Hailsham
TOWN COUNCIL

Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan

Consultation Statement
Volume 1: Overview

Troy Planning + Design
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Introduction

This document comprises Volume 1 of the Consultation Statement prepared in support of and submitted to Wealden District Council for the examination of the Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan. It summarises the process followed and key messages from this.

This Volume acts as an introduction to the wider Consultation Statement which is presented across the following documents:

- Volume 2: This presents the report of the initial consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan undertaken between September and October 2024.
- Volume 3: This presents the report of consultation on ideas and opportunities for the Neighbourhood Plan as discussed at various meetings, presentations and drop-in events that took place across January and February 2025.
- Volume 4: This presents the report of the series of 'focussed' consultation events on ideas for the Neighbourhood Plan that took place in June 2025.
- Volume 5: This presents the report of the formal Regulation 14 consultation of the Neighbourhood Plan that took place between January and March 2026. It is accompanied by a separate annex that summarises the comments made by Wealden District Council.

Initial consultation (Volume 2)

The initial consultation for the review of the Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan took place between September and October 2024, forming a "soft launch" to reconnect the community with the Plan without it being confused with consultations on the Wealden Local Plan earlier that year. The consultation involved a two-page survey issued both online and in paper form, complemented by publicity through the Town Council website, social media, and the Our Hailsham newsletter. A dedicated children's engagement session (the Hailsham Lego Master Builder event) also sought views from younger residents.

The consultation revealed several clear messages. Respondents emphasised the need for improved community facilities, especially healthcare services (such as new GP surgeries, dentists and a minor injuries unit) along with more and better public toilets, recreation facilities, sports provision and high-quality spaces for all age groups. Transport issues also featured strongly, with respondents calling for better bus services, safer and more accessible walking and cycling routes, traffic-speed management and solutions to congestion and illegal parking. Environmental concerns were widespread, including the need to protect green spaces, tackle litter and waste, plant more trees, and safeguard the floodplain and water quality. Children's feedback echoed many adult concerns, stressing the lack of varied play spaces and the need for more accessible green areas.

The findings point to several key themes and priorities for the Neighbourhood Plan review. These include: strengthening policies on social and community infrastructure (with a strong emphasis on healthcare); developing an integrated sustainable travel network; improving and expanding green and blue infrastructure; and ensuring that new development is well-integrated, reduces car dependency and supports access to local facilities. A recurring message was frustration about the scale of recent growth in Hailsham without matching infrastructure improvements, highlighting the need for the Plan to reinforce infrastructure-led development principles even though housing allocations sit with Wealden District Council through publication of the Local Plan.

In addition, respondents raised broader place-based concerns (such as improving the town centre's appearance, ensuring better cleanliness and maintenance, enhancing safety, and encouraging stronger community engagement). Overall, the consultation identified a community seeking better services, improved mobility, enhanced green space and a stronger sense of place, providing a clear steer for shaping the updated Neighbourhood Plan.

Meetings, presentations and drop-in events (Volume 3)

Between mid-January and the end of February 2025, a further round of consultation was undertaken. This comprised a series of in-person activities, including presentations to the Hailsham Historical and Natural Society, Hailsham Chamber of Commerce, and Young at Heart Club, two public drop-in events at the James West Centre and The Laurel Café, and a workshop with Year 11 (GCSE) pupils at Hailsham Community College. A survey was available alongside these events.

The feedback highlighted positive feelings about Hailsham's community spirit, access to countryside, free parking, and existing amenities such as the cinema, leisure centre and Cuckoo Trail. Looking ahead to 2040, respondents expressed a desire for Hailsham to become a more self-sufficient town with improved healthcare, better roads and public transport, protection of green spaces and rural character, and a more vibrant town centre with independent shops. Workshop sessions with pupils of the College reinforced many of these themes, particularly the need for a more attractive and functional town centre and better active travel provision.

Several priorities emerged consistently across the consultation. These included: improving healthcare provision through new or expanded facilities; reducing congestion and improving public transport; revitalising the town centre through pedestrianisation, a broader retail offer, improved cleanliness and better public spaces; and protecting and expanding green spaces, tree planting and biodiversity initiatives. Respondents also emphasised concerns about the ongoing scale of housebuilding in Hailsham and its impact on infrastructure, calling for development to be paced more effectively alongside improvements to services and facilities. Additional ideas included the need for community hubs, more recreational and cultural facilities, and improvements to traffic management and road design.

Respondents were asked whether the 'ten-minute town' concept established as part of the made Neighbourhood Plan remined relevant and if it should continue to be used. Respondents overwhelming supported the concept, using this as a guiding principle for the Neighbourhood Plan, reflecting support for walkability, local accessibility and a more integrated settlement structure. The findings of this consultation stage point towards a need for better community infrastructure in Hailsham, enhanced active travel networks, improved design and integration of new development, more ambitious green-infrastructure planning, and a renewed focus on a vibrant, attractive town centre.

Consultation ‘focus’ events (Volume 4)

A series of focused consultation events were held in June 2025 to gather community views on three emerging themes for the updated Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan and Design Code. These sessions built on earlier engagement and specifically explored ideas relating to: improvements to community facilities (including the possibility of a new ‘community hub’), options for partial pedestrianisation of the High Street, and proposals for improving walking and cycling access alongside and across the A22. The consultation consisted of a series of drop-in events supported by online publicity, direct invitations, and promotion on the Town Council’s social media networks.

Feedback on community facilities showed a consistent call for more accessible, inclusive, affordable and multi-functional spaces that meet a wide range of community needs. Attendees supported the idea of an integrated, town-centre community hub and suggested re-using existing buildings (such as the Charles Hunt Centre or Old Station Building) to create a central, adaptable space for youth activities, arts, health services, social events, and community kitchens. Many also emphasised the need for improved healthcare provision, a stronger police presence, and more youth-focused facilities. Affordability was repeatedly raised, with clubs reporting they were being priced out of existing venues.

Views on the potential for part-pedestrianisation of the High Street were mixed but leaned towards support, with many respondents welcoming the idea of restricting vehicles during set hours to create a safer, cleaner and more attractive shopping environment. However, some concerns were raised regarding accessibility for older and disabled people, impacts on bus routes and servicing arrangements, potential anti-social behaviour, and risk of displacing traffic into surrounding streets. Overall, respondents emphasised that success would depend on detailed design, trial periods, and clear management arrangements.

Feedback on the proposed A22 access and active-travel improvements was very positive. Many participants supported reopening the disused underpass beneath the A22 and improving paths to it, while others supported exploring new pedestrian/cycle bridges to create safer crossings and better links to leisure facilities such as the Country Park. The idea of a “Hailsham Country Line” walking and cycling route alongside the A22, potentially incorporating recreation features such as a BMX track, was well-received. Respondents stressed that solutions must be safe, family-friendly and well-maintained.

Additional comments across the events highlighted broader concerns about infrastructure capacity, public transport, drop-kerbs, pothole repairs, anti-social behaviour, parking enforcement, and enhanced greenery and interpretation to support an inclusive town environment.

Regulation 14 consultation (Volume 5)

The Regulation 14 consultation on the Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan took place over six weeks (and extended for a short period for statutory consultees), from 3 January to 14 February 2026, and was widely promoted through leaflets, local newspapers, social media, the Town Council website and direct notifications to statutory consultees and interested parties. A comprehensive programme of engagement supported the consultation, including seven drop-in events attended by over 175 people, online and printed response forms, and summary display materials accessible in multiple locations.

Responses were received from a range of statutory consultees, most notably Wealden District Council (WDC), East Sussex County Council (ESCC), Historic England, local organisations and several community bodies. In addition, 71 survey responses were submitted, the majority from residents, showing high engagement across age groups. Overall, the survey responses indicated strong support for the draft policies, with an average of 73% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing to all policies.

Responses revealed broad support for the vision and direction of the Plan, but also highlighted some areas requiring refinement. WDC provided detailed comments aimed at strengthening clarity and usability of policies, requesting, for example, rationalisation of policy length, clearer distinction between policies and projects, and confirmation of alignment with the adopted Local Plan. ESCC's response was also broadly supportive but sought amendments relating to transport and additional acknowledgement of matters such as archaeology, minerals and waste safeguarding, and SuDS terminology.

Public comments were wide-ranging but generally positive, with strong support for new healthcare provision, improved community facilities, diversification of green spaces, enhanced biodiversity, better bus services, and safer walking and cycling routes. Concerns focused mainly on infrastructure delivery not keeping pace with development, traffic congestion, maintenance of pavements and drains, pressures on local services, and the future of town centre parking. Several of these issues fall outside the remit of a Neighbourhood Plan, but the document is to be updated to signpost responsibilities for utilities, highways, and infrastructure delivery, and to clarify how local policies complement Local Plan requirements.

Overall, the consultation demonstrates broad and robust support for the Neighbourhood Plan and its policies, with statutory consultees, organisations, and residents all broadly endorsing its direction. In response, the Plan has been updated through a series of targeted amendments, including updates to policy wording, supporting text, additional signposting, refined mapping, and adjustments to the housing-mix policy.

Summary

The section below summarises the key points raised through consultation and how the Neighbourhood Plan has evolved in response to these.

- Strong concern was expressed through consultation about the pressure on health and community facilities, including calls for a new medical centre, more GP and dental provision, youth facilities, public toilets, and multi-functional community spaces. This is addressed in Section 4 of the Neighbourhood Plan with policies HaCF1–HaCF8 prioritising new healthcare facilities in the town centre, a network of community halls and hubs, and early delivery of facilities in major development.

- A keen desire to revitalise the town centre was expressed through consultation, including a need for improvements to the quality of the public realm and shopfronts, a better mix of uses and safer spaces for all. This is addressed in Section 5 of the Neighbourhood Plan through policies HaTC1–HaTC8 which covers a range of issues including the mix of uses in the town centre, shopfront design, safety by design, rationalisation of parking, better integration of green infrastructure, and projects such as TCM 01 (Town Centre Concept Masterplan) and TCM-02 (Place-branding strategy) which will further strengthen the centre.

- Consultation comments identified a need for better-quality housing, a wider mix of homes, and well-integrated growth that reflects local character, including homes for older people, starter homes and downsizing options, meeting local housing needs. This is addressed in Section 6 of the Neighbourhood Plan in policies HaHD1–HaHD7 and which have been supported by production of a Hailsham specific Hailsham Needs Assessment and Survey to better understand the mix and type of homes that should be provided in new development. Furthermore, the associated Design Guidelines support an approach to delivery of high-quality and well-integrated residential development.

- Transport concerns were raised through consultation, covering matters such as congestion, poor bus services, lack of safe walking/cycling routes, pavement parking, and the need for safer links to the Cuckoo Trail and across the A22. This is addressed in Section 7 of the Neighbourhood Plan through policies HaM1–HaM5. These policies support delivery of active travel networks, improved access to and enhancements along the Cuckoo Trail, upgraded of public transport, provision of community mobility hubs and EV charging points. Supporting text signposts wider highway schemes and interventions being taken forward and which address some of the concerns expressed.

- Consultation responses expressed strong support for improved green and blue infrastructure, including more street greening and protection of green areas. This is addressed in Section 8 of the Neighbourhood Plan through policies HaGI1–HaGI6 which promote delivery of biodiversity net gain within the plan area, protection and enhancement of green corridors. Linked to this was a call for more and better located play space, inclusive parks and doorstep green areas, especially from younger people. This is addressed in Policy HaCF6 requiring inclusive, well-overlooked, walkable play and amenity space.

- A desire was expressed for stronger action on environmental quality in Hailsham, in terms of drainage, wastewater impacts, flooding, litter and better street maintenance. Although the Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to duplicate policies in the Local Plan nor the statutory responsibilities of service providers, the Plan does signposting information on wastewater, utilities and highways, and which clarifies the different roles of infrastructure providers. The Plan also embeds SuDS and biodiversity principles across various policies.

- Safety concerns were raised through consultation, especially in the town centre, and where there are concerns about anti-social behaviour. Insofar as this can be influenced through planning policy, the Neighbourhood Plan sets out, at Policy HaTC3, and approach to safety by design which requires the design and delivery of inclusive, well-overlooked spaces and routes, better lighting, co-designed public spaces, and support for reinstating a regular police presence.

- Consultation responses expressed support for the 'ten-minute town' concept, with a desire for more local facilities, walkability and integrated neighbourhoods. The concept continues as a core organising principle for the entire Plan, shaping housing, movement, facilities and green space policies.

The Neighbourhood Plan has been comprehensively shaped by consultation at every stage, and its policies and projects directly reflect the priorities, concerns and aspirations raised by residents and stakeholders, as evidenced by the strong levels of support expressed during the Regulation 14 consultation.

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