

Wealden
District Council

Consultation Statement

Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 19)
September 2026

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1. Introduction

Purpose of this Consultation Statement

This Consultation Statement has been prepared by Wealden District Council to support the submission of the Wealden Local Plan. It explains how the Council has engaged with residents, businesses, community organisations, landowners, infrastructure providers, neighbouring authorities, statutory consultees and other interested parties throughout the preparation of the Local Plan.

The Statement demonstrates how the Council has met its statutory requirements for public participation, including those set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, as they continue to apply through the transitional arrangement for plan-making, together with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). It also evidences the Council's commitment to meaningful and proportionate engagement throughout the plan-making process.

Consultation and Engagement Approach

The preparation of the Wealden Local Plan has been informed by extensive consultation undertaken over several years since work progressed in 2020. The Council has sought to engage a wide range of stakeholders at key stages in the development of the Plan, providing opportunities for participation both in person and through digital platforms. Consultation activities have included public exhibitions, workshops, stakeholder meetings, online engagement, targeted consultation with statutory bodies, and formal consultation periods on plan documents.

Whilst engagement with stakeholders has taken place on an ongoing manner throughout the preparation of the Wealden Local Plan, the Council has formally sought consultation feedback with the general public and stakeholders at three key stages. These were as follows:

- **Direction of Travel public consultation**[1]: **23 November 2020 – 18 January 2021** – The first stage in the Local Plan engagement process, providing the opportunity to hear the views of the local community and stakeholders on a range of important topic areas in relation to growth and a vision for the district. 1,700

[1] Direction of Travel Consultation webpage

comments were received from 304 respondents. This stage had its own consultation summary report which can be found at the following link.

- **Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan consultation[2]: 15 March – 10 May 2024** – This stage of the emerging Local Plan set out the Council's draft policies and proposed growth strategy and was an important stage in the plan-making process. It provided an early opportunity for communities, businesses, landowners, developers, partners, and stakeholders to 'have a say' and comment on the draft Local Plan before it was considered further. 12,210 comments were received from 1,516 respondents at this stage. The Council produced a summary of the issues raised at this stage within a Local Plan Sub-Committee report on 5 March 2025, which can be found at the following link.
- **Focused Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18 Stage): 6 February – 30 March 2026** - This stage of the emerging Local set out the Council's revised proposed growth strategy for the district responding to the new growth targets associated with the amended National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It also included some other supporting policies that warranted public consultation and was an important point in the plan-making process before progressing to the Regulation 19 stage. 3,541 comments were received from 1,479 respondents at this stage. The Council has responded to comments received at this stage and at the previous Regulation 18 stage within this Consultation stage, and this is presented by each proposed policy area.

[2] Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan Consultation webpage (2024)

The Council recognises that effective plan-making is strengthened through collaboration and constructive dialogue. Consultation and engagement have played a vital role in identifying local issues, testing policy options, understanding community aspirations and ensuring that proposed planning policies are informed by local evidence and stakeholder knowledge.

How Consultation and Engagement Has Influenced the Wealden Local Plan

Comments received throughout the preparation of the Local Plan have been carefully considered and have helped shape the content of the Plan. Feedback has informed the development of the spatial strategy, housing and employment policies, environmental protections, infrastructure planning, place-based policies and site allocations. Where appropriate, changes have been made to reflect issues raised by consultees and to ensure that the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy.

The Council has also sought feedback and engagement on the Wealden Local Plan on an ongoing manner through the production of the Local Plan. This has taken place through on-going duty to co-operate meetings with neighbouring authorities, infrastructure providers and stakeholders, as well as other online engagement such as sharing evidence and updates when relevant. This also involved organisations commenting on draft policy wording and sections of the Local Plan as well as its evidence base, such as the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, or commissioned reports by consultants during their production.

Structure of this Statement

This Statement sets out:

- The legislative and policy framework for consultation and community engagement.
- Compliance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement and relevant statutory requirements.
- The consultation activities undertaken at each stage of Local Plan preparation, including the Council's consultation objectives and approach.
- A summary of the main issues raised through consultation, which is detailed in supporting appendices;
- How those issues have been considered and addressed in the evolution of the Local Plan.

Together, this information demonstrates that the Wealden Local Plan has been prepared through a transparent, inclusive and robust process of engagement, providing stakeholders with meaningful opportunities to influence the Plan's development.

2. Legislative and Policy Framework

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 establishes the statutory framework for the preparation of Local Plans in England. Section 19 requires local planning authorities to prepare development plan documents in accordance with principles of community involvement and to have regard to their Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) when undertaking plan preparation and consultation.

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

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out specific consultation requirements for Local Plan preparation, including:

- Regulation 18, which requires local planning authorities to notify and invite comments from specific consultation bodies, general consultation bodies and residents on the subject matter of a Local Plan before it is prepared.
- Regulation 19, which requires publication of the proposed submission version of the Local Plan and provides an opportunity for representations to be made on its legal compliance and soundness.
- Regulation 22, which requires submission of a Consultation Statement explaining:
    - which individuals and organisations were invited to make representations;
    - how they were invited to participate;
    - a summary of the main issues raised; and
    - how those issues have been addressed in preparing the Local Plan.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework emphasises that plans should be prepared positively, transparently and collaboratively. It states that neighbourhoods, local organisations, infrastructure providers and businesses should be engaged throughout the plan-making process so that Local Plans reflect local priorities and are shaped by effective public participation.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

The Government's Planning Practice Guidance provides further advice on effective community engagement, encouraging local planning authorities to use a range of

consultation methods appropriate to the communities and stakeholders being engaged. The guidance promotes early, meaningful and proportionate engagement throughout plan preparation.

3. Wealden District Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

The Council's most recent SCI[3] was adopted in November 2025 following public consultation between 4 July and 29 August 2025. The SCI sets out how Wealden District Council will involve residents, businesses, community groups, developers, statutory organisations and other interested parties in planning policy preparation, planning applications and neighbourhood planning.

For the purposes of the Local Plan Consultation Statement, the following aspects of the SCI are particularly relevant. This statement confirms how the requirements of the SCI have been complied with, throughout the development of the Wealden Local Plan. This is further explained through the various stages of production and consultation that have taken place since the evolution of the Local Plan in 2020.

Key Principles

The SCI commits the Council to:

- Providing opportunities for early and meaningful engagement.
- Making planning information accessible and understandable.
- Using a range of consultation methods, including digital and traditional approaches.
- Seeking to engage a broad and diverse range of stakeholders.
- Ensuring consultation is proportionate to the stage and significance of the planning document being prepared.
- Explaining how consultation responses have influenced decision-making.

These principles underpin the Council's approach to Local Plan preparation and consultation. Compliance with these principles is evidenced in Table 1 within this section.

Stakeholders

[3] Wealden Statement of Community Involvement, November 2025

The SCI identifies a wide range of consultees who should be engaged during plan-making, including:

- Local residents and community groups.
- Parish and town councils.
- Businesses and landowners.
- Neighbouring local authorities.
- Statutory consultees and infrastructure providers.
- Environmental and voluntary organisations.
- Hard-to-reach groups and protected characteristic groups where appropriate.

These stakeholders are included on the Local Plan mailing list and are outlined in Appendix A and B of this Consultation Statement. They were consulted at each of the three formal consultation stages of the Local Plan.

Methods of Engagement

The SCI confirms that the Council may use a variety of consultation methods, including:

- Publication of consultation documents on the Council's website and consultation portal.
- Email notification and consultation databases.
- Public notices and press advertisements where required.
- Public exhibitions, drop-in events and community meetings.
- Workshops, briefings and stakeholder meetings.
- Social media and other digital communication channels.
- Direct engagement with parish councils and key stakeholders.

The SCI recognises that different consultation methods may be appropriate at different stages of plan preparation and that a blended approach can help maximise participation.

Local Plan Consultation Stages

The SCI explains how the Council will engage communities during the preparation and review of planning policy documents, including Local Plans. It commits the Council to undertaking consultation in accordance with the statutory requirements of the 2004 Act and the 2012 Regulations and to publicising opportunities for involvement through a combination of online and offline methods. The 3 formal consultation stages undertaken on the Wealden Local Plan are identified in the Introduction section of the Consultation Statement.

Reporting Consultation Outcomes

A particularly important commitment for the Consultation Statement is the SCI's requirement that consultation outcomes are reported transparently. The Council

commits to considering all representations received and explaining how consultation responses have informed the preparation of planning policy documents. This is reflected in the structure and purpose of this Regulation 22 Consultation Statement.

Compliance with the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

The preparation of the Wealden Local Plan has been undertaken in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, the National Planning Policy Framework and relevant Planning Practice Guidance. Throughout the plan-making process, the Council has had regard to its adopted Statement of Community Involvement (most recently updated in November 2025), which sets out the Council's principles, methods and commitments for engaging communities and stakeholders in planning matters. Consultation has been undertaken using a range of proportionate and inclusive engagement methods to ensure that interested parties had meaningful opportunities to participate in the development of the Local Plan and influence its content. The following table (Table 1) provides evidence for how this has been undertaken.

Table 1 - Evidence for meeting SCI Requirements

SCI Requirement	How Wealden DC has met the requirement in preparing the Wealden Local Plan
Providing opportunities for early and meaningful engagement	WDC consulted on the Draft Local Plan through a Direction to Travel Consultation in 2020/2021 as well as a Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) consultation between 15 March and 10 May 2024, which were both specifically described as an early opportunity for communities, businesses, landowners, developers, partners and other stakeholders to comment on the proposed growth strategy and draft policies before the Plan was progressed further. The Direction of travel asked for response based on the identified key issues, whereas the Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) consultation was the first opportunity for respondents to comment on proposed draft policies.
Making planning information accessible and understandable	The Council made consultation material available through its dedicated Local Plan webpages, online consultation portal, virtual exhibitions and in person public exhibitions. These are detailed further within this Consultation Statement. Supporting information, evidence documents and consultation material were published alongside the draft Plan, enabling interested parties to understand the proposals and comment on them.

Using a range of consultation methods, including digital and traditional approaches	WDC used a mixture of consultation methods, including an online consultation portal, a virtual exhibition, publication of documents on its website, and in-person drop-in consultation events across the district. This reflects both the required digital and face-to-face engagement techniques.
Seeking to engage a broad and diverse range of stakeholders	The Council's consultation was directed towards a wide range of participants, including residents, communities, businesses, landowners, developers, partner organisations and statutory stakeholders. The consultation portal also allows interested parties to register for ongoing Local Plan engagement and notifications.
Ensuring consultation is proportionate to the stage and significance of the planning document being prepared	The extensive Regulation 18 consultation reflected the importance of preparing a new Local Plan. WDC undertook a formal consultation period, publicised draft policies and the growth strategy, provided supporting evidence, held district-wide events and enabled public comments before moving to later stages of plan preparation. The Council then repeat this for its Focused Regulation 18 Local Plan in early 2026.
Explaining how consultation responses have influenced decision-making	WDC has published all consultation responses through its consultation portal and produced a Summary of Main Issues arising from both the Direct of Travel and the two further Regulation 18 consultations (2024 and 2026) as part of this consultation statement. The Council states that comments were reviewed and considered as part of the ongoing preparation of the Local Plan up to the Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan, with feedback informing evolving versions of the Plan and supporting reports to the Local Plan Sub-Committee.

4. The consultation activities undertaken at each stage of Local Plan preparation

The Council has undertaken ongoing engagement with stakeholders throughout the production of the Local Plan but has prepared formal consultation material for the general public and all of its stakeholders at three key stages. The period for undertaking all of this engagement is considered to be covered by Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, and as such the Council followed the requirements of planning legislation when undertaken these formal consultation stages. The three key formal consultation stages were as follows:

Direction of Travel public consultation[4]: 23 November 2020 – 18 January 2021

This was the first stage in the Local Plan engagement process, providing the opportunity to hear the views of the local community and stakeholders on a range of important topic areas in relation to growth and a vision for the district. This early engagement was undertaken to help shape the type of policies that the Council should be preparing within the Plan and the key issues that should be addressed. The aim was for the Council to maximise the number and breadth of responses it could receive at this early stage in the development of the Local Plan.

The consultation was undertaken at a time when the Council had revised temporary measures for consultation (as amended in the Local Development Scheme at the time) as a consequence of the COVID pandemic, where all engagement and consultation was moved to on-line methods. Appendix C of this report provide a summary of the consultation arrangements that were undertaken for this stage of the Local Plan, including supporting documentation that formed letters and emails sent out to stakeholders on the Local Plan mailing list, and the focus on on-line engagement and promotion through social media channels.

At this stage, 1,700 comments were received from 304 respondents in response to the consultation. As this stage was early in the production of the Local Plan process, it had its own consultation summary report which can be found at the following link. This report was presented to Local Plan Sub-Committee on 11 March 2021 and presented the responses under four appendices. The responses were presented under each chapter of the Direction of Travel Local Plan document.

The Direction of Travel consultation document had identified the next steps in plan making following the consultation, with further review of work and progress taking into

[4] Direction of Travel Consultation webpage

account the planning issues that had been raised during the consultation. The focus was then to obtain a proportionate and robust evidence base alongside considering at a strategic level, what the Council would want to and need to achieve through the local plan to meet its statutory duty.

The next steps would be to continue dialogue with Members and stakeholders (Town and Parish Councils, Duty to Cooperate Partners, Developers, other relevant organisations and officers from other relevant Council service areas) to help define the vision, objectives and high-level options for the spatial strategy for the Plan.

The vision and objectives would be to establish priorities, particularly where there may be competing interests as the plan evolved. For example, the balance between infrastructure delivery and affordable housing supply. The vision, objectives and spatial strategy would be in draft form and the Council would need to test, through evidence base work, whether what had been identified was fit for purpose, meeting national policy and legislative requirements or whether the Council would need to make changes to ensure that the local plan and its policies delivered what was required and was the right approach.

Following this work, it was envisaged that consultation with the public and all partners, on the draft vision, objectives and spatial strategy (as projected at the time) would be carried out in the early part of 2022. This was set out in the adopted Local Development Scheme (LDS) and Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) at the time. Due to other priorities in the planning policy team, resource implications and the amount of evidence base that was commissioned, the next stage of formal consultation on the Wealden Local Plan was delayed until early 2024.

Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan consultation[5]: 15 March – 10 May 2024

The Council spent time preparing the evidence base for the Local Plan in order to develop a full Draft local Plan for public consultation. This involved drafting policies for all areas of the Local Plan, including preparing a development strategy which presented the anticipated level of residential and commercial growth along with the expected infrastructure to be delivered to support it. Before the Council undertook public consultation, it published an updated Local Development Scheme (January 2024) which set a new timetable for the production of the Local Plan through the next stages. This was approved at Local Plan Sub-Committee on 29 January 2024 and can be found here.

This emerging Local Plan set out the Council's draft policies and proposed growth strategy and was an important stage in the plan-making process. It provided an early opportunity for communities, businesses, landowners, developers, partners, and

[5] Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan Consultation webpage (2024)

stakeholders to 'have a say' and comment on the draft Local Plan before it was considered further.

The focus for the plan was clearly set out in the introduction, with paragraph 1.2 stating that '*it will provide a vision for the district, a long-term spatial strategy for growth, including the locations where development will take place. It will provide a range of both strategic and non-strategic policies that will guide development across the district contributing to social, environmental and economic (sustainability) goals*.'

The introduction section also provided information about how the Direction of travel consultation had informed this version of the Local Plan. Paragraph 1.6 to 1.8 of the introduction stated the following:

'This Regulation 18 draft Local Plan has been informed by the Direction of Travel consultation, which took place between 23rd November 2020 and 18th January 2021. The consultation document presented issues and policy options on several key themes such as climate change, housing, our economy, our natural environment, landscape and heritage, design and health and wellbeing. It also presented four high-level options for growth. The consultation provided the opportunity for early engagement with our communities, businesses, infrastructure providers, Statutory Consultees, local authority partners, organisations, stakeholders and developers. We received 1,702 responses from 304 individuals / organisations. All responses have been considered as part of the preparation of this draft Regulation 18 Local Plan and a summary of the main issues raised from consultees is available on our website1 as well as summarised within this draft Plan.'

'As part of our early consultation, we undertook a call for sites. The call for sites invited landowners and those with an interest in land to submit their sites for an assessment as to whether sites are suitable and deliverable for development. This assessment, called the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (February 2024), is published alongside this Plan, and has informed the local plan spatial strategy and site allocations set out in this document.'

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

The Local Plan was structured in chapter form, with a series of questions and sub questions presented after each policy area. A total of 85 main questions (with sub questions) were presented in order to get wanted specific feedback. There was still the opportunity for the general public and stakeholders to make any general comments they wished on the Local Plan and its supporting documents.

The Council undertook a wide scope in its plans to consult with the public on this document. A combination of methods was used in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This included promoting the consultation on the Council's social media and notification channels as well as sending an email/writing to those people on the Local Plan mailing list.

Appendix D provides a summary of the Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) Consultation Arrangements (2024), with a list of deposit points where documentation was made available, and a list of the public consultation exhibitions that were undertaken. A virtual exhibition was also provided on the Council's website at the following link: Wealden 'Focused' Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) Exhibition . All Local Plan consultation information, including information on the evidence base, the Sustainability Appraisal and the Strategic Housing and Land Availability Assessment was available on the Council's website, and this can be found at the following link: Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan Consultation - Wealden District Council

12,210 comments were received from 1,516 respondents at this stage. The Council produced a summary of the issues raised at this stage within a Local Plan Sub-Committee report on 5 March 2025, which can be found at the following link. The comments received at this stage of the plan have been collated with the comments received at the next stage within this Consultation Statement, as they were both used to formulate the final policies as part of the Regulation 19 version of the Wealden Local Plan.

Focused Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18 Stage): 6 February – 30 March 2026 –

This stage of the emerging Local Plan set out the Council's revised proposed growth strategy for the district responding to the new growth targets associated with the amended National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It also included some supporting policies that warranted public consultation as they had not been presented before or the amendments were important at this stage to seek consultation feedback. This was an important stage in the plan-making process to present options on the spatial development strategy before progressing to the Regulation 19 stage. It was not considered necessary to present all of the policy areas that were consulted on at the previous Regulation 18 stage as many of these policy elements could be carried forward into the final version of the plan taking on board the representations that had previously been made. In addition, the Council had been progressing and finalising a suite of evidence base documents to support the overall plan, and these would be used to inform and validate the policy approaches that would be used at the Regulation 19 stage of the Wealden Local Plan.

The focus for the plan was clearly set out in the introduction within paragraphs 1.1 to 1.5. The format of the Focused Local Plan was It clearly set out in the following text:

Format of the Focused Draft Wealden Local Plan
'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. In December 2024, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated as well as the calculation on housing need, known as the 'standard method' which results in increased housing need within Wealden District compared to that in our March 2024 draft local plan. Subsequently, the Council considers that a further consultation stage is needed to address those national planning changes and to consider whether further changes to the spatial strategy are required. Therefore, this Focused Regulation 18 draft local plan concentrates primarily on the spatial strategy and associated policies, site allocation policies, as well as updates to our affordable housing policy, Sustainable Urban Drainage (SuDS) policy and a new policy on Coastal Change Management Areas. It does not present a full Local Plan draft at this stage. We need focus, through this consultation, on areas updated through the recent national policy changes which give rise to the need for further consideration in that wider context.'

The introduction section also provided information about how the Direction of travel consultation and the Draft Local Plan (2024) had informed this version of the Local Plan. Paragraph 1.6 to 1.11 of the introduction stated the following:

'The initial consultation on the emerging local plan was the 'Direction of Travel'3 consultation, which took place between 23 November 2020 and 18 January 2021. The consultation document presented issues and policy options on several key themes such as climate change, housing, our economy, our natural environment, landscape, heritage, design and health and wellbeing. It also presented four high-level options for growth that included:

Option 1 – Focused Growth including Large Extensions to Existing Sustainable Settlements; Option 2 – Semi-Dispersed Growth to Existing Sustainable Settlements and Larger Villages; Option 3 – Dispersed Growth; and
Option 4 – New Settlement(s) Growth'.

'The consultation provided the opportunity for early engagement with our communities, businesses, infrastructure providers, statutory consultees, local authority partners, organisations, stakeholders and developers. We received 1,702 responses from 304 individuals/organisations. All responses were considered as part of the preparation for the draft Regulation 18 Local Plan that was published in March 2024 (see further below) and a summary of the main issues raised from consultees is available on our website.'

'Following this stage of the local plan process, the Council then published its draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) in March 2024. This draft local plan included a full suite of policies on a number of issues that included climate change, the natural environment, the historic environment, housing, infrastructure, design, economy and town centres. The plan also included a draft spatial strategy that sought to deliver 15,729 (net) dwellings between 1 October 2023 and 31 March 2040 (equating to 953

dwellings per annum (dpa)), as well as 84,850 sqm of employment floorspace. This included draft site allocations across the district and spatial strategy policies. '

'Overall, in response to the Regulation 18 Wealden Local Plan consultation, we received 12,210 representations from 1,516 individuals. All responses have been reviewed and, as part of the preparation for this draft, where relevant to this new Focused Regulation 18 local plan, have been fully considered. A summary of the main issues raised from consultees is available on our website.'

'As part of these early consultations, we have undertaken two formal 'Call for Sites' during the consultation periods. The 'Call for Sites' invited landowners and those with an interest in land to submit their sites for an assessment as to whether the sites are suitable and deliverable for development. This assessment, called the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) was initially published alongside draft Wealden Local Plan (March 2024) and informed the spatial strategy and site allocations set out in that document. This has now been updated as part of this draft local plan in view of the changes to national planning policy under the NPPF.'

'Since our previous consultation, we have also been consulting and working closely with infrastructure providers, partner organisations and stakeholders. This has allowed us to understand issues and constraints, as well as to test different options for delivering the spatial strategy. This conversations with infrastructure providers and other relevant stakeholders are ongoing as we progress the plan further following this consultation.'

Appendix E provides a summary of the Focused Local Plan (Regulation 18) Consultation Arrangements (2026), with a list of deposit points where documentation was made available, and a list of the public consultation exhibitions that were undertaken. A virtual exhibition was also provided on the Council's website at the following link: Wealden 'Focused' Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) Exhibition . All Local Plan consultation information, including information on the evidence base, the Sustainability Appraisal and the Strategic Housing and Land Availability Assessment was available on the Council's website, and this can be found at the following link: Focused Local Plan Consultation - Wealden District Council

3,541 comments were received from 1,479 respondents at this stage. The Council has responded to comments received at this stage and at the previous Regulation 18 stage within this Consultation stage, and this is presented by each proposed policy area.

5. A summary of the main issues raised through consultation

The Council have used the comments received at the two previous stages of Regulation 18 consultation to help shape the final proposed versions of the policy in the Wealden Local Plan. These two stages asked specific questions in relation to draft policies, whereas the Direct of Travel consultation was focussed on identifying the key issues and range of policies that should be included within the Local Plan as a starting point. This has helped shape the structure of the Local Plan, but not the final wording of policies or supporting text. The summary of the main issued raise therefore relates to where draft policies and supporting text were presented and consulted on at the two previous Regulation consultation stages (2024 and 2026).

Part 7 of this report gives a full summary of the issues raised through these two consultation stages. Whilst all the identified issues have been evidenced and actioned in Part 7 of this report, the Council has presented the main issues raised at a strategic level in Table 2 below. This is mirrored and built upon in the Council's Sustainability Appraisal that supports the Wealden Local Plan.

Table 2 – Strategic Main Issues raised during consultation on the Wealden Local Plan

Main Issue	Detail
Spatial Strategy and Growth Options	Concern was generally raised with regards to the Spatial Strategy and Growth Options presented at both stages of public consultation. Several of the respondents with development interests in the district, considered that the Options for growth set out were not reflected adequately in the Draft Local Plan and that the preferred options, as presented, did not meet the housing need requirements for the district or address the housing need of the neighbouring authorities. Conversely, many respondents from the local community considered the proposed quantum of development for housing and employment to be too high Concern based on the rural nature of the district, the designations for landscape and nature, and the poor provision of public transport.
Transport and Accessibility	Concern was generally raised regards transport infrastructure across the district, and the impact of development making this more severe.

Main Issue	Detail
	National Highways have provided detailed comments on the impact of the Local Plan upon the Strategic Highway Network as well as the Transport Modelling needed to assess proposals. East Sussex County Council have provided responses at each relevant stage and have been heavily involved in partnership with the Council on the development and implementation of the County-wide Transport Model. Various responses also raised the need to strengthen the use of sustainable modes of transport through the plan to reduce the related impacts upon climate change.
Frant and Horam	Whilst there were responses to all of the proposed site allocations in the Local Plan there was a significant level of response to sites within the settlement areas of Frant and Horam. Several respondents considered the proposed allocations in these locations to be inappropriate and that options should be considered without these allocations. The inclusion of allocations in these locations has been reviewed against the emerging evidence base as part of the Spatial Strategy review.
Other Site Allocations and the Sustainability Appraisal	A range of other site allocations received comments either in terms of objection or as a result of additional information made available by developers, which may alter the results of the overall assessment of the sites. Concern was also raised regarding the consistency of the assessments and some responses being contradictory. A summary of this can be found in the supporting Sustainability Appraisal to the Wealden Local Plan.
Proposed Policies and consistency with the NPPF/Planning Guidance	A range of comments have been received on various chapters of the Local Plan, but especially in relation to the Climate Change and Natural Environment Chapters, where policies either add extra detail to or seek to go further than national planning policy and guidance. Some comments also relate to some conflicts in the policy wording or supporting text in relation to national planning policy and guidance, and whether evidence is available to justify the Council's position. The Council now have completed all of its evidence base for the Wealden Local Plan and this clearly demonstrates and justifies the Council's position on its revised planning policies.
Further evidence base required	Comments have been received in relation to further evidence base that is required to deliver the policy ambitions of the Local Plan. This includes comments from Historic England on the need to develop a

Main Issue	Detail
	Heritage Strategy to assist with policy development and considering proposed site allocations in the Local Plan. Other comments on the evidence base to be developed include but is not limited to: Biodiversity Net Gain, Landscape and viability evidence. This evidence base has been prioritised and delivered as the Local Plan has been progressed to its Regulation 19 stage.
Habitats Regulation Assessment and Impact on environmental designations	Comments were raised on the progress of the Habitats Regulations Assessment to support the Wealden Local Plan, to demonstrate that the plan will not have adverse impacts on environmentally designated sites. The Council produced a HRA for its first Regulation 18 stage in 2024 and has been developing this since to support the Regulation Stage of the Local Plan. Concern was raised about the outcomes of the HRA and the need to demonstrate the growth strategy is appropriate and that any mitigation can be delivered, for instance SANG[6] provision.
Infrastructure and Growth	A range of comments have been received at both formal consultation stages on the level of infrastructure to support proposed growth. The Council had produced an Infrastructure Delivery Plan at each stage of public consultation which outlined the range of infrastructure needs to support growth in the Local Plan. Concern was raised over the lack of certainty and timeframe of delivery for some infrastructure items and utility provision, for instance water supply and wastewater discharge which are the responsibility of South East Water and Southern Water respectively. Ongoing engagement and focused consultation with infrastructure providers and liaising specifically with South East Water and Southern Water through the development of the Council's Water Cycle Study has helped to strengthen the infrastructure evidence to support the Wealden Local Plan.

[6] Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace

6. How have issues been considered and addressed in the evolution of the Local Plan.

The following section (Part 7) of the Consultation Statement shows how the comments on the policies and various sections of the Local Plan have been taken account of and responded to by the Council. All the comments received have been taken on board along with the evidence base that has been prepared and finalised to justify the Council's position in relation to the final version of the Local Plan. When considering the comments the Council have taken the opportunity to streamline and restructure the policies and supporting text, avoiding any unnecessary duplication of national policy through the evolving National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

As previously stated, the issues raised at the very first formal consultation 'Direction of Travel' were used to help identify the key policy issues to be covered and the policy scope of the Local Plan. This helped shape the structure, chapters and individual policy areas to be progressed and helped identify the evidence base to be produced to support policy development. The more detailed issues raised were at the last two Regulation 18 consultations stages in 2024 and 2026. Part 7 of this report covers this in detail, but the following table (Table 3) provides an overall high level summary of how the main strategic issues have been addressed in the evolution of the Wealden Local Plan. This follows on from Table 2 where the main strategic issues were presented.

Table 3: How the Main Strategic Issues have been considered and addressed

Main Strategic Issue	How Issue has been considered/addressed
Spatial Strategy and Growth Options	The Council has continued to work on its Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) throughout the development of the Wealden Local Plan. The call for sites process was open for an extended period until earlier this year to enable as many sites as possible to be considered and maximise the potential for them to contribute to its development strategy. The assessment of all sites considered has been a long and comprehensive process, with the need to take into account the emerging detailed evidence base to assist with site constraints such and landscape, infrastructure, heritage and flooding. This has now been completed and sites have been included within the spatial development strategy that are

	considered deliverable and developable within the planning period to 2042. A further review of the Options for the Spatial Strategy has been undertaken as part of the Regulation 19 Sustainability Appraisal, which has taken into account the representations received, as well as evidence and site information that was not available at the two Regulation 18 formal consultation stage. This has resulted in a hybrid Spatial Option, which seeks to meet as much housing and employment need as possible, whilst ensuring the Plan meets its sustainability objectives, including on the environment.
Transport and Accessibility	The Council have further developed its evidence base in relation to the transport infrastructure needs to support proposed growth within the Wealden Local Plan. The County wide transport model has been used to provide a detailed Transport Assessment for the Local Plan and identify any transport interventions that are required. This follows the vision led approach as advocated in the NPPF (2024). The vision led approach seeks to align transport planning with objectives such as: sustainable growth; accessibility; active travel; public transport use; health outcomes; decarbonisation; and place-making. This means that transport modelling now has the following focus: • A clear vision linked to the Local Plan strategy; • Demonstrate accessibility to jobs, services and facilities; • Assess opportunities for: walking, cycling, public transport, mobility hubs, and demand management; • Test whether development patterns support sustainable travel. • Use modelling proportionately to examine network impacts and infrastructure requirements.
Site Allocations and the Sustainability Appraisal	The Council have considered in detail all comments that have been received on proposed site allocations at both previous Regulation 18 consultation stages. This has helped to inform the SHELAA process and the final site assessments. The finalised evidence base to inform site constraints, along with assessing sites through the Sustainability Appraisal has provided a comprehensive and

	rigorous assessment process of sites. This ensures that all sites identified and capable of forming part of the Council's development strategy are deliverable within the plan period to 2042. The supporting SHELAA and SA has been published alongside the Regulation 19 version of the Wealden Local Plan.
Proposed Policies and consistency with the NPPF/Planning Guidance	A comprehensive review of proposed policies within the Wealden Local Plan has been undertaken taking on board all of the representation received and the finalised evidence base. A clear focus was to streamline the policies as much as possible and remove any duplication of national planning policy or unnecessary detail. This has resulted in amended policy wording and supporting text. Background papers where relevant have been produced to show the evolution of specific policy areas of the Wealden Local Plan.
Further evidence base required	The Council has now developed its evidence base to support the Regulation 19 version of the Wealden Local Plan and this has helped to shape the final policies presented. The Council's detailed evidence base can be found at the following link on the Council's website: Planning Policy Evidence Base - Wealden District Council. A key consideration is the Council's overall viability assessment for the Plan that demonstrates that the proposed planning policies are viable.
Habitats Regulation Assessment and Impact on environmental designations	The Council has now finalised its Habitats Regulation Assessment for the Local Plan. This had fed in detailed information in relation to the Transport Assessment, Air Quality Modelling, SANG provision and has looked at the impact of development on the environmentally designated sites. This demonstrates that the proposed policies and proposed allocations within the Local Plan do not have adverse impacts on these sites, as long as the identified mitigation that is proposed is delivered.
Infrastructure and Growth	The Council has further developed its infrastructure evidence base in support of the Wealden Local Plan. Further to the Regulation 18 consultation in early 2026, the Council has engaged directly with infrastructure providers on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and associated schedule. This ensured that information is up to date and reflects proposed growth identified in the emerging Local Plan. An

	Infrastructure Questionnaire was sent to all infrastructure providers, for which detailed responses were received to help develop the IDP. The Council has now finalised this and has presented the IDP alongside a Storymap, which helps present infrastructure requirements and delivery in a simpler more pictorial way.

7. Presentation of the Comments Summary Forms for Policies and Site Allocations within the Draft Local Plan

The following section of the Consultation Statement provides a detailed summary of the responses that were made at both the Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) consultation stage in early 2024 as well as the Focused Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18) consultation stage in early 2026. These are combined where a policy area was consulted on at both stages. This demonstrates how the issues and comments raised at these stages were addressed and how they have helped shape the final version of the policies proposed in the Regulation 19 Version of the Local Plan

The comments summary forms are structured by chapter, following the structure in the Draft Local Plan (2024) and as built up in the Focused Local Plan (2026). The structure is as follows:

- Vision and Objectives
- Spatial Strategy
- Climate Change
- Natural Environment
- Historic Environment
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Design
- Economy
- Town Centres
- Site Allocations (attached as a separate document)