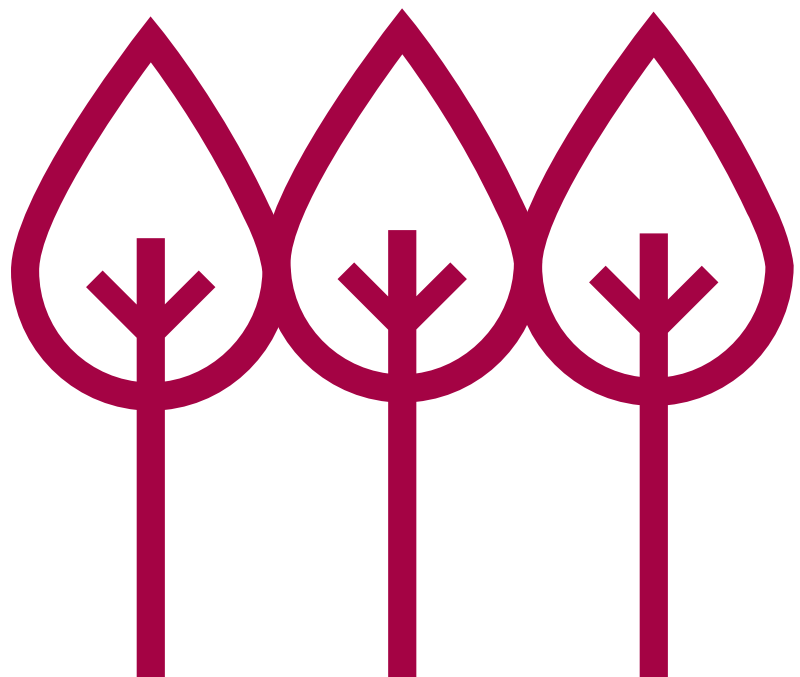
The Council published its [!\[\]\(23d9fc146e83b5c3013cfa32c784f8d5_img.jpg\) **'Notice of Intention'**](#) to start work on the Local Plan Review and the [!\[\]\(f5c463b8c1554ac5049d611bd8e33a51_img.jpg\) **timetable**](#) (also available at Appendix B) for that work on the 26 June 2026. The timetable will be regularly reviewed and updated.

What is a Local Plan?

Local Plans sit at the heart of England's planning system, guiding how areas grow and change over time. They establish where new housing, employment opportunities, infrastructure and community facilities should be located. They give residents, businesses, developers and others a clear understanding of how development will be managed. They also set out planning policies for the local area. These are used to help make planning decisions, together with national policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (add hyperlink when published or to the existing one). The Council is legally required to have an up-to-date Local Plan.

The way we prepare Local Plans is changing

In March 2026 the government introduced [!\[\]\(aa53ad6fea213b8b2226d3077e30533a_img.jpg\) **new rules**](#) for how Local Plans are written to make the process more efficient. The changes mean Plans must be produced more quickly (within 30 months) and should use standardised data, digital tools and more accessible consultation methods. The aim is that Local Plans are clearer, more transparent and easier for communities and stakeholders to engage with and understand. Another change was to introduce a Scoping Consultation as the first part of the process.



What will the Local Plan Review consider?

Housing

One of the roles of a Local Plan is to plan for housing that is needed in an area. The housing need figure is set using a government calculation [\(the Standard Method\)](#). The Government has changed this calculation which has resulted in a significant increase to the Borough's housing need figure. We will need to plan to provide around 1,100 homes per annum between 2029 and 2044. This compares to the current figure of 678 per year. To meet this increased need, the Plan will need to consider where new houses can be built (site allocations). It will need to make the most efficient use of land and decide how many homes each site should provide, taking account of site context and constraints such as landscape and heritage.

At this early stage, the future development strategy has not been determined and the Council will be following a 'no stone unturned' approach to finding suitable sites for allocation to seek to meet the Borough's housing need in full, including consideration of a new 'Garden Settlement'.

Economy and jobs

There is also an important need to plan positively for economic growth to support the borough and provide local jobs. The economy in the borough needs to grow to support employment. This will mean that we will need to find places for new and growing businesses of all types and a range of sectors. This could be office space, or units for light industry, warehouses for storage or technology infrastructure and support for rural businesses.

Infrastructure

We will also need to make sure supporting infrastructure is provided alongside new development. This includes ensuring sufficient education and healthcare provision, as well as investment in transport networks and utilities (including water supplies), and other infrastructure provision and services. Providing high-quality infrastructure is essential to ensure that development is sustainable and deliverable in the way envisaged, and to ensure good place-making, where people wish to live, work and enjoy their time.

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Plan

The Local Plan Review will also include a separate section relating to the strategy for the Town Centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells, (following Policy STR/RTW2 of the current Local Plan). This will provide a policy framework for the town centre, including a specific vision, objectives and site allocations for development. It will also provide development management policies specifically for the town centre. For more information see [Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Plan webpage](#).

Paddock Wood Town Centre Plan

The current Local Plan sets out (within Policy STR/SS 2) that plans for Paddock Wood Town Centre are to be developed. These plans are intended to support the town's future vitality and viability and they will be included as a sub section of the Local Plan Review. More information on housing developments at Paddock Wood can be found on the [Major Developments at Paddock Wood and East Capel webpage](#).

The most sustainable locations for growth

More broadly across the borough, we must consider where further future sustainable growth can take place. Opportunities for growth in and around existing settlements can help to support local services and maintain the vitality of communities. These also can make the best use of land including opportunities for redeveloping previously developed land, and other urban sites. At the same time, development patterns must respond to the historic character of different areas, and to other constraints. We must continue to ensure we protect and conserve landscape quality and settlement patterns. The future development strategy will need to be informed by the local plan's evidence base reports as they are prepared during the plan-making process.



How can you help shape the Local Plan Review?

This is still a very early stage in the plan preparation process. We are not making decisions about the overall spatial development strategy, specific sites, or policies at this stage. Instead, we are seeking views on the key issues, challenges and opportunities that the plan should address, and more generally, what the local plan should contain.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council 'Call for Sites' 2026

Alongside this scoping consultation, we are also running a 'Call for Sites'. This is where we invite residents, landowners, developers and other stakeholders to suggest sites for consideration for allocation for development as part of the Local Plan Review. The call for sites began on the 11 May 2026 and currently runs until the 3 August 2026. Details of the Call for Sites, including how to submit sites for consideration by the Council can be found on the [call for sites webpage](#).

Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping

Another important element of Plan preparation is carrying out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Local Plan. The SEA Scoping Report is the first formal step in evaluating the environmental impact of a Local Plan and determining the need for SEA. It sets the baseline and methodology for future testing and ensures that environmental, social and economic factors are considered during plan preparation. [The Scoping Report](#) has been published and is being consulted upon alongside this Local Plan Scoping document. We would welcome your comments on this.

Other factors affecting the Local Plan Review

The Council's Strategic Plan

The [Council's Strategic Plan 2024–2032](#) sets out the Council's overall vision and priorities for the borough. The Strategic Plan identifies four key priorities.



Community Wellbeing

supporting healthy, safe, and connected communities



Climate Action

tackling climate change and protecting our environment



Sustainable Development

the right homes in the right places, with the right infrastructure



Vibrant Economy

helping local businesses thrive and creating opportunities for all

These priorities provide an important framework for the Local Plan Review. The Local Plan sits under the Council's Strategic Plan, and it will play a central role in helping the Council to deliver its vision and priorities by shaping how land is used and how development is managed across the borough.

Other strategies

There are a range of other strategies that will be important to consider during plan preparation, including for example other Council strategies such as the [Borough Climate Change Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy](#) as well as those produced by other bodies such as the [Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#). These documents will be considered during the baseline review and as part of the SEA Scoping.



Local Government Reorganisation

Our Local Plan Review is taking place against the background of proposed changes to local government. The Government has set out plans which will replace Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council with a single unitary council. It will be responsible for all local government functions.

The Unitary Council will combine Tunbridge Wells borough with other neighbouring local councils to cover a larger area - the precise area will be decided in July 2026. Elections for councillors for the Unitary Council will take place in May 2027 and the Unitary Council will take over from TWBC on 1 April 2028. Town and parish councils will not be affected by the reorganisation.

This represents a significant change in the way local services will be delivered in the future. But for now, our Borough must continue to guide where development should take place so that new homes, jobs and infrastructure come forward in the right locations and in a way that benefits our local communities. Maintaining an up-to-date Local Plan is an important part of this. The new Unitary Council will in the future prepare a Local Plan for the area it covers, but until that time, the Local Plan prepared by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will still operate for our area. This will help to secure sustainable development that meets the borough's needs (including housing, economic opportunities and the delivery of essential infrastructure), and to provide certainty for residents, businesses and developers.

You can find out more details on the [Local Government Reorganisation webpage on the Council website](#).

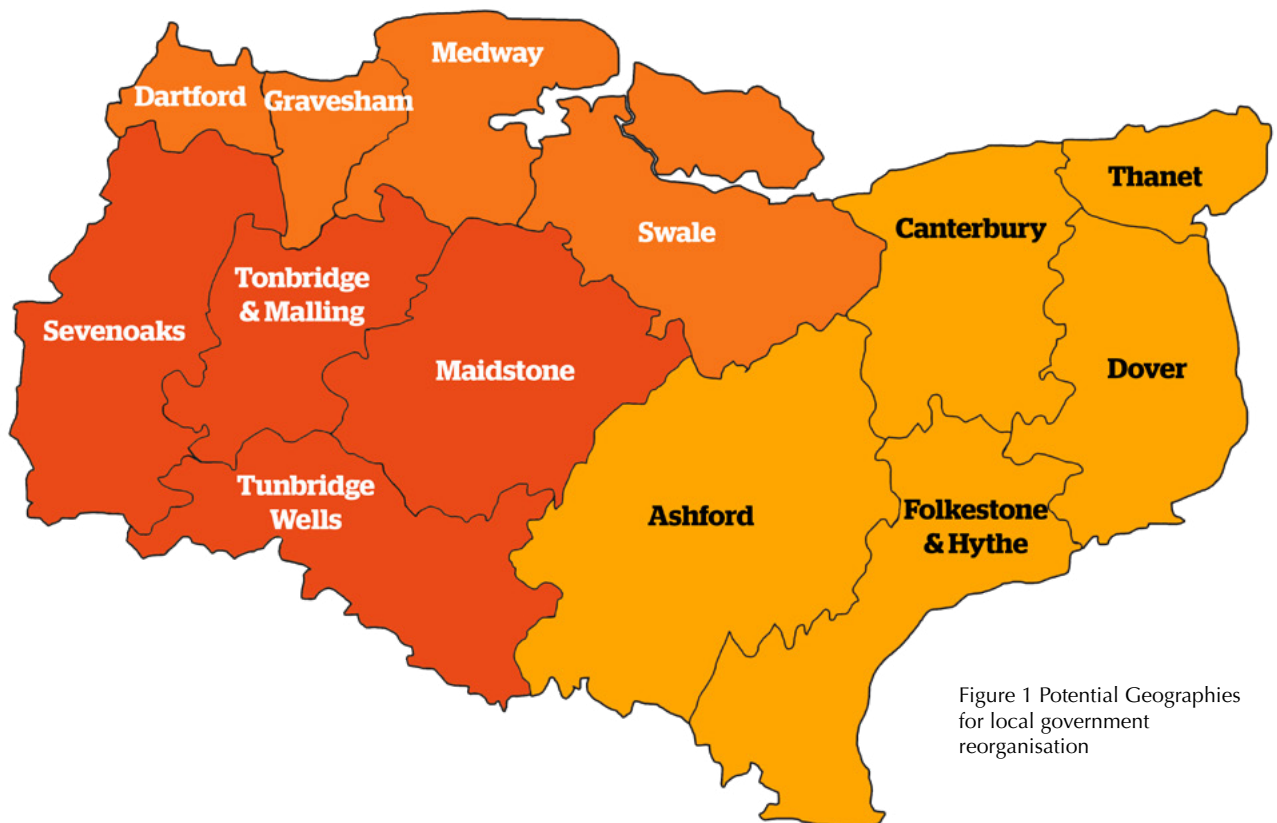


Figure 1 Potential Geographies for local government reorganisation

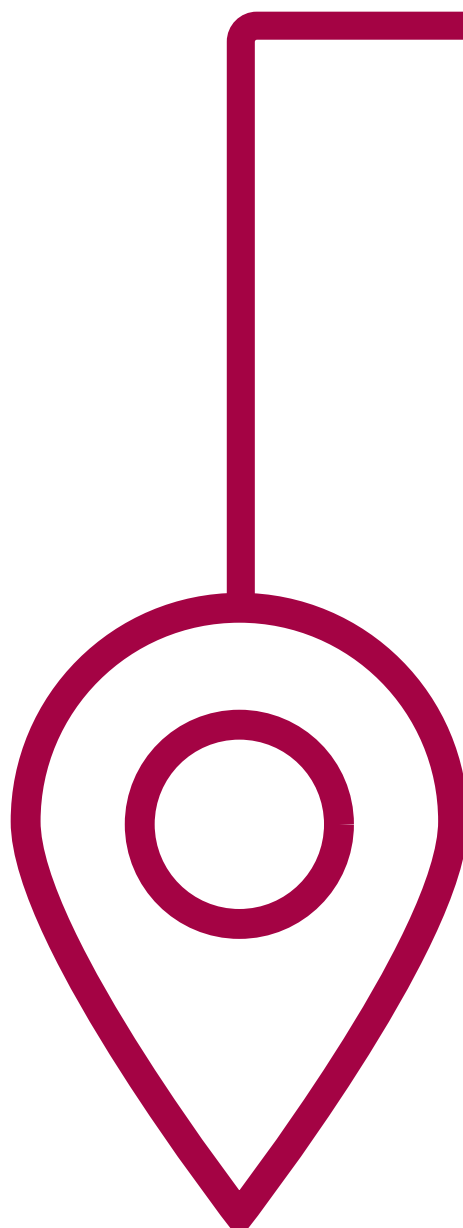
Spatial Development Strategies

The government has stated that it wants additional long term planning strategies to be developed for every region of the country. These are called Spatial Development Strategies (SDS) and will co-ordinate housing, jobs and infrastructure (like roads and schools), looking 20-30 years ahead. They set the framework for individual Local Plans which will need to be in conformity with the relevant SDS

We expect Tunbridge Wells to sit in an SDS region that covers Kent and Medway but that hasn't been decided yet. The Local Plan will need to fit in with the proposals in the SDS and we will co-ordinate our work on the Local Plan with the SDS as it develops. The Council will ensure it engages with the relevant SDS body, which will be responsible for producing the SDS, as both plans progress.

What this means for the new Local Plan

The Council needs to continue to plan for future growth as Local Government Reorganisation progresses. This includes consideration of the relevant SDS. The borough needs to maintain a clear approach to where development should be directed, ensuring that new homes, employment opportunities, and supporting infrastructure are delivered in the most appropriate and sustainable locations, and in a way that supports local communities. Keeping an up-to-date Local Plan is central to achieving this, and it is also a statutory obligation to do so.





Why are we doing it?



Why is a scoping consultation document needed?

The new rules for creating Local Plans state that after the process has been formally started, a Scoping Consultation is one of the first elements to complete. In the Scoping Consultation we ask for feedback from stakeholders on;

- What the plan should cover?
- How we should engage with them about the Local Plan throughout the process.

Who are we asking in the Scoping Consultation?

We are inviting comments from statutory consultees, known as 'specific' consultation bodies and other 'general' consultation bodies, such as voluntary organisations. (These are bodies 'considered to be appropriate and having an interest in the preparation of the plan' in accordance with the new Town and Country Planning Regulations 2026 [\(Regulation 20, paragraph 2\)](#)). The bodies we are consulting are listed in Appendix A.

In addition, we have also chosen to open the Scoping Consultation to the public. We want to ensure everyone is kept up to date as we begin the Local Plan Review and can have a say on what the new local plan should contain and how to engage as we move forward. Everyone on our consultation database will be notified about the consultation. This is a similar approach to how we have consulted in the past about plan-making.

What will we do with the results of the Scoping Consultation?

The consultation will help us develop a clear understanding of the potential scope and content of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan Review. This will include identifying the key themes and locally specific issues that the Plan should address. It will also tell us how you would like us to engage with you during the preparation of the Plan. Comments on engagement will inform the Councils Local Plan Review Engagement Strategy which will be published later in the process. We will then prepare the Local Plan Review in accordance with this Engagement Strategy.

Once the consultation has concluded, we will publish a Scoping Consultation Summary. This will set out the main issues raised in the responses, with details on how these responses will be taken into account in preparing the Local Plan. The Summary will be published after the Gateway 1 stage of the plan-making process, as per the published Timetable (Appendix B).

Details of how the Scoping Consultation fits into the full plan preparation process can be found on the next page.

The updated plan-making legislation sets out a series of stages that must be followed when preparing a Local Plan, which are set out in the diagram on the next page.

This diagram shows each step of the plan-making process. This scoping consultation forms part of the 'Get Ready' stage. It is expected that the 30-month plan making stage will begin November this year.

? You will find questions throughout this document which you can use to tell us your views on these subjects.

Your feedback will help to shape the direction and priorities of the Local Plan Review as it evolves. Importantly it will help decide how the Council engages with you during the later stages of the plan-making process.

Following this Scoping Consultation, the Council will prepare a comprehensive 'Local Plan Review Engagement Strategy' setting out how the Council will engage with those interested in the Plan in accordance with [Regulation 20 of the Town and Country Planning Regulations](#). Your feedback to the Scoping Consultation will inform this strategy.

Questions start on [P.16](#)

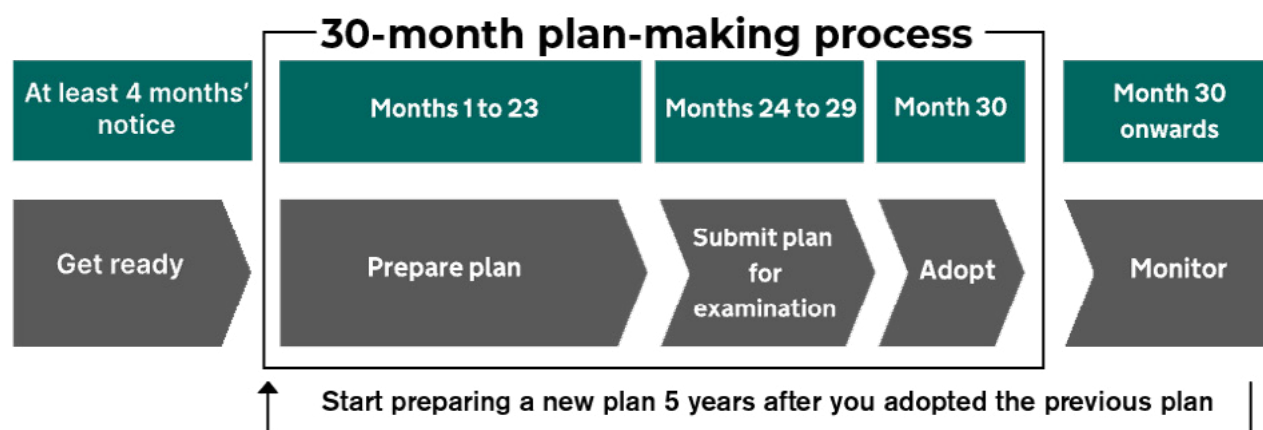


Figure 2: Diagram illustrating the main stages and timings in the 30-month Local Plan preparation process.

Publish local plan timetable	The timetable must be kept up-to-date and set out the anticipated and actual dates for key plan-making stages.
Publish notice of intention to commence local plan preparation	Publication of notice which commences a minimum 4-month notice period so that stakeholders are aware plan-making is beginning.
Scoping consultation	Inviting feedback from stakeholders on how to engage with them and what the plan should contain.
Gateway 1: self-assessment of readiness	Publication of a document setting out details of how you have got ready for plan-making, marking formal commencement of plan-making for the purposes of the 30-month timeframe.
Consultation: proposed local plan content and evidence	Minimum 6-week consultation on the proposed local plan content and evidence, including a draft vision.
Gateway 2	Seeking observations and advice from PINS to Support the early resolution of potential soundness Issues and progress towards the 'prescribed requirements'.
Consultation: proposed local plan	Minimum 8-week consultation on the proposed local plan and its supporting documents.
Gateway 3	Testing if the proposed local plan has met the 'prescribed requirements' and can proceed to examination.
Examination	Examination of the local plan against the tests of soundness, to be set out in national policy.
Adoption	Publication of the local plan and adoption statement.

Figure 3: Key stages of Local Plan preparation

We published the [local plan timetable](#) (also available at Appendix B) and the [notice of intention to commence local plan preparation](#) on 26 June 2026. We are now at the scoping consultation stage. During this initial consultation phase, we want to gather views on what the Local Plan should contain.

Proposed Content and Evidence Documents

Once we have reviewed the responses received to the Scoping Consultation, we will publish and consult on a Proposed Content and Evidence Document. This will present options for shaping the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan. This document should include:

- **A draft Vision** – a clear statement outlining long-term ambitions and describing what kind of place Tunbridge Wells Borough should become in the future.
- **Aims and objectives** – a focused set of goals explaining how the vision will be achieved over the lifespan of the Plan. This would typically include up to ten measurable outcomes (in line with government requirements).
- **An emerging, high-level spatial strategy** – a draft outline of how development will be distributed across the borough. This would include broad locations for housing, employment and infrastructure.
- **Policy approaches** – a summary of potential planning policy directions
- **Evidence base summary** – an overview of the technical studies which support the Plan as it develops. Comments will be invited on the emerging Evidence Base as part of the local plan content and evidence consultation.
- **Strategic Environmental Assessment** – initial findings on the likely environmental, social, and economic impacts of the emerging local plan and proposed options.

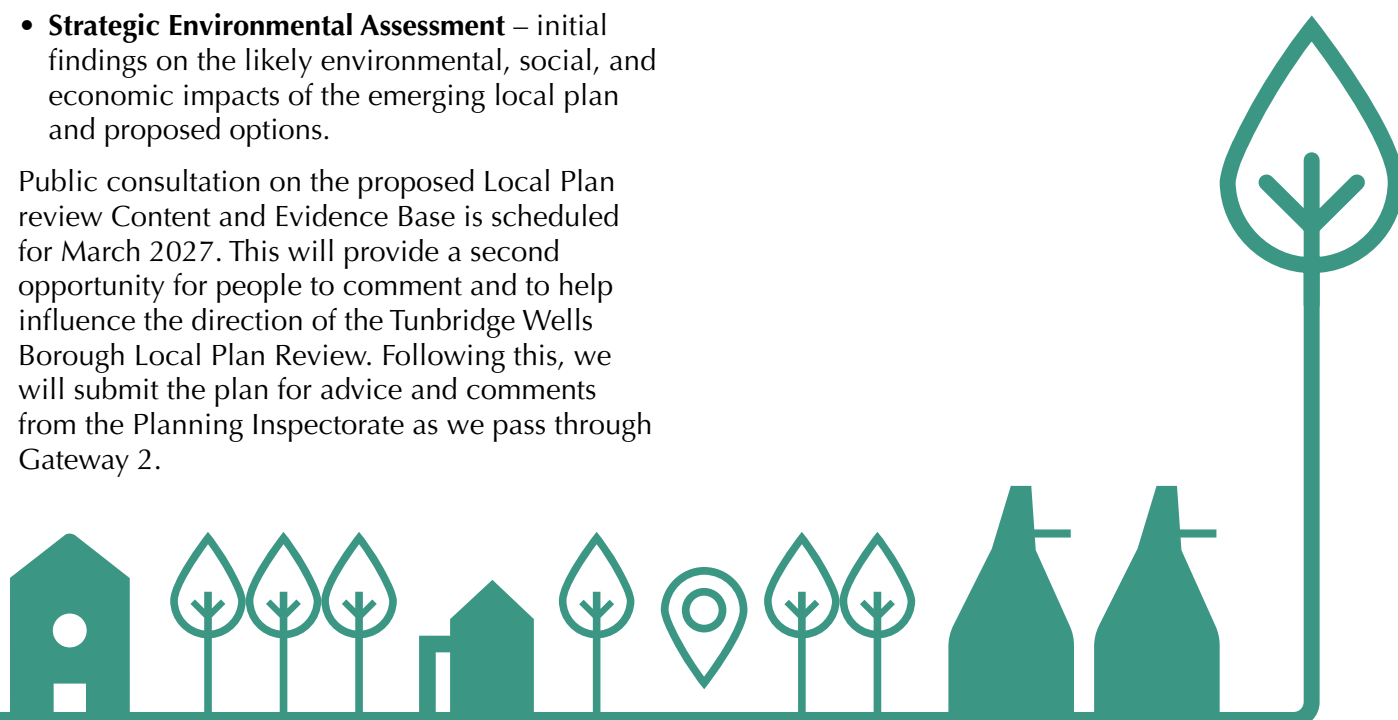
Public consultation on the proposed Local Plan review Content and Evidence Base is scheduled for March 2027. This will provide a second opportunity for people to comment and to help influence the direction of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan Review. Following this, we will submit the plan for advice and comments from the Planning Inspectorate as we pass through Gateway 2.

Proposed Local Plan

After the Gateway 2 stage is completed, we will then prepare a Proposed Local Plan for Tunbridge Wells Borough. This will use the feedback received from the previous two consultation stages, the guidance from the Planning Inspectorate and the evidence base. The Proposed Local Plan will be shaped by input from residents, community groups, and stakeholders, aiming to achieve the best overall outcomes for the borough.

The Proposed Local Plan will set out detailed planning policies to guide future development, covering areas such as housing, the local economy, environmental protection, and infrastructure. It will also set out a list of proposed locations for future development (site allocations), which will seek to meet the identified growth needs of the borough.

It is expected that the Proposed Local Plan will be published for public consultation in November 2027. This will be the last stage of consultation, allowing you a third and final opportunity to comment on the Plan. It will then be formally tested at Gateway 3 and submitted for independent examination by the Secretary of State.





When Are We Doing It?



Scoping Consultation timings

The Scoping Consultation for the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan Review 2029 is taking place between the **14 July to the 11 August 2026**. More details on how to submit comments can be found on [our website](#).

This timetable meets the requirements of the revised plan-making system and replaces the Council's previous [Local Development Scheme](#) (last updated in November 2025). More details are available on our [online timetable](#) (also available at Appendix B), which will be kept up to date as work progresses and as additional national guidance becomes available. If any dates or details change, then we will update the timetable as soon as possible and will clearly explain each change.

Local Plan Review Timetable

Below is an overview of our timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan, including the Scoping Consultation





How Will We Engage?

Have Your Say



Engagement Strategy Have your say

We are developing a Local Plan Review Engagement Strategy which will outline how we intend to involve different people, stakeholders, statutory bodies and other organisations throughout the preparation of the Local Plan Review. We want to understand how you want to be consulted and involved in the process.

The Engagement Strategy will be published by November 2026 (Gateway 1) and will be used to plan our approach to the next rounds of consultation, and other work we do to prepare the local plan. The strategy will describe the range of communication and engagement methods we will use at each stage of the plan-making process.

We have already commenced updating our existing [Statement of Community Involvement 2020](#) (which sets out how we will involve the community in plan making) prior to the new plan-making system regulations coming into effect. This is in the form of a consultation document [\(Draft Statement of Community Involvement April 2026\)](#) which was subject to public consultation in April and May 2026. The document includes our proposed

consultation methods in plan-making, and these are set out in the table below for you to consider. You may wish to suggest other methods or alternative ways on how we should engage/communicate with you and these ideas can be included in the Engagement Strategy to help us to make sure it is as effective and inclusive as possible.

Statutory ('specific') consultees (see list at Appendix A below), are asked to provide:

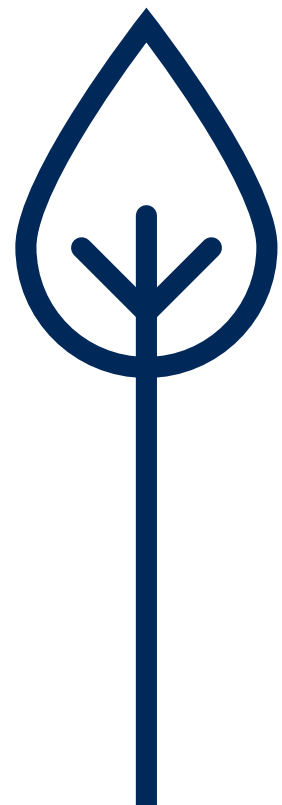
- Details of your preferred method of engagement (electronic response form, workshops etc.)
- Specific questions, issues or areas you think we should include in the consultation to assist with your response.
- Up-to-date contact details.

It is expected that the Engagement Strategy for the Local Plan review will replace the plan-making section in the Statement of Community Involvement once it comes into effect and is published by Gateway 1.

Sign up to the Planning Policy database

We have a planning policy consultation database of individuals, organisations and interested bodies who are kept informed of emerging policy formulation. Anyone who wishes to be added to the database or amend their details can contact 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.

- Q1** How do you think the Council should engage in preparation of the Local Plan? Are there any other methods of communication or engagement that you think we should be using that we haven't already included in the table below?
- Q2** Do you have any suggestions on how the Council can ensure that the consultation is inclusive of different groups/individuals in our borough communities?



Proposed Engagement Strategy methods

Below are listed our proposed engagement methods for the stages of consultations and the stakeholders that we will consult.

Key consultations in the plan making process

1. Proposed Content and Evidence Base Consultation

2. Consultation on the proposed Local Plan

Engagement methods to be used

Mail out – email and post to everyone on our database



Council's website and consultation portal

– publication of consultations including information and guidance and making documents available to view on an accessible, engaging and easy to use online/digital platform



Press releases in local newspapers/ magazines and the Council's Local Magazine



Other newsletters – Councils' weekly e-newsletter and planning news webpages



In person engagement events/exhibitions/ workshops – in appropriate locations across the borough (exact locations will be dependent on the content of the Plan)



Briefing Sessions/ workshops – may be held with Parish/Town Councils and targeted groups



Social media    



Paper Copies will be made available at named locations and can be purchased upon request



Information posters/ leaflets may be used to advertise events and/or provide key information about a consultation



Who we will consult

We intend to reach and contact a range of organisations and individuals including:

- Residents
- Business owners
- Community groups
- Parish and town councils
- Landowners and developers
- Infrastructure providers and other key stakeholders
- Technical and specialist bodies





Priorities

What Do You Think
The Plan Should
Contain?



Background – national policies

Government planning policy and guidance will shape what is included in the Local Plan Review. These include [the National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#), [the Create or Update a Local Plan \(CULP\) guidance](#) and [the National Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\)](#).

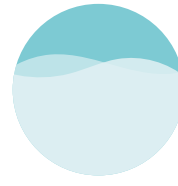
A revised NPPF is due to be published in summer 2026 and we will need to take account of it in the preparation of the Local Plan Review. A significant change in the revised NPPF is the introduction of National Development Management Policies (NDMPs). NDMPs will provide consistent national policies on planning matters such as design, heritage and site sustainability, with the intention that this will reduce repetition of policies at the local level in a consistent way across England. There is however scope for Local Authorities to include locally specific policies within their plan where relevant and justified.

As a result, the new Local Plan will be shorter and more streamlined in line with government intentions. Therefore, our Local Plan will focus on the issues, challenges and opportunities that are specific to Tunbridge Wells Borough and provide the spatial strategy, the individual site allocations and any locally specific policies.

The NPPF sets out the following key topic areas that all Local Plans are expected to address for their area.



Sustainability



Green Belt



Minerals and Waste



Climate Change



Natural environment



Effective use of land



Housing



Built/historic environment



Transport



Employment and commercial/retail



Health



Infrastructure



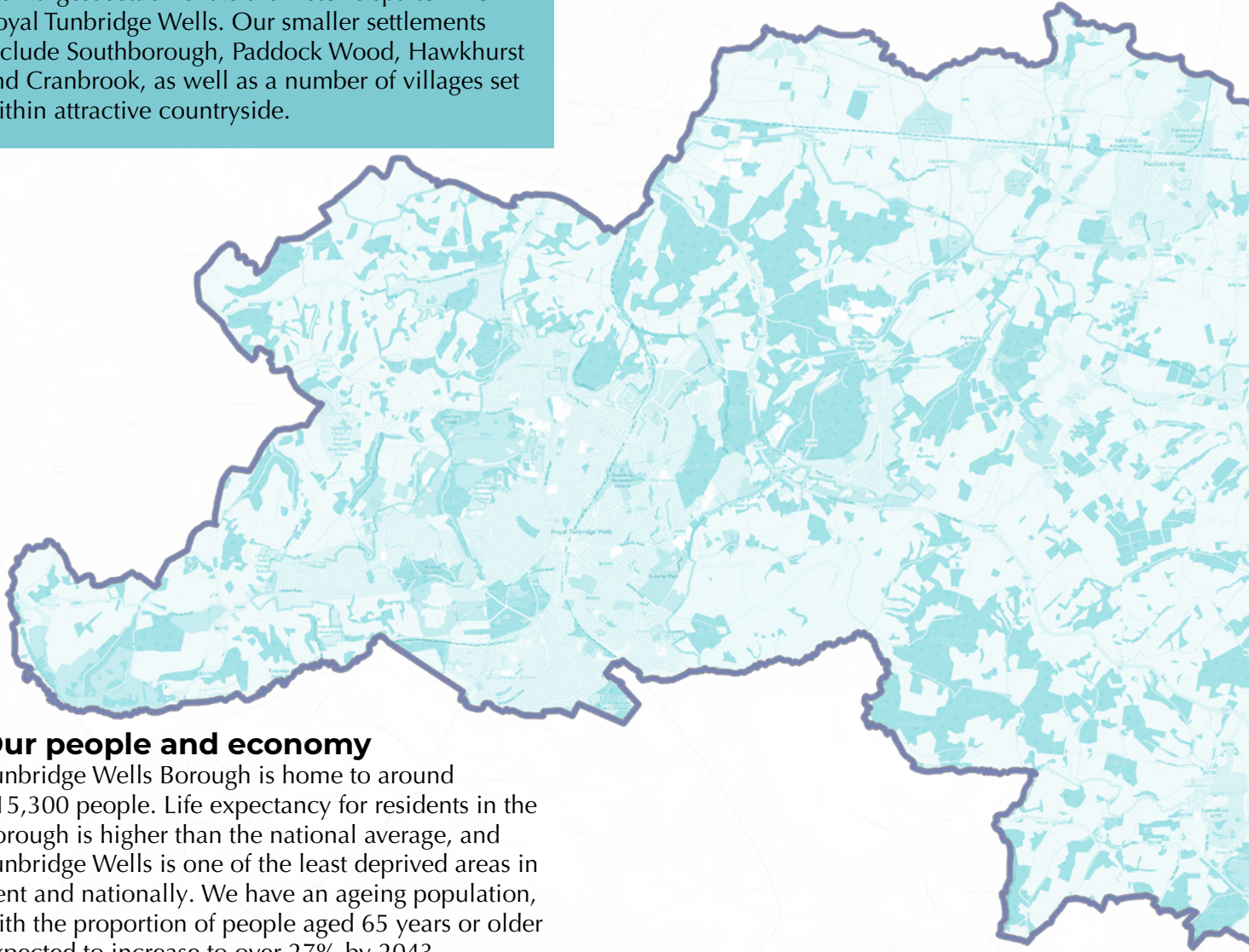
Design



Flood Risk

Background - Tunbridge Wells Borough profile

Tunbridge Wells is a diverse and prosperous borough covering 128 square miles in west Kent. Our largest settlement is the historic spa town of Royal Tunbridge Wells. Our smaller settlements include Southborough, Paddock Wood, Hawkhurst and Cranbrook, as well as a number of villages set within attractive countryside.



Our people and economy

Tunbridge Wells Borough is home to around 115,300 people. Life expectancy for residents in the borough is higher than the national average, and Tunbridge Wells is one of the least deprived areas in Kent and nationally. We have an ageing population, with the proportion of people aged 65 years or older expected to increase to over 27% by 2043.



Percentage of population over the age of 65 will increase to **27% by 2043.**

Around 75% of the working-age population is economically active, and the unemployment level is one of the lowest in Kent. We have a highly skilled workforce, and household incomes are generally higher than the national average. The Council's **Economic Development Strategy 2023–2026** sets out how we support sustainable economic development and create an environment in which existing businesses can flourish and new investment is attracted.



Tunbridge Wells
Population - 115,311
increasing to
127,046
in 2043.

House prices are higher than most places in Kent, making the borough less affordable than other areas in the southeast.

These factors create a range of shared challenges and opportunities across different areas, including housing, health and care services, transport, and the role and design of our town centres.

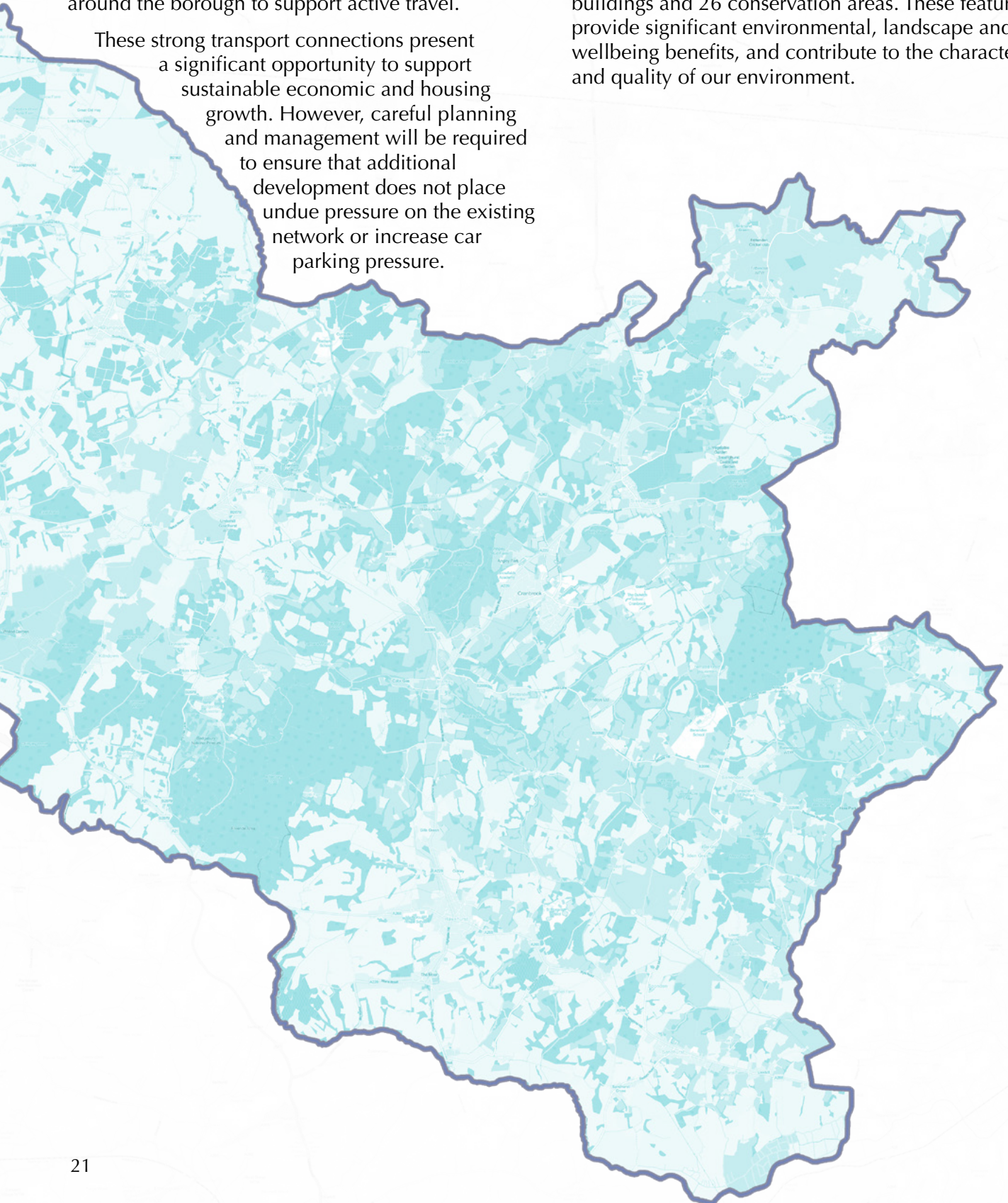
Transport and movement

The borough is well-connected to other areas within the south-east and is supported by key transport infrastructure. This includes the A21 trunk road running north-south towards London and Hastings, and strong rail links to London. Our [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2021](#) sets out how we will improve cycling and walking routes in and around the borough to support active travel.

These strong transport connections present a significant opportunity to support sustainable economic and housing growth. However, careful planning and management will be required to ensure that additional development does not place undue pressure on the existing network or increase car parking pressure.

Our natural, historic and built environments

Around 70% of the borough is sited within the High Weald National Landscape, and 22% of the borough sits within the Metropolitan Green Belt. In addition, the borough includes 10 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 60 Local Wildlife Sites. The borough is also rich in historic features, with around 2,200 listed buildings and 26 conservation areas. These features provide significant environmental, landscape and wellbeing benefits, and contribute to the character and quality of our environment.





Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis



This section sets out a SWOT analysis for Tunbridge Wells Borough which covers each key topic area from the NPPF. Understanding these topic areas in depth will help us to prepare a future growth strategy for the borough that is sustainable, balanced and based on evidence. Please answer the questions following each topic area.



SWOT Analysis - Housing

Strengths

Strong housing market and desirability -

Tunbridge Wells borough is a highly desirable location in the South East attracting demand for housing due to its historic character, attractive environment, good schools, and proximity to London.

Range of Housing

There is a range of housing types, size and tenure across the borough

Weaknesses

Affordability issues - High house prices relative to incomes and to other places in Kent make it difficult for local people, particularly younger residents, to access housing, both to rent and to buy.

Under-occupation -

Multiple homes in Royal Tunbridge Wells (particularly family-sized homes) are under-occupied (with people living in homes much bigger than they need e.g. older person households)

Threats

Meeting housing need -

Meeting the housing needs of the borough in line with national policy is challenging given the constraints of the borough. Government targets require the provision of around 1, 110 dwellings per annum (a significant uplift on 678 per annum in the adopted Local Plan).

Ageing population

The borough has an ageing population requiring the provision of suitable housing.

Opportunities

Providing a range of housing -

Explore opportunities to deliver sufficient levels of affordable housing, ensuring a range of housing options are available to meet the needs of all residents.

Growth can enable provision of a range of suitable homes for older people (downsizing), residents with disabilities/other specialist needs, the provision of more affordable housing.

Provision of further land to meet the accommodation needs of **Gypsies and Travellers** and **Travelling Show people**.



Q3 Do you agree with the SWOT analysis for Housing Yes/No

Q4 If No, what other issues should be included and why?



SWOT Analysis - Built and historic Environment and the effective use of land

Strengths

Strong heritage assets - borough is rich in historic features and a range of heritage assets - historic buildings, conservation areas and registered parks/gardens. A diverse collection of historic farmsteads and archaeological remains contribute to the borough's cultural significance and sense of place.

Varied character - There are a wide range of settlement types within a predominantly rural landscape contributing to the borough's distinctiveness. These range from the urban character of Royal Tunbridge Wells, with its notable Georgian and Victorian architecture, to picturesque rural villages such as Goudhurst.

Protected landscapes - Around 70% of the Borough is covered by the High Weald National Landscape. This is considered to be one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in north-west Europe and has remained a unique and recognisable area for at least the last 700 years.

Threats

Impact of growth on heritage assets -Future growth and development proposals may pose risk to the significance of heritage assets and their settings if not carefully managed.

Inappropriate scale, design, materials or location of development could result in harm to the historic environment and distinctive character.

Unsympathetic retrofit measures - Pressure to improve energy efficiency and meet climate targets could result in inappropriate or poorly designed retrofit interventions (such as replacement windows, external insulation, or removal of historic fabric) which may harm the significance and integrity of heritage assets if not properly controlled and guided.

Weaknesses

Underused land - areas of underused or vacant land within the borough that detract from the quality of the built environment.

Challenges of historic buildings and retrofitting - Heritage features often suffer from lack of management and can easily fall into decline.

Improving the energy efficiency of historic buildings can be complex and costly. Many are harder to retrofit due to their construction, sensitivity to change, and need to preserve their significance.

Opportunities

Underutilised historic buildings - The borough contains a wide range of traditional buildings, many of which are either vacant, underused, or have vacant upper floors. They present a significant opportunity for sensitive reuse with potential economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Making efficient use of land - There is opportunity to continue prioritising a brownfield-first approach. This will ensure that land is used efficiently and creates the potential for comprehensive regeneration and appropriate densification in sustainable locations, reducing pressure on greenfield and rural areas.

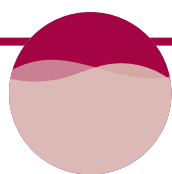
Retrofit and energy efficiency -There is opportunity to improve the energy performance of the existing building stock to reduce carbon emissions while maintaining historic significance. This can be achieved through sensitive and well-informed retrofit measures, including improved insulation, draught-proofing, secondary glazing and efficient services.

Positive placemaking – Planned growth presents an opportunity to deliver high-quality placemaking and design. This can enhance the built environment and public realm, reinforce local character, and ensure that new development responds positively to its historic context.



Q5 Do you agree with the SWOT analysis for the Built and Historic Environment Yes/No

Q6 If no, what other issues should be included and why?



SWOT Analysis - Natural environment and the Green Belt

Strengths

High environmental quality and strong landscape character - The borough has a distinctive, diverse and visually attractive landscape formed by a patchwork of agriculture, woodland, heathland and rural settlement on a landform of rolling plateaux crosscut by thin and wider river valleys/floodplains. It includes extensive areas of the High Weald National Landscape (AONB), creating a strong sense of place and high quality of life.

Biodiversity rich - The borough is rich in a diverse range of notable and protected habitats and species including extensive areas of ancient woodland and a network of gyhll streams. The borough has a wide network of designated sites - Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites. Together these cover 4,572 ha (13.8%) of the borough.

Weaknesses

Significant physical constraints on development - Around 70% of the borough is designated as National Landscape (with extensive areas of land outside of it also falling within its setting). Around 20% is Green Belt (overlying parts of the National Landscape). Combined with biodiversity/priority habitat designations, this severely limits land supply and flexibility for new growth.

Threats

Development pressure on sensitive landscapes and biodiversity - Growth needs to be carefully managed to avoid harming National Landscape character, the openness of the Green Belt and protected and scarce species and habitats. Particular threats include pressure on water resources and adverse effects on water quality, loss of dark skies and intrusive activity and noise in areas of tranquillity.

Opportunities

Landscape and Biodiversity net gains - Proposed growth could provide opportunities for net gains for nature in line with the [Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) and greater connectivity and improved management of priority habitats.

Degraded landscape areas could be improved/restored and access and management of green spaces improved, supporting biodiversity and health and wellbeing objectives.



- Q7** Do you agree with the SWOT analysis for the Natural Environment Yes/No
- Q8** If No, what other issues should be included and why?



SWOT Analysis - Climate change and sustainability

Strengths

Focus on climate change - The global climate and biodiversity emergencies are already recognised by TWBC, reflected in the ambition to make the entire borough net zero by 2050 as set out in the TWBC Borough Climate Change Strategy. Carbon emissions have already significantly fallen since 2005 (by over 40%).

Weaknesses

Flood risk in key growth areas - Parts of the borough are located in flood risk areas. Areas to the north and west of Paddock Wood are particularly prone to flooding which could impact on development potential and infrastructure costs.

Historic building stock - Over 30% of the borough's carbon dioxide emissions come from existing domestic buildings some of which have limitations improving energy efficiency. 60% of domestic properties in the borough are at an EPC D or below (meaning energy inefficient, higher bills and release of more emissions).

Threats

Climate change impacts - Increased flooding, heat, wildfires and drinking water scarcity and other environmental pressures may hinder growth. If climate change continues at its current pace, up to 92% of UK properties could overheat by 2050. Peak river flows will increase by 45% (increasing flood frequency/severity), and wildfires will be more common (over 40,000 hectares burned in 2025).

Water stress - The Borough is within an area of 'water stress', which could intensify as a result of climate change. Daily water shortfall in the UK could exceed 5 billion litres by 2050, should climate change continue its current pace.

Opportunities

Sustainable development and climate leadership - Opportunities to embed low-carbon design, renewable energy and heat source measures to reduce the overheating of buildings (including retrofitting in older buildings). Also to incorporate green infrastructure across new development – helping to improve comfort and reduce property running costs.

Larger scale green energy generation - Explore opportunities for larger scale sustainable energy generation (such as solar farms), helping reduce the carbon intensity of electricity and reliance on expensive and volatile fossil fuels.

Flood mitigation and betterment - Proposed growth could provide opportunities for substantial mitigation and betterment in terms of flood alleviation and sustainable drainage systems.

Reducing vehicle emissions - Opportunities to create or improve schemes to reduce vehicle emissions as part of development schemes or funded by them, including improving Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure, public transport provision and expanding car clubs and active travel (walking/cycling and wheeling).



Q9 Do you agree with the SWOT analysis for Climate Change
Yes/No

Q10 If No, what other issues should be included and why?



SWOT Analysis - Employment, commercial and retail

Strengths

Good strategic location and connectivity -

Proximity to London and links to wider Kent/ East Sussex support commuting, economic activity and tourism.

Strong heritage and tourism offer - The borough's spa town history, built heritage, and attractive town centres combined with high-quality open space and the appealing landscapes of the rural areas contribute to visitor appeal in the form of tourism and to economic vitality and investment.

Thriving local economy - The borough functions as an employment and service centre for West Kent, supporting a range of businesses and services.

Weaknesses

Limited employment land supply in some areas - Constraints and competing land uses can restrict opportunities for economic expansion and job creation locally.

Limited availability of employment floorspace - The supply of employment floorspace is aging and much of it is low quality. In recent years there has been a significant loss of office floorspace, with little new larger-scale commercial development.

Threats

Economic uncertainty - Wider economic downturns may reduce investment, housing delivery, and job creation. Significant structural changes in retailing and town centres, have caused uncertainty for the retail, business, and tourism sectors of the local economy making it difficult to plan with certainty.

Economic uncertainty may also put pressure on/result in loss of rural shops and services which provide an important supporting role at the heart of communities.

Opportunities

Economic diversification and job growth - Expansion of employment areas and support for rural businesses and tourism can strengthen the economy.

Regeneration of town centres and brownfield land - Redevelopment can enhance vitality, improve public realm, and optimise land use. There may be opportunities to explore investment/regeneration of employment areas where sites are outdated or no longer meet modern energy performance standards.

Range of employment uses

Making available a range of employment unit sizes to support different types of businesses and provide flexibility as businesses grow and change over time/the plan period.

Town Centres

Reinvigorate our town centres as vibrant and welcoming places that respond to changing retail patterns and support a wider range of activities. They should provide inclusive facilities and spaces for everyone, particularly young people and older residents.

- Q11** Do you agree with the SWOT analysis for Economics and Viability Yes/No
- Q12** If No, what other issues should be included and why?



SWOT Analysis - Transport

Strengths

Rail connections - The borough has good railway connections to both London and Hastings, including mainline stations in Royal Tunbridge Wells and Paddock Wood and the additional stations of High Brooms and Ashurst.

Existing strategies - The borough has strategies in place to encourage sustainable forms of transport and movement such as the successful car club (Co-Wheels) which operates across the urban area of Tunbridge Wells and a Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan which includes active travel projects and improvements. A Tunbridge Wells Station Travel Plan is also in development.

Weaknesses

Infrastructure capacity pressures - Existing road networks and public transport provision are already under strain in parts of the borough.

Car dependency, particularly in rural areas

- Limited or no public transport options (lack of bus and train services) outside main towns increases reliance on private vehicles. With a much smaller range of services and fewer local employment opportunities, residents in rural areas must travel further, usually by car.

Congestion and environmental challenges

- Transport congestion in the borough has impacts on air quality and climate change.

Topography and severance

- Steep hills and narrow roads may constrain the successful implementation of better-connected cycling and walking networks. Some major roads and railway lines create barriers to walking and cycling in parts of the borough.

Threats

Network congestion - Existing transport congestion and network constraints - increased growth without sufficient mitigation could worsen congestion and air quality.

Car parking pressures - While it may be appropriate to provide a lower amount of parking in the urban areas (served by public transport and nearby local services), there is substantial private car ownership and use with the expectation of sufficient off street parking provision in new developments.

Visitors could be deterred if insufficient public parking spaces are provided to serve commercial developments or current provision is changed. This is true in both urban and rural areas and could negatively impact on the local economy.

Opportunities

Investment in infrastructure and connectivity - Growth could unlock upgrades to transport (including public transport improvements and improved electric vehicle charging infrastructure).

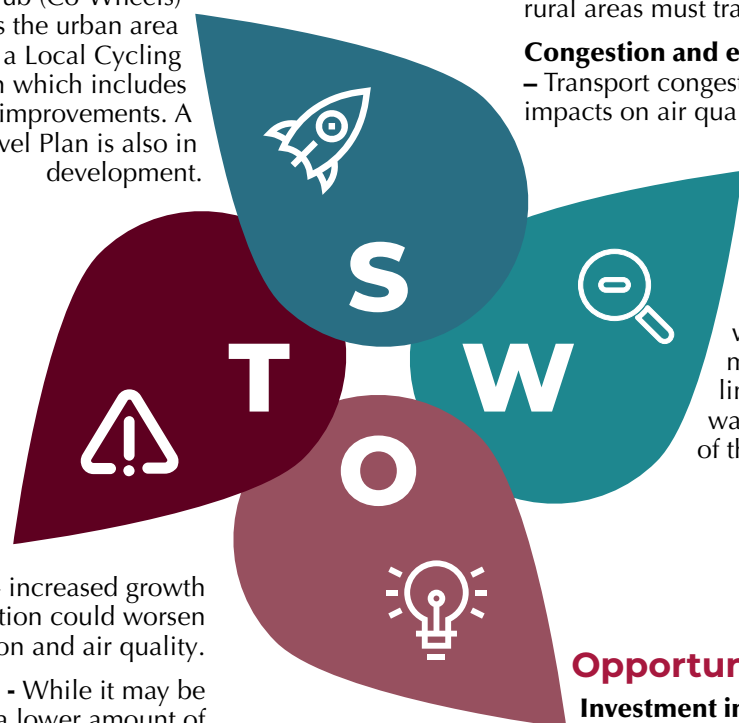
Improvements to active travel

Improvements to walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure to create continuous, safe active travel route and encourage more journeys by these modes.

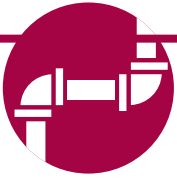
Enhanced bus and rail partnerships

Potential to work with operators to improve frequency, coverage, and integration (e.g. through the Kent County Council Bus Service Improvement Plan).

Demand management measures - Parking strategies, approaches to workplace parking management, and enhanced travel planning could help reduce car dependency.



- Q13** Do you agree with the SWOT analysis for Transport and Movement Yes/No
- Q14** If No, what other issues should be included and why?



SWOT Analysis - Infrastructure and Communities

Strengths

Diverse settlement hierarchy - A mixture of towns (including Royal Tunbridge Wells, Paddock Wood), rural service centres and villages providing a range of local services and supporting balanced communities.

Active local governance and community engagement - Strong engagement from parish councils and stakeholders supports local decision-making and governance processes.

Weaknesses

Infrastructure capacity pressures - Existing infrastructure such as healthcare and education are already under strain in parts of the borough.

Rural isolation and service accessibility - Smaller villages can lack access to services, employment, and digital infrastructure.

Threats

Failure to deliver infrastructure alongside growth - If infrastructure lags, quality of life and sustainability will decline.

Water related infrastructure - There are known problems and inefficiencies in respect of existing water related infrastructure in the region. Further growth could exacerbate this without effective mitigation and intervention.

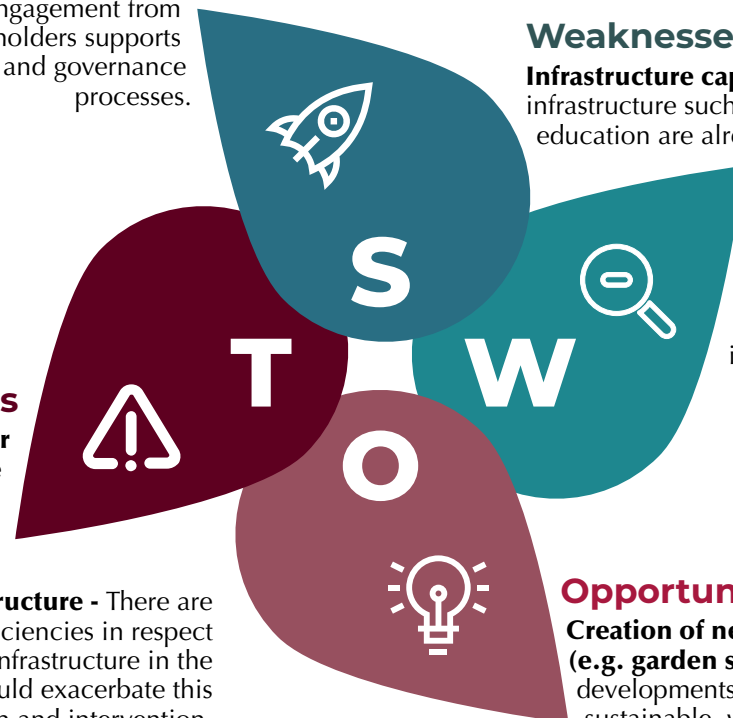
Cross-boundary impacts and pressures - Growth near boundaries may place strain on neighbouring authority infrastructure and require complex coordination.

Opportunities

Creation of new communities (e.g. garden settlement) - Strategic developments offer the chance to create sustainable, well-designed, infrastructure-led communities.

Investment in infrastructure and connectivity - Growth could unlock upgrades to transport, education, health, digital and other types of infrastructure and enable more focus on health and wellbeing opportunities to support proposed development such as the provision of more accessible green open space and health service facilities.

Local government reorganisation - Collaboration with neighbouring authorities and infrastructure providers could improve strategic planning and funding access.



Q15 Do you agree with the SWOT analysis for Infrastructure and Communities Yes/No

Q16 If No, what other issues should be included and why?

Draft priorities for the Local Plan Review

Now that you have had a chance to look at topics above, and consider the analysis of them individually, we would like to ask your thoughts on the whole picture.

Creating a Local Plan for Tunbridge Wells Borough is a complex task. It involves balancing the need for new homes, jobs and supporting infrastructure while protecting and enhancing the borough's environmental quality and heritage assets. It means

making difficult choices about where development should be located to make sure we provide the homes and facilities that people in our borough need, while safeguarding what makes Tunbridge Wells such a distinctive and desirable place.

Our Local Plan Review is about achieving that balance and securing the best outcomes for the borough, both now and in the future.

To help us understand how important you think these issues are and how you would balance them, please answer the following questions.



Q17: Please rank the list of priorities below in what you think is the priority order with 1 being the most important and 10 being the least important. Why do you think your top priorities are the most important?

Q18: Are there any other priorities not listed that should be included?

Priority	Rank
 Housing - Build enough homes of different sizes and types and to meet the needs of our residents – including affordable housing and housing for older people.	
 Historic Environment - Protect and enhance our historic assets and ensure all development is of a high design standard that contributes to local character.	
 Economy - Strengthen the borough's economy by promoting commercial development in the right locations and provide local jobs; and to regenerate and support town centres in providing a range of uses for all age groups.	
 Natural Environment - Protect our landscape and natural environment, improving biodiversity and air quality and reducing the risk of flooding.	
 Climate - Embed low-carbon design and renewable energy into all new development. Reduce carbon emissions by promoting sustainable forms of transport and exploring options for renewable energy provision.	
 Traffic - Reduce traffic congestion and constraints on the network through carefully planned investment into highways improvements which is supported by evidence (e.g. junction improvements).	
 Infrastructure - Ensure all development is supported by sufficient infrastructure (including healthcare and education facilities and water supplies) to meet local needs.	
 Transport - Upgrade public transport and improve active travel options such as walking and cycling.	
 Car Parking - Recognise the importance of providing adequate car parking facilities for residents, businesses and visitors across the borough.	
 Community and Cultural - Provide enough community facilities including sports facilities, culture and leisure, parks and gardens and recreation open spaces.	



Our Vision



The Council will need to develop a vision that will shape the future for Tunbridge Wells Borough and genuinely reflects the priorities and objectives for the area.

The current Local Plan (adopted in 2025) sets out a Vision to guide development. It considers the key challenges in terms of the demographic, economic and environmental trends. It sets out the main guiding factors affecting conservation and change in different parts of the borough, notably the main settlements, as well as the other villages and wider rural area.

This will need to be reviewed and amended to make sure it aligns with:

- the SWOT analysis carried out as part of this scoping consultation
- the evidence base that will be commissioned to inform the Local Plan Review
- the outcome of the 'Call for Sites' process and the resulting emerging spatial strategy.

Currently, we feel that many of the themes and issues highlighted in the current Vision are still relevant and they will inform the new Vision for the Local Plan Review. A new, draft Vision will be consulted upon as part of the process.

Please consider the existing Adopted Local Plan Vision set out opposite and answer the questions.

Adopted Local Plan Vision

Growth in new homes, jobs, and supporting infrastructure will be achieved over the plan period in a manner that respects the distinctive qualities of the borough.

The Council will work with stakeholders* to maintain and improve overall living standards and access to employment, leisure, and cultural opportunities for all the borough's residents.

In particular, the Council will improve access to suitable, especially affordable, housing, including for local young people and older households, and will develop the borough's economic strengths and range of accessible job opportunities.

Important local services, infrastructure, and amenities will be retained and, where necessary, improved, in line with community needs.

Development should help achieve the Council's goal of carbon neutrality for the borough by 2050. It should also help to conserve and enhance the borough's recognised heritage and environmental assets.

All development should be of high-quality design that respects local identity and character. Local ambitions are:

- For Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough, to maintain their role as the main urban area, with a mix of housing, employment, leisure, and cultural developments, including by making effective use of urban land, whilst protecting their respective distinctive natural and built environmental qualities;
- For Paddock Wood, to provide for comprehensive planned strategic growth (including on land in east Capel parish) that is fully aligned with timely infrastructure provision and which delivers significant improvements in local employment, town centre, leisure and other services/community facilities commensurate with its enhanced role, as well as ensuring that it is not vulnerable to flooding;
- For other settlements, to retain their essential local character, with high-quality sustainable development that reflects their environmental context, infrastructure, and site circumstances, having due regard to local needs;
- For the countryside, to retain its landscape, biodiversity, and historic character for its own sake, as well as a setting for settlements, whilst supporting sympathetic rural enterprise.

* stakeholders include town and parish councils, neighbouring authorities, statutory



Q19 Do you think the Vision identifies the right issues to be taken forward within the Local Plan Review Vision?

Q20 Are there any other topic areas that you think we should be including within the Local Plan Review Vision? Please tell us about them and give reasons why.

Q21 Are there any issues that you think should be removed from the Local Plan Review Vision?

Q22. Please let us know if there are there any other issues not already covered, which you think the new Local Plan Review should contain and why.

What happens next?

Thank you for getting involved and contributing to this initial Scoping Consultation. When the consultation closes, we will review the comments received and consider them in the next steps of plan preparation as outlined above. We will publish a Scoping Consultation Summary. This will set out the main issues raised in the responses, with details on how these responses will be considered in preparing the Local Plan. The Summary will be published after the Gateway 1 stage of the plan-making process, as per the published Timetable (Appendix B).

Appendix A – Consultation Bodies

(This list is not exhaustive)

Parish and Town Councils

Benenden Parish Council	Council	Paddock Wood Town Council
Bidborough Parish Council	Frittenden Parish Council	Pembury Parish Council
Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council	Goudhurst Parish Council	Rusthall Parish Council
Capel Parish Council	Hawkhurst Parish Council	Sandhurst Parish Council
Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish	Horsmonden Parish Council	Southborough Town Council
	Lamberhurst Parish Council	Speldhurst Parish Council

Specific (Statutory) Consultees

Active Travel England	Kent County Council - Highways and Transportation	Natural England
Canal & River Trust	Kent County Council - Flooding	Network Rail Infrastructure Limited
Civil Aviation Authority	Kent County Council – Education	NHS Kent and Medway (Local integrated care board)
Coal Authority	Kent Nature Partnership (Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy)	Office for Nuclear Regulation
Environment Agency	Marine Management Organisation	Office of Rail and Road
Forestry Commission	National Highways	Sport England
Historic England		
Homes England		

Utility providers:

Electric: EDF Energy Plc and UK Power Networks, National Grid	Telecommunications: Vodafone and O2, British Telecommunications Plc, EE, Three,	Water: South East Water (water supply) and Southern Water (sewerage undertaker)
Gas: Scotia Gas Networks and National Grid, Cadent Gas		Upper and Lower Medway Internal Drainage Boards

Neighbouring/ Other Authorities:

Ashford Borough Council	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council	Kent County Council (including other services to those above – nature, PROWs, minerals and waste, arts and culture)
Maidstone Borough Council	Wealden District Council	East Sussex County Council
Rother District Council		
Sevenoaks District Council		

Community groups/forums

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum	Society	High Weald AONB Unit
Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic	Tunbridge Wells Business Improvement District	Kent Wildlife Trust

All other interest groups, societies and forums included on our consultation database

Other

Kent Fire Service	Kent and South East Ambulance services
Kent Police	

Appendix B – Local Plan Timetable

 **The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, Part 2, Regulation 4 (1)** requires that ‘a local plan timetable must contain the following information from the date on which it is first published in accordance with section 15B(8) of the [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004]’.

The following timetable Local Plan Review Timetable follows the Regulations set out in  **Part 4 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.**

Stage of Plan-Making	Dates
Reg 19: Notice of intention to commence local plan preparation	Friday 26 June 2026
Reg 20: Scoping Consultation (including publication of the ‘Notice of Scoping Consultation’ (Regulation 20(1)(b))	Tuesday 14 July 2026 - Tuesday 11 August 2026 Notice of Scoping Consultation to be published on or before 14 July 2026.
Reg 21: Gateway 1 self-assessment of readiness for local plan preparation	Friday 30 October 2026
Reg 23: Consultation on proposed local plan content and evidence (including publication of the ‘Notice of Local Plan Content and Evidence’ (Regulation 23 (1)(a))	Tuesday 2 March 2027 – Thursday 15 April 2027 Notice of Local Plan Content and Evidence to be published on or before the 2 March 2027.
Reg 26: Gateway 2 observations and advice from an appointed person	Wednesday 15 September 2027 – Wednesday 27 October 2027
Reg 27: Consultation on the proposed local plan (including publication of the ‘Notice of Proposed Local Plan’ consultation (Regulation 27 (1)(a))	Tuesday 30 November 2027 – Friday 28 January 2028 Notice of Proposed Local Plan to be published on or before 30 November 2027.
Reg 31: Gateway 3 prescribed requirements assessment by an appointed person	Monday 10 July 2028 – Monday 7 August 2028
Reg 34: Submission of documents and information to the Secretary of State	Monday 9 October 2028
Reg 35: Independent examination	November 2028 – April 2029 (to be confirmed by the Planning Inspectorate)
Reg 39: Adoption (Month 30) of the Local Plan Review and publish Policies Map	30 April 2029