

Wealden
District Council

Statement of Community Involvement

July 2025

How to Contact Us

Planning Policy

Wealden District Council

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

Telephone: 01892 602008

Email: planningpolicy@wealden.gov.uk

Website: www.wealden.gov.uk

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

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1. Introduction

1.1 Planning should aim to ensure that the right development happens in the right place, at the right time, benefiting communities and the economy, and protecting our landscape and heritage. Planning decisions that are made affect everyone, from the residents in our district to those who work and visit the area.

1.2 The planning system contains many opportunities to ensure people get involved and have a greater say in how development happens in their local area. Wealden District Council (WDC) are keen to maximise these opportunities and encourage public engagement and stakeholder interaction in the ways set out in this document.

What is a Statement of Community Involvement?

1.3 A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a document that sets out how the Council will consult on planning matters with relevant parties. It details specific arrangements for what will be consulted on, at what stage in the planning process, and how that consultation will take place. This applies in both the formulation of planning policy documents and the determination of planning applications.

1.4 The aim is to achieve early and effective engagement with local communities, businesses and other stakeholders in the planning process. By involving the local community meaningfully and early in the planning process, it will help us to understand the relevant issues, opportunities, challenges and options before decisions are taken, improving community wellbeing. Engagement and consultation with relevant partners and our community is essential to this.

1.5 The detailed methods of engagement as set out in this SCI will ensure that local communities are appropriately informed of and given opportunities to get involved in the planning of their areas.

Why have and review a Statement of Community Involvement?

1.6 The Council is required by law to have an SCI in place, as set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. It is also a requirement under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012[1] that the SCI be reviewed every five years following its adoption.

1.7 The Council last adopted the SCI in July 2020, when temporary changes were introduced due to the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, and in response to a number of changes to planning legislation and technological engagement systems at that time. The legislative requirement for a five-year review means it is necessary to review and update the SCI once more.

1.8 This also presents an opportunity to reconsider the SCI, to take account of new planning practice guidance, the emphasis of new national policies, and the changes in engagement methods available.

[1] Under Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)

1.9 Furthermore, whilst there is no statutory obligation to consult on this review of the SCI, we wish to seek views from partners and stakeholders on whether we can improve engagement and consultation methods further, making them fit for purpose for 2025-2030 period. This SCI is therefore subject to public consultation over a six-week period between 4 July and 29 August 2025, to seek views on the process and methods that we intend to use to engage with you in the planning services we provide.

The Public Sector Equalities Duty

1.10 As a public authority, WDC must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The Public Sector Equality Duty involves the need to:

a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and

c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

1.11 The relevant protected characteristics referred to in (b) and (c) include age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The SCI follows the principles of the Council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion framework 2024-2028, which sets out the Council's commitment to the provision of services for the entire community and to ensure that everyone has equal access to our services and information. We will ensure that any public consultation events are held at accessible venues, and we will make reasonable adjustments to enable participation and involvement in those consultations.

1.12 With support from the council's Inclusion and Diversity Officer we also aim to engage with groups and individuals who are traditionally "seldom heard communities". For example, this includes Gypsies and Travellers, the elderly, younger people, those digitally excluded, homeless people, people from minority ethnic groups and young adults who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and people experiencing unemployment.

1.13 We acknowledge that it is sometimes difficult to involve these groups and individuals in consultations, but we hope to overcome this barrier. We aim to proactively engage with public, private and charitable organisations who may be able to provide more information on the specific needs or requirements of such groups, including incorporating a range of methods for consultation and engagement that might be suitable to overcome any barriers that would impede their effective participation in consultations. It is hoped that public consultation on this SCI may elicit further suggestions on how engagement with all communities may be improved.

2. The Planning System

2.1 The planning system is 'plan-led', which means that applications for planning permission should be determined in line with the policies set out in the statutory development plan[2], unless material considerations indicate otherwise. WDC act as the local planning authority responsible for drafting the statutory development plan (known as the 'Local Plan') that plans for development across the district (excluding the South Downs National Park (SDNP)). WDC is also responsible for determining whether proposals set out in planning applications comply with the development plan and whether to approve or refuse development in its area.

2.2 The two separate areas of responsibility are mirrored by the two areas within the planning service at WDC:

- **Planning Policy** - is concerned with the preparation of local development plan documents and policies that are used to guide development in Wealden District. These documents provide information on how the district will change during the plan period, which must be for a minimum of 15 years from adoption. The documents must conform to relevant government guidance and policy at the time of preparing the plan and there are specific statutory procedures that must be followed during the preparation of those documents. The Planning Policy Team also provide advice and assistance to Town and Parish Councils who are developing Neighbourhood Plans for their areas.
- **Development Management** - is responsible for processing and determining planning applications for new development, changes of use of land and buildings as well as determine applications in relation to listed buildings, advertisements and works to certain trees where they are covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) or are situated within Conservation Areas. The Development Management Team also provides pre-application advice to applicants and investigates where appropriate action is needed, when breaches of planning control have taken place.

2.3 Both teams are also responsible for the preparation, monitoring and administration of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). CIL is a charge which can be levied by local authorities on new development in their area. The 'levy' only applies in areas where a local planning authority has consulted on, and approved, a charging schedule which sets out its levy rates and has published the schedule on its website[3]. The Planning Policy Team is responsible for the preparation and review of CIL that has several statutory stages, as well as monitoring CIL each year through the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS). The Development Management Team is responsible for the day-to-day management and administration of CIL.

2.4 The planning function of WDC does not cover the area of the district located within the SDNP, as shown in Figure 1 below. The South Downs National Park Authority

[2] Wealden District Council's Statutory Development Plan

[3] Wealden District Council Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule, Adopted November 2015

(SDNPA) is the planning authority for this area and has its own SCI.

2.5 WDC is responsible for planning for 39 out of the 42 Town and Parish Council areas in the district and the SDNPA is responsible for planning in 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.

2.6 We want the planning of the district to reflect the priorities and interests of local communities, so we want to hear from everyone, during all parts of the planning process to improve community wellbeing. Opportunities to get involved and share views during the planning process will vary depending on the planning process being engaged with and this is set out further in the following chapters.

Figure 1: Area of Wealden District located within the South Downs National Park



3. Planning Policy and Community Involvement

Planning Policy Documents

3.1 Planning Policy is responsible for preparing, modifying and reviewing a range of key local planning policy documents that guide the use and development of land in the district. The key planning policy documents have different preparation processes and stages, including formal public consultations. The statutory processes for preparing these key planning policy documents and when consultation must take place is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations (2012)[4].

3.2 Various documents are produced to guide development in the area. These include two key types of planning policy documents known as 'Development Plan Documents' (DPDs) and 'Supplementary Planning Documents' (SPDs), both of which are explained in more detail below.

Development Plan Documents

3.3 Development Plan Documents (DPDs) is the collective term used to describe documents which comprise the development plan for the area. Local Plans when adopted become part of the development plan for the area, together with any 'made' Neighbourhood Plans for the areas they cover geographically.

3.4 Local Plans, in general, set out policies that guide how a particular geographical area will develop over the next 15-to-20-year period. Local Plans contain policies to guide development and often include policies that seek to protect areas from development and other policies which identify sites where development is to take place. These Local Plans form a key part of the overall development plan[5] for an area and are used for the assessment of planning applications submitted in that area. Legislation requires that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, which shows the importance, influence and prevalence of these documents.

3.5 The following documents currently comprise WDC's development plan (not including the area of Wealden District located within the SDNP):

- 'Saved' policies contained in the Wealden District Local Plan (1998);
- Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan (February 2013);
- Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan (May 2016);
- East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Plan (February 2013);
- East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton and Hove Waste and Minerals Sites Plan (February 2017);
- East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton and Hove Waste and Minerals

[4] The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

[5] The 'Development Plan' is defined in section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Local Plan – Revised Policies (October 2024);
- Herstmonceux Neighbourhood Development Plan (July 2019);
- Hailsham Neighbourhood Plan (July 2021);
- Hellingly Neighbourhood Plan (July 2021);
- Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan (May 2024);
- Ninfield Neighbourhood Plan (October 2024);
- East Hoathly with Halland Neighbourhood Plan (October 2024); and
- Horam Neighbourhood Plan (October 2024).

3.6 Once adopted, the new Local Plan will form part of the statutory development plan for the district, replacing all existing local plan policies (the first three documents listed above) and will be used to assess and make decisions on planning applications, as well as to inform investment in the area and the provision of infrastructure.

3.7 Local Plans are subject to a number of legally required assessments during their development, which includes a Sustainability Assessment (SA)/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which assesses the environmental, social and economic impacts of a plan and a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), which considers whether a plan and/or its policies would impact on a European site designated for its biodiversity. In addition, we are also required to undertake an Equality and Fairness Impact Assessment (EFIA) which ensures that the needs of all people are considered. These assessments must be carried out at the various draft stages of developing a Local Plan and are iterative processes that evolve alongside, and feeds into the development of the Local Plan, forming part of the evidence base of that plan.

3.8 Whilst the Local Plan is a key policy document, a number of other documents feed into and are influenced by it. A list of all the planning policy documents that the Council intends to produce and the programme for their preparation and review is set out in the Local Development Scheme (LDS)[6], which identifies the timetable for the formulation of such documents and the interdependencies between these different documents. The LDS is the starting point for local people, organisations and businesses to find out about emerging planning policy documents, what is being proposed and when consultation will take place.

3.9 It is also important to monitor the progress of the Local Plan. To do this, the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)[7] is prepared by the Council annually and is published at the end of December each year, which assesses the current Local Plan against a number of indicators, as well as progress with the emerging Local Plan, amongst other matters. If there has been an unavoidable slippage in the timetable for the Local Plan, the AMR will explain the reasons for the delay, and any amendments to the timetable for the implementation of planning policy documents.

[6] Wealden District Council Local Development Scheme (LDS) (March 2025)

[7] Wealden District Council Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

3.10 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) provide site specific or thematic based advice or guidance on policies in an adopted development plan. SPDs are material considerations in planning decisions but do not form part of the development plan. An SPD cannot introduce more or new policies; rather they build upon the specifics of policies already contained in the development plan.

3.11 Examples of documents that might form an SPD include things such as a Design Code, which sets out design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. Other documents such as development briefs can seek site-specific requirements, to deliver the overall aspirations of the Local Plan.

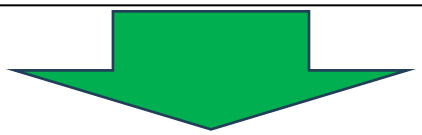
4. Local Plans

4.1 Like all other local planning authorities, WDC is required to have an up-to-date Local Plan. The preparation of any Local Plan involves several key stages. Figure 2 below identifies the key stages of a Local Plan's preparation, including community involvement during each stage.

Figure 2: Local Plan - Key stages of community involvement

1. Pre-production and informal consultation

- The Council will publicise on its website the timetable for plan-making (known as the LDS);
- Notify and work with groups, organisations and relevant parties;
- Collect evidence and information through various sources;
- Confirm relevant environmental, economic and social objectives to inform the Sustainability Appraisal (SA);
- Identify high level issues, opportunities, challenges and options;
- Identify key strategic cross-boundary matters and develop high level spatial options;
- Consult for a minimum of six weeks;
- Provide a summary of the responses made to the early engagement consultation.



2. Preparation of a Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18)

- Engage and consult on the draft plan (with those listed above) and provide a minimum period of six weeks for comments to be made;
- Make certain supporting documents available as part of the consultation on the Council's website including the Sustainability Appraisal, HRA and EFIA;
- Consider responses and provide a summary of the responses received; and
- Continue to collect and finalise evidence, as required.



3. Publication of Pre-Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19 & 20)

- Publication of the Pre-Submission Local Plan on the Council's website for a minimum of six weeks and request for representations to be made on the plan;
- Publication of the evidence base and supporting documents including the Sustainability Appraisal, HRA and EFIA;
- Documents to be made available on the Council's website; and
- Prepare a report for the Planning Inspectorate setting out the main issues and a summary of the responses received.



4. Submission for Independent Examination (Regulation 22, 23, 24 & 25)

- The Submission Local Plan, evidence base, supporting documents, statement of consultation and representations received to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination;
- Planning Inspector assesses the plan and supporting documentation submitted and undertakes the Examination in Public, of which, parties can engage at the examination, as relevant; and
- Inspector issues report following the conclusion of the examination.



5. Adoption of Local Plan (Regulation 26)

- If the Local Plan is found legally compliant and 'sound', a Council decision is then taken as to whether to formally adopt the Local Plan; and
- Produce a post-adoption statement and monitor sustainability.



6. Monitoring and review

- The 'adopted' plan is monitored on an annual basis, to ensure that the plan is being implemented and is achieving its aims; and
- A review of the plan is undertaken, as necessary and at least every five years.

Local Plan Consultation

4.2 The Council wants to maximise engagement opportunities and encourage public engagement and stakeholder interaction in the planning process. Whilst the majority of these engagement measures are targeted at increasing public engagement, some specific measures are to be implemented to maintain and enhance stakeholder engagement.

Duty to Cooperate

4.3 One vital aspect of how we prepare our planning policy documents, including the Local Plan, is how we maintain effective cooperation on an ongoing basis with neighbouring authorities and other key partners (such as prescribed bodies[8]) in addressing strategic planning issues that cross administrative boundaries. This is referred to as the 'Duty to Cooperate'.

4.4 Duty to Cooperate is a legal requirement and is set out in planning law. The Localism Act 2011[9] places a duty on the Council to work and cooperate with other neighbouring authorities, the County Council and also other prescribed bodies on strategic cross-boundary matters.

4.5 Duty to Cooperate will be one of the first issues that will be assessed when we submit our Local Plan to the Secretary of State for examination. As part of the Duty to Cooperate process, local planning authorities are required to produce and maintain Statements of Common Ground (SoCG); a written record of progress made by local planning authorities during the process of planning for strategic cross-boundary matters. The purpose of SoCG is to document where cooperation is and is not happening through the plan-making process. The statements will provide evidence that Local Plans are effective in relation to them being deliverable over the specified plan period and are sound in that they have been based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters.

4.6 The Council will meet its requirements under the duty to cooperate through regular engagement with its partners and will publish SoCGs as they are prepared and finalised for publication.

Consultation bodies

4.7 Legislation[10] provides the minimum legal requirement for consultation on draft local plan documents (known as the 'Regulation 18' stage). This includes:

- Specific consultation bodies who must be consulted at the formal consultation stages in local plan production. This includes statutory consultees such as neighbouring districts/boroughs, government agencies/organisations and utility providers;

[8] The full list of the prescribed organisations and bodies are set out in Appendix A.

[9] Localism Act 2011

[10] Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

- General consultation bodies that include organisations and bodies who have an interest in the district. This can include interest and amenity groups, resident associations, property, trade and business associations, voluntary organisations and bodies that represent issues of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disabilities and those with caring responsibilities[11]; and
- Residents, businesses and landowners located in the local authority area.

4.8 Details of the 'specific consultation bodies' and examples of those more general consultation bodies are provided in Appendix B. The methods employed to consult these bodies, and to maximise engagement with residents, businesses and landowners in the district are set out further below.

Local Plan Consultation Methods

4.9 The Council offers a variety of ways in which local residents, businesses, stakeholders and groups can become involved in the preparation of the Local Plan. The consultation method we decide to use at any given time will be dependent on the type of planning document being consulted upon and the stage it has reached. Table 1 summarises which method will be adopted at which stage, with further detail set out below.

4.10 We recognise that we need to have a variety of consultation methods to reach as wide an audience as possible. This will maximise opportunities for involvement in the plan-making process. Not everyone in the district will be contacted directly in respect of every planning policy document, but by combining measures, we hope to create a proportionate and targeted approach to seek engagement with interested and affected parties.

4.11 We will ensure that the consultation methods we employ are underpinned by sound ethical principles that are suitable and sensitive to the needs, interests, backgrounds and experiences of our local communities. The following outlines some of the different techniques the Council will use.

Publicising our consultations

4.12 We aim to provide several platforms for people to express their views, share their experiences and knowledge, ask questions and expand their understanding of plans before providing feedback. This can be done via the Council's online consultation portal through the website, email and by writing.

4.13 To ensure that the Local Plan reaches our residents, businesses, stakeholders and organisations, we will publicise our consultation events in a number of ways. These are set out in Table 1 and detailed in the sections below.

Consultation portal

4.14 We have a large consultation portal database of thousands of individuals and

[11] Regulation 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

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

4.15 All consultations will be published on the Council's consultation portal and responses to consultations can be submitted via the portal. At the start of each consultation, we will contact those individuals and organisations on our database to make them aware that a Local Plan consultation has started. We will also explain how to respond and make comments on our consultation. Anyone is free to join our consultation portal database. You can do so by registering at Wealden's consultation portal[12].

Website

4.16 We will publicise our public consultation on our website and direct people to our online consultation portal where they can view the consultation documents and make comments. We will also provide an opportunity to download a questionnaire or response form from our website.

4.17 The Council's Local Plan webpages will be kept up to date so that our communities and partners can track progress on the Local Plan and other planning policy documents as the Local Plan/documents progress and evidence base documents will be uploaded to the Council's website as they are completed.

Virtual Exhibition

4.18 In addition to in-person exhibitions (see paragraph 4.23 of this SCI), the Council has also published on its website a 'virtual exhibition' that contains the exact same content as the in-person exhibitions. At the in-person exhibitions, we do display physical exhibition boards and present these at the events, and this can be displayed on our website too, to mimic attending these events virtually. At the Regulation 18 consultation for Local Plan (held between March and May 2024) we had 974 unique visitors to the webpage portal and 4,473 views overall (of each exhibition board and page), which was successful. We will consider the use of such virtual exhibitions in the future.

Social and Digital Media

4.19 At each stage of consultation, the Council will publicise the start of the public consultation period on the Council's social media channels and these can be found on our Wealden District Planning Hub.

[12] Wealden District Council – Consultation Portal

4.20 We will also publicise the consultation at various stages during the consultation period. We will provide a link directing people to the consultation portal where they can view consultation documents and provide comments. We hope that using technology will allow us to reach 'hard to reach' groups, especially younger people.

4.21 We will use digital media methods to discuss the topics of Local Plan, enhancing visibility of the public consultation period on various platforms, using Wealden District Council's social media pages. This may include discussions on platforms such as the fortnightly Planning Pulse Podcast[13]; posting of videos such as 'how to' guides on the Council's 'YouTube channel; or through posts on the Wealden 'Let's Talk Planning' hub, including those hubs and forums associated with the wider planning service. This range of digital media engagement will ensure consistent and proactive publication during the full extent of any consultation period, with the aim of increasing visibility and feedback received.

Wealden Weekly

4.22 We will also publicise our consultations through the Council's 'Wealden Weekly' subscription system. This is a weekly email bulletin that provides news and information about Council services and local events, which also covers planning issues in the district. You can subscribe to this service by filling in a form[14].

Face to Face engagement

4.23 We will engage with people face to face during consultation events and 'in person' exhibitions in accessible exhibition venues across the district, as we have done previously for our Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation held between March and May 2024. Our 'in person' exhibitions will provide an opportunity for people to ask questions about the Local Plan and other evidence base documents, and to speak to Council Officers.

Display Locations

4.24 We are embracing the culture of virtual tools and interactive technology as it provides us with new opportunities that are likely to open more avenues for involvement. However, we recognise that not everyone has access to the internet or can access electronic documentation. We will therefore continue to provide hard copies of documents at the Council's offices and at certain locations across the district for our consultations where we are not restricted to do so.

4.25 Hard copies of relevant documentation can also be provided on request. However, should hard copies be requested, there will be a charge for these commensurate with the cost of producing the document. The cost of hard copies will be stated on our website or communicated to you should we receive a telephone or email request.

[13] The Fortnightly Planning Pulse Podcast

[14] Wealden Weekly

Local Plan consultation stages

4.26 The requirements for engagement and consultation for Local Plans are set out in legislation. In the paragraphs below, we have set out in detail the specific consultation and engagement methods we will employ at each stage of our Local Plan production. Table 1 summarises this in tabular format.

Early Consultation: Direction of Travel

4.27 At our initial Direction of Travel[15] consultation stage, we were interested in gaining as many views as possible in relation to the scope of our local plan. We considered that the best way to achieve this was by asking a number of questions on several different planning topics via our consultation portal.

4.28 Our Direction of Travel consultation was a very early consultation process, and we did not have answers in relation to our spatial strategy and our policies at this preliminary stage. At this initial stage in plan-making, we were open to learning about what is important to our residents, businesses and stakeholders and how they would like to see Wealden in 15-20 years' time. Once we understood this and gained the necessary information through evidence gathering, we then progressed work on our draft Local Plan.

Draft Local Plan

4.29 It is at the Draft Local Plan stage (known as the 'Regulation 18' stage) where the preferred spatial strategy, detailed policies, and site allocations will be published. The Council undertook its first 'Regulation 18' stage consultation between March and May 2024[16] and we are scheduled through our Local Development Scheme (LDS) to publish a second targeted Regulation 18 consultation on our spatial strategy and site allocations in Q3 of 2025/26.

4.30 We held exhibition events at the first 'Regulation 18' stage to publicise the draft Local Plan and to seek feedback during the formal consultation period. These events were held across the district, in accessible venues, so everyone had a reasonable opportunity to attend an event close to them. However, we also recognise that the Local Plan will affect some of our communities more than others. We therefore focussed these events in areas where a larger amount of growth and change is envisaged. We also held these events on different days and times of the week, including some evenings and weekends, to ensure we have provided the best opportunity for our communities to attend, including for those who work full time.

4.31 At this stage, in addition to the measures above, we will consider employing additional engagement, including publicising information on our website and the following:

- **Virtual exhibitions**: This is where we can present the exact information

[15] Wealden Local Plan Direction of Travel Consultation (November 2020)

[16] Draft Wealden Local Plan (Regulation 18) (March 2024)

that we would present live at a public exhibition, but make this available on the internet so that people can visit the exhibition at any time; and

- **Video blog / video log (Vlog):** This is where we can create short to medium length videos to provide explanations on certain planning topics or to introduce our consultation. The Vlog can also include visuals such as pictures, graphics and charts, for example. A Vlog can be made available so that it can be viewed at any time.

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

Proposed Submission Local Plan

4.33 The Proposed Submission Local Plan is the version of the Local Plan that we intend to submit to the Planning Inspector (known as the 'Regulation 19' stage). At this stage in plan-making, representations are invited as to whether our communities and stakeholders consider the plan to be legally compliant, whether we have met our Duty to Cooperate process and whether the plan is 'sound'. When responses are received, these are provided to the Planning Inspector who will examine our plan.

4.34 At this stage, we will meet the requirements set out in this SCI, including publicising information on our website through social media and the Council's Wealden Weekly system.

What happens to my comments once the consultation has ended?

4.35 Once an early consultation stage or an 'Regulation 18' consultation stage has ended, we will add all the representations we have received to our consultation database, and review and consider them alongside the available evidence to consider how the Plan and other development plan documents should be developed. Once we have processed a response, a confirmation email/letter will be sent to the person who submitted the response.

4.36 The Council will also produce a 'Summary of Responses' document where a summary of the comments made is publicised. The Council may consider the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to summarise the responses, but officers will manually check such summaries to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The report will be presented to the relevant committee or meeting, including the Planning and Development Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG), Local Plan Sub Committee and Full Council (if needed). The report will be noted and agreed by our Council Members before we move onto the next stage in the plan making process. Council decisions on the Local Plan will be made publicly available on the Council's website.

4.37 As noted previously, any comments received on a Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan (Regulation 19) will be collated and provided to the Planning Inspector who is examining the Local Plan.

What comments may not be considered by the Council?

4.38 By law, we are required to make the comments we receive about the Local Plan public, including your name. No other personal information will be published. This meets the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. We will process all personal information in accordance with the Council's Privacy Policy. We will not accept comments that include abusive, racist or other discriminatory or inflammatory language. Please consider that all comments will eventually be made available for public inspection, so we ask that you are respectful in your language. We will report any such submissions to the relevant authorities and/or where appropriate, they will be discarded. We will also not be able to accept anonymous comments or comments marked as private or confidential.

How to get in touch

4.39 You can get in touch with the Planning Policy Team by emailing us at planningpolicy@wealden.gov.uk or by calling us on **01892 602008** or you can write to us at:

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

Table 1: Local Plan Consultation Methods

Statutory Requirements

Method of consultation	Preproduction and/or formal consultation	Preparation of a Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18)	Publication of Pre-Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19)	Submission for Independent Examination	Adoption of Local Plan
Written/email notification to Duty to Cooperate partners, statutory consultees, businesses, stakeholders, and individuals on the planning policy database.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Formal consultation documents available for inspection on the Council's website, at the Council's office and at key locations (e.g. libraries).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise on the Council's website.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Potential Additional Consultation Methods for Each Stage

Method of consultation	Preproduction and/or formal consultation	Preparation of a Draft Local Plan (Regulation 18)	Publication of Pre-Submission Local Plan (Regulation 19)	Submission for Independent Examination	Adoption of Local Plan
Public consultation event(s) held in accessible locations.	No	Yes	No	No	No
Online engagement methods (for example, virtual exhibitions, digital consultations, video conferencing etc.).	No	Yes	No	No	No
Publicise on social media (including where appropriate vlogs/visual explainers/infographics).	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issue online publications such as press releases.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise on the Council's 'Wealden Weekly' system.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

5. Supplementary Planning Documents

5.1 As discussed previously, SPDs do not form part of the development plan and therefore, they cannot introduce new policies or allocate sites. However, they are a material consideration in decision-making when determining planning applications. There is a formal legal process for preparing SPDs. They are subject to public consultation but are not required to be independently examined by a Planning Inspector. They also need to gain Council approval prior to them being adopted. Sometimes an SPD may require a Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

5.2 The type of stakeholders we will involve in the preparation of SPDs will depend on the scale, detail and nature of the document. Like the Local Plan, each stage of the process will offer an opportunity to work collaboratively with the local community to shape better places for local people.

5.3 The following SPDs are currently a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in Wealden District (not including the area of Wealden District located within the SDNP). They provide additional detail to relevant 'saved' policies in the Wealden Local Plan (1998):

- Wealden Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), November 2008 (Policies EN1 and EN27);
- High Weald AONB Management Plan (Policies EN6 and EN7);
- Ashdown Business Park (Policy BS10); and
- Hellingly Hospital (Policy HH1).

Producing an SPD

5.4 The process for preparing and adopting an SPD is shorter than that for Local Plans and is set out in legislation[17]. The key stages are provided in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: SPDs – Key stages in community involvement

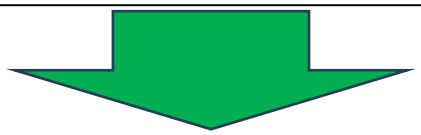
1. **Evidence gathering and engagement**
   - Identify whether an SPD is required;
   - Collect evidence and information;
   - Engage with relevant partners, stakeholders, key groups with specific knowledge of the SPD topic area.



[17] The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

2. Publication of SPD (Regulation 12 and 13)

- Engage and consult on the draft SPD with the local community, businesses and other relevant parties and provide a minimum period of four weeks for comments to be made;
- Publication of the SPD and supporting documents including the Sustainability Appraisal/SEA if required;
- Consider the main issues raised, make amendments where required and prepare a statement setting out how any issues have been addressed;



3. Adoption of SPD (Regulation 14)

- SPD formally adopted by the council.

Consultation methods for SPDs

5.5 The following consultation methods will be used at the various stages in the SPD process, subject to the SPD topic area and a consideration of the most suitable consultation methods.

Table 2: SPD consultation methods

Statutory Requirements

Method of consultation	Draft SPD	Final SPD	Adoption
Written / email notification to duty to cooperate partners, general and statutory consultees, businesses and other relevant parties including relevant stakeholders, individuals and organisations who are registered on the Council's planning policy database.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Make consultation documents available for inspection at the Council's office and other key locations across the district such as libraries.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Make consultation documents, supporting documents and information available on the Council's website.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise on the Council's website.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Potential Additional Consultation Methods for Each Stage

Method of consultation	Draft SPD	Final SPD	Adoption
Public consultation event(s) held in accessible locations.	No	No	No
Publicise on social media (including where appropriate vlogs/visual explainers/infographics).	Yes	Yes	Yes
Issue online publications such as press releases	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise on the Council's 'Wealden Weekly' system.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online engagement methods (virtual exhibitions, digital consultations, video conferencing, etc.)	Yes	No	No

6. Community Infrastructure Levy

6.1 The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy that local planning authorities can choose to impose on certain types of new development to help fund and/or deliver infrastructure needed to support development in its area. It takes the form of a charge applied to new floorspace, as measured in square metres (sqm). CIL was introduced by the Planning Act 2008 and is governed by the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended).

6.2 CIL is specifically designed to enable the provision of new infrastructure which is required to support development contained within a Local Plan. It is not therefore available to deal with existing deficits in infrastructure. Unlike Planning Obligations, funding from CIL does not have to directly relate to the development from which it is collected and can be used to enhance and deliver infrastructure at the district wide level to offset the cumulative impacts of new development. CIL itself is a fixed rate charge which varies dependent on development type and is collected (normally) at the commencement of a project, although it can be phased.

6.3 Local planning authorities who choose to charge CIL must produce a draft Charging Schedule which sets out the levy rate(s) that it will charge. WDC adopted a CIL Charging Schedule[18] on 25 November 2015. The Council implemented its CIL Charging Schedule on 1 April 2016, charging the levy on new residential and retail development within the district in accordance with the adopted CIL Charging Schedule.

6.4 The processes involved in preparing and adopting a new CIL charging schedule is similar to that for producing a Local Plan and offers opportunities for engaging all sections of the community as set out in Figure 4 below.

[18] Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule (adopted November 2015)

Figure 4: CIL – Key stages in community involvement

1. Evidence gathering

- Collaborate with neighbouring authorities and other stakeholders;
- Identify types of infrastructure to be funded or part-funded through CIL;
- Gather evidence on development viability; and
- Prepare a draft charging schedule for consultation.



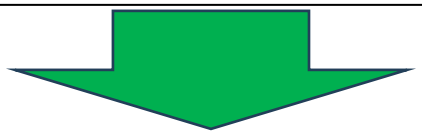
2. Publish Draft Charging Schedule (Regulations 16 & 17)

- Seek representations on the published draft; and
- Take account of representations made and update charging schedule.



3. Submission and Examination (Regulations 19 and 20)

- Submit the Draft Charging Schedule to an Independent Examiner;
- Examination in Public takes place; and
- Publication of Examiners recommendations.



4. Approval and Publication of Charging Schedule (Regulation 25)

- Council to consider the Examiners recommendations; and
- Council approves and formally adopts the charging schedule.

Consultation methods

6.5 The following consultation methods will be used in the CIL process.

Table 3: CIL consultation methods

Statutory Requirements

Method of consultation	Draft Charging Schedule	Submission for Independent Examination	Publication of Charging Schedule
Written / email notification to duty to cooperate partners, general and statutory consultees, businesses and other relevant parties including relevant stakeholders, individuals and organisations who are registered on the Council's planning policy database.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Make consultation documents available for inspection at the Council's office and other key locations across the district such as libraries.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Make consultation documents, supporting documents and information available on the Council's website.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise on the Council's website.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Potential Additional Consultation Methods for Each Stage

Method of consultation	Draft Charging Schedule	Submission for Independent Examination	Publication of Charging Schedule
Publicise on social media	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise on the Council's Wealden Weekly system	Yes	Yes	Yes
Online engagement methods (virtual exhibitions, digital consultations, video conferencing, online publications such as press releases etc.)	Yes	No	No

7. Neighbourhood Plans

7.1 Local communities have the opportunity to shape future developments in their neighbourhoods through the Neighbourhood Planning process. Neighbourhood Planning was introduced by the Localism Act 2011, which gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. Communities are able to choose where new homes, shops or offices are to be built or to have their say on how development should be designed. Neighbourhood Planning also provides a powerful set of tools for local people to plan for the types of development to meet their community's needs and where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.

7.2 Local communities can either choose to develop a Neighbourhood Plan, which sets out planning policies that form part of the development plan, or to grant planning permission for specific types of development in their neighbourhood through Neighbourhood Order or Community Right to Build Order. Once a Neighbourhood Plan is 'made' (formally adopted), it forms part of the development plan and together with the Local Plan, is used to determine planning applications in the relevant neighbourhood areas, along with any other material consideration.

7.3 Neighbourhood Plans or orders are not developed by WDC. Instead, Neighbourhood Plans are developed by either Town or Parish Councils in Wealden, or in relation to a Community Right to Build Order, by a Community Group.

7.4 Local planning authorities do, however, have a statutory duty to provide advice and technical assistance in the development of Neighbourhood Plans, as well as providing a role in the consultation process and making information available at various stages. The government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)[19] provides further guidance on the process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan. The Locality Neighbourhood Planning website[20] also provides advice, support, toolkits and guidance.

7.5 WDC is legally required to be involved in consulting and/or notifying with the public at the key stages in the Neighbourhood Plan and/or order process as set out in Figure 5 below.

[19] Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), Neighbourhood Planning

[20] Locality Neighbourhood Planning website

Figure 5: WDC involvement in consulting on Neighbourhood Plan/Order

1.The designation of a Neighbourhood Area for the purpose of producing a Neighbourhood Plan or Order (Regulations 5, 6 and 7).

- Parish/Town Council identify on a map the area to which the area application relates;
- The local planning authority must publicise the area application on its website and details of how to make representations within six weeks from the date on which area application is first published;
- The local planning authority must publicise designation of the neighbourhood area.

2. Consultation on a draft Neighbourhood Plan prior to submitting the draft plan to an Independent Examiner (Regulations 15 and 16).

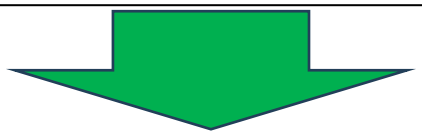
- The District Council must publicise the Neighbourhood Plan on its website and invites representations on the Plan, with the consultation being no less than six weeks from the initial Neighbourhood Plan publication;
- Notify any consultation body which is referred to in the Consultation Statement submitted alongside the Neighbourhood Plan proposal.

3. Publication of the Independent Examiner's report and Plan Proposal Decision (Regulations 17 and 18)

- Examiner's Report is published on the Council's website.
- The local planning authority must decide to proceed (or not) with the Neighbourhood Plan following the Examiner's Report and provide a 'Decision Statement' on its website and notify those of the decision.

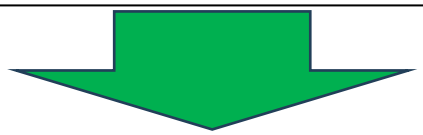
4. Publish notice of a Referendum (The Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012)

- The Council must hold a referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan following a positive decision statement at the previous stage.
- Residents of the Neighbourhood Plan area are invited to vote on whether to 'make' the Neighbourhood Plan through a referendum.



5. Publish the decision to 'make' or refuse a neighbourhood plan (Regulation 19)

- Following the referendum, the local planning authority must publish on its website a statement of its decision to 'make' the Neighbourhood Plan following a positive referendum outcome and reasons for it;
- The local planning authority must send a copy of the decision statement to the Neighbourhood Plan group and any person who wished to be notified of the decision.



6. Adopting a Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 20)

- The local planning authority must seek to adopt the Neighbourhood Plan;
- The local planning authority must notify any person who asked to be notified of 'making' the neighbourhood development plan and where and when it may be inspected.

Consultation methods

7.6 Neighbourhood Plans are developed in line with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012[21]. In relation to the consultation on the Draft Neighbourhood Plans under Regulation 16, local planning authorities have a statutory duty to publicise the draft Neighbourhood Plan on its website and bring the plan to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area. There is also a requirement to notify consultation bodies which are referred to in the consultation statement submitted by the Neighbourhood Planning group alongside their Neighbourhood Plan. The consultation must run for a minimum of six weeks. The local planning authority is also required to facilitate the examination and publish the examiner's report.

7.7 The specific consultation methods used to bring a 'Neighbourhood Plan' to the attention of people will need to be specifically tailored to a neighbourhood area, taking into account factors such as location, and the effectiveness of certain methods. In Wealden, this will be considered in collaboration with those proposing the Neighbourhood Plan.

7.8 The Council's website will be kept up to date in relation to the progress of Neighbourhood Planning in the district.

Table 4: Neighbourhood Plan consultation methods

Method of consultation	Neighbourhood Plan Area Designation (Regulation 5, 6 and 7)	Publication of Draft Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 16)	Publication of the Examiners Report and Plan Proposal Decision (Regulation 18)	Publication of the decision to 'make' (adopt) or refuse a Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 19)	Adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 20)
Written/email notification to Duty to Cooperate partners, statutory consultees, businesses, stakeholders, and individuals on the planning policy database.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

[21] The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012

Method of consultation	Neighbourhood Plan Area Designation (Regulation 5, 6 and 7)	Publication of Draft Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 16)	Publication of the Examiners Report and Plan Proposal Decision (Regulation 18)	Publication of the decision to 'make' (adopt) or refuse a Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 19)	Adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 20)
Make available consultation documents and supporting documentation on the Council's website.	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Make available hard copies of consultation documents and supporting documents at the Council's Office, the town or parish council office and up to a maximum of five hard copies of documents to be made available within the town or parish.	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Communicate with consultation bodies referred to in the consultation statement submitted alongside the Draft Neighbourhood Plan and other relevant parties either by written notification or email.	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise the Plan Proposal to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area[22]	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise on the Council's website.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

[22] Where possible, the Council will endeavour to communicate with individuals and organisations who have expressed that they wish to be contacted or have previously made comments on the Neighbourhood Plan at the Regulation 14 stage.

Method of consultation	Neighbourhood Plan Area Designation (Regulation 5, 6 and 7)	Publication of Draft Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 16)	Publication of the Examiners Report and Plan Proposal Decision (Regulation 18)	Publication of the decision to 'make' (adopt) or refuse a Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 19)	Adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 20)
Publicise on social media	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Publicise on the Council's Wealden Weekly system.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leaflets and / or posters (as considered necessary by the local planning authority to meet its statutory consultation duty).	No	Yes	No	No	No

Advice and assistance to facilitate the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans

7.10 To meet the Council's statutory duty in providing advice and assistance in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans, the Council will normally undertake the following (defined by need on a case-by-case basis in discussion with the group proposing the Neighbourhood Plan):

- Provide initial advice in relation to undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan;
- Set up meetings at various stages of the process to discuss:
  - Neighbourhood Plan process, timetable and key issues;
  - Issues, options and the role and possible content of a plan;
  - The availability of evidence for the purpose of plan making;
  - Legislative requirements including HRAs or SEA;
  - Policy development;
  - Pre-Submission Draft plan / Submission Draft Plan; and
  - Independent Examination, post examination and referendum.
- The Council will offer to provide both a SEA and HRA screening opinion. Where an SEA is required, then this will normally be prepared by the town or parish council;
- Providing access to the existing and emerging planning policy evidence base;
- Provide information in relation to validated planning applications in the area as relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan being prepared;
- Provide information to facilitate mapping, and where practical to do so, prepare basic maps;
- Liaise with partners and relevant parties to facilitate involvement in

the Neighbourhood Plan process; and

- Offer comments on the Draft Plan prior to the statutory consultation phase.

8. Development Management and Community Involvement

Introduction

8.1 The Council's Development Management service is responsible for processing planning applications within the district, except for the area of the district located in the SDNP (see Figure 1 above). The SDPNA is the local planning authority for their own area, setting their own Local Plan and determining any planning applications within its area. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is the local planning authority in respect of development involving minerals and waste.

8.2 There are several different types of applications processed by the department in addition to those for different forms of planning permission. Other application types include those for listed building consent, certificates of lawfulness, advertisement consent, prior approval applications and permission in principle (PiP).

8.3 The Council is committed to meeting its statutory requirements for consultation at all stages of the planning application process, from the initial pre-application stage through to potential planning appeals.

8.4 The Council also aims to use several consultation methods to engage the public, businesses and interested parties in the application process. Whilst this SCI lists the minimum requirements for consultation, the Council will seek to maximise consultation using complimentary methods. We will use digital media methods and social media platforms to enhance visibility of the development management service. This may include discussion on platforms such as the fortnightly Planning Pulse Podcast; posts on the Wealden 'Let's Talk Planning' hub; and Question and Answer sessions on forums such as the 'Ask the Development Manager' page. Opportunities to engage and influence topics associated with development management will be raised on associated platforms, such as 'Let's Talk Trees' which focusses on arboricultural and landscape matters. This range of digital media engagement will ensure consistent and proactive engagement, with the aim of increasing visibility and feedback received.

8.5 As digital technologies evolve, the Council may explore the use of automation or artificial intelligence assisted tools to support aspects of planning application management, such as supporting the validation of applications or the review of representations. Any such tools would be used to support, not replace, decision-making by officers and elected members.

Consultation stages

Pre application consultations

8.6 The Council advocates that whatever the scale of development proposed, prospective applicants or developers should at an early stage discuss their proposals with the Council. Should general advice be sought, applicants may wish to engage with the Council's free to use Duty Planning Officer service. Should development or site-specific advice be required, the Council offers pre-application

advice[23] for all applicants or developers.

8.7 Prior to submitting a planning application, applicants or developers are encouraged to discuss the proposals with the owners/occupiers of neighbouring land/premises prior to making an application. This may assist in resolving any objections and conflict prior to a formal planning application being submitted.

8.8 In addition, for significant development schemes (currently some wind turbine developments[24]), there is a statutory requirement for applicants or developers to carry out their own early consultation with the local community to inform the application process, as set out under Section 122 of the Localism Act 2011. An application for relevant development cannot be submitted, until the statutory pre-application consultation has been undertaken.

8.9 The Council is not involved in arranging pre-application consultations. However, applicants and developers should inform the Council of the details of any such arrangements. Such consultation methods could include community consultation events, public meetings, meetings with district, town or parish Councillors, neighbourhood plan steering groups or making information available via the website, leaflets and posters or contacting residents and businesses by writing to them. Pre-application consultation should also include engagement with key consultees such as infrastructure providers and nature conservation bodies as relevant.

8.10 The Council encourages applicants and developers to ensure that if any public meeting is held, it should take place in accessible locations that offer accessible facilities. A summary of the consultation method(s), a meeting record and received feedback may also be useful to include in any planning application submission, for public information.

8.11 On more significant scales of applications, the Council would urge applicants to conduct their own engagement and document this for public information.

Planning Application publicity and consultation

8.12 Once a planning application has been registered and validated, the Council will record the application on the planning register and make the application available for inspection. All planning applications can be viewed on Planning Register - Wealden District Council.

8.13 The Council also publishes a weekly list of applications that have been received. You can see the lists on Planning Weekly List and Other Publications - Wealden District Council.

8.14 There are minimum requirements provided in legislation relating to the methods for publicising applications. These requirements are provided in planning guidance. The methods that the Council will use to publicise applications include the following:

- Publishing applications and associated documents on the Council's website

[23] Wealden District Council Pre-Application Advice Service

[24] See The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) articles 3 and 4

(as above);

- Displaying one or more (as relevant) site notices near the application site. The site notice will provide details of the planning application, information on how the plans can be viewed and how comments can be made and when comments must be submitted by; and
- Advertising certain applications in local newspapers in accordance with statutory requirements. For example, for major development or for applications relating to a listed building or a conservation area.

8.15 The Council notify residents of planning applications using our 'Wealden Weekly' system. This provides an opportunity where you can register for email alerts, to be notified automatically of planning applications in your local area. You may register for MyAlerts via Wealden Weekly.

8.16 Appendix C provides further information in relation to how we consult in relation to specific types of applications.

8.17 Consultation will take place with both statutory and non-statutory consultees, alongside wider public consultation. Statutory consultees include bodies such as other local planning authorities, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission, Historic England, Natural England and Town and Parish Councils, to name a few. The Council will also consult internally with its housing, environmental health, community and economic development colleagues. Further information can be found in the PPG[25].

8.18 The publicity and consultation period for planning applications will be 21 days unless the notification period states otherwise. The application cannot be determined until this period has expired. Depending on its nature, re-consultations on amendments to applications will usually be a more restricted period. Information on how to make comments on a planning application is provided on the Council's website at WDC How To Be Involved In The Planning Process.

8.19 To be certain of not missing any new information that is added to a planning application, we encourage those with an interest in a proposal to subscribe for email alerts from the Council's planning applications system.

8.20 In some instances, particularly where there is a statutory requirement to re-publicise the application or additional information or amendments are considered as significant material changes to an application, the application will be re-publicised by way of additional site notices and/or press advertisements. This formal re-publicity will be undertaken for a minimum of 14 days or, where a statutory requirement, for the minimum period defined.

8.21 The Council will otherwise, and in the majority of instances, only use the website (with email alerts described above) to communicate other amendments to planning applications. The Council commits that minor material amendments will not be determined until the expiry of 7 days of the amendment information being added to the website. Non-material amendments will not result in any delay to the

[25] The PPG – Consultation and Pre-Decision Matters

determination of the application.

8.22 The website and email alert system is also how you can find out the final decision on the application. Registration for updates is free, though an active e-mail account is required. Information on this process is provided in the Councils website at WDC Keeping Up To Date With Planning Applications.

8.23 WDC are unable to respond to individual comments owing to the volume of cases processed and the number of representations received in a year. However, all comments received on an application will be considered prior to a decision being made and will be set out in decision making reports. Providing representations are lodged with a postal address, comments made on an application are published on the Council's website subject to the terms of the Data Protection Act 2018.

8.24 If you comment on a planning application, it is important that your comments relate to planning matters. The PPG and the Government's Planning Portal websites contain helpful information about how decisions on planning applications must be made and what matters constitute 'material considerations' and are relevant when making planning decisions.

8.25 The Council may use digital tools, including artificial intelligence assisted software, to support the summarisation and thematic analysis of consultation responses and representations received. All outputs from such systems will be reviewed by planning officers prior to use. These tools will only be used in accordance with data protection legislation and the Council's ethical standards.

Policy and practice regarding letters and e-mails received that contain offensive or, potentially defamatory comments

8.26 Offensive or defamatory comments will not be publicised. Such correspondence is to be handed immediately to the Head of Planning and Environmental Services (or where unavailable, the Head of Planning Policy, Economy and Climate Change) relating to a response or destruction or deletion.

8.27 The dissemination or publication of defamatory statements in correspondence received can make the publisher liable. Where such correspondence is received, a senior member of the Development Management Team will consider alleged misrepresentation, withholding publication in the most serious cases or otherwise seeking redaction of the offensive or defamatory comments before publication.

Determining planning applications

8.28 The majority of planning applications are determined under delegated powers by the Head of Planning and Environmental Services, as set out in the Scheme of Delegation contained in the Council's Constitution. However, certain applications are considered by a Planning Committee. In Wealden, following changes to the Council's constitution on the 14 May 2025, there are two planning committees, one of which deals with 'major' development within the district and one which deals with 'minor' development within the district[26]. Where applications are reported to a

[26] The term 'major' development is defined within NPPF (February 2025) and is otherwise provided in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The

Planning Committee, all comments made on an application are summarised and published in the committee report.

8.29 When applications are reported to a Planning Committee, the Council operates a scheme where applicants, supporters and objectors can address the Committee. Details of this can be found on WDC Committee Meetings. Committee meetings are also live streamed, with recordings then available on the same page.

8.30 Where people have commented on the application, the Council will write to inform them when and where the application will be considered and the arrangements for further representations. A request to address the Planning Committee is required prior to the meeting.

8.31 Where third party submissions are received less than 24 hours ahead of the Planning Committee meeting, it will not normally be possible to report the summary of comments to the Committee. Such late information is not possible to be incorporated in the written update to the Committee.

8.32 When a formal decision is made on an application, either through delegated powers or by a Planning Committee, a decision notice will be published on the Council's website and anyone who has commented on the application will be notified of the decision. Notification of any subsequent appeal will also be provided to any interested party who commented on the application.

Planning Appeals

8.33 It is possible for an applicant or a developer to appeal a planning decision if the application has been refused or if an application has not been determined within the statutory timeframes. It is also possible to appeal against the grant of planning permission that is subject to conditions that restrict or control the manner in which planning permission is to be implemented.

8.34 Third parties and members of the public cannot appeal against the council's decision on a planning application. Any challenge to a planning decision from third parties or members of the public can only be in the High Court by Judicial Review. Further information can be found on Planning Court - GOV.UK.

8.35 Planning appeals are determined by the Secretary of State, who will appoint a Planning Inspector to consider and hear the appeal. The appeal process is undertaken by one of three methods: Public Inquiry; Informal Hearing; or by the Written Representations procedure.

8.36 When WDC is notified of an appeal by the Planning Inspectorate, often referred to as 'PINS', we will contact all those originally consulted on the application letting them know the appeal has been made. The Council will send copies of all letters originally received about the application to the Planning Inspector. Advice will be given as to how to make further representations to the Planning Inspector who will determine the appeal. Interested parties are advised of how they can be involved in

Council's Constitution sets out precisely what applications go to a 'major' or 'minor' Planning Committee.

the appeal process.

8.37 If an appeal is to be considered at an informal hearing or public inquiry, the Council will also notify interested parties of the arrangements in line with the Planning Inspectorate's requirements.

8.38 The Planning Inspector will make a decision to either allow or dismiss the appeal or alternatively a decision will be deferred to the Secretary of State for a final decision. Once the decision is made, a decision notice will be sent to the appellant, the Council and any interested person who has requested a copy of the decision. The decision will also be available on the Wealden District Council's website and Planning Inspectorate website.

Planning Enforcement Strategy and Scope

8.39 Wealden District Council's Planning Enforcement Strategy (referred to as its Local Enforcement Plan) has been updated to reflect amendments under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, with the immunity period for breaches extended to ten years for developments completed on or after 25 April 2024. The Strategy reinforces that enforcement is discretionary and proportionate, designed not for retribution but to mitigate harm in line with the NPPF's expectation that "effective enforcement is important to maintain public confidence in the planning system." Breaches of planning control—such as unauthorised works, breaches of planning conditions or Section 106 obligations, protected tree damage, and unauthorised engineering operations—are investigated based on a risk-prioritised framework.

Complaint Procedures, Timeframes and Discretion

8.40 Upon receipt of a valid complaint, the Council aims to acknowledge within five working days and conduct an initial assessment (including a desktop or site visit) within approximately 25 days. Enforcement actions may include negotiation, invitations for retrospective planning applications, formal Enforcement Warning Notices (EWAs), notices, injunctions, or prosecution where justified. Importantly, public representations will be kept confidential or withheld when necessary to maintain investigation integrity, protect personal data, or uphold the Council's discretion. This approach reinforces transparency, consistency, and fairness—core principles of the Strategy.

8.41 While every effort is made to keep interested parties informed, contact throughout the enforcement process may not be frequent. Updates will generally be provided when there is a material development in the case—such as formal action or resolution—rather than at set intervals. This approach reflects the variable and often lengthy nature of enforcement investigations and ensures officer time is focused on progressing cases efficiently.

8.42 Where you are directly involved in an investigation—for example, as a complainant, landowner, or affected third party the Council will liaise with you at key stages. This may include requests for information, updates on progress where appropriate, or notification of decisions taken. We recognise that managing expectations is important and aim to communicate clearly and appropriately depending on your role

in the process.

9. Monitoring and Review

9.1 The SCI is updated in accordance with changes to government legislation. It will be reviewed at least every five years.

9.2 We may also update or review the SCI:

a. as a result of our forthcoming development plan consultations to make improvements to the process as a result of new or different approaches to consultation;

b. on publication of a new Local Plan to adapt consultation or publicity to the requirements of relevant new policies; or

c. in accordance with digital technology changes, including reviewing the potential role of artificial intelligence in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of public consultation and the work of our planning services. Any changes will be subject to appropriate oversight, transparency, and compliance with applicable law.

9.3 We will continue to evaluate our consultation processes in terms of resources used and responses received. We will also assess the effectiveness of various consultation and engagement methods used to review the appropriateness of those methods.

10. How we use your data

10.1 Planning is an open and public activity. Any representations or comments made by members of the community, stakeholders and other relevant parties during the preparation of planning documents or in relation to a planning application may and can be made public. However, we will redact personal information from any comments published.

10.2 Wealden District Council is committed to ensuring that your privacy is protected and will only use and store your personal data in line with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018. We collect and use your personal data in order to provide services you have requested from us or to carry out our legal obligations to you. We will not disclose your personal data to any third parties, unless we need to do so to provide a service to you or we are legally required to do so. We may share your personal data with other Council departments in order to provide the service you have requested and to ensure that the information we hold about you is accurate and up-to-date. Our Privacy Policy sets out how we collect, use, and securely hold your data. If you want more information on how a particular Council service uses your personal data, please view the Privacy Notices on our website using the following link: Data-protection/privacy-policy.

11. Glossary

Disclaimer - This glossary is neither a statement of law nor an interpretation of the law, and its status is only an introductory guide to planning issues and should not be used as a source for statutory definitions.

Authority Monitoring Report (AMR): The AMR is the main mechanism for assessing the performance and effects of the policies contained in the current statutory Development Plan and the timescales set out for the emerging Local Plan though the Local Development Scheme (LDS).

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): A levy allowing local planning authorities to raise funds from owners or developers of land undertaking new building projects in their area to support the delivery of new infrastructure.

Community Right to Build Order: An Order made by the local planning authority (under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) that grants planning permission for a site-specific development proposal or classes of development.

Development Plan: Is defined in section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and includes adopted local plans, neighbourhood plans that have been made and published spatial development strategies, together with any regional strategy policies that remain in force. Neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are also part of the development plan, unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made.

Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA): An assessment of the potential effects of planning policies or new development on European nature conservation sites as defined at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (see below).

Habitats Site: Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites.

Local Development Scheme: A project management plan that describes the Council's programme for producing its Development Plan Documents, such as the Local Plan.

Local Plan: A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community, under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. A local plan can consist of either strategic or non-strategic policies, or a combination of the two.

Neighbourhood Development Order: An Order made by a local planning authority (under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) through which parish councils and neighbourhood forums can grant planning permission for a specific development proposal or classes of development.

Neighbourhood Plan: A plan prepared by a parish council or neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area. In law this is described as a neighbourhood development plan in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Permission in Principle: A form of planning consent which establishes that a site is suitable for a specified amount of housing-led development in principle. Following a grant of permission

in principle, the site must receive a grant of technical details consent before development can proceed.

South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA): The South Downs National Park Authority is the statutory planning authority for the National Park area and was formed in 2011.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA): A procedure (set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) which requires the formal environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Statement of Community Involvement: A public statement of the Council's intentions for involving the community in the production of its local Development Plan Documents (such as Local Plans), and its ongoing development management decisions (i.e. planning applications).

Supplementary Planning Documents: Documents which add further detail to the policies in the development plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA): An evaluation of the social, economic and environmental impacts of policies and strategies in a local Development Plan Document to ensure the policies and strategies are in accordance with sustainable development objectives. Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a local planning authority to carry out a sustainability appraisal of each of the proposals in a plan during its preparation.

12. Appendix A - Duty to Cooperate partners and prescribed bodies[27]

Neighbouring Local Authority Duty to Cooperate Partners

- Eastbourne Borough Council
- Rother District Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Tandridge District Council
- Mid-Sussex District Council
- Sevenoaks District Council
- Lewes District Council
- South Downs National Park Authority
- East Sussex County Council
- West Sussex County Council
- Kent County Council
- Surrey County Council

Other prescribed bodies

- The Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Natural England
- The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)
- Homes England
- Each integrated Care Board established under Chapter A3 of Part 2 of the National Health Service Act 2006
- NHS England
- The Office of Rail and Road
- The Local Highway Authority
- National Highways

[27] See Regulation 4 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

13. Appendix B - Specific and general consultation bodies

Specific Consultation Bodies

- Adjoining Local Planning Authorities and County Councils as set out in Appendix A
- Parish and Town Councils (within and adjoining the plan area)
- The Police and Crime Commissioner
- The Coal Authority
- The Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Marine Management Organisation
- Natural England
- Network Rail Infrastructure Limited
- National Highways
- East Sussex County Council (ESCC) as the Local Highway Authority
- Relevant telecommunications companies
- Relevant Integrated Care System
- NHS England
- Relevant electricity and gas companies/operators
- Relevant water and sewerage companies; and
- Homes England

General Consultation Bodies and other interested groups

- Nature Conservation / countryside bodies
- Environmental groups
- Infrastructure and service providers
- Interest and amenity groups
- Residents Associations
- Property, trade and business associations
- Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups
- Learning agencies
- Recreation bodies
- Disabled groups
- Ethnic minorities/gender/age/sexual orientation/disability and those with caring

responsibilities groups

- Residents
- Local businesses
- Landowners
- Religious groups and churches
- Voluntary bodies; and
- Other miscellaneous bodies

14. Appendix C - How we consult in relation to specific types of applications

Type of Development	Site notice *	Newspaper advertisement *	Website	Wealden Weekly (opt-in service)
Applications for major development as defined in Article 2 of the Development Management Procedure Order (which are not covered in any other entry)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applications subject to Environmental Impact Assessment which are accompanied by an environmental statement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applications which do not accord with the development plan in force in the area	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applications which would affect a right of way to which Part 3 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 applies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applications for planning permission not covered in the entries above e.g. non-major development	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Applications for listed building consent where works to the exterior of the building are proposed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applications to vary or discharge conditions attached to a listed building consent or involving exterior works to a listed building.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Type of Development	Site notice *	Newspaper advertisement *	Website	Wealden Weekly (opt-in service)
Applications for development which would affect the setting of a listed building or affect the character or appearance of a conservation area.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes