

### **Scoping Consultation Introduction**

Newark & Sherwood District Council have started the production of new Local Plan. The Local Plan will set out a vision for the District, local planning policy, identifying development targets and sites to accommodate the development.

We are producing the Local Plan under a new system which aims to speed up production. This scoping consultation is the initial stage which we conduct before we formally start the process in September.

The timetable is available here ([Local Plan Timetable](#)) and the key dates are:

- Scoping Consultation July 2026
- Gateway 1 September 2026
- Consultation on proposed plan content and evidence June – July 2027
- Gateway 2 November – December 2027
- Consultation on proposed Local Plan March – April 2028
- Gateway 3 July 2028
- Examination of the Local Plan by an independent Planning Inspector - September 2028 to March 2029
- Adoption April 2029

Gateway stages are a new mechanism for checking if the Local Plan is progressing appropriately. Gateway 1 is a self-assessment but Gateways 2 and 3 are conducted by a independent Planning Inspector.

In this scoping consultation we want to set out what we believe the key issues are in producing a local plan for the district and ask how you want to be consulted as part of the production of the plan.

The remainder of the scoping consultation is set out in two parts. Firstly, we have prepared a District Profile which identifies some key information about the district and identify potential issues we need to address. It can be view here ([insert link](#))

The second element sets out what will be in the plan, potential documents – evidence base – to support the delivery of the plan, ways of appraising the plan and our consultation approach.

#### *Why are we doing this now?*

This is a reasonable question, as we have only just taken our Allocations & Development Management DPD through examination and in less than two years' time the District Council will merge with some of its neighbours and part of the County Council to form a new Council. The answer is that because of the changes to national policy elements of

our current plan are out of date, the government has directed Councils to prepare plans as quickly as possible whether or not they are going through local government reorganisation. Therefore, we have commenced plan making. The Plan will be the responsibility of the new Council from April 2029 onwards.

### **Scoping Consultation – Vision & Objectives**

<District Profile Results to be inserted>

#### ***Preparing a vision***

It is important when preparing a plan to have a statement which sets out what you are aiming to achieve and how the place you are planning for will look at the end of the plan period if your plan is successful. The government say that any vision should:

- set out key aims and objectives for your area over the next 15 years or longer
- be ambitious but also reflect what the local plan can realistically achieve through its policies

Our current vision adopted in 2019 states:

By 2033, Newark and Sherwood will become:

*“An area providing a high quality of life, made up of thriving sustainable urban and rural communities where people want to and can, live and work. These sustainable, balanced communities will feature good quality housing with a mix of different sizes, types and tenures which will address local needs.*

*The District will have a successful, diverse economy by providing employment opportunities to a local workforce, equipped with a wide range of skills arising from improved education, learning and training and encouraging tourism potential.*

*The District will be made up of a hierarchy of attractive and vibrant towns, and larger villages that provide a range of accessible facilities and activities for smaller villages and the surrounding rural areas that is effective and sustainable.*

*Newark's role as the Sub-Regional Centre will be strengthened through housing and employment growth in sustainable urban extensions, the regeneration of existing neighbourhoods, new economic and infrastructure investment, and the shortage of affordable housing will have been addressed.*

*Access will be improved, key transport improvements will have been secured and non car use encouraged.*

*The architectural and historic built environment and the District's archaeology will be protected and enhanced. New buildings and spaces will be well designed, with a strong sense of place that builds on local character.*

*Development will be environmentally sound, energy and water efficient, minimise waste, and maximise opportunities for appropriate renewable energy, helping to reduce the impact of climate change.*

*The natural environment will be safeguarded and enhanced, green infrastructure will be strengthened, new green and woodland spaces will increase ecology, biodiversity and nature conservation, providing a resource for local people and encouraging personal well being and health.*

*The District will have strong local distinctiveness as Newark and Sherwood’s unique diverse character, culture and heritage will have been respected and promoted in the course of change that has been guided by the principles of sustainable development.”*

This vision guides and reflects the strategy, policies and proposals in the Amended Core Strategy, therefore as we produce a new local plan we will need to write a vision to match our ambitions for the area over the next 20 years.

The Council’s Community Plan sets out our ambitions for the District over the next five years it includes the following vision:

*“The ethos of Newark and Sherwood District Council is ‘Serving People, Improving Lives’. We exist for the benefit of others and we are accountable for making things better. We accept this responsibility and recognise that our Community Plan can only be achieved by working in partnership with others and at a variety of different levels – sometimes street based, sometimes regionally, nationally and internationally.”*

This vision translates into the Council’s seven ambitions for action. Ambition 7 relates to how the Council operates as an organisation, but we believe that the ambition 1 to 6 could provide the basis of forming a new vision and objectives alongside the key planning issues which we will need to address.

## **Community Plan Ambitions and Key Planning Issues**

<b>Ambitions</b>	<b>Key Planning Issues</b>
<p><b>Ambition 1</b> Break down barriers to opportunity to enable residents and businesses to prosper and fulfil their potential</p>	<p>Encourage sustainable economic growth</p> <p>Promote the long-term vitality and viability of centres</p>
<p><b>Ambition 2</b> Increase the supply of housing, in particular decent homes that residents can afford to buy and rent, as well as improving housing standards</p>	<p>Deliver homes of the right sizes, types and tenures to support sustainable growth and creation of places</p>

<p><b>Ambition 3</b> Improve health and wellbeing, with an emphasis on communities with lower levels of life expectancy</p>	<p>Promote sustainable transport and access to a range of transport nodes</p>
<p><b>Ambition 4</b> Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, improving community feelings of safety</p>	<p>Deliver well-designed, high quality and sustainable places</p>
<p><b>Ambition 5</b> Promote, maximise and celebrate the diversity of Newark and Sherwood's heritage, culture and community spirit</p>	<p>Protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment</p>
<p><b>Ambition 6</b> Reduce the impact of climate change and protect and enhance green spaces</p>	<p>Plan for climate change mitigation and adaptation</p>

**Question** – Do you agree with our approach to creating a vision and objectives and what key issues do you believe should be included in our vision?

***Measuring our success***

The local plan is required to identify no more than 10 measurable outcomes to help monitor progress towards meeting the vision.

The outcomes should be:

- tangible
- locally specific
- easy to monitor the plan against

To achieve this, they should:

- flow from the aims and objectives identified in the vision statement
- outline how the desired change will be delivered and measured

Measures should be quantitative and qualitative and should be linked to policies and outcomes. We have a monitoring framework for our current plan ([Annual Monitoring Reports](#)) but as the vision and policies will be changing significantly this will need to be replaced.

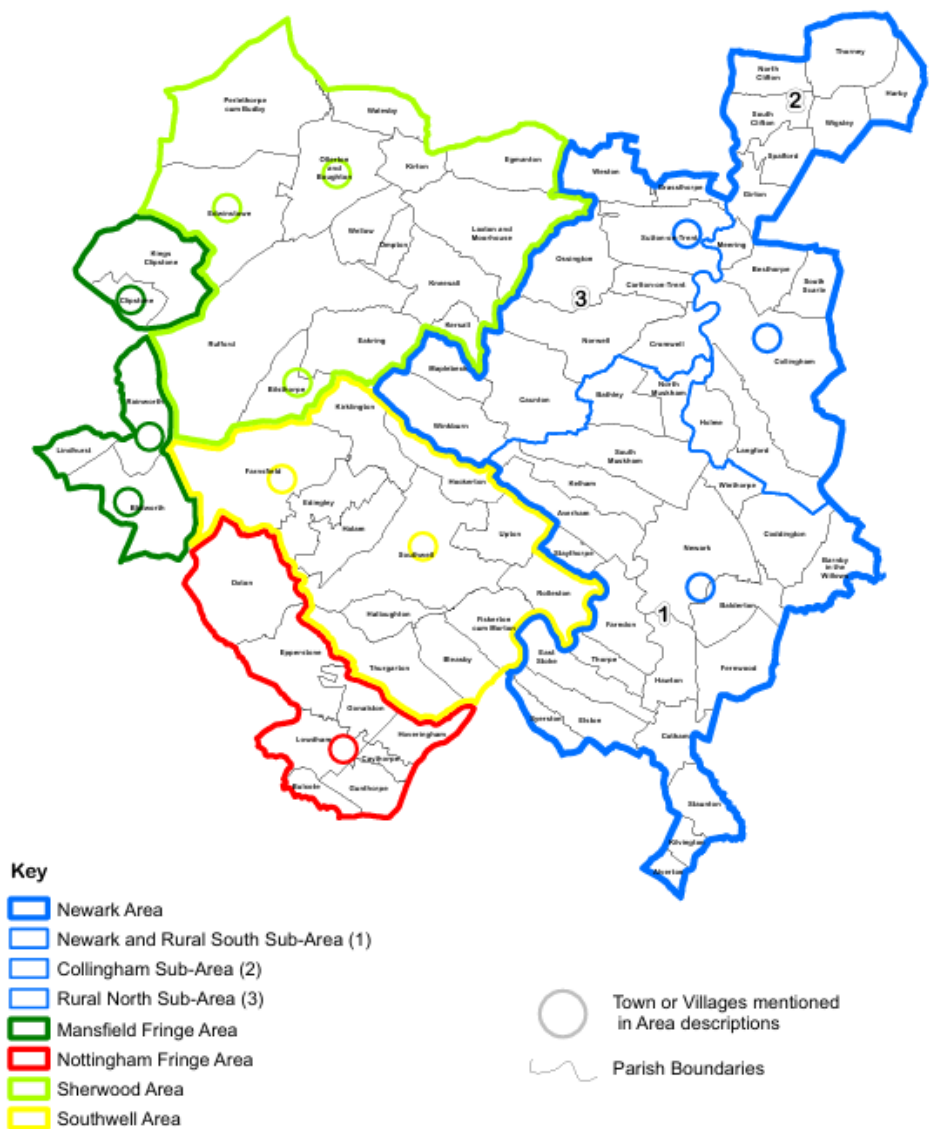
**Question:** What issues do you believe the measurable outcomes should address?

## Spatial Strategy

The key purpose of any Local Plan is to provide a spatial strategy. Its aim is to ensure that the area develops in a sustainable way, delivering social, economic and environmental development and supporting infrastructure. It should identify key settlements and locations for growth. The spatial strategy informs all of the other policies and proposals in the Local Plan.

Our current spatial strategy in the 2019 Amended Core Strategy. It recognises the diverse characteristics of the district and the various roles of the different settlements within it. It also allocates housing and employment development to various locations. The District is split into 5 Areas with the Newark Area being split into 3 sub areas to reflect its diversity.

## Map of Plan Areas



In order to recognise the role of different settlements and direct growth the Council has a settlement hierarchy which identifies four levels:

- **Sub Regional Centre** - To be the focus for housing and employment growth in Newark & Sherwood and the main location for investment for new services and facilities within the District.
- **Service Centre** - Act as a focus for service provision for a large local population and a rural hinterland.
- **Principal Village** - Act as secondary focus for service provision in each Area. Support for service provision in these locations to assist rural accessibility.
- **Other Villages** – Villages which have limited or no facilities.

We identified communities in the first three levels of hierarchy as locations for growth based on the following principals:

1. **Supporting the role of the Sub-Regional Centre** - the requirement to focus development, seeking to support the role of the Sub-Regional Centre.
2. **Regeneration** - address the regeneration needs of the District by focusing housing, employment, facilities and services in communities suffering from deprivation.
3. **Sustainable Communities** - seek to address identified local housing need in a sustainable manner and promote and protect the roles of the Service Centres and Principal Villages as locations for local services and facilities.

The table below set out how this effects major settlements in the Hierarchy, the figure in brackets reflect the principal applied:

Area	Settlements	Status
Newark Newark & Rural South Collingham Rural North	Newark Urban Area* (1) Collingham (3) Sutton-on-Trent (3)	Sub Regional Centre Principal Village Principal Village
Southwell	Southwell (3) Farnsfield (3)	Service Centre Principal Village
Nottingham Fringe	Lowdham (3)	Principal Village
Sherwood	Ollerton & Boughton (2) Edwinstowe (2) Bilsthorpe (2)	Service Centre Service Centre Principal Village
Mansfield Fringe	Rainworth (2) Clipstone (2) Blidworth (2)	Service Centre Service Centre Principal Village

\*Newark Urban Area is made up of Newark, Balderton and Fernwood

Growth was apportioned accordingly. In terms of housing growth, the split is based on settlement size and the relevant growth principal. This resulted in the following split:

	<b>Percentage of Housing Growth</b>	<b>Amount of Housing Growth (dwellings)</b>
Sub Regional Centre	60%	5284
Service Centres	30%	2641
Principal Villages	10%	880
Total (A further 274 dwellings came forward in other locations)		8805

Employment requirements were pursued at a Plan Area level:

<b>Area</b>	<b>Overall employment land to be provided (In hectares)</b>
Newark Area	51.9
Southwell Area	4.5
Nottingham Fringe Area	0.1
Sherwood Area	16.2
Mansfield Fringe Area	10.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>83.1</b>

The current spatial strategy directs the majority of both housing and employment to Newark Urban Area. This reflects the provision of three strategic sites around Newark and the approach of accommodating growth around the most sustainable location in the district to support the function of Newark Urban Area and support infrastructure improvements (e.g. the Southern Link Road).

Whilst the strategic sites have significant further capacity for growth over the new plan period the Council will need to consider if the current spatial strategy, remains the most effective going forward. There are a number of considerations regarding this:

- 1) Does the analysis of service provision and infrastructure capacity undertaken for the Amended Core Strategy remain valid. We will need to understand current infrastructure provision and capacity issues across the district through a new Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- 2) Land Availability – we need to have an understanding of what land is available to accommodate future growth. We are carrying out a Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment process, seeking out potential sites and then assessing if they are suitable for development.
- 3) Market Trends – we are seeing changes in how employment land is developed and brought forward, including different types of use being accommodated in employment areas and the growth of large-scale logistics. Ongoing change in the

retail sector including continued closure of national retailers and renewed pressure for out of centre supermarkets. Viability for all types of development continues to be difficult in the district.

- 4) Changes in national policy. The draft NPPF encourages growth more widely than previously, including around railway stations, and the government has already changed Green Belt policy that are less important to its purposes (known as grey belt). These may well change our approach to allocating development.

We will be developing our evidence base, working with infrastructure providers, stakeholders, landowners and communities to identify a new spatial strategy.

**Question:** The Council believes that it should develop a different spatial strategy than currently used, do you agree?

**Question:** What factors do you believe are important in designing a new spatial strategy?

### ***Green Belt***

As mentioned above national Green Belt policy has changed, and the government have identified that Grey Belt land within the Green Belt may be suitable for development. Newark & Sherwood has an element of the Nottingham-Derby Green Belt down its western flank from the river Trent up to Rainworth.

<Insert map of green belt>

National policy says that “once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period.” It goes on to state that “exceptional circumstances in this context include, but are not limited to, instances where an authority cannot meet its identified need for homes, commercial or other development through other means. If that is the case, authorities should review Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the policies in this Framework and propose alterations to meet these needs in full, unless the review provides clear evidence that doing so would fundamentally undermine [the purposes of the Green Belt]”

We are currently considering if we need to carry out a review of our Green Belt emerging national policy in the Draft NPPF has similar wording. If following our SHELAA process, we don't feel that any Green Belt land needs to be considered we don't believe this will be necessary.

**Question:** Do you agree with the Council's approach to reviewing the Green Belt?

## **Our Consultation Approach - Proposed Future Local Plan Engagement**

### **Existing Council Engagement Strategies**

#### ***Consultation and Engagement Strategy (2022-2027)***

The Council has a Consultation and Engagement Strategy (2022-2027) which sets out how the Council will engage with residents and stakeholders. It establishes a framework of engagement levels, core principles, and coordinated processes to ensure consultation is inclusive, proportionate, and consistently reviewed and improved over time.

This has established a range of engagement principles which in summary outline that consultation should be co-ordinated, inclusive and transparent, using accessible methods and plain English to reach a wide range of audiences without causing over-consultation. It should handle data responsibly, meet legal requirements, support participation from underrepresented groups, ensure feedback is considered and acted on where appropriate, and continue to improve based on experience and learning.

Commitment is provided to carrying out consultation when the Council is considering significant policy changes that could impact on residents, and when there is an express statutory duty to consult. These commitments would cover the production of a new-style Local Plan. Complimenting the engagement principles are a range of standards which the Council seeks to meet when carrying out consultation. This includes.

- Consulting at a formative stage (before proposals are fully developed);
- Ensuring that consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible;
- Provision of enough information to make sure residents are properly informed when responding to a consultation;
- Providing an appropriate period of time for residents to respond (2-12 weeks); and
- Conscientiously consider the responses received.

#### ***Statement of Community Involvement***

There are however also statutory obligations beyond how the Council seeks to engage as an organisation. In this regard the Council has a Statement of Community Involvement which sets out how individuals, groups and communities with an interest in the District will be involved in the planning system, including plan-making. However, it was designed to meet the procedural requirements of the 'legacy' plan-making system and so in some key areas is inconsistent with the requirements of the newly reformed system.

Nevertheless, it has established a set of broad principles that have informed several previous rounds of plan-making in the District. These principles revolve around the following.

- Engaging early and continuously throughout the plan-making process;
- Ensuring that consultation is open, transparent, and accessible to all;

- Showing how views have influenced evolving proposals, with clear feedback; and
- Aligning consultation with wider engagement activity where possible.

These principles are consistent with the Councils wider Consultation and Engagement Strategy and reflect good practice, having helped shape community expectations around Development Plan consultation. They provide a sound basis for developing a robust approach to engagement on the new-style Local Plan.

### **New Plan-Making System**

The basis for engagement on the new Local Plan will however need to evolve to reflect the structure, requirements and objectives of the reformed plan-making system. There is a 30-month period for production of the new Local Plan, requiring a more compressed programme. This will require greater use of digital consultation methods and early consideration of how artificial intelligence can support the process and improve productivity.

National Guidance introduced to support the new system provides a further set of community engagement principles. These largely reflect the current practices of the Council but are outlined below.

- Start engagement as early as possible in the process. Be proactive and do not assume local people will know how to find and access information.
- Help local people understand the plan-making process and how their feedback has helped prepare the plan.
- Use mixed methods of engagement to gather a broad range of insights and ensure consultations are accessible for all.
- Each consultation stage will be different. Consider the following matters when creating and updating, where necessary, the community engagement strategy:
  - Identifying baseline demographic information
  - Defining the target audiences
  - Tailoring engagement approaches and publicity to meet the needs and interests of those target audiences
  - Outlining what the consultations will cover and what falls outside of scope

### **Developing an Approach for Engagement on the New Local Plan**

Taking account of the above an updated set of principles for engagement on the new Local Plan have been drafted. These build on the Councils current practice and guidance supporting the new plan-making system. The principles are to:

- Engage meaningfully and proportionately, with consultation being tailored to the requirements of each stage of the plan-making process;
- Consult from an early stage and at key points throughout the process;
- Design engagement around target audiences and make it open, transparent and accessible to all, including hard-to-reach groups;

- Use a mix of consultation methods, with greater use of digital tools, while remaining accessible and designed with artificial intelligence in mind;
- Show clearly how views have informed evolving proposals, with feedback on the outcome; and
- Align consultation with wider engagement activity where possible.

### **Consultation Groups**

In terms of the different types of consultee who will need to be engaged in the process, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 refer to two different types of consultation body.

### ***General Consultation Bodies***

- Voluntary bodies (some or all whose activities benefit all or part of the planning authority's area);
- Bodies which represent the interests of persons in the planning authority's area who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010;
- Bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying on business in the planning authority's area;

### ***Specific Consultation Bodies (relevant to Newark & Sherwood District)***

- Active Travel England
- Electrical Communication Operators
- Canal & River Trust
- Civil Aviation Authority
- Coal Authority
- English Sports Council
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Highways Authority
- Highways England
- Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England
- Homes and Communities Agency
- National Health Service
- Electricity suppliers
- Gas suppliers
- Sewerage undertakers
- Water undertakers
- Marine Management Organisation
- Natural England
- Neighbourhood forum's within or adjoining the District
- Network Rail
- Office for Nuclear Regulation

- Office of Rail and Road
- Relevant consultation bodies (Local Planning Authority's, Minerals & Waste Planning Authorities, Parish Council's, local policing body and any Combined Authority / County Authorities) within or adjoining the District
- Education Authority
- Lead Local Flood Authority
- Responsible Authority for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy

***Additional Consultees (Defined by the Council)***

However, beyond those bodies named in the regulations the SCI identifies seven main groups that the District Council will seek representations from during the plan-making process. Some of which are covered by those bodies detailed above, but not all. The definition of these groups remains appropriate, and they will continue to be engaged as part of the process for the new Local Plan.

- The general public;
- Hard to reach groups;
- Local voluntary groups / interest groups;
- Town Councils, Parish Councils and Parish Meetings;
- Businesses;
- Statutory bodies; and
- Developers.

Hard to reach groups are those sections of the community whose opinions can be difficult to obtain because they have less day-to-day contact with the planning system than other groups of consultees. In Newark & Sherwood District, these are:

- Young people;
- Older adults;
- Ethnic minorities, including gypsies and travellers;
- People with disabilities; and
- Homeless people.

The District Council will work together with organisations representing hard to reach groups to ensure that the most appropriate consultation methods are used to seek their opinions, and that the views of people within these groups are properly taken account of. The Council will also draw upon the expertise of these representative groups by inviting them to comment through the plan-making process.

**Consultation Methods**

To support robust and comprehensive engagement the following methods will be utilised.

- Contacting appropriate people and organisations by email and letter (where preferred);
- Offering links to interactive consultation platforms and digital storytelling rather than relying on static documents;
- Publicising the consultation via appropriate local media;
- Use of social media across multiple platforms to maximise reach, provide short-form content (such as videos) that improves understanding, and encourages feedback via an alternative channel;
- Digital advertising and targeted communications to reach specific groups;
- Providing details of the consultation and response mechanisms via the Council's website;
- Making consultation documents available, including on the Council's website in accessible formats, and in physical form at deposit locations such as libraries and Council offices where appropriate;
- Use of exhibitions, briefing sessions, workshops or meetings. Offering a mix of in-person and virtual / hybrid events (webinars, online workshops, live Q&A sessions). Recorded sessions being made available online and use of interactive digital tools (e.g. polls, live feedback platforms) during events;
- Appropriate and secure use of digital tools and data analysis to support engagement – including artificial intelligence; and
- Provision of consultation feedback as soon as possible – including clear summaries of key issues raised, explanation of how representations have been considered and use of digital formats to present findings in an accessible way.

### **Engagement Stages within the Plan-making Process**

The new Local Plan process includes 3 formal stages of consultation.

- **Stage 1: Scoping Consultation** (prior to commencement of the 30-month plan-making process and passing through Gateway 1)
- **Stage 2: Proposed Plan Content and Evidence Consultation** (prior to passing through Gateway 2)
- **Stage 3: Proposed Plan Consultation** (prior to finalising the plan and passing through Gateway 3 and examination)

Approaches towards engagement for each specific stage are outlined below.

#### ***Stage 1: Scoping Consultation Engagement (4-week consultation period)***

This consultation stage gives the local community and other key stakeholders the opportunity to have their say at the very start of the plan-making process. With views being sought on:

- What to include in the Local Plan;
- How to approach future local plan engagement (set out here); and
- Any other matters that are felt to be appropriate

Responses to the consultation will inform the development of the Community Engagement Strategy for the remainder of the process. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 require, as a minimum, at this stage that representations be sought from:

- General consultation bodies that are considered appropriate; and
- Specific consultation bodies that are considered may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan

The consultation will be delivered and publicised following the approach outlined earlier. However, in-line with the principle of proportionate consultation, the purpose of this stage of the process and that the target date for passing through Gateway 1 is 1st September 2026, a high-level approach towards direct engagement will be followed. Specific invitations to participate will be limited to those general and specific consultation bodies that meet the tests set out from the regulations above. The public will therefore not be directly invited to participate in this initial consultation. Notwithstanding this any submissions made by residents will be accepted and taken account of.

To gain more localised input into the scoping consultation Local Members will be actively engaged, and Town and Parish Councils are considered a specific consultation body with an interest in the preparation of the Local Plan. In both instances direct invitations to participate will be made to these parties. Developers and landowners are the final set of consultees who will receive direct notification and be invited to respond.

Engagement events designed and administered in a way which follows the principles outlined earlier will be held for relevant stakeholders. Town and Parish Councils are also shortly to be invited to prepare 'Parish Priority Statements' setting out key objectives for their areas. This is considered a potentially valuable source of localised information which will be integrated into the plan-making process at the earliest opportunity

A summary of the Scoping Consultation, including an explanation of how we have considered the feedback, will be published following the Council passing through Gateway 1.

### ***Stage 2: Proposed Plan Content and Evidence Consultation (8-Week consultation period)***

The second stage of consultation involves seeking representations on a draft vision, aims and objectives and a proposed spatial strategy. Details of evidence already collated should be provided, along with a summary of further evidence which is intended to be gathered. The stage is flexible and allows for consultation on other elements- as deemed appropriate – which could include draft policies for instance.

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 require, as a minimum, at this stage that representations be sought from:

- General consultation bodies that are considered appropriate;
- Specific consultation bodies that are considered may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan;
- Residents or people carrying out business in the area that are considered appropriate; and
- Anyone who requested to be notified of this consultation.

In addition to the minimum requirements those additional consultees that have been defined by the Council will also be invited to participate at this stage.

The consultation will be delivered and publicised following the approach outlined earlier. The key differences to Stage 1 being the direct invitation of the general public and businesses and anyone who has requested to be notified.

To support this stage there will be a wider range of consultation events held, including use of exhibitions, briefing sessions, workshops and meetings as appropriate. These will incorporate a mix of in-person and virtual / hybrid events (webinars, online workshops, live Q&A sessions).

Before the Council can move onto Gateway 2 it is required to publish a summary of this consultation stage. This will provide a summary of the main issues raised from responses and how regard has been had to those submissions.

It is also this stage of the process where national guidance recommends that consultation takes place on the level of detail and scope of the Strategic Environmental Assessment – alongside the proposed plan content and evidence.

### ***Stage 3: Proposed Plan Consultation (6-week consultation period)***

The final stage of formal consultation is where the Council publishes its draft plan and requires that the proposed local plan, a map of proposed local plan policies, site allocations and designations, details of the evidence gathered to support the plan and a summary of the main issues raised at the previous statutory consultations and how they have been addressed are made available and representations sought.

As with the previous stage, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 require, as a minimum, at this stage that representations be sought from:

- General consultation bodies that are considered appropriate;
- Specific consultation bodies that are considered may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan;

- Residents or people carrying out business in the area that are considered appropriate; and
- Anyone who requested to be notified of this consultation.

In addition to the minimum requirements those additional consultees that have been defined by the Council will also be invited to participate at this stage.

The consultation will be delivered and publicised following the approach outlined earlier. At this stage we will focus on establishing whether consultees support or object to the Plan.

Before the Council can move on to Gateway 3 it is required to publish a summary of the consultation and make any updates to the Plan and supporting evidence which are required.

At this point in the process national guidance recommends that consultation takes place on the Strategic Environmental Assessment environmental report. Furthermore, if there is a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) in operation within the District then the Council will also need to consult the relevant Authority – to establish whether the Local Plan is in conformity with the SDS. This would need to take place across the same dates as the Proposed Plan consultation.

### **Additional Stages of Consultation**

National guidance supporting the new system is very clear that there is no anticipation additional stages of consultation will be required. This is highlighted as a risk which would add significant delay to the plan-making process and so is recommended to be avoided, where possible. The conducting of additional stages of consultation will therefore require strong justification.

This does not however mean that softer less formal forms of engagement will not be undertaken between those statutory consultation periods. Continuous dialogue will also be facilitated with key stakeholders throughout the process.

### **Digital-first Approach**

One of the more significant changes to the way in which new Plans are to be prepared is the expectation that a digital-first approach be followed, which prioritises digital formats and complies with defined data standards. This will sit at the heart of the approach which the Council follows towards engagement on its new Local Plan.

Digital engagement tools have the potential to significantly increase active participation in plan-making and to make the process more accessible. There are also benefits available in the receiving, considering and handling of representations. Reflecting the consultation principles for the new Local Plan outlined earlier, a mix of websites,

consultation platforms and social media will be utilised. Improvements to how information is presented- moving away from static documents- to use interactive visualisations and story maps is a further benefit which the Council is looking to leverage in its engagement. It is however recognised that this will not suit all consultees and so to ensure the process remains inclusive alternative formats and non-digital options will be maintained.

To support effective and efficient plan-making Artificial Intelligence will be integrated into the process to support the administrative and analytical tasks associated with consultation on the new Local Plan. This will include helping to sort and categorise representations, identify common themes and issues, draft summaries of responses, and assist officers in tracking matters that require follow-up. Where used appropriately, this will reduce manual processing time, improve consistency, and enable staff to focus more on analysis, engagement and professional judgement. Appropriate controls will be put in place to maintain clear oversight, support quality assurance and meet data protection requirements. Transparent communication will be provided over how consultation responses have been handled.

Consultations will therefore be designed with clear questions, structured response options and consistent formats so that responses can be analysed more efficiently, while remaining transparent, accessible and open to fuller comments where needed.

### **How Consultation Data will be Used**

Data collected as part of consultation on the Local Plan will be handled in line with relevant legal and professional standards, including data protection and information governance requirements. This will include collecting only the information needed, storing it securely, using it transparently, and ensuring that any digital tools or artificial intelligence used to support engagement are applied appropriately, proportionately and responsibly.

**Question:** Do you agree with the Council's proposed approach to consultation?

**Question:** Are there any groups and organisations which you think we should be contacting as part of the Local Plan consultation?