

01

BACKGROUND TO THE LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION



Introduction	2
Impact of the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	6
Structure of this Document	8
Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation	10

01

BACKGROUND TO THE LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

Introduction

1.1 A new Local Plan for Tonbridge and Malling Borough is being prepared.

1.2 The Local Plan will look ahead to 2042 and will provide a long-term vision and growth strategy for the borough. This will provide certainty for our communities, stakeholders and the development industry in relation to future housing and employment development, as well as the infrastructure required to support both existing and new communities.

1.3 The Local Plan, once adopted, will provide a range of policies to help guide development, ensuring that the borough's needs and priorities are met whilst also protecting the natural and built environment, alongside delivering on our climate change objectives, including our net zero ambition.







Previous consultation

1.4 An 'early stage' Regulation 18 public consultation was held between 22 September and 3 November 2022.

1.5 This consultation presented issues and options relating to the Local Plan vision and objectives, growth distribution and strategic matters and priorities for the borough. It provided the first opportunity for our local community including residents and businesses, stakeholders and partners to tell us what is important to help us progress the Local Plan further. You can view this previous consultation as well as the responses made on our [Regulation 18 \(Stage A\) webpage](#).

Purpose of this consultation – Regulation 18 Stage 2

1.6 This is our second Regulation 18 consultation. It is a formal Local Plan consultation stage required by [The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#).

1.7 At this stage, the local planning authority continues to seek feedback from the local community, partners and stakeholders. This is to allow early input on the draft proposed policies and the growth strategy including proposed site allocations, before the Local Plan is finalised for publication (Regulation 19) and final consultation.

1.8 Following this consultation, the Plan is then submitted for independent examination to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Key changes since our previous consultation

1.9 Since our previous consultation took place, much has changed that the council must take account of. This includes the [Levelling Up and Regeneration Act \(LURA\) 2023](#) and two updates to the [National Planning Policy Framework](#). The first was in December 2023 and the second more recently in December 2024 following the general election in June 2024. The [Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\)](#) has also been updated.

1.10 In addition, the current Government published the [Planning and Infrastructure Bill](#) in March 2025 setting out how they will deliver their aim of building 1.5 million homes and deliver sustained economic growth. This includes measures such as bringing forward a more strategic approach to nature recovery, to unlock and accelerate growth and introducing strategic planning at a sub-regional level through the production of Spatial Development Strategies.

1.11 The Government has also indicated that there will shortly be a consultation on National Development Management Policies, and a new planning system is anticipated to be in place by autumn 2025/2026.

Impact of the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)



1.12 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) and [Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\)](#) sets out the Government's planning policies and guidance for England and a framework for how these policies and guidance should be applied at a local level.

1.13 All Local Plans need to be in conformity with the NPPF to be able to progress successfully to adoption and be implemented.

1.14 The December 2024 NPPF, which came into immediate effect, and the national policy updates contained within it, has meant that we have had to reconsider many aspects of our emerging Local Plan that we were progressing since 2022. A key part of our work has centred on considering a significantly increased housing need figure for the borough, which increased by 29% from 839 to 1,097 dwellings per annum. Another key focus has been the important changes that were made to national Green Belt policy.

1.15 Such key changes have resulted in us having to reconsider both our policy and our approach to growth within the borough, to ensure new national policy and guidance is met. A key aspect of this is that we must meet our objectively assessed housing need figure, as per that derived from the Government's standard method, as a minimum.



Local Government reorganisation

1.16 The Government is pursuing [Local Government reorganisation](#) aiming to simplify the current two-tier system (county and districts/ boroughs) into unitary authorities. Whilst there is much to progress, the aim is to have unitary authorities in place by 1st April 2028. Once a new unitary authority is in place, it is likely that up-to-date adopted Local Plans will remain to be used until such a time that they are replaced. This could be before the end of our plan period in 2042. However, we are required by national guidance to plan for a minimum 15-year plan period from adoption of the Local Plan.

1.17 The future of strategic planning in Kent is therefore currently uncertain. However, we know that having a Local Plan in place when the area becomes a unitary authority will ensure that local priorities are delivered effectively, and that the borough is well-positioned to respond to any future changes in governance.

With change proposed, why should we progress a new Local Plan now?

1.18 The Government remains committed to its ambition of achieving universal Local Plan coverage and boosting housing supply and has made it clear that local planning authorities should continue to progress Local Plans, despite Government reorganisation.

1.19 Councils are required to submit their Local Plans by December 2026, under the current planning system. Should we not progress a Local Plan, then we would likely be subject to intervention from the Government, i.e. we could lose the ability to make key planning decisions about future growth in our borough. In addition, not getting a Local Plan in place as quickly as possible will also mean that we will continue to be open to speculative development, and we would not be able to provide any certainty to our communities on future growth. Also, without a 5-year housing land supply in place, which we do not have currently, it will continue to be very difficult to refuse speculative applications and win related appeals. Planning appeals are of course costly to defend.

1.20 The council therefore considers it very important to progress a Local Plan to ensure that we can deliver policies and a growth strategy that meets our vision, objectives and priorities and in a way where we can meet the needs of both existing and future communities. The alternative is to be without a plan for more years and witness further speculative development. This won't achieve our ambitions or priorities, and it will also be difficult to coordinate a strategic approach to growth and development including delivering much needed infrastructure provision.

Structure of this Document



1.21 The Local Plan is structured around key themes and presents both strategic and non-strategic policies.

1.22 The strategic policies set out the overarching approach and deal with major subject matters that are fundamental to decision making or provide the strategic approach that applications for development should take. A list of the Local Plan policies are presented in Figure 1.1. The strategic policies are highlighted in **bold**. Non-strategic policies generally add an additional layer of detail in relation to how development should be managed and delivered, to help inform decision-making.

1.23 Throughout the Plan we provide the context and justification for each policy as well as an explanation as to how the policy is intended to operate. Many policies refer to specific locations or areas, and as required we have defined these on the Local Plan Policies Map, which is also provided as part of this consultation.

Figure 1.1: Local Plan Policies (Strategic Policies are in bold)

No.	Policy name	Page
SP1	Spatial Strategy	38
SP2	Delivering Homes for Our Communities	44
SP3	Settlement Hierarchy and General Development Principles	59
SP4	Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople - Accommodation Needs	61
SP5	Future Employment Growth	65
SP6	Town Centre Needs	67
SP7	Green Belt	68
SP8	Managing Development in the Green Belt	70
SP9	Local Green Gap	75
CC1	Addressing Climate Change	84
CC2	Circular Economy	89
CC3	Sustainable Design and Construction	92
CC4	Energy & Heating	97
CC5	Renewable and Low Carbon and Heat Projects	101
CC6	Water Efficiency	105
CC7	Managing Development Within Flood Risk Areas	109
CC8	Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)	113
NE1	Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment	125
NE2	National Landscapes	131
NE3	Landscape Character	137
NE4	Designated Sites, Irreplaceable Habitat and Priority Habitat and Species	142
NE5	Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	147
NE6	Green and Blue Infrastructure	151
NE7	Woodland, Trees and Hedgerows	155
NE8	Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land	163
NE9	Noise, Vibration and Odour	167

No.	Policy name	Page
NE10	Air Quality	171
NE11	Ground Contamination	175
NE12	Light Pollution	179
HE1	The Historic Environment	187
HE2	Listed Buildings	191
HE3	Conservation Areas	197
HE4	Historic Parks and Gardens (Designated and Non-Designated)	200
HE5	Archaeology	203
HE6	Enabling Development for Heritage Assets	206
D1	Achieving High Quality Design	216
D2	Design Codes and Masterplans	221
H1	Housing to Address Needs	227
H2	Affordable Housing	230
H3	Build-to-Rent	237
H4	Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople – Safeguarding Sites	241
H5	Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople – Site Criteria	245
H6	Specialist Housing to Meet the Needs of Older and Vulnerable People	248
H7	Accessible and Adaptable Homes	252
H8	Self and Custom Build Housing	257
H9	Houses in Multiple Occupation	260
H10	Residential Extensions, Alterations, Annexes and Ancillary Accommodation	264
E1	Supporting a Prosperous, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Future	273
E2	Strategic Employment Areas	278
E3	Other Employment Sites, Premises and Floorspace	283
E4	Employment and Skills	287

No.	Policy name	Page
E5	Supporting the Vitality of Town, Service and Local Centres	293
E6	Primary Shopping Areas	295
E7	Above Ground Floorspace	297
E8	Sequential and Local Impact Tests	299
R1	Rural Exception Sites	307
R2	Housing For Rural Workers	311
R3	Replacement Dwellings Outside Settlement Confines	315
R4	Conversion of an Existing Building to Residential Use Outside Settlement Confines	319
R5	Residential Parks	323
R6	Employment Development Outside Existing Settlement Confines	327
R7	Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture	331
R8	Farm Diversification	334
R9	Sustainable Tourism and Visitor Accommodation	339
R10	Equestrian Facilities in the Countryside	343
INF1	Provision of Infrastructure and Services	350
INF2	Sustainable Transport and Active Travel	356
INF3	Parking	361
INF4	Community Facilities	365
INF5	Outdoor and Indoor Sports, Recreation and Open Space Provision	370
A1	Housing and Employment Allocations	386



Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation



1.24 We encourage everyone to take part in our consultation which will run from **10th November to 22nd December 2025** - we would really like to hear from you.

1.25 This Regulation 18 consultation Local Plan sets out our draft vision and objectives, a draft growth spatial strategy for the borough and provides both our strategic and development management policies on a range of planning matters including climate change, the natural environment, the historic environment, housing, the economy, design and infrastructure. It also identifies sites where we consider that future development should be delivered.

1.26 Details about the consultation including further information and how to make comments is available on our [website](#).

1.27 This is your chance to feed into the Local Plan process ahead of us testing the draft proposals further and developing the Plan for its final publication stage in 2026.