

Wealden District Council

Wealden Local Plan Consultation & Engagement Strategy

November 2020

How to Contact Us

Planning Policy

Wealden District Council

Council Offices, Vicarage Lane, Hailsham, East Sussex BN27 2AX

Telephone 01892 602008

E-mail: planningpolicy@wealden.gov.uk

Website: www.wealden.gov.uk

If you, or somebody you know, would like the information contained in this document in large print, Braille, audio tape/ CD or in another language please contact Wealden District Council on 01323 443322 or info@wealden.gov.uk

Contents

1. Overview.....	2
2. Introduction.....	2
3. Our Consultation Principles	3
4. What will the Local Plan cover?	4
5. How is a Local Plan Produced?	4
6. Evidence Gathering	5
7. Local Plan public consultation.....	6
8. Engagement and consultation	8
9. Consultation and engagement methods	15
10. Engagement methods at each stage of consultation	16
11. Local Plan Engagement Strategy	19
12. How to comment on our consultation documents?	22
13. What are we looking to find out through our consultations?	22
14. Considering comments / feedback and decision making.....	23
15. How to get in touch?.....	24

1. Overview

1.1 The planning system is an important part of our lives and affects us all in some way; from the homes and streets we live in, the places that we work, the location and types of shops that we shop in, as well as the outdoor spaces and natural environment that we spend time relaxing in.

1.2 The planning system is plan-led and we are required to provide a succinct and up-to-date plan to provide a positive vision and framework for the future development of the area addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy and other social and environmental priorities.

1.3 There is a wide range of Planning Acts and Regulations, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) that provides the legislative and national policy requirements as to how we should go about setting this vision and framework.

1.4 Once our plan is set, it then becomes the document in which planning applications are determined, unless there are any material considerations otherwise. The Local Plan will cover a 15 year period. Its production is an important platform in which our communities, businesses and stakeholders can shape our surroundings.

2. Introduction

2.1 This Consultation and Engagement Strategy sets out our approach to consulting and engaging the community and stakeholders on a new Local Plan. The purpose of the engagement plan is to provide detail in relation to what we are aiming to achieve through engagement to inform the development of policies and to provide further detail about the methods and approach in which this will be achieved.

2.2 Engagement with those who live, work or visit Wealden is an essential and critical part of the plan-making process and an element that we are committed to so that our communities and stakeholders have an opportunity to be involved and have a say in how to shape the place in which we live. This strategy sets out the detail as to how we will engage, both internally and externally, with Council Members, officers in other relevant teams, partners and stakeholders, Town and Parish Council's and of course our communities.

2.3 The approach that we have set out in this document has been developed to ensure that consultation and engagement is both effective and meaningful. Our approach is aligned with the recommendations of the Planning Advisory Service's (PAS) Local Plan Route Mapper¹ and is consistent with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which was adopted on 22 July 2020, following a six week consultation². Whilst the SCI sets out in broad terms our minimum consultation requirements to meet legislation, this document provides further detail in relation to the process that we will take and also how and when decisions will be made.

¹ PAS [Local Plan Route Mapper](#) (2019)

² Wealden District Council [Statement of Community Involvement](#) (July 2020)

2.4 A vital aspect of how we prepare our Local Plan is how we maintain effective cooperation with neighbouring authorities and other key partners in planning for wider strategic cross boundary matters. This 'duty to cooperate' is a legal requirement and is set out in planning law³. It is one of the first issues that is assessed when we submit the final Local Plan to the Secretary of State for examination. This Consultation and Engagement Strategy therefore will also set out how we intend to engage with our partners to meet the requirements of the Duty to Cooperate.

2.5 The Government published a Planning White Paper in August 2020 for a public consultation. The proposals set out in the White Paper include significant changes to the process of Local Plan preparation and when public consultation might happen. It is unclear at this stage if or when the Government will take forward these changes. If these changes are taken forward we will review and update our position and will ensure that this is communicated with our communities and stakeholders.

3. Our Consultation Principles

3.1 In order to help to inform our Consultation and Engagement Strategy for the Local Plan we have developed the following overarching principles to help guide our approach. These principles build on those outlined in the Wealden Community Engagement Strategy but have been refined to make them more specific to developing our Local Plan⁴.

3.2 These principles also take into account local community feedback we received following our public consultation on our Statement of Community Involvement earlier this year. They are:

- **To meet our legal obligations on consultation;**
- **To consult with a wide range of stakeholders;**
- **To engage with hard to reach groups;**
- **To make sure consultation is simple and cost-effective;**
- **To consult effectively even under social distancing / lockdown conditions as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic;**
- **To make our work accessible by using plain English and avoiding jargon wherever possible; and**
- **To champion early engagement involving residents and other stakeholders.**

³ [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#), Section 33A

⁴ [Community Engagement Strategy](#) 2013

4. What will the Local Plan cover?

4.1 The new Local Plan will cover a 15-20 year period. It will cover the whole of Wealden District, excluding the area located within the South Downs National Park. The Local Plan once adopted will replace our existing policy framework which currently consists of our Core Strategy (2013), Adopted Wealden Local Plan (1998) and Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan (2016).

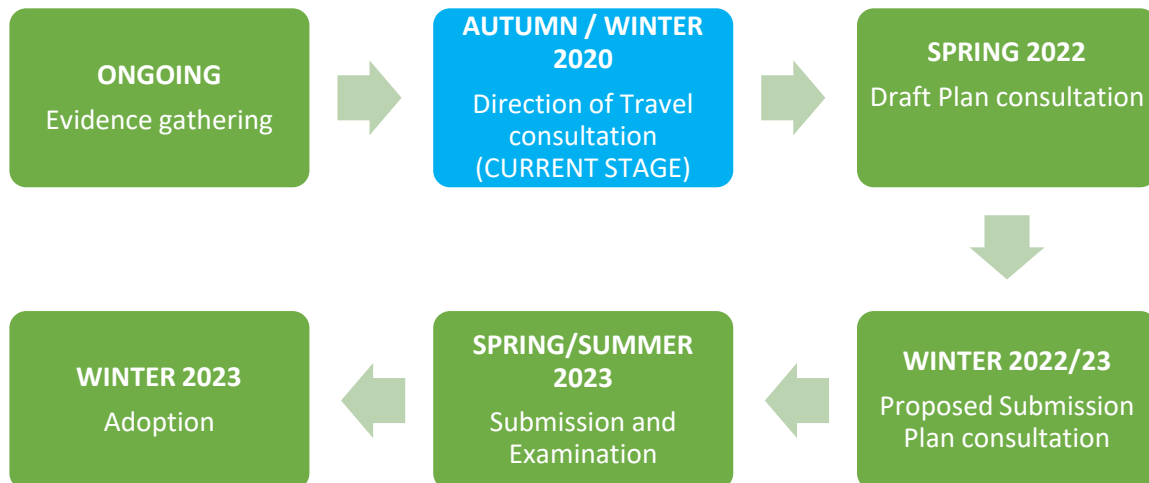
4.2 The new Local Plan will set a vision for Wealden and will provide a range of strategic objectives. The Local Plan will also set out both housing and employment requirements and allocations to meet the development needs of the area and where possible, any unmet need from neighbouring authorities. The Local Plan will also make sufficient provision for leisure, infrastructure, community facilities as well as providing policies to address climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Local Plan will also cover non-strategic policies for specific areas or types of development. This may include design principles, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment and other development management policies.

4.3 It is important to note that non-strategic policies can also be delivered in Neighbourhood Plans, which once 'made' (adopted) form part of the development plan for decision making. It will be important therefore to work with communities who are preparing neighbourhood plans to ensure that plans complement each other as each progress. Currently there is one 'made' neighbourhood plan covering Herstmonceux. However, the Hailsham and Hellingly Neighbourhood Plans have both completed their examination and are awaiting referenda in May 2021.

5. How is a Local Plan Produced?

5.1 The timetable for production of the new Local Plan is set out in our recently adopted Local Development Scheme (LDS). We aim to adopt our new Local Plan by 2023 in line with the Government's objective for local plan adoption.

5.2 The key stages of Local Plan production and timescales are summarised below:



6. Evidence Gathering

6.1 The NPPF requires local plan policies to be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date (less than five years old) evidence, which is adequate and proportionate, focused on supporting and justifying policies and taking into account market signals. We are also required to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment.

6.2 Through the previous local plan process the Council gathered an evidence base, which is mostly still considered up-to-date as it currently stands, helping to provide us with a solid foundation. However, certain evidence base documents will be considered out of date when the time comes to submit the local plan and will need further work to take account of the revised strategy as well as changes to Government policy and legislation.

6.3 In some circumstances, a refresh of the evidence will be required where baseline information can be relied upon, but for others, a new study will be required, although of course, the previous study will remain useful still.

6.4 We are currently in the process of preparing a number of studies. Many of these studies will be progressed by external specialist consultants, however, some will be progressed in house, where this is relevant and appropriate.

6.5 Certain evidence base studies will have cross boundary implications and some will be more key than others in relation to our overall strategy. As part of gathering evidence we will carry out both formal and informal engagement with a range of relevant stakeholders to obtain information, knowledge and advice. Along with consultation and engagement with our communities and stakeholders, our evidence base will inform the development of policies in the Local Plan.

Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment

6.6 A key piece of evidence is the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA). This is a technical study that considers whether sites are suitable, available and achievable for housing and economic over the plan period. The Council is required to undertake a 'call for sites' in order to identify a supply of deliverable and developable sites. The assessment does not in itself determine site allocations but is used as a starting point to inform the development of an overall growth strategy.

6.7 We undertook a 'call for sites' between 1st June and 10th August 2020. The sites that were submitted as part of this process, along with sites submitted as part of the Council's previous SHELAA (published in January 2019), are available to view using the Council's [online mapping system](#). We will update the publicly available maps quarterly to account for any new sites submitted.

7. Local Plan public consultation

General

7.1 There is considerable flexibility in how the initial stages of local plan production is carried out, provided that we meet specific legislative⁵ requirements on consultation, and with the commitments in their Statement of Community Involvement.

7.2 Whilst a lot of work goes on throughout the process, generally speaking, there are two key consultation stages to local plan production, a Regulation 18 stage, which is where a Draft Plan is consulted upon and a Regulation 19 stage, where the submission plan is published and under Regulation 20 representations are invited on whether the plan has been positively prepared, is justified, effective, and consistent with national policy. Early consultation must meet the consultation requirements of Regulation 18.

7.3 Consultation periods must be for a minimum of six weeks. However, should this fall within school holidays, it is good practice to extend the consultation to either 7 or 8 weeks. Additional consultation may be undertaken to aid plan making as long as the Regulation 18 and 19 legislative requirements are met.

Direction of travel consultation

7.4 As set out above, engagement is key to preparing a Local Plan. It is important to understand the issues, opportunities and challenges that face the district and for these, along with national policy requirements, to firmly shape the scope and direction of the Local Plan. . As set out in our SCI⁶, we have opted to include an additional early round of consultation, which will be known as the '*Direction of Travel*' consultation. This *Direction of Travel* document will be the first stage in our

⁵ Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

⁶ [Statement of Community Involvement](#) 2020, Figure 2

engagement and consultation process with our residents, businesses and other stakeholders including our Council Members.

7.5 As a District, we are facing a number of key challenges, opportunities and critical planning issues and this document will set out what we think they are and will provide policy options on how they could be included in a new Local Plan.

7.6 We will invite views from our communities, businesses, stakeholders and statutory and non-statutory consultees. The overall aim of this consultation stage will be to ask the 'Big Questions', to find out what would improve the quality of life of our residents, to help business thrive and how we can do this in an environmentally focused way, especially in considering the challenge of the climate emergency.

7.7 We will consult on this document for an eight week period between 23rd November 2020 and 18th January 2021 and will meet the requirements of Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

7.8 It is important for us to involve and empower our communities and stakeholders in the plan-making process and this engagement and understanding of people's views whilst balancing this with legislation and policy requirements will allow us to move forward with confidence to progress a detailed Draft Plan and to consult on this at a Regulation 18 stage.

Regulation 18: Draft Local Plan Consultation

7.9 The next stage of consultation will be on a full draft Local Plan. This will be produced following the evidence base gathering stage and in consultation with key stakeholders and will include both strategic and non-strategic policies. Consultation and engagement at a Regulation 18 stage will provide our communities and stakeholders with an opportunity for targeted engagement on a full plan, whilst still in its formative stage, enabling a truly iterative process ahead of publishing a final submission plan. Following a consideration of responses we will be able to work up our Regulation 19 Proposed Submission plan and will be able to undertake any further evidence base studies or review our existing evidence as required to ensure that our plan is robust.

Regulation 19: Proposed Submission Plan

7.10 Prior to the submission of the Local Plan for examination, we must consult our communities and stakeholders on the final draft Local Plan. This is a more focussed technical consultation that seeks views on whether the Local Plan is 'sound' and legally compliant. At this stage any representations received will be passed onto the planning inspector who is appointed to examine the Local Plan.

Examination of the Local Plan by Planning Inspector

7.11 The Secretary of State will appoint an independent Inspector (from the Planning Inspectorate) to consider the 'soundness' of the draft submission Local Plan as part of a public examination. In determining whether or not the draft Local Plan is 'sound', the Inspector will consider the representations received during the

Regulation 19 consultation, and where appropriate, individuals or organisations that submitted representations will be invited, by the Inspector, to appear at the examination.

7.12 Following the examination, the Inspector will produce a report in order to determine whether or not the plan can be considered to be 'sound' and legally compliant. This report may include changes to the draft Local Plan where the Inspector feels that these are necessary to ensure that the plan is sound. Any modifications suggested by the Inspector will be consulted on for a period of six weeks. Any consultation responses received will be considered by the Inspector prior to the publication of the final report.

Adoption

7.13 The final stage in the plan making process is the formal adoption of a Plan. In accordance with the Council's constitution, the adoption of the Local Plan must take place at a meeting of Full Council. Following adoption, the Local Plan will become the main document against which decisions on planning applications will be made.

8. Engagement and consultation

Who will be consulted?

8.1 The Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012 sets out who we are required to consult as part of the Local Plan process. This includes both specific and general consultation bodies as well as residents, businesses and landowners in our local authority area. Our specific and general consultees are detailed in the table below.

Specific Consultation Bodies	General Consultation Bodies and other interested groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjoining Local Planning Authorities and Councils as set out in Appendix A • East Sussex County Council; • Parish and Town Councils (within and adjoining the plan area); • The Police and Crime Commissioners; • The Coal Authority; • The Environment Agency; • Historic England (Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England); • Marine Management Organisation; • Natural England; • Network Rail Infrastructure Limited; • Highways England; • Relevant telecommunications companies; • Relevant Clinical Commissioning Group(s); • NHS Commissioning Board; • Relevant electricity and gas companies / operators; • Relevant water and sewerage companies; and • The Homes and Communities Agency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Conservation / countryside bodies; • Environmental groups; • Infrastructure and service providers; • Interest and amenity groups; • Resident's Associations; • Property Trade and business associations; • Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups; • Learning agencies; • Recreation bodies; • Local Nature Partnership; • Disabled groups; • Black Asian Minority Ethnic/gender/age/sexual orientation/disability and those with caring responsibilities groups • Residents; • Local businesses; • Landowners; • Religious groups and churches; • Voluntary bodies; and • Other miscellaneous bodies.

How will we engage with our Duty to Cooperate partners?

8.2 The Localism Act 2011 places a duty on the Council to cooperate with neighbouring local planning authorities, the relevant County Councils and other prescribed bodies on strategic cross boundary matters. Therefore the identification of, and planning for, strategic cross boundary matters and positively engaging on these matters to find workable solutions will be an essential element to our plan making. Capturing the outcomes of this engagement will be critical to achieving a successful local plan. Duty to cooperate partners and bodies are provided in the table below.

Local Authority Duty to Cooperate Partners	Other prescribed bodies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eastbourne Borough Council; • Rother District Council; • Tunbridge Wells Borough Council; • Tandridge District Council; • Mid Sussex District Council; • Sevenoaks District Council; • Lewes District Council; • Hastings Borough Council; • Brighton and Hove City Council; • South Downs National Park Authority; • East Sussex County Council; • West Sussex County Council; • Kent County Council; and • Surrey County Council. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Environment Agency; • the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England); • Natural England; • the Civil Aviation Authority; • the Homes and Communities Agency; • each clinical commissioning group established under section 14D of the National Health Service Act 2006; • the National Health Service Commissioning Board; • the Office of Rail Regulation; • the Highways Authority; • Highways England; • the Marine Management Organisation; and • Local Enterprise Partnerships.

8.3 It is important to ensure that the right people and organisations are involved in the process and at the right time. Key partnerships who will need to be involved / input into the process, at varying degrees, include the following:

- East Sussex Strategic Planning Members Group;
- East Sussex Local Plan Managers Group;
- Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership;
- Infrastructure Roadmap meetings;
- Team East Sussex and associated working groups including:
 - Developers East Sussex;
 - Culture East Sussex;
 - Skills East Sussex; and
 - Environment East Sussex.
- Local Strategic Partnership;
- Transport for South East;
- Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Partnership;
- Ashdown Forest Working Group;
- Ashdown Forest air quality officer working group;
- High Weald Officer Steering Group; and
- Local Nature Partnership.

8.4 The first step toward meeting the Duty to Cooperate is identifying the strategic matters that need to be addressed in collaboration with relevant duty to cooperate partners. The NPPF identify what these are in broad terms and include:

- a) housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;

- b) infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
- c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and
- d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.

8.5 As part of the duty to cooperate process, authorities are required to produce statements of common ground, which is a written record of progress made by strategic policy-making authorities during the process of planning for strategic cross-boundary matters. The purpose is to document where cooperation is and is not happening. The statements can then be used at examination to demonstrate that the plan is deliverable, is based on effective joint working and that the duty to cooperate has been complied with. The approach for developing statements of common ground is set out in national policy and as these are developed we will make these publicly available throughout the plan-making process to provide transparency.

8.6 The Council will meet its requirements under the duty to cooperate through regular engagement with its partner local authorities. Given the importance of the duty to cooperate to the success of the Local Plan at examination, Officers and Members have already held a number of meetings with strategic partners to help shape this plan and a shared approach to the duty to cooperate moving forward.

8.7 Officer meetings with each partner, will reflect the extent of cross boundary issues, holding meetings with those strategic partner local authorities at a minimum, of every three months. Once a year (minimum) a meeting will also involve both officers and Planning Policy Portfolio Holders of both authorities.

8.8 Statements of common ground and, where deemed necessary, Memorandums of Understanding will be drafted by officers in collaboration with our partners. The format for these statements is set out in national planning guidance. At the time of writing, early draft Statements of Common Ground are in preparation with strategic partners and on key topic areas. These will continue to evolve throughout the process.

8.9 We are also working with the Planning Advisory Service to gain advice as part of a local authority forum, which includes our neighbouring authorities. This will further assist the Council to meet its duty.

8.10 It will be essential throughout the plan making process to work closely with East Sussex County Council and other prescribed bodies and infrastructure partners such as South East Water and Southern Water, to test and model options and to ensure that infrastructure can be provided to support the strategy. This will be achieved through meeting at appropriate times during the process. Officers, where it would be helpful, will work with infrastructure providers to draft statements of common ground to aid local plan production, and at examination to aid demonstrating plan deliverability.

8.11 There are also opportunities to work closely with partners in relation to joint or shared evidence bases. We have undertaken early work with partners to explore this and we have already instigated joint working with our East Sussex partners on a Gypsy and Traveller study and transport modelling. We are also working with Eastbourne Borough Council on a flood modelling project, a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and also an Economic Needs Assessment in recognition of the close links between our administrative boundaries. There may be further opportunities to work jointly with our partners as we progress. However, where joint evidence bases are not undertaken then evidence base requirements and its outputs will be discussed with partners as information emerges.

8.12 More information on Duty to Cooperate matters is provided in our latest Authority Monitoring Report⁷.

How will we engage with our Town and Parish Councils?

8.13 As local representatives of Wealden's communities, our Town and Parish Councils have a vital role to play in helping to develop our Local Plan. Town and Parish Councillors have detailed knowledge of their areas and are aware of any issues facing their communities at a local level. For these reasons, we have developed our engagement strategy to ensure that our Town and Parish Councils have a key role in helping us develop and progress our Local Plan.

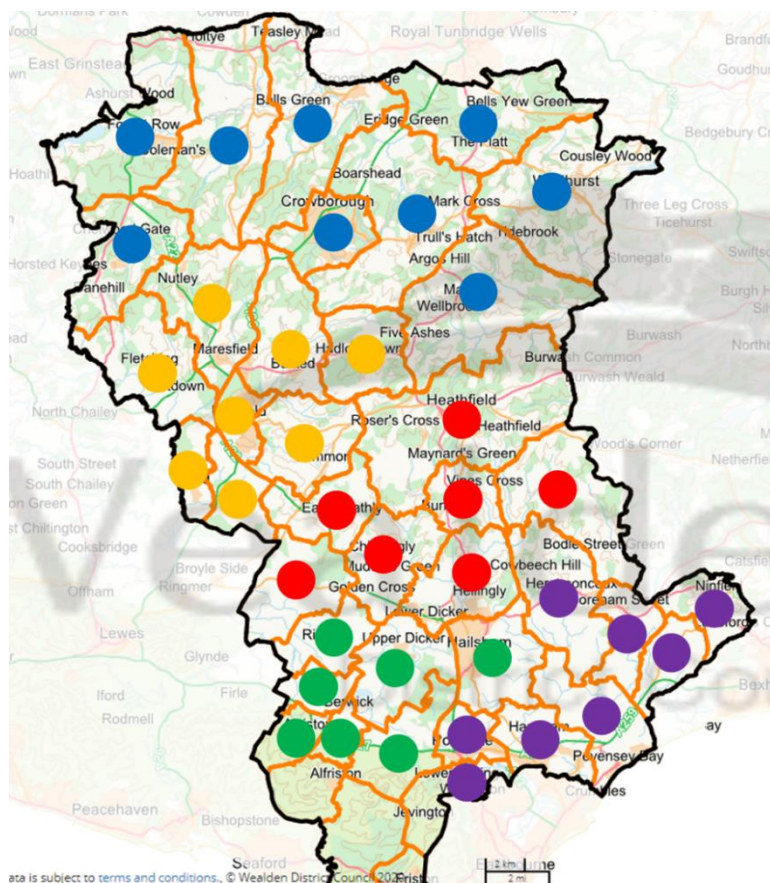
8.14 We already hold Parish Panel meetings every three months. These meetings are open to all of our Parish and Town Councils and the Parish and Town Clerks. This has in the past been the forum where we have discussed Local Plan issues and options, issues specific to each Town and Parish Council as well as providing an opportunity for our Town and Parish Councils to ask any questions.

8.15 For this Local Plan, we are introducing a new forum. This will be in addition to our existing Parish Panel rather than instead of it. The purpose of the meetings will be to provide a regular platform, where local issues can be discussed on a more regular basis.

8.16 Taking into account that we are a large District with 42 different Towns and Parish Councils, we have formed five Parish clusters so that we can ensure regular dialogue but a scale that will enable good discussion as well as a focus on the local issues. The five clusters have been defined geographically to ensure that there will be diversity of issues to discuss, for example, the clusters include a mix of both rural and more urban areas. Meetings will be attended by a representative from each Town or Parish Council. Currently these meetings will be virtual, however, it is hoped that at some point in the future it will be possible to hold these meetings face-to-face, depending on the requirement for social distancing as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

8.17 The map and table below sets out how these 'Parish Clusters' will be organised.

⁷ [Authority Monitoring Report](#) 2018/2019



N.B Please note that the area of Wealden District within the South Downs National Park is not included because the South Downs National Park Authority is responsible for planning policy in those areas.

North	Central West	Central East	South West	South East
Crowborough	Uckfield	Heathfield & Waldron	Hailsham	Polegate
Forest Row	Maresfield	Horam	Arlington	Willingdon & Jevington
Danehill	Fletching	Chiddingly	Chalvington & Ripe	Westham
Hartfield	Isfield	East Hoathly with Halland	Selmeston	Pevensey
Withyham	Little Horsted	Hellingly	Alciston	Herstmonceux
Frant	Framfield	Laughton	Long Man	Wartling
Wadhurst	Hadlow Down	Warbleton	Berwick	Hooe
Rotherfield	Buxted			Ninfield
Mayfield & Five Ashes				

How will we engage with our District Councillors?

8.18 Our District Councillors are one of our principal assets. Many District Councillors are also Town or Parish Councillors. This provides an unparalleled opportunity to understand issues on the ground, at the same time as recognising these issues within the wider context of the District. Engagement throughout the

Local Plan process will take place with our District Councillors through the existing Planning and Development Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG). Through the CAG we will share information, evidence as this becomes available and will discuss key Local Plan issues throughout Local Plan production. At a minimum, the Planning and Development CAG will meet every two months. As appropriate, extra ordinary meetings will also be arranged should there be key matters to discuss. The CAG will be attended by our district councillors and senior officers / planning officers, as appropriate, who are responsible for progressing and delivering the Local Plan.

How will we engage and work with our Neighbourhood Plan Groups?

8.19 The Localism Act (2011) introduced new powers that gave local communities the chance to create their own Neighbourhood Development Plans to set out planning policies to shape development in their neighbourhood areas. Before a neighbourhood plan can be adopted (or 'made'), it must first pass an independent examination and local referendum. Once adopted the neighbourhood plan becomes part of the Council's Development Plan and will then guide planning decisions in that neighbourhood area.

8.20 There are thirteen designated neighbourhood areas in total across the District and many neighbourhood plan groups are actively working towards a draft neighbourhood plan. The [Herstmonceux Neighbourhood Plan](#) is the only 'made' neighbourhood plan in the District but [Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan](#) and [Hellingly Neighbourhood Plan](#) have both passed examination and referenda are due to take place in May 2021.

8.21 It is important for the Council to consult and engage with our neighbourhood planning groups to ensure, as far as possible, that the emerging local plan and neighbourhood plans closely align. Neighbourhood plans must be in 'general conformity' with the strategic policies of the higher-level local plan. This is one of the key issues an independent examiner assesses through the neighbourhood plan examination process. It is therefore important that neighbourhood planning groups are aware of the emerging strategic policies in the Local Plan and how this may affect the policy approach they adopt in their emerging neighbourhood plans.

8.22 To address this, we will regularly meet and provide advice and assistance to neighbourhood planning groups who are developing draft neighbourhood plans and will advise them on the emerging local plan policy direction as this is developed. We will also discuss with neighbourhood planning groups what implications, if any, the emerging strategic policies of the Local Plan may have on their neighbourhood plan approach.

8.23 The Local Plan will be supported by a range of technical evidence that will be developed through the local plan process. When this becomes available, we will signpost relevant information to neighbourhood planning groups that may assist with the development and justification of their emerging neighbourhood plans.

8.24 We will also notify and invite each neighbourhood planning group to make comments at each consultation stage of the Local Plan so that the views of our neighbourhood planning groups are considered throughout the evolution of the Local

Plan. We will invite neighbourhood planning groups to attend consultation events planned at the draft Local Plan stage (regulation 18) and will engage with neighbourhood planning groups through other forums such as the Parish Panels and also through the five Local Plan Town and Parish forums.

How will we ensure that our Local Plan takes into account Council priorities and issues?

8.25 Although we are one Council, we have many different departments, for example, Housing, Waste, Development Management, Community and Regeneration, Environmental Health and our Corporate Policy team who deliver our climate change objectives amongst other roles. Officers in the Council have a wealth of experience and knowledge in their specific areas and beyond, including day-to-day experience of our District as well as a good grasp on issues from speaking with our communities and businesses as well as other Stakeholders in their line of work.

8.26 We consider that it will greatly benefit the Local Plan overall if we engage with our officers. To facilitate this we have set up a number of working groups around specific topics. The working groups will be attended by key officers and will meet either every 4 months or at key points in the process, as relevant to the specific topic. The working groups will be a forum where information and knowledge is shared and issues, challenges and options will be discussed in order to progress policy.

9. Consultation and engagement methods

9.1 There are a variety of ways in which our residents, businesses, stakeholders and groups can become involved in the preparation of the Local Plan. Our minimum requirements for consultation and engagement are provided in the Council's recently adopted SCI (July 2020). However, we want to engage with as wide a range and as many individuals and organisations with an interest in the future of Wealden as possible, to help shape the Local Plan.

9.2 We have worked with the Council's Equalities Officer to identify hard to reach groups and we have contacted these groups to ensure that we can engage with them. We are aware, that there may be other groups that we are not aware of. If you are part of a group that would like to be involved in the production of our Local Plan you can sign up to be kept informed about our consultations by registering at Wealden's [consultation portal](#).

9.3 In order to achieve engage with as many people and organisations as possible, we must use a range of methods for consultation and engagement as well as providing easy ways for our communities and stakeholders to respond.

Publicising our consultations

9.4 In order to ensure that the Local Plan reaches our residents, businesses, stakeholders and organisations we will publicise our consultation events in a number of ways. These are detailed in the below sections.

Consultation portal

9.5 We have a large consultation portal database of thousands of individuals and organisations that have expressed an interest in being consulted on planning policy matters in Wealden. This database covers a wide range of interests from local residents, businesses, town and parish councils, neighbouring local authorities, relevant county councils, utility providers, health providers, specialist organisations, advocacy groups and residents' associations and community groups amongst many others. This database includes those we have a legal duty to consult with but includes a much wider group of residents, businesses and organisations who wish to be involved in the Local Plan process.

9.6 At the start of each consultation stage, we will contact those individuals and organisations on our database to make them aware that a Local Plan consultation has started. We will also explain how to respond and make comments to our consultation. Anyone is free to join our consultation portal database. You can do so by registering at Wealden's [consultation portal](#).

Social Media

9.7 At each stage of consultation the Council will publicise the start of the public consultation period on the Council's [Facebook page](#) and via our [twitter](#) feed. We will also publicise the consultation at various stages during the consultation period. The Council will provide a link directing people to the consultation portal where they can view the consultation documents and provide comments.

Website

9.8 At each stage of consultation, the Council will publicise the public consultation on our website and direct people to our online consultation portal where they can view the consultation documents and make comments.

My Alerts

9.9 The Council will also publicise our consultations through the Council's 'my alerts' system. This is a weekly email bulletin that provides news and information about Council services and local events, which also covers planning issues in the district. You can subscribe to the Council's 'My Alerts' by filling in a simple form [My Alerts - Subscribe](#).

10. Engagement methods at each stage of consultation

10.1 The requirements for engagement and consultation for Local Plans are set out in legislation. We must notify specific organisations and individuals of the consultation and make the documents available on our website and in hard copy at our offices and other locations (such as local libraries) where we are able to, taking into account any restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We will meet our requirements as set out in our SCI.

10.2 Within our SCI we set out some potential additional methods of engagement in addition to the methods we are legally required to undertake in order to engage in a more proactive way. For all of the Local Plan stages we will publicise the consultation on our website and through social media channels including the ‘My Alerts’ system.

Early Consultation: Direction of Travel

10.3 At our initial Direction of Travel consultation stage we are interested in gaining as many views as possible in relation to the scope of our local plan. We have considered that the best way to achieve this is by asking a number of questions on a number of different planning topics via our consultation portal.

10.4 Our Direction of Travel consultation is a very early consultation and we really do not have all of the answers in relation to our spatial strategy and our policies at this preliminary stage. At this initial stage in plan-making, we are open to learning about what is important to our residents, businesses and stakeholders and how they would like to see Wealden in 15-20 years’ time. Once we understand this and gain the necessary information through evidence gathering, we will then progress work on our draft Local Plan.

Draft Local Plan

10.5 It is at the Draft Local Plan stage where the emerging spatial strategy and detailed policies will be published. At this stage, in addition to the measures above, we will employ additional engagement activities.

Public Consultation events

10.6 Public consultation events will be dependent on whether we are allowed to hold such events due to the Covid 19 pandemic. However, if it is safe for our communities and stakeholders we intend to hold a series of public consultation events at the beginning of the Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) consultation period.

10.7 We will hold these events across the District in accessible venues. We want to hold events across the District so everyone has the opportunity to attend an event close to them. However, we also recognise that the Local Plan will affect some of our communities more than others. It is therefore important we focus specific events in areas where a larger quantum of growth and change is envisaged.

10.8 Due to being in an early stage of plan-making we are unable to define the locations of where we may hold consultation events at this time. However, we can confirm that we will hold these events at different days and times of the week including some evenings and weekends to ensure we have provided the best opportunity for our communities to attend including those who work full time.

Online engagement Methods

10.9 At the Draft local plan stage, we will also use additional online methods for public consultation events. This will also be a necessity should continuing social distancing be required due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There are great benefits in using technology as an engagement method because it will allow us to reach wider audiences. Information about our consultation and draft Local Plan can be accessible via phones and computers and people can access this at any time of the day.

10.10 The options that we have include the following:

- Virtual exhibitions: This is where we can present the exact information that we would present live but make this available on the internet so that people can visit the exhibition at any time and from anywhere;
- Digital consultations: This is where we can ask a set of questions or undertake a poll either during our main Local Plan consultation events (Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan) or where we consider it will be useful to undertake any additional consultation. For example, we may wish to undertake a focused consultation on a specific planning topic or in relation to a specific town or village in our district, for example. A digital consultation or a poll would allow us to do this;
- Video conferencing: This is where we can use video conferencing software to host an event or a workshop. This could be a public event, where people can request attendance, an event for specific stakeholders or indeed an event in relation to specific planning topics or for specific towns or villages. The time and date for a video conference would be set, however, we would be able to make this available for viewing after the event also.
- Video blog / video log (Vlog): This is where we can create short to medium length videos to provide explanations on certain planning topics or to introduce our consultation. The Vlog can also include visuals such as pictures, graphics and charts, for example. A Vlog can be made available so that it can viewed at any time.

10.11 We hope that using these methods might make attending our events easier and could help to reach groups that have traditionally be hard for us to reach such as younger residents and those that are in full time work.

Proposed Submission Local Plan

10.12 The Proposed Submission Local Plan is the version of the Local Plan that we intend to submit to the Planning Inspector. At this stage in plan-making representations are invited as to whether our communities and stakeholders consider the plan to be legally compliant, whether we have met our Duty to Cooperate and whether the plan is sound. When responses are received these are provided to the Planning Inspector who will examine our plan. At this stage, we will meet our SCI requirements for consultation including the additional methods i.e. publicise on our website, social media and the Council's My Alerts system.

11. Local Plan Engagement Strategy

Stage of Plan Preparation	Methods of consultation and engagement
<p>Evidence Gathering (including SHELAA Call for Sites)</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss evidence base needs with key Council officers; • Commission joint evidence base documents with our duty to cooperate partners where appropriate (e.g. Employment Needs assessment and Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment). • Issue a call for sites, as part of the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. • Hold meetings and workshops with key stakeholders and duty to cooperate bodies to involve them in the preparation of key evidence base documents (Housing and Employment and others as appropriate). • Present key evidence base outcomes and discuss key issues with the Planning and Development CAG and Officer Working Group. • Discuss key evidence base outcomes with Neighbourhood Plan Groups. • Publish evidence base documents on our website as they become available.
<p>Direction of Travel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold topic based workshops with key Council officers to discuss and understand issues and opportunities; • Hold sessions with members of the Planning and Development CAG. • Minimum six week consultation period. • Consultation documents to be made available on the Council's website. • Send emails / letters informing consultees of consultation and how to respond. • Publicise on the Council's website, Facebook and Twitter. • Publicise on the Council's My Alerts system.

Preparation of the Draft Local Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold regular meetings with Officer working group, Planning and Development CAG, Town and Parish Council's and Senior Leadership Team. • Hold regular meetings with Duty to Cooperate partners and develop Statements of Common Ground; • Hold regular meetings with infrastructure providers. • Hold specific sessions with hard to reach groups. • Hold meetings with relevant landowners and agents. • Issue an online newsletter every six months.
Draft Local Plan Regulation 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum six week consultation period. • Consultation documents to be made available on the Council's website. • Send emails / letters informing consultees of consultation and how to respond. • Publicise on the Council's website, Facebook and Twitter. • Publicise on the Council's My Alerts system. • Make consultation documents available for inspection at the Council's office at a minimum, if possible (subject to Covid 19 pandemic). • Public consultation event(s) held in accessible locations, if possible (subject to Covid 19 pandemic). • Public consultation using online consultation methods.
Preparation of Proposed Submission Local Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold meetings with Officer working groups, Planning and Development CAG and Senior Leadership Team. • Hold meetings with Duty to Cooperate partners. • Hold meetings with infrastructure partners. • Hold meetings with relevant landowners and agents. • Engage with consultants to update evidence base as required.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue an online newsletter at appropriate times.
Draft Proposed Submission Local Plan Regulation 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum six week consultation period. • Evidence base and Draft Proposed Submission Local Plan to be made available on the Council's website. • Send emails / letters informing consultees of consultation and how to respond. • Publicise on the Council's website, Facebook page and Twitter. • Publicise on the Council's My Alerts system. • Make consultation documents available for inspection at the Council's office at a minimum, if possible (subject to Covid 19 pandemic).
Submission to Secretary of State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council to appoint an independent programme officer that will be responsible for assisting the Inspector with the smooth running of the Examination. This will involve keeping people informed about the forthcoming examination. • Submit Local Plan and associated documents including Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulations Assessment and the Statement of Consultation to the Secretary of State. • All documents to be made publicly available. • Inform general consultation bodies and anyone requesting notification of submission that documents are available for inspection. • Issue a Public Notice / Statement.
Examination	<p>Working with the programme officer prior to the examination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue a Public Notice / Statement. • Publish details on the Council's website. • Notify people who made a representation of the time and place

	<p>of examination and the name of the person appointed to hold the examination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish all examination details including agendas, and statements on the Council's website.
Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make adopted documents, adoption statement and the sustainability appraisal available for inspection and available on the Council's website. • Inform all consultees of adoption. • Send the adoption statement to anyone who requested to be notified of adoption. • Send the adoption statement and document to the Secretary of State.

12. How to comment on our consultation documents?

12.1 The best way to access consultation documents and leave comments during the consultation period is to do so online via our [consultation portal](#). You will need to register to make comments, which is simple and straightforward to do. You can view all the consultation documents and submit comments electronically. This is our preferred means of receiving comments as it reduces the administrative burden on the Council.

12.2 However, if you do not have access to the internet we will ensure that you can also take part in the consultation. We will set out these arrangements at the time of each consultation stage. We are unable to set this out now because we will need to consider our options taking into account any restrictions that may be in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

13. What are we looking to find out through our consultations?

13.1 The level of detail in the responses we are hoping to receive is dependent on what stage of the process we are at. The initial Direction of Travel document is a very high level document that seeks to capture the key issues that the Local Plan might address. The consultation is a chance to comment on the issues raised, suggest areas that have been missed and to comment on possible policy solutions.

13.2 The next stage of consultation is the Draft Local Plan Stage. This is a key consultation stage where we are looking for comments on the detail of the draft

document. Are the policies and sites allocated the right approach and what amendments can we make to improve the document? Are there any key issues with our spatial strategy and the policies we have set out? Following the consultation there will still be scope at this stage to make changes to the document and to seek additional information to support the spatial strategy and / or its policies.

13.3 The 'Publication' stage consultation is a more technical consultation. As detailed above, we ask for representations at this stage in relation to legal compliance, Duty to Cooperate and soundness⁸. Any representations made are considered by a Planning Inspector.

14. Considering comments / feedback and decision making

14.1 At the end of each consultation period all comments received will be added to our consultation database which is publicly available. Once we have processed a response a confirmation email/letter will be sent to the person who submitted the response. Responses will be processed as soon as we are able. Where responses are submitted towards the end of our consultation period this may mean we need to process them after the consultation has closed, especially where we receive a high volume of responses.

14.2 All comments received will be considered and analysed. A summary of all comments, responses and changes that we propose to the Local Plan (where relevant) will be produced in a report which will be presented to the Planning and Development CAG and Full Council and will therefore be agreed by our Council Members before we move onto the next stage in the plan making process. Council decisions on the Local Plan will be made publicly available on the Council's website.

14.3 Key decisions will need to be taken by the Council at the following stages in the Local Plan process:

- Evidence gathering: Officers will update the Planning and Development CAG, the Council's Leadership Team and Officer working group on the preparation of the evidence base for the Local Plan. The evidence base does not require any key decisions to be made.
- Direction of Travel consultation: The Direction of Travel consultation was agreed to be progressed by the Local Plan Sub-Committee on 13th November 2020.
- Preparation of Local Plan: Officers will involve the Planning and Development CAG and Senior Leadership Team in the preparation of the Local Plan. The progression of the Local Plan does not require any key decisions to be made.
- Regulation 18 Consultation on the Draft Local Plan: Officers will seek approval from the Council's Planning and Development CAG, Local Plan Sub-Committee and Portfolio Holder for Planning prior to the consultation.

⁸ The tests of soundness are set out in paragraph 35 of the [NPPE](#)

- Regulation 19 Consultation on the Proposed Submission Local Plan: Officers will seek approval from the Council's Planning and Development CAG, Local Plan Sub Committee, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Full Council prior to the consultation.
- Submit Local Plan to the Secretary of State for Examination: Following the Regulation 19 consultation we will submit the Draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State along with all required documentation and representations received.
- Examination of Local Plan: An independent Planning Inspector will be appointed by the Secretary of State and will examine the Local Plan.
- Adoption of Local Plan: A decision will be made by Full Council as to whether the Local Plan will be adopted following receipt of the independent Planning Inspector's final report.

15. How to get in touch?

15.1 You can get in touch with the Planning Policy Team by emailing us at PlanningPolicy@wealden.gov.uk or submitting an [online query](#).

15.2 If you don't have access to the internet you can write to us at:
Planning Policy, Council Offices, Vicarage Lane, Hailsham, BN27 2AX,

Published by
Wealden District Council
Council Offices
Vicarage Lane
Hailsham
East Sussex BN27 2AX
Tel: 01323 443322
Fax: 01323 443333
e-mail: planningpolicy@wealden.gov.uk
Website: www.wealden.gov.uk