



Project Initiation Document (PID) Summary

for Residents, Businesses and Stakeholders

October 2026

Introduction

This document provides an overview of how Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will prepare its new Local Plan and provides a summary of what it has done to get ready to begin the main plan making stages of the process over the next 30 months.

The Council has prepared a Project Initiation Document (PID) to help manage the project and ensure it remains on track. The full PID is an internal project management document. This PID Summary (prepared with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence) provides details of the key information in a format that is accessible to residents, businesses and other interested parties.

This summary will be updated as preparation of the Local Plan progresses.

About the Local Plan

What is the Local Plan

The Local Plan will set out the Council's planning policies and proposals for development across Tunbridge Wells Borough up to 2044. It will guide where new homes, jobs, services and infrastructure should be located across the borough and will be used to help determine planning applications.

Once adopted, the Local Plan will become the main planning policy document the Council will use when making decisions on planning applications.

The Local Plan will consider a wide range of issues, including:

- New homes (including affordable housing and specialist housing), with the borough's growth needs having substantially increased in recent times (currently now some 1,100 dwellings per annum)
- Employment and economic development (supporting existing and new business and planning for employment land in suitable locations)
- Transport and movement
- Infrastructure to support the growth needs, including Schools, healthcare and community facilities and other forms of infrastructure
- Open spaces and recreation
- Climate change and sustainability
- Biodiversity and the natural environment
- Heritage and the historic environment

The Local Plan must also consider important constraints to development, including the Metropolitan Green Belt, the High Weald National Landscape, and areas at risk of flooding in the borough.

- Changes to national planning legislation require us to prepare the new Local Plan under the [new plan-making system](#), which has a plan preparation process of 30 months.

Why are we preparing a new Local Plan

Tunbridge Wells is required to prepare a new Local Plan because:

- The Council's current Adopted Local Plan (adopted in December 2025) was submitted for examination before 12 March 2025.
- The Adopted Local Plan meets less than 80% of local housing need using the updated Standard Method.
- There is no operative Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

The Council is required to comply with two statutory deadlines:

1. Publish a Notice of Intention to commence plan preparation for the next Local Plan 2029 by **30 June 2026**
2. Publish its Gateway 1 Self-Assessment by **31 October 2026**

Furthermore, the Council's current Local Plan was adopted in December 2025. We could not demonstrate that we could meet our full housing need for the borough in this plan, so we made a commitment to begin a review of the Local Plan within six months of its adoption. We have now begun the Local Plan Review, and we will aim to meet our full housing need and to make sure all development in the borough is positively planned and sustainable.

The Local Plan Review aims to:

- Plan positively for homes, jobs and infrastructure.
- Support thriving town and village communities.
- Protect and enhance the borough's natural and historic environment.
- Respond to climate change.
- Ensure growth is supported by the infrastructure required to serve it.

The Local Plan Review will incorporate the Council's [Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Plan](#).

How does the Local Plan relate to other plans?

The Council will prepare the Local Plan having regard to other relevant strategies and programmes. This includes for example:

- The Council's [Strategic Plan 2024 – 2032](#)
- National Planning policy set out in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) and associated guidance
- County-wide infrastructure planning, environmental strategies, and transport plans set by [Kent County Council](#)
- Future strategic planning arrangements that may emerge through local government reorganisation or wider strategic planning initiatives, including an emerging Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)

The Council also works closely with neighbouring authorities and infrastructure providers to ensure planning decisions reflect issues that cross administrative boundaries.

Programme and timetable

The Council will prepare the Local Plan by following a series of stages set out in the government's [30-month Local Plan process](#). A summary of the key stages is set out in the table below, with dates which reflect the [published timetable](#) for the Local Plan Review.

The government's new plan-making system includes 'Gateway Reviews' at key stages. These reviews are carried out by the Planning Inspectorate which is an independent body. These reviews assess whether the Local Plan is progressing appropriately before it moves to the next stage.

Activity	Indicative Start: Month/ Year	Indicative End: Month Year
Developing project management process and structure, governance risk register and ensuring resources are in place to begin the project (including completion of this PID)	May 2026	October 2026
Scoping, collating, and procuring early evidence and scoping strategic environmental assessment	February 2026	Ongoing
Scoping and production of an engagement strategy/Councillor and key internal and external stakeholder briefings/ early engagement about forthcoming plan production	Started May 2026	October 2026

Activity	Indicative Start: Month/ Year	Indicative End: Month Year
(Statutory) Notice of intention to start plan making	May 2026	June 2026
Call for sites and initial site assessment process	May 2026	October 2026
Procuring Strategic Environmental Assessment	August 2025	Ongoing
Gateway 1 (Self-Assessment)/Commencement of plan-making	May 2026	October 2026
Prepare Vision and Strategy for consultation feeding in emerging evidence	September 2026	January/February 2027
Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Consultation (note statutory minimums)	14 July 2026	18 August 2026
Public consultation on Vision and Strategy (note statutory minimums)	As per Reg 23 dates (2 March 2027)	15 April 2027
Development of draft plan including responding to consultation and any further evidence gathering	November 2026	October/November 2027
Councillor and key internal and external stakeholder briefings/ early engagement about next stage of plan production	Has been ongoing since 2025	October 2028
Gateway 2 (PINS)	September 2027	October 2027
Public consultation (8 weeks) on Local Plan	November 2027	January 2028
Officer report to Full Council on the consultation on the proposed local plan, including responses to the consultation ahead of Gateway 3 prescribed requirements assessment by an appointed person	Late April – Mid June 2028 [TBC]	Late April – Mid June 2028 [TBC]
Gateway 3 (PINS)	July 2028	August 2028
Plan Submission	October 2028	October 2028
Independent Examination (Indicative)	October 2028	April 2029
Plan adoption (Indicative)	April 2029	April 2029

These dates may change as work on the Plan progresses.

The Local Plan timetable sets out a full list of stages and be routinely reviewed and updated as necessary.

Governance and decision making

Preparing a Local Plan within 30 months is a significant project which involves elected councillors, council officers, partner organisations and local communities amongst others.

The Council will ensure that the governance and decision making process remains transparent and that important decisions are taken at the appropriate level.

On the 25th of June 2026, a report (see [Item CAB12/26](#)) presented to the Council's Cabinet Members sought approval of the Local Plan Timetable and Notice of Intention and their publication. [Appendix C](#) of the Report set out the suggested approach to delegation and sign-off for the key stages in plan production. This approach was approved by Cabinet and establishes a suitable approach to governance.

The Planning Policy Team regularly updates elected Members of the Council's Planning Policy Working Group, and the Council's Portfolio Holder for Planning, on matters relating to the Local Plan Review. We provide updates on progress and work streams with Members, including through All Member Briefings.

This arrangement enables regular reporting to councillors on matters relating to the Local Plan Review.

The Council's Lead on the Local Plan Review is Councillor Matt Lowe, the Cabinet Member for Planning.

The Local Plan Sponsor (Lead Officer) is Carlos Hone, Head of Planning Services.

Project Team and Resources

Project Leadership

The Local Plan is being led by the Council's Planning Policy Team with support from other teams across the Council. The Planning Policy Manager heads the team.

Other teams and services that support the work on the Local Plan include the wider planning service, transport, economic development, housing, legal services, GIS and communications.

Preparation of the Local Plan is overseen by senior management (primarily the Planning Policy Manager and the Head of Planning Services) to ensure that sufficient resources and support are available throughout the plan-making process. This will help ensure the Local Plan Review remains within budget and is completed within the government's required timescales.

Evidence Base

A Local Plan must be supported by robust and up to date evidence.

The Council is preparing and commissioning a range of studies to help understand the borough's needs and opportunities. Specialist consultants will be appointed where independent studies or technical expertise are required, and we will work with statutory bodies and stakeholders as necessary.

The studies we are preparing are many, and include for example:

- Housing Needs Assessment
- Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)
- Green Belt Assessment
- Employment and economic studies
- Infrastructure assessments
- Transport studies
- Landscape studies
- Biodiversity, ecology and environmental assessments
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Health and wellbeing evidence
- Viability and delivery assessments

The findings from these studies will inform decisions about future development and planning policies. The evidence base will be published on the [Local Plan Review webpages](#).

Community and stakeholder engagement

Local people and organisations will play a very important role in shaping the Local Plan. The Council wants residents, businesses, community groups, landowners, developers, infrastructure providers and other interested parties to help shape the Local Plan throughout its preparation.

The Council has prepared an [Engagement Strategy](#) which explains how we will involve communities and stakeholders in preparing the Local Plan.

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

- Use of digital and electronic means of engagement
- In-person stakeholder events and exhibitions

- Sending letters out by email or by post
- Engagement sessions and briefings with targeted groups

We will publish consultation summaries explaining the comments received and how they have been taken into account in preparing the Local Plan.

More 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](#).

Managing Risks

Preparing a Local Plan is a complex process and there are risks that could affect the programme.

Examples include:

- Changes to national planning legislation or policies
- Delays in obtaining key evidence
- Resource or staffing challenges
- Changes arising from local government reorganisation
- Legal challenges
- Delays during examination

The Council will regularly review these risks and has a plan for how to respond to each risk. The Council will take action where possible to minimise the impact of any risk.

Approvals and document management

This summary document is based on the Council's full Project Initiation Document for the Local Plan Review. The full PID is a working project-management document and will be updated as the Local Plan progresses. Any significant changes to the programme, governance arrangements or project scope will be reflected in future updates.

The Council will continue to provide information on progress and consultation opportunities through its [Local Plan Review webpages](#) and other communication channels.

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

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