

Wealden
District Council

Interim Duty to Co-operate Topic Paper

February 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 As part of a local authority's plan preparation, legislation and national policy requires local authorities to cooperate and 'engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis on strategic cross-boundary matters with other local authorities, county councils and prescribed bodies when preparing a Local Plan. This is referred to as 'Duty to Cooperate'.

1.2 The government has recently published a written ministerial statement[1] around the Duty to Cooperate process. It states that under the current planning system for Local Plans that the government would remove the requirement to be examined under the duty to cooperate process. This has yet to be implemented at the time of writing and the statement notes that local planning authorities should continue to collaborate across their boundaries, including on unmet development needs from neighbouring areas, and expect Planning Inspectors to continue to examine plans in line with the policies in the NPPF on 'maintaining effective co-operation'. Therefore, the Council will continue its liaison with neighbouring authorities and statutory stakeholders on strategic planning matters.

1.3 This document is an interim statement of the work that Wealden District Council has undertaken so far as part of its plan-making process in respect of the Duty to Cooperate. It supports the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) which is being consulted on between Friday 6 February and Friday 20 March 2026. Given that the Duty to Cooperate is an ongoing process, the Council will continue to work with partners as the Plan progresses and we will update our position further at the Regulation 19 Local Plan stage.

1.4 At this stage it does not set out every meeting that has taken place with regards to the Duty to Cooperate but instead identifies the types of meeting that have been taking place and the key policy areas and outcomes so far that are being discussed.

Geography

1.5 Wealden District covers an area of 321 square miles. It is the 44th largest out of 317 local authorities in England, the second largest in the southeast region and the largest and most rural local authority in East Sussex. As Figure 1 illustrates, Wealden adjoins eight other local authorities including Tunbridge Wells, Rother, Eastbourne, Lewes, Mid-Sussex, Tandridge, Sevenoaks and the South Downs National Park (SDNP). In terms of County Council's, Wealden District is located within East Sussex, but it also borders West Sussex to the west, Kent to the north and Surrey to the far northwest.

1.6 Wealden District is part of three tiers of local government at present. East Sussex County Council provide public services in relation to county matters that includes Waste and Minerals Planning, waste management, social care, education and highways, amongst other matters. Wealden District Council covers matters relating to land-use planning, environmental health, waste collection and housing, amongst other matters. In addition, Parish/Town Councils deal with more localised issues.

[1] Written Ministerial Statement (WMS), Reforming Local Plan-Making, 27 November 2025

1.7 Wealden District Council is responsible for planning (both plan-making and development management) for 39 out of the 42 Town and Parish Council areas in the district. The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is responsible for planning in the Alfriston, Cuckmere Valley and the East Dean and Friston Parishes. There are several other parishes within Wealden District that are partly located within the SDNP. Each of our parishes, towns and villages are unique and special in their own way, each with their own communities, character, history and heritage.

1.8 There are a number of towns within the district, including Crowborough, Uckfield, Hailsham, Heathfield and Polegate. The district also comprises villages, hamlets and large areas of countryside. The north and south of the district adjoins the large settlements of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Eastbourne, respectively.

1.9 The district includes both High Weald and Low Weald landscapes and 53% of the district[2] falls within the High Weald National Landscape. The Pevensey Levels in the southeast of Wealden and the Low Weald are also important landscape areas, each with their own characteristics. The southwestern most part of the district falls within the SDNP.

1.10 The district contains many Heritage Assets with over 2,200 Listed Buildings, 33 Conservation Areas (excluding that part of the district which falls within the National Park), 105 Scheduled Monuments and 20 Registered Historic Parks and Gardens.

1.11 Around two thirds of the district is covered by the national landscape designation of the High Weald National Landscape (53%) and South Downs National Park (SDNP) (7%). Within the district, there are two areas of European and national importance in relation to ecological conservation at the Ashdown Forest and Pevensey Levels. Ashdown Forest is a European Site designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as well as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Pevensey Levels is a European Site (SAC) and is also recognised as a site of international importance (Ramsar Site), as well as a SSSI and National Nature Reserve (NNR). Both sites require specific consideration in relation to ecological impacts from development. In addition, there is a need to consider any likely significant effects from development proposed in the Wealden Local Plan on European Sites outside of the district.

[2] High Weald JAC (2024) High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2024-2029. Available at: https://highweald.org/document-library/aonb-management-plan/high-weald-aonb-management-plan-2024-2029/?layout=default

Figure 1: Map showing the 8 adjoining local authorities to Wealden District Council, including the South Downs National Park Authority



2. Legislation and National Policy Background

Legislation

2.1 The Localism Act 2011[3] introduced the requirement, or duty for local planning authorities (LPA's) to **cooperate and "engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis"** with other local authorities, county councils and prescribed bodies when preparing a development plan and other local development documents, on strategic matters.

2.2 For the purposes of the Duty to Cooperate, a strategic matter is defined as sustainable development, use of land or strategic infrastructure that has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas. There are several matters which can be considered strategic including those relating to housing, employment, retail, transport, infrastructure (including community facilities), environmental or nature conservation matters and water / flooding.

2.3 Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act) imposes a duty on local planning authorities to cooperate with other local planning authorities, county councils or other bodies/persons prescribed in Regulation 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The prescribed bodies are:

(a) the Environment Agency;

(b) Historic England;

(c) Natural England;

(d) the Mayor of London;

(e) the Civil Aviation Authority;

(f) the Homes and Communities Agency;

(g) each Primary Care Trust established under section 18 of the National Health Service Act 2006 or continued in existence by virtue of that section;

(h) the Office of Rail Regulation(3);

(i) Transport for London(4);

(j) each Integrated Transport Authority(5);

(k) each highway authority within the meaning of section 1 of the Highways Act 1980; and

(l) the Marine Management Organisation.

[3] Localism Act 2011. Available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents?section-110-1

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024)

2.4 The NPPF[4] states at paragraph 25 that:

"strategic policy-making authorities should collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which they need to address in their plans. They should also engage with their local communities and relevant bodies including Local Nature Partnerships, the Marine Management Organisation, county councils, infrastructure providers, elected Mayors and combined authorities (in cases where Mayors or combined authorities do not have plan-making powers)".

2.5 Paragraph 26 of the NPPF explains that effective and on-going joint working between strategic policy-making authorities and relevant bodies is integral to the production of a positively prepared and justified strategy. Joint working can help to determine where additional infrastructure is necessary and ascertain unmet need.

2.6 Paragraph 28 of the NPPF then explains that strategic policy-making authorities

"should prepare and maintain one or more statements of common ground, documenting the cross-boundary matters being addressed and progress in cooperating to address these. These should be produced using the approach set out in national planning guidance and be made publicly available throughout the plan-making process to provide transparency".

2.7 The NPPF at paragraph 36 sets out the 'tests of soundness' used to assess Local Plans at examination. This states that:

Plans are 'sound' if they are:

a) ***Positively prepared*** *– providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs[5]; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;*

b) ***Justified*** *– an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;*

c) ***Effective*** *– deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and*

d) ***Consistent with national policy*** *– enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant".*

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

2.8 The PPG provides further guidance on the maintaining effective cooperation with other bodies and explains that a statement of common ground forms part of the evidence required to demonstrate that LPA's have complied with the duty to cooperate and sets out what information they should contain.

[4] National Planning Policy Framework (publishing.service.gov.uk)
[5] Where this relates to housing, such needs should be assessed using a clear and justified method, as set out in paragraph 62 of the NPPF.

2.9 The PPG also sets out what activities are expected to be documented when in the process of addressing strategic cross-boundary matters whilst cooperating. This includes (but is not limited to):

- working together at the outset of plan-making to identify cross-boundary matters which will need addressing;
- producing or commissioning joint research and evidence to address cross-boundary matters;
- assessing impacts of emerging policies; and
- preparing joint, or agreeing, strategic policies affecting more than one authority area to ensure development is coordinated, (such as the distribution of unmet needs or policies relating to county matters).

These activities will need to be tailored to address local circumstances[6].

2.10 The PPG states that strategic policy-making authorities should explore all options for addressing strategic matters within their planning area, unless they are able to show that this would contradict policies that constrain development as set out in the NPPF. If they are unable to do so they should make every effort to secure the necessary cooperation in strategic cross boundary matters before their plans are submitted for examination.

2.11 The PPG explains that Inspectors will expect to see that strategic plan-making authorities have addressed key strategic matters through effective joint working. The duty to cooperate is not a duty to agree and where an authority demonstrates it has done all it can to deal with matters but has been unable to reach an agreement, this should not prevent the authority from submitting a plan for examination. However, 'the authority will need to submit comprehensive and robust evidence of the efforts it has made to cooperate, and any outcomes achieved; this will be thoroughly tested at the plan examination'.

[6] Paragraph 015 Reference ID:61-015-20190315 of the PPG

3. Wealden District Council's Development Plan

The Current Wealden Development Plan

3.1 The current development plan for Wealden District consists of

- the Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan (February 2013)[7];
- the Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan[8] (May 2016);
- 'saved' policies from the Wealden Local Plan[9] (1998);
- East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan[10] (February 2013);
- East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Sites Plan[11] (February 2017); and
- East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan Review – Revised Policies[12] (October 2024).

New Wealden Local Plan

3.2 Wealden District Council is preparing a new Local Plan. The Plan will be the key planning document for the district, excluding the area covered by the SDNPA. The SDNP has planning powers for its own area. Once adopted, the Local Plan will form part of the Development Plan for the district, replacing all existing local plan policies.

3.3 The Local Plan will determine the overall strategy for future development across the district, including the location of both residential and employment development to address housing and employment needs. The Plan will seek to allocate sufficient land in appropriate locations to meet as much of its needs as it is possible, as well as provide both strategic and non-strategic policies that will guide development across the district contributing to social, environmental and economic (sustainability) goals. The Plan is envisaged to run to 2042.

3.4 The Council adopted an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS)[13] in January 2026 and is consulting on a 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) between 6 February and 20 March 2026. The Council will then proceed to the

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[7] Wealden District Council (adopted February 2013) Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan. Available at www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Adopted_Core_Strategy_2013_for_web.pdf

[8] Wealden District Council (adopted May 2016) Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan. Available at: www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/AHDLP_Adopted_May_2016.pdf

[9] Wealden District Council (N.D.G) Wealden Local Plan Index of Saved Policies. Available at: www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Index_of_Saved_Policies.pdf

[10] East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan (adopted February 2013). Available at: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/planning/waste-minerals-plans-monitoring-reports

[11] East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Sites Plan (adopted February 2017). Available at: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/planning/waste-minerals-plans-monitoring-reports

[12] East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan Review – Revised Policies (adopted October 2024). Available at: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/planning/waste-minerals-plans-monitoring-reports

[13] Local Development Scheme (LDS), January 2026. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-policy-documents/local-development-scheme/

Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan later this year in line with the LDS and to submit the Local Plan to Examination in Public (EiP) by the end of the calendar year.

Direction of Travel Consultation (November 2020)

3.5 The first consultation on the draft Wealden Local Plan was the Direction of Travel document, which provided an opportunity for us to hear the views of our communities, partner organisations and stakeholders on a range of important topic areas as to how the district should address the issues and challenges that it faces, accommodate growth and to help us define a vision for our district. We undertook an eight-week early Regulation 18 Direction of Travel consultation[14] in line with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

3.6 The Direction of Travel Consultation took place between 23 November 2020 and 18 January 2021 and was the first stage in the new Local Plan engagement process with residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

3.7 The Council received 1,702 responses from 304 individuals/organisations. A summary of responses from local authority partners, statutory consultees and other relevant organisations has been produced[15]. Parish and Town Councils within Wealden were also consulted, and a summary produced[16]. The Consultation Summary Report was reported to the Local Plan Sub-Committee on 11 March 2021[17]. All the responses received by the Council have been considered and were taken into account in the formulation of the draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) published in March 2024.

Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024)

3.8 Following on from the 'Direction of Travel' consultation, in March 2024, Wealden District Council published a draft local plan (known as Regulation 18) that set out the Council's draft policies and growth strategy for the plan period. It provided an early opportunity for our communities, businesses, landowners, developers, partners, and stakeholders to 'have a say' and comment on the draft Local Plan before it was considered further. The draft Local Plan was subject to consultation between the 15 March 2024 and the 10 May 2024.

3.9 The Council received 12,210 representations from 1,516 individuals/organisations. A summary of responses from local authority partners, statutory consultees and other relevant organisations has been produced[18]. The Consultation Summary Report was

[14] Wealden District Council Direction of Travel Consultation, November 2020. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/direction-of-travel-consultation/
[15] Appendix B - Summary of Responses from LPAs, Statutory Consultees and other relevant organisations. Available at: https://council.wealden.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=534&MId=5057&Ver=4
[16] Appendix C – Town and Parish Council responses. Available at: https://council.wealden.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=534&MId=5057&Ver=4
[17] Wealden District Council (11 March 2021) Report to Local Plan Sub-Committee. Available at: https://council.wealden.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=534&MId=5057&Ver=4
[18] Appendix A – Summary of Main Issues to the Draft Regulation 18 Local Plan. Available at: https://council.wealden.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=534&MId=5877

reported to the Local Plan Sub-Committee on 5 March 2025[19]. The responses received by the Council have been considered and were taken into account in the formulation of the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) published in February 2026, where relevant to the policies considered in this version of the Local Plan.

Adopted Neighbourhood Plans

3.10 Neighbourhood Plans were introduced under the Localism Act 2011. They provide communities with a direct way of shaping development in their areas. For example, they can identify the location of new development as well as the type of residential development needed. There are currently seven adopted Neighbourhood Plans in Wealden District. This includes Hailsham, Hellingly and Herstmonceux, Wadhurst, Ninfield, East Hoathly with Halland and Horam[20].

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

3.11 Wealden have updated their Statement of Community Involvement[21] (SCI) which details who will be consulted on the Local Plan (and also on Supplementary Planning Documents, Community Infrastructure Levy, Neighbourhood Plans, Development Management) and the proposed consultation methods to be used. The Council consulted on a draft SCI between 4 July and 29 August 2025 and it was adopted on 19 November 2025.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

3.12 The SA Scoping Report is the first stage in the SA process and considers the context and scope of an SA for the new local plan and establishes an assessment process to ensure that the options considered for the policies and site allocations are assessed against suitable sustainability objectives.

3.13 The Council produced and consulted on an SA Scoping Report in 2020/2021 alongside our Direction of Travel Consultation. The Scoping Report was first consulted on for a period of five-weeks (8 July 2020 to 12 August 2020) with the three statutory consultation bodies (Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England), as well as our neighbouring local planning authorities; the Sussex Local Nature Partnership; Sussex Wildlife Trust; High Weald AONB Unit and the Local Highways Authority. A number of comments were received from all parties consulted and these were incorporated as appropriate into the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report.

3.14 Given the consideration of new and emerging evidence, legislation and policy changes since this time, the Council consulted on an updated SA Scoping Report from 26 June to 7 August 2023. This included consulting again with the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England, neighbouring authorities, local

[19] Wealden District Council (5 March 2025) Report to Local Plan Sub-Committee. Available at: https://council.wealden.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=534&MId=5877
[20] Wealden Neighbourhood Plan Webpage www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning/
[21] Wealden District Council Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), November 2025. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-policy-documents/statement-of-community-involvement/

communities and other interested parties. A summary of the responses received can be found on the Council's website[22].

3.15 The Council has considered all consultation responses received and has updated and published the SA Scoping report accordingly[23]. Since then, the Council has published its accompanying SA for the draft Wealden Local Plan (March 2024)[24] and the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026).

[22] Wealden Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, Appendix D – SA Scoping Report Consultation Responses, January 2024. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Appendices-For-Website-January-2024-V2.pdf
[23] Wealden Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, January 2024. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Wealden-Scoping-Report-January-2024.pdf
[24] Initial Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for the draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18), March 2024. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/wealden-local-plan/draft-sustainability-appraisal-scoping-report-consultation/

4. Meeting The Duty to Cooperate

Forms of Engagement

4.1 The Council has sought to actively and constructively engage with county councils, neighbouring local authorities and the prescribed bodies, as well as other bodies, on an ongoing basis, in the following ways:

- Regular and ongoing meetings and discussions to agree and discuss a way forward in respect of strategic cross boundary matters.
- The production of joint evidence base documents with other local authorities.
- Responding to Local Plan consultations and evidence base methodologies and presentations of other authorities. We have also invited them to respond to our Local Plan / SA consultations and evidence base methodologies and presentations.
- Membership of, and meetings/engagement with, other strategic planning/working groups, including those relating to planning in general as well as specialist issues such as nature, the environment and health and wellbeing.
- Drafting and agreement of individual Statements of Common Ground with adjoining authorities.
- Contributing to and agreeing Statements of Common Ground and Memorandums of Understanding.
- Responding to requests to/from neighbouring authorities in meeting any unmet housing and employment need.
- Undertaking an independent peer review (Planning Advisory Service) in respect of the preparation of the Local Plan and related strategic cross boundary activities.
- The exchange of ideas and collaboration to help provide direction on evidence base study specifications including those relating to joint working as well as working on similar topic areas.
- Subject specific meetings with appropriate bodies to discuss particular issues.
- Responding to consultations from other bodies/organisations.

4.2 Further details of engagement in the plan-making process so far are set out in more detail below.

Summary of Cooperation and engagement between Local Authorities

4.3 WDC has been working with a number of authorities in identifying and working on strategic, cross boundary issues. These authorities include:

- Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC)
- Lewes District Council (LDC)
- Rother District Council (RDC)
- Sevenoaks District Council (SDC)

- South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)
- Tandridge District Council (TDC)
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC)
- Hastings Borough Council (HBC)
- Crawley Borough Council (CBC)
- Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC)

Summary of Duty to Cooperate engagement and outcomes with neighbouring authorities (and other relevant authorities)

4.4 This section sets out, on an authority-by-authority basis, the engagement with neighbouring authorities (and other relevant authorities).

Brighton and Hove City Council

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Plan Documents

- Brighton & Hove City Plan – Part One (adopted March 2016)[25]
- Brighton & Hove City Plan – Part Two (adopted October 2022)[26]
- Shoreham Harbour Joint Area Action Plan (adopted October 2019)[27]

New Local Plan

4.5 A new Local Plan for Brighton and Hove is currently being prepared by BHCC and is expected to replace Brighton & Hove City Plan – Parts One and Two. Policies will be revised to take into account changes in national policy, local priorities and other changes in circumstance. The adopted LDS for BHCC confirms that a Draft Plan and SA (Regulation 18) are to take place between July and September 2026, with the submission of the Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate in early 2028 and potential adoption in late 2028. Only an early-stage consultation has taken place so far.

Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

4.6 Neither a SoCG nor a MOU has yet been signed between either party. The local authorities do not neighbour each other and therefore there is no formal requirement to do so.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **Housing Market Area (HMA) and Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA)** – Uckfield (with Wealden District) and its surrounding areas are in a zone of transition in terms of its HMA and FEMA, but the town is considered more closely linked to the Sussex Coastal HMA and FEMA and specifically Lewes District.

[25] Brighton and Hove City Plan - Part One, March 2016. Available at: https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/city-plan-part-one
[26] Brighton and Hove City Plan – Part Two, October 2022. Available at: https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/planning/city-plan-part-two/download-city-plan-part-two
[27] Shoreham Harbour Joint Area Action Plan, October 2019. Available at: https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/migrated/article/inline/Shoreham%20Harbour%20Joint%20Area%20Action%20Plan%20(JAAP).pdf

Brighton and Hove is the main urban area that forms the Coastal HMA and FEMA. The percentage of Wealden's overall population considered within the Sussex Coastal HMA is approximately 19%. The boundaries to the FEMA are the same.

- **Ashdown Forest SAC –** BHCC and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution.

Formal Local Plan consultations

WDC Responses to BHCC Consultations

4.7 WDC has made no responses to BHCC consultations.

BHCC Responses to WDC Consultations

4.8 BHCC has made no responses to WDC consultations.

Crawley Borough Council

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Plan Documents

- Crawley Borough Local Plan 2023 – 2040 (adopted October 2024)[28]

New Local Plan

4.9 The adopted LDS for CBC confirms that a Review and Early Engagement consultation (Regulation 18) is to take place Mid-2027, with the submission of the Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate in the winter of 2028/29 and potential adoption in late 2029. No consultation has yet taken place on this draft Local Plan.

Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

4.10 Neither a SoCG nor a MOU has yet been signed between either party. The local authorities do not neighbour each other and therefore there is no formal requirement to do so.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **Housing Market Area (HMA) and Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA)** – The rural parts to the northwest of Wealden District around Forest Row and Ashdown Forest relate more closely to East Grinstead (in Mid Sussex) and more widely to the North West Sussex HMA (that also includes Crawley and Horsham). The percentage of Wealden's overall population considered to be within the North West Sussex HMA is approximately 6%. The boundaries to the FEMA are the same.
- **Housing and Employment Need** – CBC had formally requested via letter (dated 14 April 2023) that WDC consider the unmet development needs arising from Crawley Borough as part of its Regulation 19 Local Plan process for its now adopted Local Plan. WDC wrote back to CBC on this matter (June 2023) confirming that WDC would not be able to commit at this stage of its plan-making

[28] Crawley Borough Council (adopted October 2024) Crawley Borough Local Plan 2023-2040. Available at: https://crawley.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan/about-local-plan

process that it could deliver the suggested amount of unmet housing needs of CBC.

- **Ashdown Forest SAC –** CBC and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution.

Formal Local Plan consultations and engagement

WDC responses to CBC Consultations

4.11 Wealden have responded to a consultation from CBC and have provided a response to their request to meet their unmet housing needs:

- WDC responded to the CBC letter regarding unmet need of April 2023 (responded 20 June 2023).
- WDC responded to the Crawley Borough Local Plan (Regulation 19) stage (responded 20 June 2023).

CBC response to WDC Consultations

4.12 CBC has made no responses to WDC consultations.

Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC)

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Plan Documents

- 'Saved' policies from the Eastbourne Borough Local Plan (adopted in 2003)[29].
- Eastbourne Borough Core Strategy Local Plan[30] (adopted in February 2013)
- The Eastbourne Town Centre Local Plan[31] (adopted in November 2013)
- The Eastbourne Employment Land Local Plan[32] (adopted in November 2016).

New Local Plan

4.13 A new Local Plan for Eastbourne is currently in preparation by EBC and was expected to cover the period from 2022-2042. The LDS for EBC (2025-2028) was last updated in March 2025. The stages of preparation so far have included:

- A twelve-week early Regulation 18 consultation on the Direction of Travel: Issues and Options document, which concluded on 24th January 2020[33].
- A second Regulation 18 consultation on the 'Growth Strategy', setting out the level of housing and employment growth that could be accommodated in

[29] Eastbourne Borough Council (adopted 2003) Eastbourne Borough Plan 2001-2011. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/eastbourne-borough-plan
[30] Eastbourne Borough Council (adopted 20 February 2013) Eastbourne Core Strategy. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/eastbourne-core-strategy
[31] Eastbourne Borough Council (adopted November 2013) Eastbourne Town Centre Local Plan. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/eastbourne-town-centre-local-plan
[32] Eastbourne Borough Council (adopted November 2016) Eastbourne Employment Land Local Plan. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/article/1849/Eastbourne-Employment-Land-Local-Plan?p=11
[33] New Eastbourne Local Plan webpage. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/elp-2019-39

Eastbourne over the period to 2039 and where it may be located, which ran between 11 November 2022 and 20 January 2023[34].

4.14 WDC responded to both consultations. A draft Local Plan (under Regulation 18) is currently being prepared, and this is scheduled to be published for public consultation in February 2026.

Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

4.15 A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between EBC and WDC was signed in July 2021. The MoU identifies cross-boundary strategic planning issues, key principles of working together and methods of cooperation.

4.16 A SoCG has been drafted and updated as appropriate. The most recent version was signed by both authorities in July 2022. Discussions are ongoing between the two authorities. The SoCG will be updated in due course to align with key stages and discussions in the plan-making process.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **Housing Market Area (HMA) and Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA)** – The southern parts of Wealden (that includes Polegate, Willingdon, Stone Cross, Westham, Pevensey, Pevensey Bay and Hailsham) are part of established and recognised HMA and FEMA with EBC. The Council's worked jointly on their economic evidence base, including agreeing the FEMA between the two local authorities and the overlaps between the two local authorities.
- **Development on the Administrative Boundary between Eastbourne Borough and Wealden District** – EBC and WDC have agreed a protocol and set of principles for dealing with development on or close to border between Eastbourne and Wealden District.
- **Housing and Employment Need** – EBC has previously made a formal request (November 2021) for WDC to meet its 'unmet' housing need and employment floorspace need. At that time, Wealden was not able to confirm whether it could assist with that request, given it was in the early stages of producing its Wealden Local Plan and it was not known whether it could meet its own housing or employment needs. WDC is actively working with EBC to address this issue, if possible, but at the 'Focused' Regulation 18 stage of its Local Plan, it is now known that WDC cannot currently meet its own needs in this respect. Work will continue on this issue moving forward.
- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** – The Council's, alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (this is now in the process of being updated once more for the Regulation 19 stages of our respective Local Plans). It is known that EBC have no 'known' accommodation needs for Gypsies and Travellers, whilst WDC will aim to meet its own needs through its Local Plan.
- **Fluvial Flooding** – Fluvial flooding is a cross-boundary issue. WDC and EBC are both members of the Blue Heart Project covering south Wealden and all of Eastbourne, with a focus on reducing flood risk and improving flood alert

[34] New Eastbourne Local Plan webpage. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/elp-2019-39

systems. Both authorities have undertaken a joint evidence base (SFRA Level 1) on flooding within the wider region.

- **Ashdown Forest SAC** – EBC and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution.
- **South Downs National Park** - Both authorities are committed to continue working together in partnership, alongside the SDNPA, to deliver the aims and objectives of the National Park including to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
- **Infrastructure** - both authorities liaise on key cross boundary infrastructure matters highways, education, health, transport and water/flooding related infrastructure. Through the joint MoU, a protocol and set of principles for dealing with the delivery of infrastructure improvements for development was established and this has been reiterated within this SoCG. Along with other Local Authorities in East Sussex, both WDC and EBC are working with ESCC and National Highways to develop a Shared Transport Evidence Base (STEB) model and a County Wide Transport Model to assess Local Plan impacts across East Sussex.

Formal Local Plan consultations and engagement

<u>WDC responses to EBC Consultations</u>

4.17 Wealden have responded to a number of consultations from Eastbourne and have provided informal responses to early drafts of evidence-base documents:

- WDC responded to the consultation on the Eastbourne Direction of Travel: Issues and Options for the Eastbourne Local Plan 2018-2038, 1 November 2019 - 10 January 2020.
- WDC responded to an informal consultation on the EBC Land Availability Assessment Methodology and the report on the Assessment of Residential Densities in Eastbourne of September 2021 (responded 6 October 2021).
- WDC responded to the EBC letter regarding unmet need of 5 November 2021 (responded 21 December 2021).
- WDC responded to the formal consultation on EBC's Land Availability Assessment (LAA) Methodology (responded 7 March 2022).
- WDC responded to the Eastbourne Local Plan: Growth Strategy consultation (responded 18 January 2023).
- WDC responded to the Eastbourne Houses in Multiple Occupation Development Plan Document (DPD) (responded 26 September 2024).
- WDC responded to an informal consultation on the EBC Land Availability Assessment Methodology (responded 23 April 2025).

<u>EBC responses to WDC consultations</u>

4.18 Eastbourne have responded to a number of consultations from Wealden:

- EBC commented on the WDC Draft Housing Needs Assessment- Specification brief and were invited to a workshop to discuss the findings of Wealden's LHNA (July 2021).
- EBC provided comments on draft Economic Development Needs Assessment Brief (responded 22 July 2020).
- EBC responded to the WDC Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation, 8 July 2020 to 12 August 2020.
- EBC provided comments on the first draft of the project brief for the SFRA (August 2020).
- EBC responded to the WDC Direction of Travel Consultation, November 2020 to January 2021.
- EBC commented on a Draft Economic Study specification for the two administrative areas (responded February 2021).
- EBC responded on the joint Urban Capacity Study Brief prepared by WDC (responded 16 August 2021) explaining that they were doing the work in house and that a joint study was not required by them.
- EBC responded to Wealden District Council Local Plan (March 2024) Consultation.

Hastings Borough Council

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Development Plan

- Hastings Local Plan – The Hastings Planning Strategy 2011 – 2028 (adopted in February 2014)[35]
- Hastings Local Plan – Development Management Plan (adopted in September 2015)[36]

New Local Plan:

4.19 The latest LDS for HBC confirms that HBC is aiming to submit its new Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate in December 2026 with a potential adoption date of June 2028.

- An early engagement survey (non-statutory) for the new Hastings Borough Local Plan took place.
- A Regulation 18 consultation on the Hastings Borough Council Local Plan[37] took place in the Winter 2020/21 and ending on the 24 March 2021.

[35] Hastings Local Plan – The Hastings Planning Strategy 2011 -2028, February 2014. Available at: https://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/policy/adoptedlocalplan/strategy/
[36] Hastings Local Plan – Development Management Plan, September 2015. Available at: https://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/policy/adoptedlocalplan/dmp/
[37] Hastings Local Plan Regulation 18, March 2021. Available at: https://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/policy/new-local-plan/2021-consultation/

Most recent published Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

4.20 Neither a SoCG nor a MOU has yet been signed between either party. The local authorities do not neighbour each other and therefore there is no formal requirement to do so.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **Housing Market Area (HMA) and Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA)** – The small rural area of Wealden District around Ninfield and Hooe relates more closely to the Hastings and Rother HMA. The percentage of Wealden's overall population considered to overlap within the Hastings and Rother HMA is approximately 2%. The boundaries to the FEMA are the same.
- **Housing and Employment Need** – HBC has formally requested via letter (dated 3 November 2021) that WDC consider the unmet development needs arising from Hastings Borough following its Regulation 18 Local Plan process. WDC wrote back to HBC on this matter (29 November 2021) confirming that WDC would not be able to commit at this stage of its plan-making process that it could deliver the suggested amount of unmet housing needs of HBC. A similar request was made by HBC around unmet housing need in letters dated 19 March 2024 and 16 September 2025, where WDC confirmed it what not in a position to meet HBCs unmet housing need on 11 April 2024 and 26 September 2025.
- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** – The Council's, alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (this is now in the process of being updated once more for the Regulation 19 stages of our respective Local Plans). It is known that HBC have no 'known' accommodation needs for Gypsies and Travellers, whilst WDC will aim to meet its own needs through its Local Plan.

Formal Local Plan consultations and engagements

<u>WDC responses to HBC Consultations</u>

4.21 Wealden have responded to a consultation from HBC and have provided a response to their request to meet their unmet housing needs:

- WDC responded to the HBC letter regarding unmet need of November 2021 (responded 29 November 2021).
- WDC responded to the HBC letter regarding unmet need of March 2024 (responded 11 April 2024).
- WDC responded to the HBC letter regarding unmet need September 2025 (responded 26 September 2025).
- WDC responded to the Hastings Borough Local Plan (Regulation 18) stage (responded 17 March 2021).

<u>HBC response to WDC Consultations</u>

4.22 HBC has made no responses to WDC consultations.

Lewes District Council (LDC)

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Development Plan:

- Lewes District Local Plan Part 1: Joint Core Strategy 2010-2030[38] (adopted by LDC and the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) in May 2016).
- Lewes District Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies[39] (adopted by LDC in February 2020).
- Most of the policies contained within the Lewes District Local Plan (2003) have now been replaced by the policies of the latest adopted Local Plans, but there are several 'saved' policies that remain[40].

New Local Plan:

4.23 The Local Development Scheme[41] (LDS) for LDC confirms that LDC is aiming to submit its new Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate by Summer 2026 with examination in public in Autumn 2026. The Council has published the following:

- An Issues and Options document was consulted upon in summer/autumn 2021[42].
- A consultation on the document 'Towards a Local Plan spatial strategy and policies directions'[43] took place between 29 November 2023 and 19 February 2024.
- A consultation on the document 'Defining our policies and early site allocation proposals'[44] took place between 6 January 2025 and 28 February 2025.
- A consultation on the document 'A Spatial Strategy for Development and Site Allocations'[45] is taking place from 18 December 2025 to 28 February 2026.

Most recent published Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

4.24 A new SoCG is in preparation between the two authorities and discussions are ongoing.

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[38] Lewes District Council (adopted May 2016) Lewes District Local Plan Part 1. Joint Core Strategy 2010-2030. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/article/1832/Lewes-Core-Strategy-Local-Plan-Part-1

[39] Lewes District Council (adopted February 2020) Lewes District Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/article/1833/Lewes-Local-Plan-Part-2-Site-allocations-and-development-management-policies

[40] Lewes District Council (N.D.G.) Lewes District Local Plan 2003 Saved Policies. Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/lewes-local-plan-2003-saved-policies

[41] Lewes District Council (February 2025). Revised Local Development Scheme (LDS). Available at: www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/local-development-scheme

[42] Lewes District Local Plan- Issues and Options webpage. Available at: planningpolicyconsult.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/LDLP_IO/consultationHome

[43] Lewes District Council – Towards a Local Plan spatial strategy and policies direction. Available at: https://planningpolicyconsult.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/LDC_PO_2023/consultationHome

[44] Lewes District Council - Defining our policies and early site allocation proposals. Available at: https://planningpolicyconsult.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/connect.ti/LP_DefiningPolicies25

[45] Lewes District Council – A Spatial Strategy for Development and Site Allocations. Available at: https://planningpolicyconsult.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/LP_SpatialStrategyandSites

Key cross boundary issues:

- **HMA and FEMA** – Uckfield (with Wealden District) and its surrounding areas are in a zone of transition in terms of its HMA and FEMA but is considered more closely linked to the Sussex Coastal HMA and FEMA and specifically Lewes District. The percentage of Wealden's overall population considered within the Sussex Coastal HMA is approximately 19%. The boundaries to the FEMA are the same.
- **Housing and Employment Need** – LDC has formally requested via letter (dated 7 February 2024) that WDC consider the unmet development needs arising from Lewes District following its Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation. Officers from WDC attended a Duty to Cooperate meeting on 15 February 2024 to discuss the matter further and responded to that request, where WDC confirmed it would not be in a position to meet LDCs unmet housing need.
- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** – The Council's, alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (this is now in the process of being updated once more for the Regulation 19 stages of our respective Local Plans). The aim from both local authorities is to meet their own needs through their respective Local Plans.
- **South Downs National Park** - Both authorities are committed to continue working together in partnership, alongside the SDNPA, to deliver the aims and objectives of the National Park including to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
- **Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA –** LDC and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution and recreational pressure on the Ashdown Forest.
- **Infrastructure** – Both authorities liaise on key cross boundary infrastructure matters highways, education, health, transport and water/flooding related infrastructure. Along with other Local Authorities in East Sussex, both WDC and LDC are working with ESCC and National Highways to develop a Shared Transport Evidence Base (STEB) model and a County Wide Transport Model to assess Local Plan impacts across East Sussex. The Councils are also continuing to consider the safeguarding of the Uckfield/Lewes railway line.

Formal Local Plan consultations

<u>WDC responses to LDC Consultations</u>

4.25 Wealden have responded to a number of consultations from LDC:

- WDC responded to the informal consultation on both the Draft Interim Policy Statement for Housing Delivery and Approach to Disaggregating Local Housing Need for the purposes of the 5-year housing land supply (responded 29 January 2021).
- WDC responded to the informal consultation on the Lewes Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Draft Scoping Report (responded 26 February 2021).

- WDC responded to the LDC Issues and Options Consultation, 9 July to 3 September 2021 (responded 31 August 2021).
- WDC attended the LDC workshop on 15 February 2024 to discuss the unmet development needs arising from Lewes District.
- WDC responded to the 'Towards a Local Plan spatial strategy and policies directions' consultation 29 November 2023 and 19 February 2024 (responded 19 February 2024).
- WDC responded to the 'Lewes Local Plan: Defining our Policies and Early Site Allocation Proposals' consultation 6 January and 28 February 2025 (responded 28 February 2025).

LDC responses to WDC Consultations

4.26 LDC have responded to a number of consultations from WDC:

- LDC responded to the WDC Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation, 8 July 2020 to 12 August 2020.
- LDC responded to the WDC Direction of Travel Consultation, November 2020 to January 2021.
- LDC responded to Wealden District Council Local Plan (March 2024) Consultation.

Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC)

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Development Plan

- The Mid-Sussex District Plan 2014-2031[46] (adopted in March 2018).
- 'Saved' policies from the Mid Sussex Local Plan 2004[47].
- MSDC Site Allocations Development Plan Document[48] (adopted June 2022)
- MSDC Small-Scale Housing Allocations Development Plan Document[49] (adopted April 2008).

New Local Plan

4.27 MSDC is in the process of reviewing and updating the Mid-Sussex District Plan and is submitted its Local Plan for examination in July 2024 and at the time of writing further examination hearings are taking place. The previous stages were as follows:

[46] Mid Sussex District Council (adopted March 2018) Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031. Available at: www.midsussex.gov.uk/media/3406/mid-sussex-district-plan.pdf
[47] Mid Sussex District Council (N.D.G.) Mid Sussex Local Plan 2004 Saved Policies. Available at: www.midsussex.gov.uk/planning-building/local-plan-2004/
[48] Mid Sussex District Council (adopted June 2022) Mid Sussex Site Allocations DPD. Available at: www.midsussex.gov.uk/planning-building/development-plan-documents/#topic-site-allocations-document
[49] Mid Sussex District Council (adopted April 2008) Small Scale Housing Allocations Development Plan Document. Available at: www.midsussex.gov.uk/media/2670/small-scale-housing-allocations-development-plan.pdf

- Draft District Plan 2021-2039 went out to Regulation 18 consultation between 7 November 2022 and 19 December 2022[50].
- The Submission District Plan 2021 – 2039 was published for Regulation 19 consultation between 12 January 2024 and 23 February 2024[51].

Most recent published Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

4.28 There was a separate SoCG signed in July 2024 relating specifically to the MSDC Local Plan that is currently at examination. The SoCG discussed:

- Housing provision in Mid-Sussex.
- Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in Mid Sussex.
- Ashdown Forest SPA and SAC.
- The high level of engagement between the two authorities throughout the preparation of the MSDC Local Plan.
- No areas of disagreement between the two authorities relating to the MSDC Local Plan and the two councils would continue to work together on the revised Local Plan.

4.29 A new SoCG is being progressed and discussions are ongoing.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **HMA and FEMA** – The rural parts to the northwest of Wealden District around Forest Row and Ashdown Forest relate more closely to East Grinstead (in Mid Sussex) and more widely to the North West Sussex HMA (that also includes Crawley and Horsham). The percentage of Wealden's overall population considered within the North West Sussex HMA is approximately 6%. The boundaries to the FEMA are the same.
- **Housing and Employment Need** – Both the housing and employment needs of Mid Sussex District are planned to be met through the Council's current Submission Local Plan. The emerging Local Plan for WDC is at an earlier stage of the plan-making process, but this does show that WDC is unable to meet its own housing and employment needs at this stage. WDC is committed to considering the suitability and deliverability of development sites further between the 'Focused' Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 Local Plan to meet our needs if at all possible. There has been no formal request yet on this matter in respect of the Submission Draft Mid Sussex District Plan.
- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** – WDC alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (which is now being updated). MSDC has undertaken its own assessment on this matter. The aim from both local authorities is to meet their own needs through their respective Local Plans.

[50] Regulation 18 Draft District Plan 2021-2039. Available at: www.midsussex.inconsult.uk/districtplanreg18/
[51] Mid Sussex District Plan 2021-2039 Submission Draft (Regulation 19) (December 2023). Available at: www.midsussex.inconsult.uk/districtplanreg19/consultationHome

- **High Weald National Landscape** - Both authorities continue to liaise on cross-boundary matters relating to the implementation of the High Weald AONB Management Plan (2024 -2029) and to liaise with each other on developments that straddle the administrative boundary between the two authorities and are located in or affect the setting of the High Weald National Landscape, and on other national planning policy requirements related to major development in the High Weald National Landscape.
- **Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA** – MSDC and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution and recreational pressure on the Ashdown Forest. They both share the 400 metres to 7km buffer zone of the Ashdown Forest SPA and have drafted policies on this issue in their respective Local Plans.
- **Infrastructure** – Both authorities liaise on key cross boundary infrastructure matters highways, education, health, transport and water/flooding related infrastructure.

Formal Local Plan consultations

WDC responses to MSDC Consultations

4.30 WDC have responded to a number of consultations from MSDC:

- WDC responded to the MSDC Draft Site Allocations DPD Reg 18 consultation (responded 12 November 2019).
- WDC responded to the Site Allocations DPD consultation (responded 16 September 2020).
- WDC provided comments on the proposed methodology for site selection within the MSDC District Plan Review (responded 15 October 2021).
- WDC responded to the consultation on the MSDC Draft District Plan 2021-2039 Regulation 18 (responded 16 December 2022).
- WDC responded to the consultation on the Mid Sussex District Plan 2021-2039 Submission Draft Regulation 19 (responded 22 February 2024).

MSDC responses to WDC Consultations

4.31 MSDC responded to the WDC Direction of Travel Consultation, November 2020 to January 2021.

Rother District Council (RDC)

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Development Plan

- The Rother District Local Plan Core Strategy[52] (adopted on 29 September 2014)

[52] Rother District Council (adopted September 2014) Rother Core Strategy. Available at: www.rother.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan/about-the-local-plan-2/

- The Development and Site Allocations (DaSA) Local Plan[53] (adopted on 16 December 2019).
- Rother District Local Plan 2006[54] includes 'Saved' Policy DS3: Proposals within development boundaries in the parishes of Etchingham and Hurst Green and Policy VL1: Land South of Strand Meadow, Burwash.

New Local Plan

4.32 RDC is currently in the process of preparing a new Local Plan that will cover the period 2025-2042. The stages commenced so far are summarised below:

- RDC undertook a Regulation 18 public consultation on a draft new Local Plan[55] in April 2024.
- RDC have commenced its second Regulation 18 public consultation on a draft new Local Plan[56] that will close 23 March 2026.

Most recent published Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

4.33 A new SoCG is being prepared and discussions are ongoing.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **HMA and FEMA** – The small rural area of Wealden District around Ninfield and Hooe relates more closely to the Hastings and Rother HMA. The percentage of Wealden's overall population considered within the Hastings and Rother HMA is approximately 2%. The boundaries to the FEMA are the same.
- **Housing and Employment Need** - Both Councils have similar timetables for their respective Local Plans and will continue to work together on housing and employment matters and identify the position on any unmet housing or employment needs as both WDC and RDC prepare their respective Local Plans for the Regulation 19 stage. RDC has written to WDC around unmet housing needs on the 28 June and WDC responded to this in June 2024 to confirm it would not be in a position to meet RDCs unmet housing need.
- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** – The Council's, alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (this is now in the process of being updated once more for the Regulation 19 stages of our respective Local Plans). The aim from both local authorities is to meet their own needs through their respective Local Plans.

[53] Rother District Council (adopted December 2019) Development and Site Allocations (DaSA) Local Plan. Available at:www.rother.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan/about-the-local-plan-2/
[54] Rother District Council (N.D.G.) Rother District Local Plan 2006 Saved Policies. Available at: www.rother.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan/2006-local-plan-supplementary-planning-documents-spd/
[55] Rother Local Plan 2020-2040 (Regulation 18). Available at: https://rdcpublic.blob.core.windows.net/website-uploads/2026/01/New-Local-Plan-Reg18-version-6979e53ac3ad1.pdf
[56] Rother Local Plan 2025-2042 (Regulation 18) – Development Strategy and Site Allocations. Available at: https://rother.oc2.uk/document/184

- **Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar Site** – WDC and RDC are both impacted by the presence of the Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar site within their administrative boundaries. WDC and RDC are working together to address issues of water quality within the Levels through their respective Local Plan policies and seeking to take a consistent approach. WDC and RDC are both members of the Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership.
- **High Weald National Landscape** - Both authorities continue to liaise on cross-boundary matters relating to the implementation of the High Weald AONB Management Plan (2024 -2029) and to liaise with each other on developments that straddle the administrative boundary between the two authorities and are located in or affect the setting of the High Weald National Landscape, and on other national planning policy requirements related to major development in the High Weald National Landscape.
- **Infrastructure** – Both authorities liaise on key cross boundary infrastructure matters including highways, education, health, transport and water/flooding related infrastructure. Along with other Local Authorities in East Sussex, both WDC and RDC are working with ESCC and National Highways to develop a Shared Transport Evidence Base (STEB) model and a County Wide Transport Model to assess Local Plan impacts across East Sussex.

Formal Local Plan consultations

WDC responses to RDC consultations

4.34 WDC have responded to a number of consultations from RDC:

- WDC responded to the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report in support of the Rother District Council and Hastings Borough Council Local Plan Updates (2019-2039) (responded 26 May 2020).
- WDC responded to RDC's Local Plan Early Engagement Document and Duty to Cooperate Action Plan (responded 29 October 2020).
- WDC responded to a consultation on the RDC draft Statement of Community Involvement (responded 20 July 2021).
- WDC responded to the consultation on the Rother Local Plan 2020-2040 Regulation 18 version (responded 18 July 2024).
- WDC responded to a letter from RDC around unmet housing needs dated 28 June 2024 (responded on 10 July 2024)

RDC responses to WDC consultations

4.35 RDC have responded to a number of WDC consultations:

- RDC responded to the WDC Direction of Travel Consultation, November 2020 to January 2021.
- RDC responded to the WDC Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation, 8 July 2020 to 12 August 2020.

- RDC responded to the WDC Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Update) Consultation, 26 June 2023 to 7 August 2023.
- RDC responded to Wealden District Council Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) Consultation.

Sevenoaks District Council (SDC)

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Development Plan

- The Core Strategy Development Plan[57] (adopted 22 February 2011).
- The Allocations and Development Management Plan[58] (adopted 17 February 2015).

New Local Plan

4.36 On the 15 November 2022, SDC Members agreed to withdraw the Proposed Submission Version of its Local Plan (Regulation 19, December 2019), which had been submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination. Since this time SDC have been preparing a new Local Plan.

- Regulation 18 consultation Local Plan 2040 (Part 1)[59] - 16 November 2022 to 11 January 2023. Focused on making the best use of land within the district's urban areas (i.e. outside of the Green Belt), including building at higher densities and on brownfield sites.
- Regulation 18 consultation Local Plan 2040 (Part 2)[60] - 23 November 2023 to 11 January 2024. Continued to focus on development opportunities in built up areas but also considered Green Belt land in exceptional circumstances.
- Sevenoaks District Local Plan – Regulation 18 Consultation (Autumn 2025)[61]. The consultation took place between 23 October 2025 to 11 December 2025.

Most recent published Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

4.37 The last SoCG between SDC and WDC was signed in October 2019. A new SoCG is in progress and discussions are ongoing.

[57] Sevenoaks Core Strategy Development Plan. Available at: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069129/current_local_plan/249/core_strategy_development_plan
[58] Sevenoaks Allocations and Development Management Plan. Available at: www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069129/current_local_plan/248/allocations_and_development_management_plan
[59] Sevenoaks Local Plan (Part 1). Available at: https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069128/emerging_local_plan/862/previous_local_plan_consultations
[60] Sevenoaks Local Plan (Part 2). Available at: https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069128/emerging_local_plan/862/previous_local_plan_consultations
[61] Sevenoaks District Local Plan (Regulation 18 Consultation, 2025. Available at: https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/info/20069128/emerging_local_plan/861/local_plan_consultation_october_to_december_2025

Key cross boundary issues:

- **HMA and FEMA** – The northern part of Wealden District that includes Crowborough, Heathfield and Wadhurst are within the Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge HMA and FEMA. However, the closest connection of these villages and towns to the HMA and FEMA is within Tunbridge Wells Borough (particularly the town) and there are more limited connections with Sevenoaks District.
- **Housing and Employment Need** - Both Councils will continue to work together on housing and employment matters and identify the position on any unmet housing or employment needs as both WDC and SDC prepare their respective Local Plans. SDC has written to WDC around unmet housing needs on the 8 May 2024 and 20 November 2025 and WDC responded to this on 29 May 2024 and 10 December 2025 respectively to confirm it would not be in a position to meet SDCs unmet housing need.
- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** – WDC alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (which is being updated). SDC has undertaken its own assessment on this matter. The aim, at this stage, from both local authorities is to meet their own needs through their respective Local Plans.
- **Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA** - SDC and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution and recreational pressure on the Ashdown Forest.
- **High Weald National Landscape** - Both authorities continue to liaise on cross-boundary matters relating to the implementation of the High Weald AONB Management Plan (2024 -2029) and to liaise with each other on developments that straddle the administrative boundary between the two authorities and are located in or affect the setting of the High Weald National Landscape, and on other national planning policy requirements related to major development in the High Weald National Landscape.
- **Infrastructure** – Both authorities liaise on key cross boundary infrastructure matters highways, education, health, transport and water/flooding related infrastructure.

Formal Local Plan consultations

WDC responses to SDC Consultations

4.38 WDC have responded to a number of consultations from SDC:

- WDC responded to the Sevenoaks District Council Targeted Review of Local Housing Needs Evidence Questionnaire (responded 20 September 2021).
- WDC responded to the consultation on the Sevenoaks Stage 2 Green Belt Assessment Methodology Paper (responded 4 February 2022).
- WDC responded to the Sevenoaks Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation (responded 16 August 2022).

- WDC responded to the SDC consultation on the draft Local Plan 2040 Part 1 (Regulation 18) (responded 6 January 2023).
- WDC responded to the SDC consultation on the draft Local Plan 2040 Part 2 (Regulation 18) (responded 11 January 2024).
- WDC responded to the Sevenoaks District Council Targeted Review of Local Housing Needs Evidence Questionnaire (responded 11 June 2025).
- WDC responded to the consultation on the Sevenoaks Green Belt Assessment Methodology Paper (responded 3 July 2025).
- WDC responded to the SDC consultation on the draft Sevenoaks Local Plan (Regulation 18) Autumn 2025 (responded 3 December 2025).

SDC responses to WDC Consultations

4.39 SDC responded to Wealden District Council Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) Consultation on 13 June 2024.

South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Development Plan

- The South Downs Local Plan 2014-2033 (adopted 2 July 2019)[62].

New Local Plan

4.40 The SDNPA have begun work on a Local Plan Review and published a draft plan for a Regulation 18 Consultation between 20 January and 17 March 2025. The latest LDS[63] was published in July 2025 and confirms that the SDNPA is to submit the Local Plan in Autumn/Winter of 2026/27, with adoption in the Autumn/Winter of 2027/28.

Most recent published Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

4.41 The last SoCG between WDC and the SDNPA was signed in March 2019. A new SoCG will be progressed and discussions are ongoing.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **Housing and Employment Need** - Both Councils will continue to work together on housing and employment matters and identify the position on any unmet housing or employment needs as both WDC and SDC prepare their respective Local Plans. It should be noted that Wealden's 'standard method' for calculating housing needs includes the parishes wholly and partially within the SDNP.
- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** - The Council's, alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (which is currently being

[62] South Downs Local Plan, July 2019. Available at: https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SD_LocalPlan_2019_17Wb.pdf
[63] South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Local Development Scheme (July 2025). Available at: https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/LDS-tenth-revision-July-2025.pdf

updated). The aim at this stage from both local authorities is to meet their own needs through their respective Local Plans.

- **Ashdown Forest SAC** – SDNPA and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution.
- **South Downs National Park** - Both authorities are committed to continue working together in partnership, to deliver the aims and objectives of the National Park including to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
- **Infrastructure** – Both authorities liaise on key cross boundary infrastructure matters highways, education, health, transport and water/flooding related infrastructure.

Formal Local Plan consultations

WDC Responses to SDNPA Consultations

4.42 WDC have responded to a number of consultations from SDNPA:

- WDC responded to the SDNPA consultation on draft sustainable construction Supplementary Planning Document May 2020; consultation statement and SEA/HRA Screening Determination Statement (responded 27 May 2020).
- WDC responded to the SDNPA consultation on the proposed local connection test for their Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Register (responded 23 February 2022).
- WDC responded to the SDNPA consultation on the South Downs Local Plan Review (2024-2042) and IIA Scoping Report (August 2024) (11 September 2024).
- WDC responded to the SDNPA Review 2024-2042 (Regulation 18) Consultation – March 2025 (responded 14 March 2025).
- Housing Need Methodology in South Downs National Park (Informal Consultation) – April 2025 (responded 29 April 2025).

SDNPA responses to WDC Consultations

4.43 SDNPA have responded to a number of WDC consultations:

- SDNPA responded to the WDC Direction of Travel Consultation, November 2020 to January 2021.
- SDNPA responded to the WDC Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Update) Consultation, 26 June 2023 to 7 August 2023.
- SDNPA responded to the WDC responded to Wealden District Council Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) Consultation on 21 May 2024.

Tandridge District Council (TDC)

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Development Plan

- The Tandridge District Core Strategy[64] (adopted October 2008).
- Tandridge Local Plan Part 2: Detailed Policies 2014-2029[65] (adopted July 2014).

New Local Plan

4.44 A new Local Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in 2019 and the examination in public has taken place. The Inspector has sent the Council his final report on 14 February 2024, which sets out that the Plan has been found unsound and should not be adopted. TDC have since withdrawn the Local Plan and has commenced in a new process to review its Local Plan.

Most recent published Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

4.45 The last SoCG between WDC and the TDC was signed in December 2018. A new SoCG will be progressed, and discussions are ongoing.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **Housing and Employment Need** - Neither WDC nor TDC has requested for each other to meet their potential unmet housing or employment needs as part of the duty to cooperate process at this stage. Both Councils will continue to work together on housing and employment matters and identify the position on any unmet housing or employment needs as both WDC and TDC prepare their respective Local Plans.
- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** – WDC alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (which is being updated). TDC has/will undertake its own assessment on this matter. The aim, at this stage, from both local authorities is to meet their own needs through their respective Local Plans.
- **Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA** - TDC and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution and recreational pressure on the Ashdown Forest.
- **Infrastructure** – Both authorities liaise on key cross boundary infrastructure matters including highways, education, health, transport and water/flooding related infrastructure.

Formal Local Plan consultations

[64] Tandridge District Council (adopted October 2008) The Tandridge District Core Strategy. Available at: https://www.tandridge.gov.uk/Planning-and-building/Planning-strategies-and-policies/Adopted-development-plan

[65] Tandridge District Council (adopted July 2014) Tandridge Local Plan Part 2: Detailed Policies 2014-2029. Available at: https://www.tandridge.gov.uk/Planning-and-building/Planning-strategies-and-policies/Adopted-development-plan

WDC Responses to TDC Consultations

4.46 WDC have responded to a number of consultations from TDC:

- WDC responded to the TDC consultation on its HELAA Methodology presented in Autumn 2024 (responded on 26 November 2024).
- WDC responded to the consultation on the Tandridge Green Belt Assessment Methodology Paper (responded 15 July 2025).

TDC Responses to WDC Consultations

4.47 TDC has made no responses to WDC consultations.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC)

Current Local Plan status:

Adopted Development Plan

- The Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan[66] (adopted in December 2025)

New Local Plan

4.48 The latest LDS was published in November 2025[67]. This latest LDS sets out the timescales for the production and adoption of the new Local Plan, as well as of other planning documents that the council expects to prepare over the next three years.

Most recent published Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) / Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

4.49 The last SoCG was signed in March 2021 by both authorities and formed part of TWBCs evidence base for its Submission version of the Local Plan that has since been adopted.

4.50 The SoCG will be updated in due course to align with both authorities' local plan progression and position on strategic cross boundary matters.

Key cross boundary issues:

- **Development on the Administrative Boundary between Tunbridge Wells Borough and Wealden District** – TWBC and WDC have agreed a protocol and set of principles for dealing with development on or close to border between Tunbridge Wells Borough and Wealden District.
- **HMA and FEMA** – The northern part of Wealden District that includes Crowborough, Heathfield and Wadhurst are within the Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge HMA and FEMA. The closest connection of these villages and towns to the HMA and FEMA is within Tunbridge Wells Borough (particularly the town).
- **Housing and Employment Need** - Policy STR 1 (The Development Strategy) of the Submission version of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan confirms that TWBC

[66] Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2020-2038 (adopted December 2025). Available at: https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/511991/Adopted-Local-Plan-2020-2038.pdf
[67] Local Development Scheme November 2025. Available at: www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-development-scheme

will meet its own housing need in full. However, a revised development strategy following examination resulted in a reduction in growth and a reduced plan period. WDC and TWBC will continue to engage with each other on this matter.

- **Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople** – WDC alongside other districts and boroughs in East Sussex, undertook a joint evidence to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. TWBC has undertaken its own assessment on this matter. The aim, at this stage, from both local authorities is to meet their own needs through their respective Local Plans.
- **Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA** - TWBC and WDC are both members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group and work as part of this group to address issues of air pollution and recreational pressure on the Ashdown Forest.
- **High Weald National Landscape** - Both authorities continue to liaise on cross-boundary matters relating to the implementation of the High Weald AONB Management Plan (2024 -2029) and to liaise with each other on developments that straddle the administrative boundary between the two authorities and are located in or affect the setting of the High Weald National Landscape, and on other national planning policy requirements related to major development in the High Weald National Landscape.
- **Infrastructure** – Both authorities liaise on key cross boundary infrastructure matters highways, education, health, transport and water/flooding related infrastructure. The Councils are also continuing to consider the safeguarding of the Tunbridge Wells/Eridge railway line.

Formal responses to Local Plan consultations

<u>WDC responses to TWBC consultations</u>

4.51 WDC have responded to a number of consultations from TWBC:

- WDC responded to TWBC Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) Consultation, 20 September to 1 November 2019.
- WDC shared a draft project brief for landscape sensitivity work to TWBC for comment (responded 20 July 2020).
- WDC responded to the letter from TWBC of 6 October 2020 requesting WDC to accommodate development needs from Tunbridge Wells (responded 20 November 2020).
- WDC responded to the TWBC Pre-Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) Consultation, 26 March to 4 June 2021 (responded 3 June 2021).
- WDC responded to the Public Consultation on Tunbridge Wells response to the Inspector's Initial Findings Letter on the Examination of the New Local Plan (responded on 26 February 2024).
- WDC responded to the Public Consultation on Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan Main Modifications (responded 22 April 2025).

<u>TWBC responses to WDC consultations</u>

4.52 TWBC have responded to a number of WDC consultations:

- TWBC shared their Landscape Character and Capacity Study brief (17 June 2020).
- TWBC shared their Green Belt Brief for Comment (shared 23 July 2020)
- TWBC responded to the WDC Direction of Travel Consultation, November 2020 to January 2021.
- TWBC responded to the WDC Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation, 8 July 2020 to 12 August 2020.
- TWBC responded to the WDC Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Update) Consultation, 26 June 2023 to 7 August 2023.
- TWBC responded to Wealden District Council Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) Consultation on 21 May 2024.

Joint working and Evidence Base Studies

4.53 To assist in plan-making matters, a number of evidence base studies and joint working arrangements have been progressed.

- **Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment**[68] (May 2022) - commissioned by all East Sussex local authorities and the SDNPA. The study assesses the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople across East Sussex.
- **Joint Employment and Economic Study**[69] (April 2022) - commissioned by WDC and EBC. For both Wealden and Eastbourne, the study identifies the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) and provides forecasts for economic need (Use Class B2, B8 and formerly Use Class B1A (now Use Class E)) for the period up to 2039. The study also provides a summary of existing employment areas (in terms of supply) and economic development briefings for both authorities.
- **Joint Employment and Economic Study (Update)**[70] (January 2026) - commissioned by WDC and EBC. For both Wealden and Eastbourne, the study updates the previous joint employment and economic study and provides forecasts for economic need (Use Class B2, B8, E(g)) for the period up to 2042.
- **Shared Transport Evidence Base and County Wide Transport Model** - all Local Authorities in East Sussex. Local Authorities are working with ESCC and National Highways to develop a Shared Transport Evidence Base (STEB) model

[68] RRR Consultancy Ltd (May 2022) East Sussex Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/planning-policy-evidence-base/gypsy-and-travellers/
[69] Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of Eastbourne and Wealden District Councils (April 2022) Employment and Economic Study- Eastbourne and Wealden. Available at: www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Eastbourne-and-Wealden-Economic-Study-Report-Final-SDS-Checked.pdf
[70] Iceni Projects Limited on behalf of Eastbourne and Wealden District Councils (January 2026) Employment and Economic Study- Eastbourne and Wealden. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Eastbourne-and-Wealden-Economic-Study-Update-Final-Report-Final-Clean-Jan-2026-v2.pdf

and a County Wide Transport Model to assess Local Plan impacts across East Sussex.

- **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and fluvial modelling work** - commissioned by Wealden and Eastbourne. This consists of the Draft North Wealden Level 1 SFRA (2026)[71] and the South Wealden and Eastbourne Level 1 SFRA (2025)[72]. Both SFRAs will inform decisions on the location of future development and the preparation of sustainable policies for the long-term management of flood risk. They will also be used by applicants to inform site specific Flood Risk Assessments, in line with the requirements of the NPPF and PPG on flood risk.
- **Air Quality Monitoring and Transport Model for Ashdown Forest SAC** – Jointly commissioned by the Ashdown Forest Working Group which consists of local authority membership of Wealden, Tunbridge Wells, Mid-Sussex, Lewes, Tandridge, Sevenoaks, Crawley, Eastbourne and Brighton and Hove. Air quality monitoring data alongside transport modelling will inform local authorities Habitats Regulations Assessments ensuring a strategic approach to considering air quality impacts to Ashdown Forest SAC.

Other Statements of Common Ground (SoCG)

Ashdown Forest

4.54 Wealden District Council were signatories to a Statement of Common Ground regarding recreational impact on Ashdown Forest, signed in 2019. It was intended for this SoCG to assist the members of the SAMMS Partnership in determining planning applications and in Local Plan preparation and ensure, as far as practicable, a consistent approach across the relevant areas. We will update this SoCG as relevant in due course.

4.55 The SoCG was signed by all members of the SAMMS Partnership which are Lewes District Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Tandridge District Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Wealden District Council. It was also signed by Natural England as a statutory consultee.

4.56 Wealden District Council were also signatories to a Statement of Common Ground regarding air quality impacts on the Ashdown Forest, signed in 2025. The purpose of this SoCG is to address the strategic cross boundary issue of air quality impacts on the Ashdown Forest SAC that may arise from traffic associated with new development. It provides evidence on how the LPAs have approached the Duty to Co-Operate, clearly setting out the matters of agreement between members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group. The SoCG was signed by all members of the Ashdown Forest Working Group.

Aggregates and minerals

4.57 Wealden were signatories to a Statement of Common Ground for the provision of aggregates and the safeguarding of minerals infrastructure in the East Sussex,

[71] Draft North Wealden Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2026. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Draft-Wealden-SFRA-Level-1-North.pdf
[72] Eastbourne and Southern Wealden Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Final Report, March 2025. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/JYW-JBAU-XX-XX-RP-Z-0001-A1-C03-Eastbourne_Level_1_Strategic_Flood_Risk_Assessment-1-1.pdf

Brighton and Hove and South Downs National Park areas. The statement was prepared alongside the review of the Waste and Minerals Local Plan and sets out areas of agreement and disagreement between the signatories in relation to the provision of sand and gravel (minerals) and the safeguarding of minerals infrastructure in the area.

4.58 Other signatories were: East Sussex County Council, the South Downs National Park Authority and Brighton and Hove City Council as Waste and Minerals Planning Authorities and Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council, Rother District Council and Wealden District Council as Local Planning Authorities.

East Sussex Public Health and Planning Memorandum of Understanding

4.59 In August 2022 Wealden signed the East Sussex Public Health and Planning Memorandum of Understanding. This sets out how the Public Health Team within East Sussex County Council (ESCC) LPAs will work together to deliver the County Council's statutory public health responsibilities and LPAs duties to deliver relevant elements of the NPPF through the planning system.

4.60 The MOU includes all LPAs within East Sussex which are Eastbourne Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council, Rother District Council, South Downs National Park Authority and Wealden District Council.

Future Statements of Common Ground (SoCG)

4.61 As part of engagement and the duty to cooperate process we will be seeking to progress SoCG as appropriate to the plan-making stage and process, with the following:

- Natural England that will cover the High Weald National Landscape and other relevant matters;
- Environment Agency and Natural England regarding the Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar Site;
- SoCG with ESCC in relation to infrastructure provision and other matters as relevant;
- SoCG with Highways England in relation to the strategic road network and transport modelling;
- Historic England that will cover matters relating to designated heritage assets and other relevant matters;
- All neighbouring local planning authorities as described above.
- Southern Water Position Statement in relation to wastewater and related infrastructure; and
- South East Water Position Statement in relation to water provision and related infrastructure.

Cooperation between Prescribed Bodies and Other Bodies

4.62 Regular dialogue has been carried out with the following bodies:

Prescribed bodies relevant to Wealden District Council

- Environment Agency
- National Highways
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Homes England
- NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Network Rail
- East Sussex County Council Highways

Other bodies relevant to Wealden District Council

- High Weald AONB Unit
- Sussex Local Nature Partnership
- National Grid
- Southern Water
- South East Water
- UK Power Networks
- ESCC Infrastructure
- ESCC (Flooding)
- ESCC (Education)
- ESCC (Health)
- ESCC (Waste and Minerals)
- West Sussex County Council, Kent County Council and Surrey County Council
- Elmbridge Borough Council

4.63 Table 1 sets out a list of the on-going engagement with the prescribed bodies and Table 2 for other bodies. Further detail of their engagement is also explained in the cross boundary strategic issues section below.

Table 1: Prescribed bodies (under Section 33A)

Prescribed body	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
Environment Agency (EA)	EA provided comments on the: • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consultation (August 2020) • Wealden Direction of Travel Document Consultation (January 2021) • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation (August 2023) • Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) WDC provided comments on the: • Environment Agency draft river basin management plans and draft flood risk management plans (January 2022) • Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels FRMP (July 2022) Consultation and engagement took place to progress and agree the Strategic Flood Risk Assessments. Ongoing discussions during draft Local Plan development and as part of the SFRAs. DtC meetings held between WDC and EA in: • December 2021 • January 2022 • April 2024 • December 2025 Meetings/workshops held in 2023 and 2024 with EA, WDC, RDC and EBC officers regarding Eastbourne and Pevensey Bay coastal Defence Scheme (PevEb).	Recommendations in the Environment Agency's response was considered when drafting the Climate Change and Natural Environment Chapters of the draft Local Plan (March 2024) and the Interim Sustainability Appraisal. The comments were also considered for the Climate Change Chapter of the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (February 2026). Provided comments on issues such as catchment areas, flood risk, water resources, sustainability, climate change, pollution. SA Scoping Report was updated in light of EA comments. Flooding is an issue which could have implications for WDC and other neighbouring authorities such as RDC and EBC. There have been specific on-going discussions and engagement with ESCC as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) our flood risk consultants and the EA in relation to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) work undertaken by WDC so far. Outcomes include proposed flood mitigation measures recommended in the SFRA in response to the proposed growth strategy. Discussions included the Local Plan Timetable and emerging policies and growth strategy in the Wealden Local Plan, wastewater treatment and the Pevensey Levels and future working arrangements including that relating to the SFRA.

Prescribed body	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
	Engagement through partnerships including: • Sussex Nature Partnership, • Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership • Blue Heart Project	
National Highways (NH)	NH provided comments on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consultation (August 2020). NH also provided comments on Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) in March 2024. Numerous meetings in 2021 and 2022 hosted by ESCC and all East Sussex Local Authorities to progress a shared transport evidence base and Countywide Transport Model to consider implications of growth in the County and to understand mitigation required. A more recent meeting took place with NH on October 2025 in relation to the Countywide Transport Model that was also attended by our transport consultants and officers from ESCC. NH are one of the partners in the Transport for South East Transport Forum and the Transport for South East Decarbonisation Forum with Wealden.	Commented on traffic congestion, sustainable travel and advances in technology. Also provided comments on strategic policies within draft Wealden Local Plan (March 2024), although not on sites at that stage. Joint meetings are held with ESCC and NH to discuss the Strategic Road Network- A27, A26 NH inputted to the process in regard to the strategic road network (A27, A26, A21) and the transport models and signed off the shared transport evidence base approach as an interim evidence base and has provided advice and guidance in relation to the Countywide Transport Model.
Historic England (HE)	HE responded to the: • Direction of Travel Document Consultation (January 2021) • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consultation (August 2020)	Commented on Infrastructure, Housing, Economy, Town Centres, Tourism, Green/Blue Infrastructure, Landscapes, Heritage, Design, Growth Options. Policy recommendations from HE response to the Direction of Travel document were considered in the formulation of development management policies relating to the historic environment/heritage assets

Prescribed body	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
	• Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation (August 2023) • Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024)	and design in the draft Regulation Local Plan. The comments on the Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) will be considered in the formulation of the Regulation 19 Local Plan. A meeting was held with HE to discuss the comments in October 2025.
Natural England (NE)	NE responded to the: • Direction of Travel Document Consultation (January 2021) • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consultation (August 2020) • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation (August 2023) • Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) Specific work / engagement streams include: • Strategic approach to considering air quality at Ashdown Forest SAC • Identifying Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs). • Draft Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey and Draft Landscape Character Area Classifications • Guidance for Development in the Pevensey Catchment • Landscape and visual appraisal of sites, particularly the High Weald National Landscape.	Commented on the Climate Change Section, Infrastructure, Housing, Economy, Natural Environment, Green/Blue Infrastructure, Landscapes, Growth Options. Policy recommendations in NE response to the Direction of Travel document were considered in the formulation of development management policies relating to the Climate Change and Natural Environment Chapters. Commented on the SA objectives, Climate Change, the indicators used. Changes were made as a result of comments. Policy recommendations in NE response to draft Local Plan (March 2024) were considered in the formulation of strategic policies and sites for 'Focused' Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18). NE responded to informal consultation on the strategic approach to considering air quality at Ashdown Forest SAC in January 2022. WDC requested formal advice in regards to a number of sites that may have potential for SANGs provision in October 2022. WDC shared the Draft Ashdown Forest Visitor Survey and Draft Landscape Character Area Classifications with NE in October 2021.

Prescribed body	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
	Duty to Cooperate meetings held between WDC and NE in: 2020, 2021 and 2024. Regular meetings as a member of the: • Ashdown Forest SAC air quality Working Group • Strategic Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Strategy partnership • Sussex Nature Partnership • Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership. • Recreational Impact SoCG for Ashdown Forest	WDC shared the Draft SANGS Visitor Survey Report with NE in December 2021. WDC responded to the consultation on the draft Guidance for Development in the Pevensey Catchment (December 2021). WDC shared the draft methodology for the landscape and visual appraisal of sites with Natural England and invited comments (May 2022). This has been asked for once more in January 2026 on our next iteration of the landscape evidence. Points of discussion/engagement include Ashdown Forest SPA and the use of SANGS and SAMMS, Ashdown Forest SAC and air quality monitoring, Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar site, the National Landscapes and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The level of support and engagement available from NE has also been discussed. Involved in discussions to devise air quality monitoring methodology, transport modelling and air quality monitoring at Ashdown Forest, with both WDC and NE being signatories to the SoCG on air quality matters for the Ashdown Forest. Involved in discussions to devise and deliver the SAMM Strategy projects at Ashdown Forest. As statutory consultee, Natural England was a party to this statement.
Homes England (HE)	Wealden have held regular meetings with Homes England during the plan-making process so far.	The purpose of these meetings was to continue dialogue with HE and update on projects underway in Wealden including WDC's New Build Project (including Sussex Weald Homes), Hailsham Aspires as well as HE providing information of national approaches as well as consideration of

Prescribed body	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
		supporting infrastructure and partnership working such as National Highways and related projects.
NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB)	Wealden have held meetings with the NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB) during the plan-making process. The NHS responded to the: • Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024)	Continuous engagement with the ICB in relation to the local plan growth strategy and implications / requirements for future health care provision as well as understanding current shortfalls. Further information on key outcomes so far is provided in the Interim Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP).
Network Rail (NR)	The NR responded to the: • Direction of Travel Document consultation (January 2021); and • Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) Meeting held with NR in February 2022.	NR provided comments on the Direction of Travel Document - Commented on the Infrastructure Section, Growth Options NR provided a number of comments to draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) Subjects discussed included the safeguarding of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line and the land and supporting infrastructure implications of this.
East Sussex County Council Highways	ESCC responded to the: • Direction of Travel Document consultation (January 2021). • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consultation (August 2020) • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation (August 2023) • Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) Engagement on emerging policies and the Interim Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP)	Provided a wide range of responses of which comments have been incorporated into the SA Scoping Report and Regulation 18 Local plan. Worked with ESCC officers in relation to the potential suitability and allocation of sites and testing growth options. Shared early drafts of emerging policies with ESCC officers and liaised on IDP position statements. WDC have worked with ESCC in carrying out transport modelling and

Prescribed body	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
		producing a Shared Transport Evidence Base and a County Wide Transport Model.
	Shared Transport Evidence Base and a Countywide Transport Model	WDC responded to the formal consultation on the LCWIP in 2020.
	East Sussex Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)	WDC responded to the ESCC consultation on proposed new cycle routes for Eastbourne in 2021.
	Proposed new cycle routes for Eastbourne	WDC attended meetings and workshops relating to the consultation on the East Sussex Transport Plan 4 and formally responded to the consultation in February 2024.
	East Sussex Transport Plan 4	Meetings to discuss numerous infrastructure matters including education, flood matters, transport matters. (Please note that this is not repeated below for other ESCC engagement).
	Infrastructure Road Map Meetings – held three times a year	
	ESCC Rail and Freight Strategies	WDC responded to the formal consultation on the ESCC Rail and Freight Strategies in 2025.

Table 2: Other bodies

Other bodies	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
Sussex Nature Partnership (SxNP)	SxNP hold monthly webinars which WDC attend. WDC also have 1:1 meetings with the SxNP.	Various subjects are discussed.
	Local Nature Recovery Strategies: how to prepare and what to include	A joint response was prepared to the Defra Consultation between Sussex Nature Partnership and authorities in West and East Sussex including WDC. The response is dated 1 November 2021.
	Green Spaces Project (2022) and Steering Group.	

Other bodies	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
	Biodiversity Net Gain Working Group Health and Wellbeing Working Group Local Nature Recovery Strategy Working Group	WDC worked with SxNP and Adur & Worthing District Council on the Green Spaces Project. Outcomes include Health Audits for the spaces, Ecological reports, Natural Capital Assessments and Social Engagement assessments. It produced a toolkit to apply these assessments to other green spaces for use by Parish and Town Councils if they wish. The BNG working group was convened to discuss how to implement BNG across Sussex, especially through Local Plans and LNRSs. WDC has responded to the LNRS consultations in 2024 and 2025 and has been involved in the group since its inception.
National Grid	Direction of Travel Document consultation (January 2021) Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) WDC attended ET stakeholder workshop from National Grid on 31 October 2023.	Provided comments on the Infrastructure Section and Growth Options. Provided comments on draft site allocations and design policies within the Local Plan. Matters covered include developing a regional planning process into a net zero future and their connections strategy.
Southern Water (SW)	SW responded to the: • Direction of Travel Document consultation (January 2021). • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consultation (August 2020) • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report Consultation (August 2023) • Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan	SW provided comments on Infrastructure Sections of consultation documents. Comments were incorporated into the SA Scoping Report as well as taken forward in the emerging local plan.

Other bodies	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
	(Regulation 18) (March 2024)	
	Regular engagement on growth strategy and options / site testing	Ongoing engagement during the plan making process on various matters including growth and site testing to understand both current and future requirements. Further information is provided in the Interim IDP.
	Southern Water Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan	WDC provided comments during the consultation (August 2022) and in December 2024 in relation to the SWRMP24.
	Several SW LPA Working group meetings held in 2023 / 2024/ 2025	Meetings to discuss water related matters and issues within the district / County.
South East Water (SEW)	Direction of Travel Document consultation	SEW provided comments on the Infrastructure and Climate Change Sections. Considerations and comments have been taken forward in the SA Scoping Report and emerging local plan.
	Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024)	SEW provided comments on Infrastructure and Climate Change policies and considerations and comments will be taken forward into Regulation 19 Local Plan.
	Regular engagement on growth strategy and options / site testing	Ongoing engagement during the plan making process on various matters including growth and site testing to understand both current and future requirements. Further information is provided in the Interim IDP.
	Regional Plan for the South East	WDC responded to the WRSE consultation on the WRSE Regional Plan for the South East 15/03/2022
	South East Water Drought Plan 2027	WDC responded to the Pre-Consultation process on the Drought Plan on 23 January 2025.

Other bodies	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
	SEW are a member of the Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership with Wealden.	
UK Power Networks (UKPN)	WDC has attend several UK Power Network engagement sessions in 2023. Meeting held with WDC and UKPN on Wealden Local Plan and growth strategy (August 2023).	Matters considered included energy planning scenarios, and the low carbon technology take up associated with each in the East Sussex area, overview of specific investments in the electricity network that are being planned in the period 2023 to 2028 in the Southeast region and their local climate ambition and how they are planning to support the delivery of this. Discussed the emerging growth strategy for the local plan.
ESCC Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)	Ongoing discussions and work during draft Local Plan development and as part of the SFRAs. Both WDC and ESCC are members of the Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership and the Blue Heart Project and attend regular meetings / workshops.	The ESCC team have undertaken work to provide up-to-date fluvial modelling and also provided comments on WDCs SFRA Project brief (September 2020). Specific on-going discussions and engagement with ESCC and the EA in relation to the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) work undertaken by WDC and consultants JBA. WDC commented on the draft scoping report 'Managing the Impact of Development on Water Quality in the Pevensey Levels SSSI Catchment (December 2020) and attended a workshop on this matter as well as follow up meetings. WDC attended a DEFRA Flood and Coastal Innovation Fund meeting organised by ESCC (May 2020).
ESCC Education	Engagement on emerging policies and the Interim Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and regular engagement on growth	Liaison with ESCC (Education) has been a continuous process over the development of the Draft Local Plan – individual meetings, specific site discussions and work undertaken by

Other bodies	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
	strategy and options / site testing.	ESCC to understand current and future education capacity and needs.
ESCC Health	Health related training and workshops Public Health and Planning Working Agreement and the East Sussex Public Health and Planning Memorandum of Understanding. Meetings and going engagement to discuss the application of Health Impact Assessments, Public Health trigger points and emerging local plan policy (various meetings in 2023, 2024 and 2025) Various meetings held for the East Sussex Planning for Health working group in 2023, 2024 and 2025.	ESCC have provided training and workshops on Health Impact Assessments and Health and Wellbeing in Local Plans. ESCC, WDC and other ES authorities inputted into content and are party to the agreement / MOU. Meetings have been undertaken with WDC regarding health and wellbeing policies, Health Impact Assessment thresholds and associated policy work. Discussions focused on a strategic approach to health and wellbeing across the County.
ESCC (Waste and Minerals)	ESCC organised a meeting with WDC on the Review of the Waste and Minerals Local Plan in January 2020. Both ESCC and WDC are signatories to the SoCG regarding the provision of aggregates and the safeguarding of Minerals Infrastructure Ongoing engagement throughout the Local Plan process.	WDC provided comments on the East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton and Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan - Draft revised policies consultation document (July 2021).
West Sussex County Council, Kent County Council and Surrey County Council	Officers from these councils meet with WDC officers at cross-boundary infrastructure meetings. Ashdown Forest Working Group	Engagement has been focused on cross border infrastructure requirements and liaison on such matters in partnership with ESCC. West Sussex, Kent and Surrey CC are members of the Ashdown Forest working

Other bodies	Engagement / Discussion dates	Involvement / Key Outcomes
		group. The focus of engagement has been devising air quality monitoring and the transport model.
Elmbridge Borough Council	Letter requesting unmet need to be met.	WDC responded to the letter from Elmbridge Borough Council asking whether Wealden can meet any of its unmet housing need on 20 February 2020.
Board of Ashdown Forest Conservators	Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Strategy	Ongoing engagement relating to SAMM projects and delivery which provides mitigation at Ashdown Forest. Engagement includes all SAMM Strategy partners.
High Weald AONB Unit	Direction of Travel Document consultation (January 2021). Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report consultation (August 2020) Wealden District Council Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024) WDC Landscape evidence base High Weald AONB Officer Steering Group (OSG)	Provided comments on Growth Options Provided comments on issues such as climate change and carbon sequestration in natural habitats and soil. Changes made as appropriate. Provided comments on the site allocations within the draft Wealden Local Plan (March 2024) WDC shared the methodology for this work with the Unit for comment and took on board their responses with our consultants. Also shared emerging landscape assessments. WDC is part of the OSG and attend regular meetings as well as providing feedback on documents and consultations as appropriate. This is an ongoing process.
RSPB	Ashdown Forest SAMM Strategy	Ongoing engagement relating to SAMM projects at Ashdown Forest.
Sport England	Wealden Playing Pitch Strategy	Steering Group meetings held with consultants, Sports England and sport National Governing Bodies to progress a playing pitch assessment and action plan.
Sussex Ornithological Society	Ashdown Forest SAMM Strategy	Ongoing engagement relating to SAMM projects at Ashdown Forest.

5. Membership of Working Groups and Partnerships

5.1 Partnership working and cooperation on key issues is embedded in the way plans are prepared by Wealden and across East Sussex. There are a range of strategic partnerships and working groups in operation that provide the necessary forums for discussion on strategic matters and issues of duty to cooperate. Table 3 summarises these.

Table 3: Membership of Working Groups and Partnerships

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
Infrastructure		
Cross Boundary Infrastructure Meetings	*Wealden District Council, Kent County Council, East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Surrey County Council*	Initiated in October 2021, these are used as a forum to discuss growth in Wealden and any cross-boundary implications, identifying any possible issues. They provide a direct dialogue and an opportunity to raise any concerns. The main focus is on roads and schools.
Infrastructure Roadmap Meetings	*Councillors and Officers of East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council*	Meetings are held every three to four months. Wealden provide an update on their Local Plan, CIL and development progress and ESCC provides updates on spend and projects. Transport issues are discussed across the district from small to large scale. It also provides an opportunity to discuss education and flooding matters.
Transport for South East Transport Forum	*16 Local Authorities, representatives of district and borough authorities, protected landscapes and national delivery agencies*	Transport for South East is the sub-national transport body for the South East of England. Its purpose is to determine what investment is needed to transform the region's transport system and drive economic growth[73].
Transport for South East Decarbonisation Forum	*District and County Councils from across the South East, TfSE, Department for Transport, NHS Commissioning Groups, NHS England, National Highways, Network Rail,*	This group meets with the objective of hitting net zero carbon emissions in the South East by 2050. It is a forum for groups to discuss different strategies for reducing carbon

[73] Transport for South East website. Available at: transportforthesoutheast.org.uk/about-us/

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
	Ambulance Service, Energy Saving Trust, South East Energy Hub and Hydrogen Sussex	emissions and TfSEs work on decarbonisation. Updates are also given by attendees on decarbonisation activities.
Shared Transport Evidence Base (STEB)	*East Sussex County Council, National Highways, Hastings Borough Council, Jacobs, Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils, Rother District Council, South Downs National Park, Wealden District Council*	Numerous meetings have been, and continue to be, held between East Sussex County Council Highway Authority and the LPA's in East Sussex to produce a shared transport evidence base across East Sussex.
Gatwick Airport Air Quality Working Group	*Relevant local authorities and other interested parties and stakeholders*	Gatwick airport have been working with local authorities in a number of working groups relating to the proposed north runway DCO.
Ashdown Forest		
Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Working Group	*Planning officers and planning managers from South Downs National Park Authority (Chair), Wealden District Council, Mid-Sussex District Council, Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council, Brighton and Hove City Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Tandridge District Council, Crawley Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Natural England*	The group provides a forum for the relevant authorities to meet and work cooperatively with each other to address the issue of air quality on the Ashdown Forest, an important cross-boundary strategic issue. A SoCG to reflect recent work has been signed by all parties.
Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) Partnership	*Wealden District Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Mid-Sussex District Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Tandridge District Council, Lewes District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, The Conservators of Ashdown Forest*	Provides a means of discussing the SAMMS Strategy for the Ashdown Forest and mitigation for recreational disturbance on the forest from new residential development, with the aim of limiting the impact of visitors on the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA). Wealden were signatories to a legal agreement with other local authorities and the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, which sets out agreement on the collection of developer contributions and the administration of the SAMM Strategy. Joint studies / surveys

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
		(i.e. the Visitor Surveys 2021) are commissioned. There is also a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMM) Tariff Guidance (October 2019) and Ashdown Forest Mitigation Zone Background Paper (January 2019) available[74].
Strategic Planning		
East Sussex Strategic Planning Members Group (ESSPMG)	*Wealden District Council, Lewes District Council, Rother District Council, Hastings Borough Council, Eastbourne Borough Council. The South Downs National Park Authority, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council and Mid Sussex District Council have also attended and contributed on invitation. (Council Members)*	Set up in 2013 to boost the political dimension of cooperation which was prudent in light of the requirements of the Localism Act. The group's intention is to create an environment which encourages the development of collaborative, constructive solutions to some of the county's most challenging strategic cross boundary development issues. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed which clarifies the primary activities of the group. The three main suggested work areas and objectives include managing housing requirements, supporting strategic infrastructure provision and common policy issues to achieve a common evidence base and policy direction.
East Sussex Local Plan Managers Group (Including Brighton and Hove)	*East Sussex County Council (various departments), Wealden District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council and Lewes District Council, Rother District Council, Hastings Borough Council, South Downs National Park Authority, Brighton and Hove City Council, Environment Agency.*	Meets every couple of months and provides a forum whereby Local Plan Managers from across East Sussex can meet to discuss issues and share advice/knowledge on a range of subjects.
Team East Sussex (TES)	*Relevant bodies from across East Sussex consisting of businesses, local authorities*	Team East Sussex is the local delivery partnership for the South East LEP for the part of the LEP

[74] https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/planning-policy-evidence-base/habitat-regulations-assessment/

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
	(including Wealden), social enterprise and education representatives[75].	that covers Wealden. This is now managed by ESCC following the abolition of the LEPs. Meetings are held on a regular basis to discuss strategic infrastructure, economic and housing issues across the sub-region.
Developers East Sussex (DES)	*Representatives from LPA's in East Sussex (Planning Officers) including Wealden District Council, developers, TES, Highways England, Homes England*	This is a subgroup of Team East Sussex that was established in May 2016[76]. DES aims to represent all developers in East Sussex, large and small, public and private. Its role is to provide advice, directions and solutions to Team East Sussex, East Sussex County Council, Government and associated bodies with the aim of bringing about 'deliverable, high quality and sustainable development, a functional property market, and growth in jobs and housing'[77].
Culture East Sussex (CES)	*Includes a range of cultural venue and provider organisations, Arts Council and local government bodies*	Has the objective of developing and promoting a wide range of cultural activities within East Sussex to aid growth and development.
High Weald National Landscape (formerly AONB)		
High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)	*Principle Partners - Natural England, East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Kent County Council, Surrey County Council, Tandridge District Council, Horsham District Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Wealden District Council, Rother District Council, Hastings*	JAC meets twice at least twice per year and its primary purpose is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape (formerly the AONB), but also to increase the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the National Landscape and to foster the economic and social

[75] ESCC Website- Team East Sussex page. Available at: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/support/economic-development/selep/team-east-sussex
[76] ESCC Website- Developers East Sussex page. Available at: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/support/economic-development/selep/developers-east-sussex
[77] East Sussex County Council (27 September 2016) DES Terms of Reference. Available at: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/support/economic-development/selep/developers-east-sussex/des-terms-of-reference

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
	Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Ashford Borough Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Crawley Borough Council. (Councillors). *Advisory (non-funding) Partners - other government and voluntary agencies who have a significant role in the area covered by the AONB e.g. Country Landowners Business Association, National Farmers Union, English Nature, The Forestry Commission, Action in Rural Sussex.*	well-being of local communities within it. The JAC produces the High Weald AONB Management Plan[78] (for adoption by local authorities) and oversees its implementation.
High Weald AONB Officer Steering Group (OSG)	*Representatives of the 15 local authorities with land in the National Landscape (including Wealden District Council), Officers from the High Weald National Landscape Unit and a representative from Natural England*	A group consisting of planning officers from the relevant local planning authorities and the High Weald AONB Unit that meet to discuss planning issues that may impact the designated landscape. The OSG reports to the JAC.
High Weald Biodiversity Net Gain Working Group	*Representatives of the 15 local authorities with land in the National Landscape (including Wealden District Council), Officers from the High Weald National Landscape Unit and a representative from Natural England*	This group was formed to specifically share information about Biodiversity Net Gain, including legislation, national guidance and examples of Local Plan policies, strategies and guidance developed by other organisations. It is intended to be used as a means of sharing experience of how the metric is being applied and common issues that are arising when analysing submissions from developers. The ultimate aim is to agree a guidance note for Local Plan policies to support the implementation of biodiversity net gain in relation to development within the National Landscape. A position on Habitats Banks and the High

[78] The High Weald JAC (2024) The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029. Available at: https://highweald.org/aonb-management-plan/

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
		Weald National Landscape was published in November 2025[79].
The Natural Environment		
Sussex Nature Partnership (SxNP)	*Action in Rural Sussex, Adur and Ouse Rivers Trust, Arun and Rother Rivers Trust, Ashdown Forest, Brighton and Hove City Council, Brighton and Lewes Downs Biosphere/ The Living Coast, Council for the Protection of Rural (CPRE) – Sussex, CLA, East Sussex County Council, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, High Weald AONB Unit, Knepp Estate, National Farmers Union, National Trust, Natural England, Portsmouth Water, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (at Wakehurst Place), RSPB, South Downs National Park Authority, South East Rivers Trust, South East Water, Southern Water, Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, Sussex Community Development Association, Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Weald To Waves Partnership, West Sussex County Council, Woodland Trust*	Established in 2014, the SxNP is a voluntary partnership of over 30 organisations across East and West Sussex, including Brighton and Hove[80], hosted by East Sussex County Council. Established to enable local stakeholders to work in a strategic way to help manage the local environment and deliver multiple benefits for local residents, the economy and the environment. The board meets quarterly but uses working groups to drive forward work in several different areas.
Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Working group	*Open to any member of the wider SxNP network. Where relevant, others from outside the SxNP membership can be invited to join the working group*	The group aims to promote a consistent approach to BNG across Sussex and to raise the understanding and expertise across LPAs in relation to BNG. It also seeks to add value through knowledge sharing and working on common issues to reduce duplication among LPAs and to work with LPAs to develop a system which targets and implements BNG. This is an ongoing working group.

[79] Habitats Banks and the High Weald National Landscape. Available at: https://highweald.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/published-version-Habitat-Bank-creation-in-the-High-Weald-Position-Statement-2025.pdf

[80] Sussex Nature Partnership Website. Available at:sussexlnp.org.uk/about-us/our-partners/

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
Green Spaces Steering Group	*Open to any member of the wider SxNP network Where relevant, others from outside the SxNP membership can be invited to join the working group*	This group was formed to undertake project work to develop methodologies and toolkits for use by local authority Park/Ranger staff and town/parish councils to assess the ecological and social value of publicly owned greenspace such as parks, gardens and woodlands. Several case studies from within Wealden and Adur & Worthing were undertaken. The work also produced a set of lessons on the role of greenspaces in delivering a wider range of benefits for people and nature and the interventions necessary to put these into practice.
Local Authority Network	*All district and borough councils across East and West Sussex, including Brighton and Hove City Council*	The Local Authority Network was launched by the SxNP in July 2021[81]. It provides a mechanism for knowledge sharing and a forum for co-development of solutions to common issues. It organises a programme of monthly webinars.
Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Working Group	*Upper Tier Authorities, LPAs in Sussex, Protected Landscape Groups e.g. High Weald AONB, Sussex Nature Partnership, Data and Evidence Groups e.g. Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre, ENGOs, Landowners, Arms Length Bodies*	East and West Sussex County Councils are the responsible authorities for the purpose of leading on preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Sussex as a whole[82]. The first meeting was in November 2022 and involved discussions around LNRS governance and process as well as a scoping exercise to determine the level of ambition for the LNRS, commitments and resources.

[81] Local Authority Network webpage on the SxNP website. Available at sussexlnp.org.uk/local-authority-network/

[82] Local Nature Recovery Strategies webpage on the Sussex Nature Partnership website. Available at: sussexlnp.org.uk/local-nature-recovery-strategies-for-sussex/#:~:text=This%20will%20include%20agreeing%20the,for%20local%20people%20to%20enjoy.

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
		These working groups will provide the means by which they can work with other organisations and partners to agree what should be included, and prioritised, in the LNRS.
LNRS Supporting Authorities Group Meetings	*East and West Sussex County Councils, Local Authorities in East and West Sussex.*	Sub-group of the LNRS Working Group. The first meeting was in June 2023. The meetings are designed for the Supporting Authorities (Local Planning Authorities) to discuss issues around the LNRS, such as governance and engagement, and to get updates on progress.
Water and Flooding		
Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership	*Combe Valley Countryside Park, Cuckmere Flood Forum, Cuckmere Valley Parish Council, East Sussex County Council, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Friends of the Cuckmere, Hellingly Parish Council, Local landowners across the Catchment, National Trust, Natural England, Pevensey Advisory Group, Pevensey and Cuckmere Water Level Management Board, Rother District Council, Rother Voluntary Action, Southdown Angling Association, South Downs National Park Authority, South East Rivers Trust, South East Water, Southern Water, Sussex Flow Initiative, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Underwater Edge - Local Artists, Water Management Alliance, Wealden District Council.*	The Partnership is focused on integrated catchment management to improve the health of rivers for wildlife and local communities within the Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment[83]. The partnership is also working towards the delivery of the Water Framework Directive objectives to improve the quality of the environment at a local level. The catchment partnership is co-hosted by the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the South East Rivers Trust.
The Blue Heart Project[84]	*Led by East Sussex County Council in Partnership With:*	Blue Heart is a six-year project that will provide an

[83] Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership website. Available at: www.southeastriverstrust.org/cuckmere-pevensey-levels/

[84] The Blue Heart Project Webpage. Available at: www.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/flooding/blue-heart

Working Group / Partnership	Members	Summary of purpose
	Environment Agency, Pevensey and Cuckmere Water Level Management Board, Eastbourne Borough Council, Wealden District Council, Southern Water	understanding of the local water catchment and how it works and also communicate the risk of flooding to the communities of Eastbourne and South Wealden. Blue Heart will mitigate the impact of flooding caused by climate change through technology to manage and monitor water levels in Eastbourne and south Wealden.
Southern Water Local Authority Stakeholder Group	*Internal discussion group for all local authorities across the Southern Water foul water catchment*	The purpose of this Group is to find ways to work together through open liaison /dialogue with Southern Water, to hold them to account for delivering on their responsibilities. The first meeting was held in February 2023[85].

[85] Wealden District Council Website. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/southern-water-stakeholder-group/

6. Cross boundary strategic issues

Housing

6.1 Meeting housing needs is a strategic matter, with cross-boundary implications where identified needs are not being fully met, where strategic growth is being proposed or where development will straddle or be close to local planning authority boundaries.

6.2 WDC has been working closely with other local authorities who border Wealden District, which has included discussions on meeting objectively assessed housing needs, as well as those local authorities identified through the Council's Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) in both 2021 and 2026 as being within a Housing Market Area (HMA) that overlaps Wealden District. This includes the Eastbourne HMA, the Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells HMA, the Coastal West Sussex HMA, the Hasting and Rother HMA and the North West Sussex HMA.

6.3 The Council has received a number of requests (from both adjoining authorities and authorities that do not share a border with the district) for Wealden to consider meeting their unmet housing need. These local planning authorities include:

- Crawley Borough Council;
- Eastbourne Borough Council;
- Elmbridge Borough Council;
- Hastings Borough Council;
- Lewes District Council;
- Rother District Council;
- Sevenoaks District Council;
- South Downs National Park Authority; and
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

6.4 In respect of overall housing needs, the extensive work that WDC has undertaken to inform the 'Focused' Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) provides an overall housing supply figure for Wealden District of 16,609 homes over the plan period (that runs from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2042). This would achieve an annual figure of 977 dwellings per annum (dpa).

6.5 At this stage in the plan-making process, there is a shortfall in housing delivery of 8,160 (net) dwellings, which amounts to a shortfall of 480 dpa. This means that the overall housing supply figure for our Focused' Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) is currently a 'capacity' based figure, based on the level of housing that can be delivered within the plan period, having regard to the identified constraints below and potential development capacity. Constraints include:

- Potential highways impacts, particularly around the A22 and A26 corridor, which will likely constrain growth in the south and north of the District respectively, particularly around Hailsham and Uckfield and the surrounding areas, accounting for cumulative impacts;
- .

- Landscape considerations in relation to the High Weald National Landscape and the setting of the South Downs National Park;
- Biodiversity designations and habitats across the District; and
- Flood risk, particularly to the southeast of the District and around urban areas that surround Eastbourne.

6.6 Further details in relation to these constraints is provided within the Interim Infrastructure Delivery Plan, the Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessments and Landscape Assessments that accompany the Regulation 18 consultation[86].

6.7 In view of the close proximity of Royal Tunbridge Wells (RTW) to the administrative boundary with Wealden, there has been particular focus in the dialogue with TWBC on proposals on the southern edge of the town, in both local authority areas.

6.8 Whilst we are undertaking a further 'call for sites', should our overall housing supply continue to be a 'capacity' based figure as we develop the plan further to the Regulation 19 stage, it will mean that we are unlikely to be in a position to meet our own housing need or indeed assist our neighbouring local authorities with their 'unmet' housing need. However, we will further consider this as we progress the plan.

6.9 Further detailed highways modelling will be undertaken between the Regulation 18 consultation and the publication of the Regulation 19 Local Plan that may provide opportunities to mitigate some impacts and improve the position in terms of growth on these key corridors.

6.10 In relation to accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers, all East Sussex Authorities, including WDC, jointly commissioned (in November 2020) a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) for the period 2021-2040. The report was agreed by all local authorities within East Sussex (as well as the South Downs National Park) and was published in May 2022[87].

6.11 The GTAA identified that Wealden District has the highest Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople population within East Sussex, in addition to the largest number of existing plots and pitches. This GTAA shows that for the period between 2021 to 2040, there is an accommodation need under the 'ethnic' definition of 51 pitches in total. It was also shown that there was accommodation need for three plots for Travelling Showpeople in the district.

6.12 WDC will continue to work with adjoining authorities via the duty to cooperate forum to ensure that sufficient provision for gypsies and travellers is made. At this time, WDC is seeking to meet its Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need, as set out in the GTAA, through its Local Plan.

[86] Please see our evidence base webpage: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/planning-policy-evidence-base/

[87] RRR Consultancy Ltd (May 2022) East Sussex Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/planning-policy-evidence-base/gypsy-and-travellers/

Economic Development / Employment

6.13 The Employment and Economic Study (2026)[88], which was commissioned to inform the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18), was carried out jointly with EBC by consultants Iceni and considers the period 2025 – 2042. It was considered that the assessment of economic needs across Functional Economic Market Areas (FEMAs) aligns with the guidance in the PPG.

6.14 Although there is no standard approach to defining such geographical relationships, WDC considers that Eastbourne and Wealden share important economic linkages and the report aligns the Eastbourne FEMA with the existing Eastbourne HMA that includes the town of Eastbourne and parts of South Wealden (which includes Hailsham and some other urban settlements surrounding the north of Eastbourne).

6.15 However, it is recognised that WDC has multiple FEMA's within its administrative boundary, given the complex set of economic relationships of a large district without a major settlement. This includes connections with a number of other local authority areas, including a strong connection (commuting patterns) with Tunbridge Wells

6.16 For WDC, this assessment concluded that in line with the ONS Travel to Work Areas (TTWA) and the HMA geographies identified, that the northern portion of Wealden District (incorporating Crowborough, Heathfield and Wadhurst) is aligned/overlapped with the Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge FEMA. The remainder of the district is more strongly associated with the Eastbourne FEMA to the south and other FEMAs to the west of the district, including the Coastal Sussex FEMA that incorporates Uckfield.

6.17 In terms of economic floorspace requirements, the Eastbourne and Wealden Employment and Economic Study (January 2026) recommends that between 2025 and 2042, it is appropriate to plan for 3.2ha (16,100 sqm) for new offices in Wealden but that there should be no strategic allocations for offices in the district, as additional floorspace can be accommodated through smaller office provisions/additions within the existing town centres of the district.

6.18 In relation to industrial and warehouse floorspace provision, the study has identified a clear need for new sites on the basis of previous completions over the last twenty-year period (2000/01 to 2019/20), which indicates a strong demand for industrial and warehouse units and in considering that the loss of such units has been limited during the same period. Overall, the market remains buoyant and requires further industrial developments to meet demand.

6.19 The study noted that it would be appropriate to plan for the net completions model, which is equivalent to 44.6ha, or 178,300 sqm for new industrial and warehousing development (B2 and B8 Use Class).

6.20 Similar to housing provision, the provision of employment land to meet need is a strategic matter, and we are required to consider whether we can deliver any shortfall from surrounding local authorities who we share a FEMA with. The Eastbourne Local

[88] Iceni (January 2026) Employment and Economic Study for Eastbourne and Wealden. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/planning-policy-evidence-base/economy/

Plan Growth Strategy consultation[89] identified that Eastbourne may have a shortfall in employment provision during their plan period of some 23,184 sqm.

6.21 In a letter dated 5 November 2021, EBC requested WDC to meet some of its unmet employment need. Given that the Council cannot meets its own employment needs at this stage, we have not sought to address this unmet need. However, if this position changes, we will consider whether we can meet any of Eastbourne's unmet employment need once EBCs evidence on employment supply is progressed further. WDC has, and will continue to, consider any EBC unmet need and whether this can be accommodated.

6.22 With regards to retailing and town centres, the Council commissioned the Wealden Town Centre Study (2026). The Study concluded that the district retains 53.6% of residents spend on convenience goods, mainly within the town, district and local centres, with just over 46.3% 'leakage' to other destinations outside the district (including East Grinstead, Eastbourne, Tunbridge Wells and Lewes). For comparison goods expenditure, the Study concluded that there was considerable 'leakage' outside of the district, indicative of Wealden's geographic relationship with other major towns nearby, including Eastbourne to the south and Tunbridge Wells to the north.

6.23 The Wealden Town Centre Study (2026) has identified that there is only a very limited capacity for new retail floorspace over the study period (2025 to 2040) for both comparison and convenience goods taking into account existing provision and future populations. For convenience goods floorspace, the capacity is between 9,700sqm by 2040 and for comparison goods floorspace the figures are 11,900sqm.

6.24 Our evidence suggests that we should not allocate land for retail floorspace but should instead focus any additional floorspace coming forward within our District, Service and Local Centre boundaries in accordance with our town centre hierarchy and this is the approach we have taken in the Focused Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18).

6.25 Wealden has maintained dialogue with adjoining authorities regarding employment and retail floorspace provision. This dialogue will continue through the preparation of the respective Local Plans.

Infrastructure (including transport)

6.26 There are a number of infrastructure issues which are particularly relevant to cross boundary considerations – including transport, health and education as well as water supply and flood risk.

6.27 As part of the production of the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP)[90] Story Map, the relevant service providers, as well as our neighbouring authorities, have been engaged throughout the process through ongoing discussions, stakeholder consultations as well as the more formal consultation stages. They have been

[89] Eastbourne Local Plan – Growth Strategy (Regulation 18), November 2022. Available at: https://planningpolicyconsult.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/ELP_GS/consultationHome

[90] Infrastructure Delivery Plan Story Map, February 2026. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/all-focused-local-plan-consultation-information/

engaged in the overall strategy for growth and input to the draft policies and proposed site allocations in the 'Focused' Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18). Full details of this process are set out in the Council's IDP Story Map which details the infrastructure requirements across the district over the plan period..

6.28 By its nature, transport and highways have a number of cross boundary considerations, which have been explored as part of DtC discussions.

6.29 As part of the preparation for the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan (March 2024) the Council commissioned, in conjunction with East Sussex County Council and neighbouring authorities', a Shared Transport Evidence Base (STEB) study to assess and understand the likely impacts of local plan growth on the transport system and gain an early indication of the possible scale and type of impacts, as well as any mitigation that may be required to address these impacts.

6.30 In relation to the preferred growth strategy set out in the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan (March 2024), the transport modelling research confirms that there are already existing link capacity issues. Whilst several junctions will be subject to future upgrades, the capacity of the A27, A22 and A26 corridors to accommodate additional traffic growth would require mitigation in order to facilitate the growth proposed.

6.31 The STEB[91] reports also confirm that accessibility to sustainable transport options, including public transport, is varied across the district with greater opportunities for bus travel in the south of the district. A key message from this early work is that the level of growth set out in the Regulation 18 Local Plan will require an overall improvement to sustainable travel provision to encourage an overall modal shift and to reduce impacts on the highway.

6.32 WDC has liaised with ESCC and National Highways as relevant on matters relating to highways infrastructure in the drafting of its draft Regulation 18 Local Plan 9March 2024). Where substantial development, particularly on the administrative boundary of WDC, is planned for, then there will be a need to coordinate the delivery of highway infrastructure improvements with other authorities, including the securing of any necessary funding. This work is currently being updated to support the Regulation 19 Wealden Local Plan.

6.33 In terms of rail connections, again WDC has explored any cross-boundary concerns with those authorities along the strategic rail network as well as Network Rail. No specific infrastructure has been identified as essential to the delivery of the plan, but policies set out throughout the Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) in March 2024 include the requirement for all development to provide accessible and inclusive access to sustainable travel opportunities. In relation to transport via rail, this might include infrastructure such as footpaths and cycle ways that connect with stations.

6.34 On a strategic level the reinstatement of the Uckfield to Lewes line is a key piece of infrastructure identified as required in the long term to assist in modal shift to sustainable travel and to support climate change and net zero carbon targets. WDC maintains its position to safeguard the Uckfield/Lewes railway line. Network Rail

[91] WDC STEB Transport Note 01 2022 and WDC STEB Transport Note 02 2022. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/planning-policy-evidence-base/transport/

advise that the track bed and specific width of land would need to be protected but that they would need to confirm the actual dimensions required. Funding remains the key issue with regards to the line reopening – a long-term aspiration for Network Rail.

6.35 The provision of education has been addressed through collaborative working with ESCC as the education provider who has input throughout the process. WDC has shared, and will continue to share, information on known housing commitments within the district as well as the growth strategy proposed in the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (January 2026) to allow ESCC to plan for future education provision, primary and secondary. As a result of testing the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan growth, ESCC have identified shortfalls in education provision in a number of settlements in the short term and this this is described in their School Organisation Plan (2025-2029)[92].

6.36 In terms of health, the NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB) has also been involved throughout the process and has assessed the proposals against their practice mapping, which covers a number of geographical areas.

6.37 In addition to partnership working, the Council has commissioned, jointly and on its own, several evidence base studies[93] to inform plan-making. Of relevance to infrastructure, these include:

- WDC Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy (PPOSS) – Assessment Report (April 2022)
- WDC Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy - Action Plan (2023)
- WDC Open Space – Assessment Report (OSAR) (April 2022)
- WDC Open Space – Parish Summaries (OSPS) (April 2022)
- WDC Indoor Sports Facility Needs Assessment (March 2022)
- Wealden Green Infrastructure Study May 2017
- Wealden District Council Strategic Flood Risk Assessments Level 1 (SFRA) (2025 and 2026) for North Wealden and Eastbourne and South Wealden; and
- Wealden District Council Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2023).

6.38 Further studies / work will be progressed alongside the plan-making process as relevant. These will include studies in relation to biodiversity net gain as well as further work to consider infrastructure provision, such as further highways testing and mitigation.

6.39 In relation to water, WDC has had ongoing discussions with Southern Water and South East Water in relation to connections and services and these will continue in the development of the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

6.40 In relation to flooding and flood risk, discussions have been held with the Environment Agency and ESCC as the Lead Local Flood Authority in the production

[92] ESCC School Organisation Plan 2025 to 2029. Available at: https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/education-learning/management/education-plans
[93] WDC – Planning Policy Evidence Bases. Available at: www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-policy-evidence-base/

of the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (SFRAs). The final SFRAs have been reviewed by both the EA and ESCC prior to their publication. WDC and EBC jointly commissioned a Level 1 SFRA for the Eastbourne and South Wealden area given the clear linkages between the two areas in terms of water flows and flood risk.

6.41 Infrastructure issues relating to transport, water/flood risk, education and health have also formed a standard discussion point with neighbouring authorities as part of regular Duty to Cooperate meetings and any potential issues/concerns have been raised at these meetings and recorded.

Environmental Issues

6.42 As above, the Council has been actively involved on wider duty to cooperate matters affecting the Ashdown Forest, a European site protected under the Habitat Regulations. Cross boundary issues of visitor pressure and vehicle emissions have the potential to adversely affect the protected habitats and species found in the Ashdown Forest. The Council has been working in partnership with other affected authorities to commission studies, undertake detailed analysis, and to develop policy to ensure planned development can go ahead without causing harm to this designated site.

6.43 Two formal partnerships covering these issues are in operation: one to address visitor pressure, the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMMS) partnership; and one to address vehicle emissions, the Ashdown Forest Working Group (AFWG). The AFWG has also produced a signed Statement of Common Ground in 2025 on air quality issues for the Ashdown Forest.

6.44 WDC participates in the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) partnership and are signatories to a legal agreement with other participating local authorities and The Conservators of Ashdown Forest. This sets out agreement on the collection of developer contributions and the administration of the SAMM Strategy as part of a joint approach to provide mitigation at Ashdown Forest for recreational disturbance from new residential development. The group has also produced a signed Statement of Common Ground in 2019.

6.45 The Council has been careful to consult with adjoining authorities in the preparation of landscape evidence base documents including landscape sensitivity studies and landscape character assessments taking note of the evidence available from adjoining authorities. The Council is also a key partner of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee for the High Weald National Landscape with Officers and Members attending JAC meetings and officers attending separate Officer Steering Group Meetings to oversee the work of the AONB Unit and to support and participate in new studies or guidance. Council officers have been part of subgroups working on Biodiversity Net Gain and a Housing Design Guide.

6.46 The Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar site is located within the administrative boundaries of WDC and RDC. In 2010, a joint WDC and RDC paper was published concerning hydrology local to the Pevensey Levels[94]. This paper formed the basis of

[94] Wealden and Rother District Councils (September 2010) Appropriate Assessment. Hydrology Local to the Pevensey Levels. Available at: https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/new-local-plan/planning-policy-evidence-base/habitat-regulations-assessment/

the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) regarding hydrology that accompanied the withdrawn Wealden Local Plan (2019), although it was updated to take account of new case law. In addition, mitigation has been updated to take into account Natural England's advice regarding strategic Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS). Strategic SuDS is a concept that was brought forward by Natural England. Whilst RDC had not requested an update to the joint hydrology paper undertaken in 2010 as part of its Development and Site Allocations Plan (2019), which was submitted at a similar time to the withdrawn Wealden Local Plan (2019), it is considered relevant to both authorities. WDC has appointed consultants to consider its requirements under the Habitats Regulations for its new Local Plan.

6.47 Although the former planning policy developed by WDC was not adopted, it shows that both WDC and RDC were working along similar lines in terms of policy requirements for SuDS in the Pevensey Levels catchment. In producing the 'Focused' Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18), WDC and RDC have continued this collaborative working to produce a consistent policy approach to the Pevensey Levels across both authorities Local Plans.

6.48 Both WDC and RDC are members of the Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Catchment Partnership, as detailed in Chapter 5.

6.49 There may be some opportunities through new planned development on the administrative boundaries between WDC and adjoining authorities to provide net gains in biodiversity and this could be explored through the duty to cooperate process. To achieve such aims, both WDC and adjoining authorities will need to liaise with each other through their Local Plans to ensure that no opportunities are missed in terms of ensuring net gains in biodiversity.

6.50 The Council is an active member of the Sussex Nature Partnership, including being involved in their subgroups on Greenspaces, Biodiversity net gain and Nature Recovery Networks.

7. Conclusions

7.1 This Interim Duty to Cooperate Paper sets out the Council's approach, actions, and outcomes in relation to undertaking the DtC with neighbouring authorities and other relevant bodies, in accordance legislation and with Government guidance.

7.2 The information included in this Paper demonstrates that WDC has actively undertaken a process of on-going collaborative, constructive engagement working with others in progressing cross boundary strategic matters in the preparation of the 'Focused' Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan. This Paper is a live document and will be reviewed and updated alongside the on-going Duty and engagement with neighbouring authorities and other relevant bodies as the Plan progresses to Regulation 19, submission, adoption and beyond, including its five-year post adoption review.