

Folkestone & Hythe Local Plan 2045

Gateway 1 Self-assessment



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1. Folkestone & Hythe Local Plan 2045 - Gateway 1 Self-assessment

1.1 Introduction

This document sets out the council's assessment of its readiness to start preparing its new local plan. We are preparing our local plan under a new process introduced by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act and accompanying local plan regulations that were introduced in March 2026.

The current stage of local plan preparation is known as the Gateway 1 assessment. This is a self-assessment prepared by Folkestone & Hythe District Council. There are three 'gateways' in the new local plan process - Gateways 2 and 3 will follow later and will be led by independent planning Inspectors.

At this stage, government guidance says that local authorities should prepare a short summary of the work they've undertaken to start preparing their local plans. This summary should deal with five topics:

- Preparing and publishing a local plan timetable.
- Establishing project management and governance arrangements.
- Setting out the local authority's approach to consulting and engaging on the local plan.
- Identifying the anticipated content of the local plan.
- Progressing the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

The government also provides a table that local authorities can use to check their progress.

The following sections provide brief summaries of our progress against the five topic areas.

1.2 Local Plan Timetable

In May 2026, we published a local plan timetable setting out the anticipated stages of the new local plan process and how we will work towards adopting the new local plan within the government's 30-month timeframe. The timetable is intended to give residents, community groups, businesses and other stakeholders an indication of what will happen next and when they will be able to get involved.

We are monitoring progress against the stages set out in the timetable. The local plan process we are following is new, and we will be among the first authorities to prepare a plan under this system, so there may be changes to the timetable. We will publish any amendments to the timetable on our website and we will report progress to government at key stages.

We have complied with other requirements of the new system, including publishing our Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation on 30 June 2026 and holding our Scoping Consultation, which ran from 7 September to 16 October 2026 (see section 1.4 below).

1.3 Project management and governance arrangements

Preparing a local plan is a complex process that involves teams across the council and inputs from many other organisations. Carefully planning the management and governance arrangements will help us monitor progress and keep the local plan on track.

In June 2026, we agreed that the Chief Planner could approve key stages of the local plan process under delegated authority. This will help us meet the government's 30-month period for plan preparation. We also established a new cross-party Planning Policy Steering Group to help guide the new local plan. The initial meeting of the steering group was held on 1 July and the group will meet regularly to guide the new local plan and get the inputs of elected Members into the process. Key consultation stages will still go through the council's Cabinet to ensure full oversight of the process.

We have prepared a project management framework which sets out the legal requirements, programme structure and governance and requirements for each stage of the local plan process. We have prepared a Project Initiation Document (PID) which sets out the scope of the local plan, key milestones, governance arrangements, resources, evidence requirements, methods of engagement and estimated budget. We have also drafted a risk register which sets out the strategic and delivery risks for the local plan. Project management documents will be updated throughout the process, as we draft the local plan and new national policy, guidance and best practice emerges. We are establishing a Local Plan Programme Board to monitor progress on the local plan and to ensure that the risk register remains up-to-date and any new risks are identified and, if mitigation is needed, it is put in place. We will also use the council's Corporate Governance Board and Corporate Leadership Team to make sure that senior managers across the council engage with the new local plan.

To engage with external parties, we are holding meetings with key stakeholders, such as National Highways, the Environment Agency, Kent County Council and others, and we will maintain communication throughout the process, agreeing Statements of Common Ground (SoCGs) with key organisations before the plan is finalised and moves to examination.

We are identifying funding for evidence needs, as well as estimated legal, planning Inspectorate and other costs, through the council's budget setting process. Budgets will be monitored through the Local Plan Programme Board and the council's budget monitoring process.

1.4 Consulting and engaging on the local plan

We set out our initial proposals for consulting and engaging on the local plan in the Scoping Consultation, which highlighted potential engagement methods designed to reach different target audiences, including under-represented groups.

People were asked:

- How would you prefer to receive information about future stages of the local plan?
- Are there any barriers that might make it difficult for you or others to take part in future local plan consultations?
- Are there any groups or communities that you think we should make greater efforts to engage with during preparation of the local plan?
- What would make it easier for you to get involved in future local plan consultations?

The Scoping Consultation ran from 7 September to 16 October 2026, and we are currently assessing the comments we received.

We have prepared an engagement strategy, and this was taken to the council's Planning Policy Steering Group for comment on 20 October 2026. The strategy sets out four principles for engagement:

- Seek views as early as possible.
- Making the process transparent.
- Choosing appropriate ways to involve as many people as possible.
- Listening and responding.

The Scoping Consultation comments and feedback from the steering group will be used to amend the engagement strategy. The strategy will be updated throughout the process, as we hold consultation events and learn from the comments we receive.

As noted in section 1.3, we are holding meetings with key stakeholders and we will maintain these contacts throughout the process, agreeing Statements of Common Ground (SoCGs) with key parties before the plan is finalised and moves to examination.

1.5 Scoping the anticipated content of the local plan

We have begun to scope out the content of the local plan, including by gathering evidence about the state of the district and people's views on key issues for the local plan.

1.5.1 Baseline information

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report sets out baseline information about the district in chapter 3. The baseline information includes topics such as biodiversity, population, human health, soils, water, the environment, climate change, cultural heritage and landscapes.

We publish an Annual Equality and Diversity Report which provides information on the district's population, and comparisons with Kent and the wider southeast. The report outlines the demographic profile of the district, and how the population is likely to change over the coming years. It looks at the ethnicity, health and economic profile of the district, including employment rates, income and deprivation.

The district's Authority Monitoring Reports provide information on the performance of the council's adopted local plans, housing supply, employment land supply and the vitality of the district's main towns, with information on shopfronts and retail vacancies. Information is given on the use of public transport and the private car, the natural environment, climate change and infrastructure provision through the Community Infrastructure Levy.

We will be commissioning specialist evidence to guide the new local plan, but the baseline information outlined above provides a useful starting point.

1.5.2 Potential local plan content

After the final National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in August 2026, we assessed the existing local plan policies against the new framework of national decision-making policies introduced in the NPPF. The NPPF instructs local authorities to avoid policies in their local plans "*which duplicate, substantively restate or are inconsistent with*

the content of national decision-making policies” (NPPF, Policy PM6: General principles for plan-making), and so the scope for local policies will be more limited than under the previous local plan system.

The effectiveness of policies in the council’s adopted local plans, the 2022 Core Strategy Review and 2020 Places & Policies Local Plan, is assessed through the council’s Authority Monitoring Reports.

Joint work on design codes we undertook with the East Kent authorities has also examined local policies and designations, as well as recent patterns of growth and the design issues raised by planning applications (both those refused and approved) and design review panels.

1.5.3 Early engagement

We have gathered people’s views on the key issues facing the district through the local plan Scoping Consultation, which ran from 7 September to 16 October 2026. This has included sessions with town and parish councils, the council’s Youth Forum and meetings with key stakeholders and statutory organisations. We are currently considering the consultation comments we received.

Before this, the council undertook consultation on the draft Corporate Plan 2025-2030 ‘*Our District, Our World*’. The consultation ran from 25 July to 29 September 2024, and comments also highlighted key issues facing the district. Comments submitted to the Corporate Plan consultation provide additional information, alongside the Scoping Consultation, to inform the next stages of the local plan.

Key findings of the Corporate Plan consultation were that:

- Transport was raised as a key issue, particularly bus services, motorway traffic and local speed limits.
- Reducing anti-social behaviour was raised by people across age groups. Teenagers highlighted a lack of facilities and job opportunities.
- The quality of the district’s rivers and coastal waters was a strong theme, as was the need to protect and enhance our green spaces.
- Affordable housing for local people emerged as a key issue.
- Business groups particularly highlighted that they wanted more to be done to promote the district and for local traffic problems to be resolved.

1.5.4 Local plan vision and measurable outcomes

We have begun drafting a new local plan vision, based on the baseline work, the comments from the Corporate Plan consultation and a review of the 2022 Core Strategy Review vision. The draft vision was discussed by our Planning Policy Steering Group on 20 October 2026, and comments from the group, alongside the results of the Scoping Consultation, will be used to refine the vision further. We will then consult on the vision as part of the next consultation stage in 2027.

The new local plan system requires the local plan vision to be supported by no more than ten measurable outcomes. We have drafted a set of measurable outcomes which were considered by the Planning Policy Steering Group on 20 October 2026 alongside the vision. The measurable outcomes will be refined further as the local plan progresses.

1.5.5 Calculating a housing requirement

We have calculated our housing requirement using the government's standard method, which sets out how many homes each local authority should provide. This changes annually as new national information is published. Our requirement is currently 820 homes a year.

We are finalising the scope of work to identify the needs for homes of different sizes, types and tenures, including affordable homes, through undertaking a Housing and Economic Needs Assessment for the district.

1.5.6 Exploring high level options and policies

Following the publication of the new NPPF in August this year, we have assessed our adopted local plan policies against the new national decision-making policies to see what scope we will have to develop policies for the local plan (see section 1.5.2).

We have undertaken two 'calls for sites', where landowners and promoters put forward land that they wish to be allocated for development in the local plan. We are currently assessing the submissions and consulting statutory consultees on the suitability of the sites. In addition, we are also exploring other potential development opportunities, such as reviewing opportunities identified in the *Place Plan for Folkestone Town Centre* (2021), which explored the potential for regeneration in Folkestone.

The district is constrained, with areas of high flood risk, nationally protected landscapes and internationally protected habitats. We undertook a comprehensive study of growth options for the district in 2016 and 2017 to inform the Core Strategy Review. We will review the

growth options work, in light of potential sites submitted during the call for sites, to identify any new high level options for the local plan.

1.6 Progressing the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

We are required to assess the likely environmental effects of the local plan from the earliest stage, and the results of the assessment should influence the next stage of the local plan. This is currently carried out through the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process. The government intends to replace SEA with a new system of Environmental Outcomes Reports. The assessment process may therefore change as new legislation is introduced.

For the first stage in the process, the council commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to undertake the SEA of the local plan. The SEA Scoping Report was finalised in August 2026, and the SEA report was consulted on alongside the Scoping Consultation on the local plan, from 7 September to 16 October 2026.

1.6.1 Other plans and programmes and baseline information

The SEA Scoping Report sets out:

- An outline of the local plan and its relationship with other plans and programmes.
- The environmental objectives which are relevant to the local plan and how these objectives will be taken into account in preparing the plan.
- Baseline information on the current state of the environment.
- Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan.
- Key sustainability issues and what would happen if the plan was not in place.
- An SEA framework, comprising a set of SEA objectives, which will be used to describe, analyse and compare its environmental effects.

1.6.2 Developing SEA objectives

The SEA Scoping Report sets out 11 proposed objectives. These are to:

1. Conserve and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity.
2. Meet the housing requirements of the whole community.
3. Improve the health of the population overall and reduce health inequalities.

4. Conserve and enhance soil and mineral resources.
5. Manage and reduce flood risk from all sources and to conserve and enhance water quality from all sources.
6. Maintain and improve the quality of groundwater, surface waters and coastal waters, and ensure that development does not contribute to nutrient pollution.
7. Maintain and where possible improve air quality.
8. Adapt to the effects of climate change while minimising greenhouse gas emissions.
9. Achieve sustainable levels of prosperity and growth throughout the plan area while supporting the vitality and viability of the district's towns and villages.
10. Conserve and where appropriate enhance areas and assets of historic and archaeological importance.
11. Conserve and enhance the quality and local distinctiveness of landscapes and townscapes.

We are currently assessing the comments that were submitted to the SEA Scoping Report from the public and statutory consultees, and the objectives may change to reflect the comments.

2. Next steps

Following the completion of this self-assessment, and building on the work outlined in this report, we will progress to the next stage of the local plan process.

We will continue to develop the vision, aims and objectives of the new local plan, decide which policies it should contain and prepare the evidence needed to support it. We expect to hold a public consultation for at least six weeks in September and October 2027 on the proposed content of the plan and its supporting evidence.



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