

Chapter 1

Introduction



Foreword – Councillor Ian Tysh, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development - to be drafted.

Draft Local Plan Consultation

1.1 Wealden District Council is preparing a new Local Plan. The new Local Plan will be the key planning document for Wealden District, excluding the area covered by the South Downs National Park Authority. The South Downs National Park has planning powers for its own area.

1.2 The Wealden Local Plan looks ahead to 2040; it will provide a vision for the district, a long-term spatial strategy for growth, including the locations where development will take place. It will provide a range of both strategic and non-strategic policies that will guide development across the district contributing to social, environmental and economic (sustainability) goals. Once adopted, the Local Plan will form part of the Development Plan for the district, replacing all existing local plan policies and will be used to assess and make decisions on planning applications, as well as to inform investment and the provision of infrastructure. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that “for the purpose of making any determination under the planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise”.

1.3 Overall, this Plan will help meet the district’s needs and priorities, whilst protecting our natural and physical environments. It will ensure that future growth is delivered alongside required infrastructure and improvements, as well as deliver on climate change objectives. It will also help to ensure that our communities are supported with the services and facilities that they need to support daily life.

1.4 This stage of the local plan (known as Regulation 18) sets out the Council’s draft policies and growth strategy and is an important stage in the plan-making process. It provides an opportunity at an early stage for all our communities, businesses, landowners, developers, partners and stakeholders to ‘have a say’ and comment on the draft Local Plan before it is considered further and then finalised.

1.5 Throughout the plan process including after this consultation, we will continue to work with our partners, stakeholders and infrastructure providers to further test the plan and our options to deliver sustainable development. This will ensure that the next iteration of our Plan and the final strategy that we submit to the Planning Inspectorate for examination is robust, sound and deliverable. An **Interim Infrastructure Delivery Plan** has been published alongside this local plan consultation. This sets out our understanding so far, it includes the potential infrastructure needs required to support the growth strategy as well as further work that will be required to understand infrastructure requirements as we progress the Local Plan further.

What has informed this Draft Local Plan?

Consultation

1.6 This Regulation 18 draft Local Plan has been informed by the Direction of Travel consultation, which took place between 23rd November 2020 and 18th January 2021. The consultation document presented issues and policy options on several key themes such as climate change, housing, our economy, our natural environment, landscape and heritage, design and health and well-being. It also presented four high-level options for growth. The consultation provided the opportunity for early engagement with our communities, businesses, infrastructure providers, Statutory Consultees, local authority partners, organisations, stakeholders and developers. We received 1,702 responses from 304 individuals / organisations.

All responses have been considered as part of the preparation of this draft Regulation 18 Local Plan and a summary of the main issues raised from consultees is available on our website¹ as well as reported within this draft Regulation 18 Local Plan.

1.7 As part of our early consultation, we undertook a call for sites. The call for sites invited landowners and those with an interest in land to submit their sites for an assessment as to whether sites are suitable and deliverable for development. This assessment, called the **Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment**, is published alongside this Plan, and has informed the local plan spatial strategy and site allocations set out in this document.

1.8 Since our previous consultation, we have also been consulting and working closely with infrastructure providers, partner organisations and stakeholders. This has allowed us to understand issues and constraints, to test different options for delivering growth, including the deliverability of these options. Many of these conversations will be ongoing as we progress the plan further following this consultation.

Legislative and Policy Framework

1.9 Plan-making takes place within a legal and policy framework and in producing our Plan, we must comply with these legally defined processes. We are also required to respond to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This sets out the Government's planning policies and guidance for England and a framework for how these policies and guidance should be applied at a local level. Any deviation from the NPPF must be supported by local evidence that would justify a different approach. Alongside a local plan (and any adopted ('made') neighbourhood plans and the adopted Waste and Minerals Local Plan), the NPPF is a material consideration in planning decisions. The NPPF was revised on 19th December 2023 replacing the September 2023 versions in response to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reform to national planning policy consultation. We have endeavoured to capture the latest references to updated paragraph numbers contained in the updated NPPF within this draft Regulation 18 version as far as we can given the Local Plan timelines. We will consider the revision in the NPPF in more detail for the Regulation 19 Local Plan. This will include considering NPPF revision as part of our Local Plan evidence base.

Sustainable Development

1.10 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to sustainable development. This can be summarised as *'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*.

1.11 The NPPF sets three overarching objectives an economy, a social and an environmental objective. These also relate to the United Nations (UN) 17 Global Goals and targets for sustainable development in the period to 2030, which seek to address social progress, economic well-being and environmental protection.

1.12 Considering the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is considered good practice in plan-making. The SDGs are a call for action on a global partnership basis. They address the global challenges we face relating to a range of issues such as poverty, health, education, inequality and economic growth whilst also tackling climate change and protecting our environment.

¹ Wealden Local Plan Direction of Travel Sub-Committee Report (11th March 2021) <https://council.wealden.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=534&MId=5057&Ver=4>

1.13 The UK is committed to the delivery of the SDGs and as part of our plan-making we have sought to embed these goals within our spatial strategy and policies.

Picture 1 Sustainable Development Goals



1.14 In relation to achieving sustainable development, the NPPF sets out that both plans and planning decisions should apply a ‘*presumption in favour of sustainable development*’. For plan-making this means that we need to promote a sustainable pattern of growth that meets the needs of our area (including housing, infrastructure and other uses), whilst improving our environment and mitigating and adapting to climate change. This has been a key consideration in our plan-making and planning applications that accord with our Plan, once adopted, will be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Ambitions for Wealden District

1.15 Developing a local plan provides an opportunity to consider local priorities and ambitions of the Council and its partners and consider how to respond to these on a spatial level. This draft Regulation 18 Local Plan has had regard to Wealden District Council’s Strategy 2023 - 2027 which sets out the Council’s aims. The Local Plan seeks to support these aims.

1.16 There are also a number of other plans and strategies that the Plan seeks to support including the Council’s Economic Strategy 2023 - 2033², the Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022 – 2025³, the East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan⁴, the Playing Pitch Strategy Action Plan⁵ and the Council’s Climate Change Emergency Plan⁶ to name a few. We also seek to support a number of strategies produced by partner organisations. More information on the plans,

2 Wealden Economic Development Strategy 2023-2033 <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Wealden-Economic-Development-Strategy-2023-2033-FINAL.pdf>

3 Wealden Health and Well-being Strategy 2022-2025 <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing-strategy/>

4 East Sussex Economy Recovery Plan: East Sussex Reset <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/support/economic-development/recovery-plan#:~:text=The%20East%20Sussex%20Economy%20Recovery,drive%20economic%20recovery%20and%20resilience.>

5 [1] Wealden District Council Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy – Strategy and Action Plan <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/FINAL-Wealden-PPOSS-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-18.12.23.pdf>

6 Wealden District Council Climate Change Emergency Plan <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Wealden-District-Council-Climate-Emergency-Plan-FINAL.pdf>

policies and programmes that we have considered are set out in this document as relevant as well as within our **Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report**.

Evidence base

1.17 The NPPF requires policies to be underpinned by robust, relevant and up to date evidence to support and justify policies at a local level. We have undertaken a number of studies covering a range of topic areas and we have referred to these, as relevant, in this plan. The evidence base that we have progressed to date is available and published on our website⁷.

1.18 For certain planning topic areas our evidence base work is ongoing and where this is the case, we have made this clear in this plan. As we refine the plan for the next stage, certain evidence bases may also need to be updated to account for baseline information changes such as forthcoming Census data or national policy / legislative changes. There are also some areas of policy where collecting evidence at this time would not be productive. This could be where government guidance is still emerging or where legislation, national policy is rapidly changing or being updated. Any of these areas could affect the way we need to collect our evidence and consider our evidence. We will progress this work at the right time to ensure that our evidence is robust to support our policies for the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment

1.19 As part of the plan-making process, we are required to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

1.20 A SA evaluates the social, economic and environmental impacts of the local plan and its policies. It is an iterative process and is integral to plan-making, ensuring that the Local Plan and its policies contributes to sustainability.

1.21 The first stage in the SA process is to produce a Scoping Report. A previous scoping report was consulted upon and published in 2020/2021 alongside our Direction of Travel Consultation. Since publishing our first SA Scoping Report there have been several legislation and data changes. We have therefore recently updated our SA Scoping Report to account for this alongside a fresh consideration of the district's sustainability issues and how we can consider these when approaching the SA. We consulted on the SA Scoping Report update between 26th June to 7th August 2023 and have published an updated **SA Scoping Report** taking into account consultation responses.

1.22 The first stage of HRA is to undertake a screening assessment. If impacts cannot be screened out, then an 'Appropriate Assessment' is required to consider the potential impacts in further detail. The HRA work is iterative and further work and testing including partnership working with other relevant local authorities will be required as the plan progresses. However, the Interim HRA that accompanies this plan, alongside the SA has informed the preferred options set out in the draft Local Plan.

Equality Impact Assessment and Health Impacts

1.23 As part of the plan-making process, we have also undertaken an **Equalities Impact Assessment** (EqIA). The EqIA is a way to help identify the likely or actual effects of policies upon all people and sectors of the community. The aim of the assessment is to ensure that any negative consequences for those people with protected characteristics as defined by the

7 Local Plan evidence <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/wealden-local-plan/local-plan-evidence-bases/>

Equality Act 2010 are eliminated or minimised, and opportunities for promoting equality are maximised.

1.24 The NPPF requires planning policies and decisions to “*enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and wellbeing needs*”. In essence, national policy requires a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of the Local Plan to be undertaken to ascertain whether planning policies prevent ill health, promote good health and/or healthy lifestyles and reduce health inequalities. We have chosen to integrate the HIA of the local plan into our SA.

Duty to Cooperate

1.25 As part of a local authority’s plan preparation, legislation and national policy requires constructive and active engagement with relevant bodies as part of an ongoing process. This is referred to as ‘duty to cooperate’. The aim of this duty is to maximise effective working on the preparation of Local Plans in relation to strategic cross boundary matters. Wealden has a number of duty to cooperate partners and we have been working on an ongoing basis with our partners in the consideration of a range of cross boundary issues. A Duty to Cooperate Topic Paper has been published alongside this draft Local Plan consultation. This sets out the process so far and how strategic cross boundary issues have been / will continue to be addressed as the plan is developed further.

1.26 Following the above work, we are publishing this draft Local Plan under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning Regulations (2012) for consultation.

Structure of this document

1.27 This Local Plan is structured around key themes to help make it easier to consider our preferred approach on a topic-by-topic basis. However, the Local Plan should be read as a whole, and individual policies should not be read in isolation. This is because all policies, proposals and supporting text when considered together set out the Council’s strategy for achieving sustainable development. Once the plan is adopted, applications for development will be considered against all relevant policies, the NPPF, neighbourhood plans and any other material considerations.

1.28 Throughout the Plan we provide the context and justification for each policy as well as provide an explanation as to how the policy is intended to operate. We have also published a separate document containing policies maps. The maps detail the areas in the district where specific policies apply.

1.29 The plan contains both strategic and non-strategic policies as presented in the above table.

How to have your say

1.30 The Consultation on the Draft Local Plan will run from XXX to XXX. Whether you have comments on the overall spatial strategy, the vision and objectives, individual site allocations and / or any of the Plan’s draft policies, we really would like to hear from you. This is your opportunity to feed into this process ahead of us developing and testing the plan further before its third and final stage in preparation (Regulation 19).

1.31 To comment on the draft Local Plan, find out more about the consultation or to visit our online virtual exhibition please go to our Local Plan Consultation webpage XXXXX.

1.32 Comments can be made directly online, using the consultation portal at XXXXX. Full instructions on how to comment are provided.

1.33 Alternatively, you can complete a comments form or collect a paper comments form from the locations below where the plan can be inspected. Please return the comments form to planningpolicy@wealden.gov.uk or by post to: Wealden District Council Offices, Vicarage Lane, Hailsham, BN27 2AX. Please note that we will not acknowledge forms received by post.

1.34 If you are having issues accessing or commenting on our Local Plan consultation then please contact us on 01892 602008 or email us at planningpolicy@wealden.gov.uk

Where can I view the draft Local Plan consultation document?

1.35 You can view the draft Local Plan and all supporting documents and evidence on our Local Plan Webpage at <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/wealden-local-plan/>

1.36 Paper copies of the draft Local Plan, topic papers and the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment are also available for inspection at our Council Offices and at the following locations.

Table 1 Document Venues

Venue	Address	Opening Hours
East Sussex County Council	County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1UE	Monday - Thursday 08.00am - 17.00pm, Friday 08.00am - 16.30pm
Crowborough Library	Pine Grove, Crowborough, East Sussex TN61DH	Monday 12.30pm - 17.00pm Tuesday, Friday & Saturday 10.00am - 17.00pm, Wednesday 10.00am - 14.00pm Thursday 11.00am - 18.00pm
Forest Row Library	The Community Centre, Hartfield Road, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5DZ	Monday & Thursday 14.00pm - 17.00pm, Wednesday & Saturday 10.00am - 13.00pm, Friday 13.00pm - 16.00pm
Hailsham Library	Western Road, Hailsham, East Sussex BN27 3DN	Monday & Tuesday 12 noon - 17.00pm Thursday 10.00am - 18.00pm, Friday & Saturday 10.00am - 17.00pm
Heathfield Library	21 High Street, Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 8LU	Monday & Saturday 10.00am - 13.00pm, Tuesday 10.00am - 17.00pm, Thursday 14.00pm - 18.00pm, Friday 10.00am - 16.00pm
Uckfield Library	Library Way, High Street, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 1AR	Monday 10.00am - 13.00pm, Tuesday, Friday & Saturday 10.00am - 16.30pm, Wednesday 14.00pm - 16.30pm, Thursday 10.00am - 18.00pm

Venue	Address	Opening Hours
Wadhurst Library	High Street, Wadhurst, East Sussex TN5 6AP	Monday & Friday 14.00pm - 16.30pm, Wednesday 10.00am - 16.30pm, Saturday 10.00am - 13.00pm
Willingdon Library	Coppice Avenue, Lower Willingdon, East Sussex BN20 9PN	Tuesday 14.00pm - 16.00pm, Wednesday 10.00am - 12 noon, Thursday 14.00pm - 16.00pm, Saturday 10.00am - 12 noon
Crowborough Town Council Offices	Council Offices, Pine Grove, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 1DH	Monday - Thursday 09.00am - 17.00pm, Friday 08.00am - 16.30pm
Forest Row Parish Council Offices	The Community Centre, Hartfield, Road, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5DZ	Monday - Friday 09.00am - 14.00pm
Hailsham Town Council Offices	Inglenook, Market Street, Hailsham, East Sussex BN27 2AE	Monday- Friday 10.00am - 16.00pm
Heathfield With Waldron Parish Council Offices	73 High Street, Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 8HU	Monday - Friday 09.30am - 13.00pm 13.30pm = 15.00pm
Horam Parish Council Offices	The Horam Centre, 3 Bank Buildings, Horam, East Sussex TN21 0EH	Tuesday - Thursday 09.30am - 12.30pm, Friday 10.00am - 13.00pm
Maresfield Parish Council Offices	Parish Office, Social Club Building, Churchfields, High Street, Nutley, East Sussex TN22 3NA	Monday - Friday 10.00am - 12.30pm
Mayfield Parish Council Offices	The Old Manor House, High Street, Mayfield, East Sussex TN20 6AL	Monday & Friday 09.00am - 11.00am, Wednesday 09.00am - 16.00pm
Pevensy Parish Council Offices	Ethel Wood Community Centre, 129 Coast Road, Pevensy Bay, East Sussex BN24 6NS	Monday - Thursday 09.00am - 14.00pm
Polegate Town Council Offices	49 High Street, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6AL	Monday - Friday 09.00am - 13.00pm
Uckfield Town Council Offices	Civic Centre, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 1AE	Monday - Thursday 09.00am - 17.00pm, Friday 08.00am - 16.00pm
Willingdon & Jevington Parish Council Offices	Council Office, The Triangle, Willingdon, East Sussex BN20 9PJ	Monday - Friday 09.00am- 13.00pm

Where and when will ‘in person’ exhibitions take place?

1.37 You can view our virtual exhibition at any time. This can be accessed via our Local Plan consultation webpage.

1.38 We will be holding a number of ‘in person’ exhibitions to provide an opportunity for you to ask any questions about the draft Local Plan and to speak to Council Officers. These events will take place as follows:

Table 2 Actual Exhibition Venues

Venue	Date	Time
Crowborough Community Centre	Saturday 20th April 2024	10.00am - 16.00pm
East Hoathly Village Hall		
Frant Memorial Hall		
Hailsham Civic Community Centre	Saturday 23rd March 2024	10.00am - 16.00pm
Heathfield Youth Centre		
Horam Village Hall		
Maresfield Village Hall		
Polegate Community Centre		
Uckfield Civic Centre	Saturday 13th April 2024	10.00am - 16.00pm

Next Steps and Local Plan timetable

1.39 Once this consultation stage has ended, we will review and consider all the responses that we receive. We will continue to test and consider the spatial strategy, site allocations and we will continue to consider our draft strategic and non-strategic planning policies. We will update the Plan to account for consultation responses, any new published legislation, national policy and guidance changes (as relevant). We will continue to collect and update evidence to support the development of the Pre-Submission (Regulation 19) version of the Local Plan and test spatial strategy and policy options. The purpose of the Regulation 19 consultation is to provide an opportunity for representations to be made on the local plan before it is examined by a Planning Inspector.

1.40 The detailed timeline for the plan is set out in our **Local Development Scheme**. A summary is provided in the table below:

Table 3 Local Plan Timeline

Local Plan Stages	Timeline
Regulation 18 consultation on the draft Local Plan	Commencing in March 2024

Local Plan Stages	Timeline
Publication of the draft Local Plan that the Council intends to submit to the Secretary of State under Regulation 19	During Quarter 4 2024/25 to Quarter 1 2025/26
Submission of the 'Publication' Local Plan to the Secretary of State	During Quarter 1 2025/26 to Quarter 2 2025/26
Independent Examination in Public	During Quarter 3 2025/26 to Quarter 4 2025/26
Adoption of the Local Plan	Quarter 2 2026/27

1.41 Place hold - Graphic to be added to show timeline and local plan process