



Engagement Strategy

October 2026

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Engagement Strategy has been produced to underpin the preparation of a review of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan, to be undertaken in accordance with the Government's new plan-making [Regulations](#) which came into effect in March 2026. The Local Plan Review will set out a spatial planning and policy framework for the whole of Tunbridge Wells Borough to cover the period 2029 – 2044. When it is adopted, it will replace the existing [Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan \(December 2025\)](#).
- 1.2 The Local Plan Review will affect everyone who lives and works within Tunbridge Wells Borough and others who may have an interest in it, meaning it is important that local residents, communities, partners, statutory bodies and other stakeholders are able to participate fully and effectively from an early stage in the local plan-making process. This involvement is key to shaping a plan that enables sustainable growth, meets the needs of our communities, and protects and enhances our local area. This Engagement Strategy sets out how the council will deliver early, inclusive and meaningful engagement throughout the plan-making process.

What is the Engagement Strategy?

- 1.3 Engagement is central to the plan-making process to enable local knowledge, experiences and aspirations to inform and shape its policies. This Engagement Strategy has been prepared to help the Council meet the statutory requirements for the Local Plan Review.
- 1.4 This document explains how we will involve communities and stakeholders at each stage of the Local Plan Review process, and how we will consider and report on the representations we receive. It sets out a clear, practical and inclusive approach that we are committed to in preparing the Local Plan Review.

Legislation

- 1.5 The Engagement Strategy has been prepared under and has regard to:
- the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#)
 - the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty
 - the Council's [Statement of Community Involvement](#) (see below)
 - the Council's equality commitments, including its [Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)
 - national planning policy, and relevant Government guidance on the new plan-making system, including [Engaging the public when preparing a local plan](#).

- 1.6 The [Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#) commits us to listening to residents, stakeholders and staff and taking the views of people with protected characteristics into account when making decisions about our policies and services.
- 1.7 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) August 2026 has an emphasis on early engagement for plan-making under Policy PM6 (1)(d) which states the requirement to *“Engage positively with communities and other key stakeholders, at appropriate points during their preparation and using a range of methods, so that relevant issues are identified and addressed as early as possible during the plan-making process.”*

Key consultation stages

- 1.8 The new Plan-Making Regulations set out the key stages of plan making and consultation requirements. For the preparation of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan Review, we will carry out formal consultation on the Local Plan at three stages:
- Scoping consultation (Regulation 20) (already undertaken between 14 July and 11 August 2026)
 - Proposed Local Plan content and evidence consultation (Regulation 23)
 - Proposed Local Plan consultation (Regulation 27)
- 1.9 A summary of the comments received will be produced and published after each public consultation stage and include:
- details of the bodies/stakeholders invited to make representations
 - how they were consulted
 - a summary of the main issues raised in the representations received
 - how the Council has had regard to the representations received

Timescales

- 1.10 A requirement of the new plan-making process is for Councils to publish and keep an up-to-date Local Plan Timetable, which provides information about the timing of the Local Plan documents the Council is and/or will be preparing.
- 1.11 The Council's Local Plan Timetable came into effect on 26 June 2026. Further details can be found on the Council's [Local Plan Timetable](#) webpage. This will be kept up to date throughout the period our new Plan is being prepared.

Engagement Strategy Principles and Objectives

Engagement Objectives

- 1.12 Our objectives for engagement on the Local Plan Review preparation process are to:
- Inform local residents and other stakeholders of the Local Plan review process and provide clear timescales for its preparation;

- Engage with local residents and other stakeholders and support their participation in the preparation of the Local Plan by using appropriate and proportionate engagement materials/activities and providing full opportunity to comment and engage in consultations;
- Provide feedback following the key stages of public consultation to show how responses received and views expressed have been considered.

Engagement Principles

- 1.13 The Council will set out clearly how people can get involved in planning policy formation, and at what stage of the consultation. It will provide clear and up-to-date timetables for consultation periods and participation exercises. It will provide appropriate and proportionate consultation documents as early as possible at each stage, to provide full opportunity to comment and engage in consultations.
- 1.14 To encourage the identification of issues and concerns at the earliest opportunity, the Council will apply the following principles:
- 1) To recognise the needs of different groups in the community by making communication timely, relevant, and accessible making it easy for groups and individuals with little or no knowledge of the planning process to get involved
 - 2) To seek to maximise opportunity for community involvement in ways that make best use of people's time and available resources
 - 3) To seek to engage as early as possible, allowing greater opportunity for the views of interested and affected parties to be reflected in decisions made
 - 4) To make the scope of the consultation and the material and information used as clear, concise and avoiding jargon wherever possible
 - 5) To produce consultation summaries and feedback to reflect how comments received have been taken into account in preparing the Local Plan Review
 - 6) A wide range of consultation methods will be used with an emphasis where possible on digital techniques to make consultations easier, quicker and more cost effective. Such digital approaches will be used alongside more traditional methods, including in-person events and meetings and the provision of printed information such as posters, flyers
 - 7) Documents will be made available upon request in accessible formats such as large print and braille and in an accessible audio format online.

How to use the Engagement Strategy alongside the Statement of Community Involvement

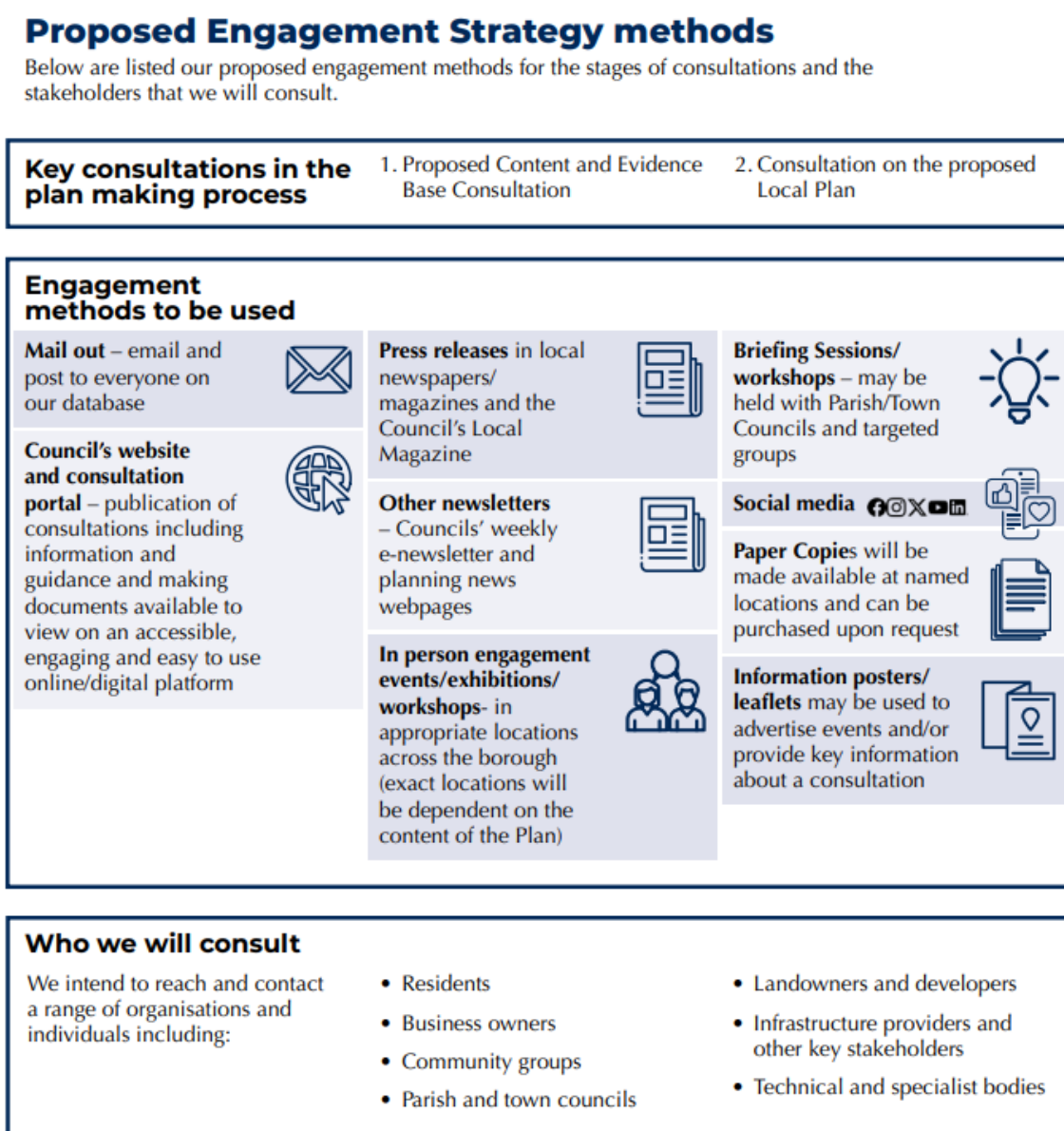
- 1.15 The Council's [Statement of Community Involvement](#) (known as the SCI) has recently been updated and sets out how the Council will involve and consult the

community in the planning process, including preparing planning policy documents and making decisions on planning applications. However, the new [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#) came into effect in March 2026 and the new plan-making and consultation requirements set out within these regulations will be used by the Council in the preparation of Local Plans going forward. In line with the new regulations, the stages of local plan making section will remain in the SCI as well as being included in this Engagement Strategy (setting out how the Council will engage during the preparation of the Local Plan Review). The SCI will remain in place alongside the Engagement Strategy to ensure engagement on all aspects of planning are covered.

2.0 Scoping consultation feedback on engagement

- 2.1 The Scoping Consultation (which took place between 14 July and 11 August 2026) was the first public consultation in the preparation of the Local Plan Review and sought early views on what the plan should contain and how future engagement should be carried out in preparing the Local Plan at each stage. We set out a summary of our proposed Engagement Strategy in the Scoping Consultation document (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – extract from Scoping Consultation document – Proposed engagement methods



- 2.2 We asked two questions about this strategy:
- 1) How do you think the Council should engage in preparation of the Local Plan?
Are there any other methods of communication or engagement that you think we should be using that we haven't already included in the table below?
 - 2) Do you have any suggestions on how the Council can ensure that the consultation is inclusive of different groups/individuals in our borough communities?
- 2.3 We received 31 responses to these questions. These were the main points raised by respondents:
- Paper copies of Local Plan documents at all Parish/Town council offices should be provided and free of charge
 - Use posters / flyers to raise awareness across borough
 - Talk and listen to people in affected areas e.g. through in person workshops for residents in broad locations
 - An appropriate balance of all the proposed measures should be used
 - Communication by email preferred in several cases
 - Strong desire for more time with Parish/Town councils through briefing sessions and effective dialogue
 - Strong representation to engage with schools and youth organisations to ensure younger people's views are represented
 - Better use of social media <https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/news/social-media>
 - Provide easy read versions and accessible versions of documents
- 2.4 Most of the consultation ideas mentioned in the responses received are already included in the proposed consultation methods shown in Figure 1 above and set out in Table 1 below. The responses relating to better use of social media and more focused engagement with Parish and Town Councils, schools and youth groups are noted and reflected in this Engagement Strategy. More detail is provided below under the *How we will engage with other/different stakeholders* section.
- 2.5 The issue raised of making fewer paper copies of Local Plan documents available to Parish and Town Councils and charging for these when requested is also noted. Although the Council is aiming to reduce paper usage given government emphasis on more digital means of communication, it is recognised that Parish and Town Councils are key partners in the plan-making process, and that the Council is required to provide paper copies on request (with a reasonable charge). Therefore the Engagement Strategy includes a note that - *The provision of paper copies of documents will be provided upon request to Parish and Town Council (free of charge). Individuals and community groups can request to purchase copies of documents, and the Council will respond to all requests as soon as reasonably practical.*
- 2.6 Further details on the responses received and our responses to them will be set out in the Council's Scoping Consultation Summary Report once published.

- 2.7 As referred to above, the Council's SCI has been updated. Part of this process included a public consultation on the updated document and the consultation methods set out within it for both planning policy documents and making decisions on planning applications. The consultation was held between 10 April and 22 May 2026.
- 2.8 A total of 12 responses were received relating to both plan-making and planning application matters. Again, as for the Scoping Consultation above, the key issue raised relating to the plan-making section was a change in making fewer paper copies of Local Plan documents available to Parish and Town Councils and charging for these when requested. The SCI has also been amended to note that - *The provision of paper copies of documents will be considered upon request from Parish/Town Council's (free of charge) and may be purchased by other groups/individuals.*
- 2.9 The comments received to these consultations have informed our Engagement Strategy. Full details of our strategy and proposed engagement methods are set out in Tables 1, 2 and 3 below.

3.0 Who will we consult?

- 3.1 We recognise that effective plan-making relies on understanding the views, needs and aspirations of a wide range of stakeholders. This includes residents of the borough, businesses, landowners, developers, infrastructure providers, service providers, community and voluntary organisations, neighbouring authorities, statutory consultees and other interested parties. By seeking a diverse range of perspectives and local knowledge, we can ensure that the Local Plan and its policies are informed by robust evidence, reflect the needs of our communities, and support the sustainable growth and development of the borough.

Who lives in Tunbridge Wells Borough?

- 3.2 Government guidance recommends that the baseline demographics should be identified and considered when creating and updating an Engagement Strategy. This can help to identify target audiences and to plan to meet their needs.
- 3.3 Tunbridge Wells Borough is home to around 115,300 people. The borough contains both urban and rural areas, with Royal Tunbridge Wells being the largest town and there are other smaller settlements including Southborough, Paddock Wood, Hawkhurst and Cranbrook. There are also several rural villages. Given the mixed character of the borough, we must consider how to ensure that rural residents, who may in some cases lack digital access or be reliant on private transport, can still be fully involved in consultation events. This means that there is a need to consider

flexible, hybrid engagement approaches to ensure inclusive engagement across the whole borough.

Age

- 3.4 Life expectancy for residents in the borough is higher than the national average. Tunbridge Wells borough has an ageing population, with the proportion of people aged 65 years or older expected to increase to over 27% by 2043, whilst census data suggests that the population aged 0-15 and 16-64 has decreased slightly in recent years. It is important to consider views from people of all different age groups, and this data suggests that we need to prepare documents and consultation events that are accessible and inviting to both younger and older people.

Disability

- 3.5 The Census (2021) recorded that around 15% of the borough population have their day-to-day activities limited a little or a lot by a long-term illness or disability. This means there is a need to be mindful of the accessibility of our digital consultation events (for example, by making sure all consultation documents are accessibility tested and approved), as well as the accessibility of public events in terms of transport, parking and entry to buildings.

Ethnicity

- 3.6 The Census (2021) recorded that 92% of people in the Borough were from a White Background. This has decreased from 95% in 2011. The proportion of those from Asian, Black, Mixed and Other ethnic groups increased between 2011 and 2021. To make sure we are reaching the full borough population, we must be mindful of the needs of different ethnic groups including language needs.

Economic activity

- 3.7 Around 75% of the working-age population is economically active, and the unemployment level is one of the lowest in Kent. We have a highly skilled workforce, and household incomes are generally higher than the national average. Ninety percent of businesses are micro sized (with 1-9 employees) and 8% are small (with 10-49 employees). We want to hear from businesses in the borough and must cater to their needs by recognising the time demands on small businesses and utilising networking groups to make it easier for them to respond to consultations.
- 3.8 A more detailed plan of how we will tailor engagement to support equality, diversity and inclusion is set out in Table 2 below.
- 3.9 More information about baseline demographics can be found on the [Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy webpage](#).

Who we are required to consult

- 3.10 We must invite certain bodies to make representations at each key consultation. Regulation 2 of the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#) sets out the 'general consultation bodies' and 'specific consultation bodies'. In this context, 'bodies' means an organisation or group.
- 3.11 General consultation bodies refer to:
- a) voluntary bodies, some or all of whose activities benefit all or part of the planning authority's area;
 - b) bodies which represent the interests of persons in the planning authority's area who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010; and
 - c) bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying on business in the planning authority's area.
- 3.12 Specific consultation bodies are organisations that have authority on matters such as:
- Protecting the natural and historic environment
 - Managing and planning infrastructure, including transport and water supplies
 - Providing health care, education or other services that people need
 - Flood management
- 3.13 Specific consultation bodies also include neighbourhood forums (an area without a parish or town council) within the borough.
- 3.14 Appendix A sets out a list of general and specific consultation bodies that we will contact with regards to the Local Plan Review.
- 3.15 The Requirement to Assist was also introduced under the new plan-making regime, as set out in [The Requirement to Assist with Certain Plan Making \(Prescribed Public Bodies\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#), with the intention of supporting the timely flow of relevant information during plan-making. It is a new obligation for prescribed bodies of a public nature to assist with plan-making when notified by a plan-making authority that assistance is required. The prescribed public bodies that can be required to assist are set out in the new regulations (above).

How we will engage with other/different stakeholders

Local Residents and other stakeholders

- 3.16 The Scoping Consultation responses identified that consultation by email was a preferred method of engagement for consultation on the Local Plan Review. We keep a planning policy consultation database of individuals, organisations,

developers and other interested groups who have told us they want to be told about emerging policy documents. We send emails to these with updates on the Local Plan Review, including invitations to comment at different consultation stages.

- 3.17 The consultation database is regularly updated and anyone who wants to be added to the database or to have their details amended can do so by contacting the Planning Policy team on 01892 554056 or by email at planning.policy@tunbridgewells.gov.uk.

Planning Policy Privacy Notice

- 3.18 All data stored and published will be compliant with the Council's Privacy and data protection policies.
- 3.19 The Council's [Planning Policy Privacy Notice](#) sets out details of what information we collect from you, what we do with it, and who it might be shared with.

Elected Members (Councillors)

- 3.20 Elected Members (Councillors) play an important role in overseeing the Local Plan and its engagement to ensure the Plan reflects local priorities and that decisions are informed by community views. This includes:
- Acting as the collective voice of the community in representing the interests of their ward constituents and the wider community
 - Taking part in focused briefings
 - Helping to shape the direction of the plan at key stages through the monthly Planning Policy Working Group (an informal group of members who, with council officers, consider and review planning policy documents as work on them is progressed).
 - Making decisions on the later stages of plan preparation including the publication of the Regulation 27 version of the proposed Local Plan prior to public consultation and its adoption after examination.
- 3.21 All Councillors will continue to receive additional updates about the local plan process through methods including email newsletters, media releases, and briefing sessions at key stages of Plan making.

Other Council departments

- 3.22 Engagement will be coordinated with other teams across the Council, including the communications and digital teams to ensure a consistent and joined-up approach and that engagement opportunities are widely promoted and are easy to take part in. This will include:
- using the Council's website and consultation platforms as the main way for people to take part

- promoting consultations through appropriate communication channels – by both digital and non-digital means, including the use of social media and in-person events <https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/news/social-media>
- making sure opportunities to get involved are accessible to all communities and groups

Parish Councils and Town Councils

- 3.23 As well as producing Neighbourhood Plans, Parish and Town Councils play an important role in the development of the Borough Wide Local Plan. Focused engagement through individual briefing sessions with Parish/Town Councils and weekly email newsletters will be used to inform and engage parishes about the context of the new local plan, identify any specific needs (such as infrastructure) and answer any questions they may have in relation to the Local Plan Review.

Infrastructure Providers

- 3.24 It is important that infrastructure is delivered in the right way to support growth and the development strategy for the Local Plan Review going forward. Therefore, it is essential to engage with infrastructure providers such as water and power companies, education and health bodies from an early stage in the Local Plan making process. Such bodies were consulted as part of the scoping consultation and going forward more targeted consultation and engagement will take place with a range of infrastructure providers to assist in the preparation of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which will be a supporting and evidence-based document for the Local Plan. The IDP will set out what infrastructure is required for each Parish/area to support any proposed growth and how this is anticipated to be delivered.

Neighbouring Local Authorities

- 3.25 Local Planning Authorities are required to cooperate on cross boundary matters with neighbouring authorities and other bodies such as infrastructure, assisting with unmet housing need, the movement of people, vehicles and water, employment need and impact of ecological/environmental designations. Engagement (including regular meetings) will continue to be held with neighbouring authorities and other bodies as well as the use of statements of common ground in demonstrating cooperation between plan-making authorities/bodies.

Developers and site promoters

- 3.26 The Council will engage proactively with developers, landowners and site promoters throughout the preparation of the Local Plan to ensure that relevant opportunities, constraints and delivery considerations are understood. As part of this process, the Council will contact known landowners identified through the Land Registry and will

write to planning agents and site promoters using existing contact databases and consultation mailing lists. The Council may also publicise opportunities for developers and site promoters to participate in the Local Plan process through relevant online and printed media, as well as other appropriate communication channels, to help ensure that interested parties are aware of opportunities to engage and submit information at key stages of plan preparation.

- 3.27 As part of the Local Plan preparation process the Council carries out a [call for sites exercise\(s\)](#) where there is opportunity for residents, landowners, developers, businesses and other stakeholders to put sites forward for development. These sites could be for different purposes including residential, employment and community uses. The Council expects to engage closely with developers and site promoters through this exercise. It is essential that the Council is able to consider all available land options to develop the Local Plan and to enable this, any call for sites exercise will be widely promoted. All site submissions will be recorded and considered in a structured and impartial manner, and feedback will be provided through published site assessment reports, as part of the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) process.
- 3.28 Whilst the Council cannot prevent site promoters from submitting sites at any point within the plan making process, it is unlikely that additional sites will be assessed after the publication of the Proposed Local Plan (Regulation 27). This is due to the practicalities of finalising the Plan for consultation and subsequent submission for assessment by an Inspector and for Examination. Any sites submitted after this point will be recorded as omission sites and retained for presentation to examination if required.

What engagement methods do we use?

- 3.29 We will use a range of consultation methods during the preparation of the Local Plan Review. The type of consultation method used will be informed by the type and stage of the document. Table 1 below explains the consultation methods to be used by the Council in the preparation of the Local Plan going forward:

Table 1 Consultation methods used by TWBC for Plan-making (replicated from the SCI update)

Consultation Method	Description
Council's website	The Council's website will be used to promote consultations, post the latest information, provide consultation documents and supporting evidence, and advice on opportunities for participation (see the Planning Policy web pages). This could include electronic surveys and interactive maps.

Consultation Method	Description
	The Planning Department's consultation portal will be used as the primary online portal to enable people to view and comment on draft documents online during the relevant consultation periods. The corporate Council consultation portal may also be used depending on the stage of plan making. As increasing use is being made of electronic communications, anyone interested in receiving notification of a consultation is encouraged to register themselves on the consultation portal or by contacting Planning Policy on 01892 554056 or by emailing planning.policy@tunbridgewells.gov.uk. The Council's website also makes provision to view responses to consultations (when closed) that others have made.
Emails/letters	The Council will seek to send letters out about the consultation by email or by post to all relevant consultee bodies and those individuals who are on the Council's database, informing them of the consultation and inviting them to comment. This could include emails to schools and other youth groups to encourage engagement with younger people or to local amenity or friends groups.
Social Media	Use will be made of the Council's Social Media accounts to publicise draft policy documents where appropriate and the wider use of social media will continue to be explored as a way of reaching a wider audience.
Publicity materials	<i>Press releases</i> Information about the consultation will normally be advertised in one local newspaper. In addition, where timelines allow, information will be provided in the 'Local' Magazine which is produced by the Council and posted in paper form to all 53,500 households across the borough on a quarterly basis and is also available to read electronically on the Council's website (if the publication timeline allows for this). <i>Newsletters</i> Consultations will be featured in the following: • TWBC online weekly newsletter (sent out as email alerts) which provides information on services, news and events across the borough. Local residents can sign up to receive the newsletter via the Council's website. • Planning and Building Control News page on the Council's website. <i>Leaflets/posters</i>

Consultation Method	Description
	➤ Leaflets, posters/flyers may be used to advertise events and provide key information about the Local Plan including consultations and site notices for any proposed draft site allocations.
Paper copies	Paper copies of Planning Policy Documents: • The Council will ensure that paper copies of planning policy documents will be available for public viewing at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations). • Other viewing locations may be added depending on the nature and content of the planning policy document being consulted upon. • The provision of paper copies of documents will be provided upon request to Parish and Town Council (free of charge). Individuals and community groups can request to purchase copies of documents, and the Council will respond to all requests as soon as reasonably practical. Paper copies may be enlarged to suit specific needs, on request. Making Representations: The preference is for representations to be submitted electronically using the Planning Department's online consultation portal (including the use of computer facilities at local libraries for those who do not have IT/digital access at home). However, it is also possible to submit a response by: • A written response form (for filling in electronically or printing out) will be available for downloading on the Council's website or where paper versions are provided; • Written representations by postal letter or email.
Engagement events and briefings	In-person stakeholder events/exhibitions will be held in appropriate locations across the borough for key stages in the Local Plan-making process. The exact locations will be dependent on the content of the Plan. Such events would be organised in a way that seeks to ensure there is a range of times people can visit. The events will be publicised in advance on the website and through other media channels which could include social media channels, and posters and leaflets. Town and parish councils will also be made aware of such events and encouraged to publicise these on their own websites/noticeboards.

Consultation Method	Description
	Meetings and briefing sessions led by TWBC Officers may also be held with targeted groups such as neighbourhood and amenity groups.

4.0 How we promote equality, diversity and inclusion

- 4.1 We recognise that some groups in the community are more difficult to reach than others, due to their specific needs or because they may have been under-represented in the past. It is important that every section of the community has the opportunity to contribute to the planning process, to make sure the Local Plan is representative and inclusive. Table 2 below sets out how we plan to reach under-represented communities (this is not an exhaustive list).

Table 2 How we plan to reach under-represented and hard to reach groups

Group	Potential barriers to involvement	How we will support engagement
Disabled residents and people with long-term health conditions	Possible restrictions on accessibility to event venues and online and paper consultation materials	• Provide fully accessible documents • Use accessibility tested online consultation portal • ensure in-person event/exhibition venues are accessible • offer alternative formats for consultation documents as appropriate • Intentionally reach out to the Tunbridge Wells and Area Access group to gain insight
Older residents	Mobility and access barriers to events (e.g. distance to events), and lack of digital experience in accessing online information and completing surveys	• Seek assistance through Parish/Town Councils and other community groups • Consider the provision of paper copies and/or different formats of key consultation documents upon request • Featured promotion through Local magazine (where timelines allow). • Work with faith groups, age related charities and care homes to deliver consultation events where there is capacity and demand.

Group	Potential barriers to involvement	How we will support engagement
Young people	Not always aware of how planning and Local Plans work or understanding on how they can take part	• Use of digital platforms (including social media) to inform and allow participation • Use of appropriate visual materials • Raise awareness at schools, colleges and youth groups • Incentivise engagement • Simplify content and make it available in a range of formats
Residents with limited digital experience or access	Limited confidence using online consultation portals; limited internet access e.g. no Wi-Fi at home	• Provide paper copies of key consultation documents and response forms at appropriate locations across the borough • Telephone support • In-person assistance at events/exhibitions • Use of posters/flyers to advertise events and provide key information about the Local Plan including consultations • Work with existing groups and organisations to promote consultation events (Creative Health courses at The Amelia, for example).
Residents with limited English	Language barriers; low confidence in writing representations	• Use Plain English and visual materials where possible • Provide translation support as required
Minority ethnic communities	May have language barriers and low awareness about the planning system and the Local Plan	• Use Plain English and visual materials where possible • Engage with community groups/local networks where appropriate to offer tailored support in accessing consultation materials

5.0 Stages of consultation for the Local Plan Review

- 5.1 This section of the Engagement Strategy provides detail of the consultation methods to be used at each stage of the plan-making process.
- 5.2 Table 3 below explains what happens at each stage of the new plan-making process and the consultation methods to be used by the Council at each stage in Local Plan preparation going forward.

Table 3 Plan-making stages under the new plan-making process 2026 and consultation methods

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
Preparation of Timetable/notice of intention	Both published 26 June 2026 Call for sites exercise commenced 11 May 2026	Publication of timetable and notice of intention to commence Local Plan preparation. Evidence gathering - The Council collects up-to-date information based on a range of social, economic, and environmental matters. This includes a call for sites exercise, requesting the submission of possible sites for development/redevelopment for assessment and possible inclusion in the Local Plan.	➤ Published on Council's website – dedicated webpages. ➤ Emails/letters sent to everyone on the Planning Policy consultation database. ➤ Featured in online newsletters (TWBC website, All Member and Parish/Town Council newsletters, internal newsletters and featured in TWBC weekly update e-newsletter). ➤ Information provided at Parish/Town Council briefings.

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
			➤ Publicised on Council's social media platforms. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations). In addition, for call for sites: ➤ Posters placed in prominent locations at settlements across the borough and distributed to libraries and Parish/Town Councils. ➤ Press notices (3 local newspapers) and featured in Local magazine. ➤ Social media strategy used including Facebook and Instagram posts.
Scoping Consultation	14 July – 11 August 2026	Early engagement: The Council gave notice of the scoping consultation and invited representations on matters such as what the plan should contain (including the vision and ranking priorities) and how future engagement on the plan should be carried out (in accordance with	➤ Published on Council's website. ➤ Dedicated online consultation platform (included a full consultation survey and a short targeted 'quick response' survey).

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
		Regulation 20 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 . We also consulted on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping report at the same time. We have used feedback from the scoping consultation to inform our Engagement Strategy.	➤ Emails/letters sent to everyone on the Planning Policy consultation database. ➤ Featured in online newsletters (TWBC website, All Member and Parish/Town Council newsletters, internal newsletters and featured in TWBC weekly update e-newsletters). ➤ Publicised on Council's social media platforms, including a short survey on Instagram. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations). ➤ Press notices (3 local newspapers). ➤ Featured in Local Magazine. ➤ Parish/Town Council and Members briefings held (prior to consultation).

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
*Gateway 1 – self assessment of readiness for Local Plan preparation	30 October 2026	This is a self-assessment summary setting out details of the Council's readiness for local plan preparation. The Council will then have 30 months to prepare and adopt the new local plan, beginning November 2026.	➤ Will be published on the Council's website. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations).
*Scoping Consultation Summary	November – December 2026	A summary of how the scoping consultation was undertaken, the comments received and how these were taken into account will be produced. These will then be considered in the preparation of the Plan.	Following Gateway 1: ➤ Will be published on the Council's website. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations).
Consultation on proposed Local Plan content and evidence	March/April 2027	The Council will give notice of undertaking a public consultation (for a minimum period of six weeks) and invite representations on the proposed local plan content and evidence, which will include:	➤ Will be published on Council's website. ➤ Dedicated online consultation platform. ➤ Emails/letters will be sent to those on the Planning Policy consultation database.

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
		• a proposed vision for the borough and any proposed aims and objectives to achieve the vision with measurable outcomes • proposed policies (including site allocation policies) • summary of evidence to support the Local Plan and any other supporting information	➤ Will be featured in online newsletters (TWBC website, All Member and Parish/Town Council newsletters, internal newsletters and featured in TWBC weekly update e-newsletter). ➤ Will be publicised on the Council's social media platforms. ➤ In-person events/exhibitions and other briefings with targeted groups, Parish/Town Councils will be held. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations). ➤ Posters/flyers may be used where appropriate including site notices for any proposed draft site allocations. ➤ Press notices (3 local newspapers).

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
			➤ Will be featured in Local Magazine (if the publication timeline allows for this).
*Summary of consultation on proposed local plan content and evidence	Before Gateway 2 below (September 2027)	A summary of how the proposed Local Plan content and evidence consultation was undertaken and, the responses received, and how these have been taken into account will be produced. The responses received will be considered in the preparation of the Plan.	Prior to Gateway 2 (see below): ➤ Will be published on the Council's website ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations).
Gateway 2 - Observations/ advice from an appointed person	September 2027	Between the consultation on the proposed Local Plan and publication of the summary of consultation (below), the Council will seek observations and advice from a Gateway 2 assessor.	As soon as is reasonably practicable after receiving the observations and advice: ➤ They will be published on the Council's website. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations).

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
			➤ Any person who requested to be notified will be informed. ➤ Copies of the observations and advice will be sent to any person or body identified/referred to in them.
Consultation on the proposed Local Plan	November 2027 - January 2028	Between Gateways 2 and 3, the Council will give notice and invite representations on a public consultation (for a minimum period of eight weeks) on the proposed Local Plan submission documents, including: • the proposed Local Plan and policies map • details of the evidence gathered to support the Plan and other relevant supporting documents • details relating to the scoping consultation and consultation on proposed local plan content and evidence (above), including a summary of the main issues raised and how these have been addressed in the proposed Local Plan.	➤ Will be published on Council's website. ➤ Dedicated online consultation platform. ➤ Emails/letters will be sent to everyone on the Planning Policy consultation database. ➤ Will be featured in online newsletters (TWBC website, All Member and Parish/Town Council newsletters, internal newsletters and featured in TWBC weekly update e-newsletters). ➤ Will be publicised on Council's social media platforms. ➤ In-person events/exhibitions and other briefings with targeted groups, Parish/Town Councils will be held.

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
			➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations) and posters/flyers may be used where appropriate. ➤ Press notices (3 local newspapers). ➤ Will be featured in Local Magazine (if the publication timeline allows for this).
*Summary of consultation on the proposed Local Plan	Before Gateway 3 below (July 2028)	A summary of how the consultation was undertaken on the consultation of the proposed local plan, the responses received and how they were taken into account in the preparation of the Plan will be produced.	Prior to Gateway 3 (see below): ➤ Will be published on the Council's website. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations).

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
Gateway 3 - prescribed requirements assessment by an appointed person	July 2028	The Council will seek observations and advice from a Gateway 3 assessor on whether the prescribed requirements are met in relation to the preparation of the proposed Local Plan. A statement of compliance and a statement of soundness and other supporting documents will be submitted including a summary of the consultation undertaken and responses received.	Following confirmation from the Gateway 3 assessor that the prescribed requirements have been met, the Council will: ➤ Publish a statement confirming that Gateway 3 has been completed. ➤ Publish the submission documents as they were submitted to the Gateway 3 assessor on the Council's website. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations). ➤ Notify any person who requested to be informed. ➤ Send a copy of the observations and advice to any person or body identified/referred to in them.
Examination	Submission October 2028	When the Gateway 3 assessor concludes that the proposed Local Plan meets the prescribed requirements, the Local Plan (Regulation 27) will need to be approved by the Council's Cabinet	Submission of Local Plan: ➤ Notification of submission will be published on the Council's website, including details of where they can be inspected.

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
		committee prior to it being submitted for independent examination. This will include: • a summary of the consultation and engagement activities carried out • the local planning authority's summary of consultation on the proposed local plan An Examination in Public will be held by an independent Inspector. The examination will assess whether the Plan is legally compliant and sound – meaning it meets the test of soundness set out in national planning policy. The Examination should last no longer than 6 months	➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations). ➤ Notify any person who requested to be informed. Examination in Public: Prior to the opening of the examination hearing, the Council will: ➤ Publish the date, time and place of where the hearing(s) is to be held and advice on attending, both online and in paper form at appropriate locations. The website will be kept up to date as the examination progresses. ➤ Notify any person who requested to be informed.
Adoption	April 2029	Should the Plan be found to be legally compliant and sound on conclusion of the examination, at a meeting of Full Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough	As soon as reasonably practicable after adoption of the Plan:

Plan Making Stage	Dates	Activity	Consultation/engagement methods
		Council will consider adopting the proposed Local Plan as the development plan for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.	➤ An adoption statement will be published on the Council's website, in the Local Magazine and on social media platforms. ➤ Paper copies of documents made available at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; The Amelia Scott, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells; and Town Council Offices at Paddock Wood and Parish Council Offices at Cranbrook (view locations). ➤ Copies of the adoption statement will be sent directly to those respondents who asked to be notified.

* Regulation 88 of the new [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#) requires documents to be published on the website, made available for inspection at the principal office and other locations considered appropriate by the LPA. No further consultation is required at these stages.

6.0 Monitoring and review

- 6.1 To make sure our engagement strategy is effective, we may monitor:
- how many people and groups are signed up to our Local Plan consultation database
 - how many consultation responses we receive
 - the range of organisations and communities who respond
 - the format of consultation responses we receive (e.g. via the consultation portal, email, social media comments, letters)
 - the use of digital and non-digital response methods (including social media)
- 6.2 We will use this information to decide what actions may be needed to support participation. This may include targeted changes to improve consultation with under-represented groups for example.
- 6.3 We use optional equalities monitoring questions in consultation activities to help us understand whether we are engaging with a broad range of communities. This information may be used to identify potential under-representation and inform future engagement activities.
- 6.4 We may also use anonymous monitoring statistics such as visit rates to the Council's planning webpages and number of phone calls received to inform response rates.

Appendices

Appendix A – Consultation Bodies

(This list is not exhaustive)

Parish and Town Councils

Benenden Parish Council
Bidborough Parish Council
Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council
Capel Parish Council
Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council
Frittenden Parish Council
Goudhurst Parish Council
Hawkhurst Parish Council
Horsmonden Parish Council
Lamberhurst Parish Council
Paddock Wood Town Council
Pembury Parish Council
Rusthall Parish Council
Sandhurst Parish Council
Southborough Town Council
Speldhurst Parish Council
(other neighbourhood forums)

Specific (Statutory) Consultees

Active Travel England
Canal & River Trust
Civil Aviation Authority
Coal Authority
Environment Agency
Forestry Commission
Historic England
Homes England
Kent County Council - Highways and Transportation
Kent County Council - Flooding
Kent County Council – Education
Kent Nature Partnership (Kent & Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy)
Marine Management Organisation
National Highways
Natural England
Network Rail Infrastructure Limited
NHS Kent and Medway (Local integrated care board)
Office for Nuclear Regulation
Office of Rail and Road
Sport England

Utility providers:

Electric: EDF Energy Plc and UK Power Networks, National Grid
Gas: Scotia Gas Networks and National Grid, Cadent Gas
Telecommunications: Vodafone and O2, British Telecommunications Plc, EE, Three,
Water: South East Water (water supply) and Southern Water (sewerage undertaker)
Upper and Lower Medway Internal Drainage Boards

Neighbouring/ Other Authorities:

Ashford Borough Council
Maidstone Borough Council
Rother District Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Wealden District Council
Kent County Council (including other services to those above – nature, PROWs, minerals and waste, arts and culture)
East Sussex County Council

Community groups/forums

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society
Tunbridge Wells Business Improvement District
High Weald AONB Unit
Kent Wildlife Trust

Other

Kent Fire Service
Kent Police
Kent and Southeast Ambulance services

All other interest groups, societies and forums included on our consultation database

**If you require this document in another format,
please contact:**

Planning Policy

Planning Services

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Town Hall

Royal Tunbridge Wells

Kent TN1 1RS

Telephone: 01892 554056