

Skeleton Draft of Local Plan (May 2022)

The following document outlines the proposed chapters and content of the emerging Local Plan.

1. Vision

The Spatial Vision is a statement of how the District will look at the end of the Local Plan period, if the strategic policy objectives are delivered. The Vision is the starting point for all aspects of the Plan and should reflect the Council's wider objectives on matters such as Net Zero and health and wellbeing.

Key aspects of the Spatial Vision will be as follows:

- **Achievement of the Council's Net Zero aspirations** - Significantly reducing carbon emissions and adapting to a changing climate.
- **Delivery of sustainable and equitable infrastructure** - To meet the needs of all residents, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, disability or social group. In transport terms, we want to encourage sustainable transport choices, as long as the approach does not alienate particular groups - for example, an active travel strategy that provides genuine choices for an aging population.
Community infrastructure should be provided to meet the needs arising from planned growth, particularly in relation to health and education.
- **Healthy places and spaces, promotion of mental and physical health** - Incorporating green space and healthy design principles, to encourage good physical and mental health. Recognition of health as a principle that cuts across all policies in the plan.
- **Greater economic competitiveness** - Through vital and viable, unique and flexible town centres, capitalising on the strategic location of the District and its functional economic links. Ensuring the delivery of the right type of employment space and supporting the rural economy are equally important in encouraging economic competitiveness.
- **Continued protection of natural resources** - Including the natural environment and biodiversity.
- **Embracing emerging trends, such as smart technology** - Future proofing and allowing flexibility, promoting innovation.
- **Responding to demographic change** - Addressing migration trends and demographic pressures.
- **Continued engagement with neighbouring authorities** - Including London Boroughs.
- **Meeting development needs in a way that respects local character and promotes design excellence** - Encouraging high quality design for new development, delivering enjoyable and attractive places to live, work and relax, that respect local character and provide innovative ways to support mental and physical well-being.

2. Growth Strategy

This initial chapter in the Local Plan provides the over-arching strategy for sustainable growth across the District. It considers the existing pattern of development and the settlement hierarchy, strategic constraints such as Green Belt and AONB and development needs for housing, employment, town centre uses and supporting infrastructure. Additional components will include options for meeting these needs and a focus for growth in sustainable locations, close to facilities and services, such as within existing town and service centres.

The Growth Strategy will promote building at optimum densities to make best and most efficient use of land and the reuse of brownfield land. It acknowledges that the District is unlikely to be able to fully meet its needs within existing developed areas and ongoing discussions will continue with neighbouring authorities regarding the accommodation of strategic needs elsewhere. Notwithstanding these measures, it is likely that some Green Belt release will be required in due course, subject to exceptional circumstances being demonstrated. The chapter will highlight the continued support for town and parish councils who are preparing neighbourhood plans.

3. Housing

Ensuring the right type of homes are delivered to meet the needs of current and future residents, including the Gypsy & Traveller community, is a key area of focus. Boosting the amount of affordable housing to rent and buy is also a top priority, given the high house prices in the District relative to incomes, as is providing more choice in the market for older residents to 'rightsized', in turn freeing up family sized housing for others. Building homes for life is also an important theme, ensuring new homes are built to enable residents to continue to live independently for longer.

Whilst new development will primarily be focused on existing settlements, we are keen to ensure that rural communities are supported by identifying and delivering local needs housing, so that residents who cannot afford to buy or rent locally are not forced to move away.

The delivery of housing in a constrained District is a challenge and a key priority is to make best and most efficient use of land. This means building homes and mixed use developments at densities that are informed by appropriate evidence, taking a design-led approach to ensure new homes are of the highest quality and enhance the character of neighbourhoods. It also means encouraging the development of small and medium sized sites up to 1 hectare in size and considering innovative solutions to boost housing delivery, for example through build to rent schemes.

Gypsy and Travellers are an important part of the community in Sevenoaks District and national policy states that we must plan for their housing needs in the same way as the settled community. We will focus on ensuring that the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community are met in a sustainable way, by focusing on existing sites and sites close to services and facilities.

4. Economy

Identifying how much land for office and industrial uses will need to come forward over the period of the Local Plan, to meet employment needs is a key aspect of the Growth Strategy. Specific sites will be identified for this purpose, alongside criteria based policies to determine planning applications for employment uses. This chapter will also provide a spatial response to longer-term economic challenges, to ensure the District remains economically competitive. Matters such as the type of office space needed and maintaining a vibrant rural economy and tourist sector will be covered. Officers are working closely with Economic Development colleagues to ensure consistency with the Council's Economic Development Strategy.

5. Town Centres

Informed by the Council's recently published Town Centre Strategy (TCS), this chapter will provide over-arching principles to support the District's town centres. These will be presented as both strategic priorities and development management policies related to a 'town-centre first' approach. Key matters for consideration include appropriate town centre boundaries and primary retail areas, the use of Article 4 directions (to restrict permitted development rights) to support town centre uses in core retail areas and the introduction of a lower (than national) threshold for retail impact assessment.

For each of the main town centres and New Ash Green village centre, the TCS identifies a town centre vision for each place, potential development projects, a place co-ordination strategy and delivery and funding mechanisms. The Town Centres chapter of the Local Plan will contain policies to support these recommendations.

6. Transport

The transport policies will aim to facilitate a connected, sustainable movement network, to encourage active and low carbon travel. A mechanism will be provided to deliver the findings of the strategic transport study and other relevant evidence base documents.

The policies will strive to embed sustainable movement priorities and the aims of the Council's Movement Strategy. They will encourage a reduction in air emissions, progress towards the Council's Net Zero ambitions and support residents and visitors to make healthy transport choices. It is noted that urban and rural areas of the District face different movement challenges and there is no singular method which will achieve policy aims.

The Movement Strategy is a corporate document that considers all aspects of movement across the District. Officers have spoken with a number of stakeholders and evaluated consultation responses from numerous documents, including the Local Transport Plan and Cycling Strategy, to gain a greater understanding of the issues faced by residents, businesses and visitors. The Movement Strategy identifies a number of priorities for the District, which include active travel, working with partners, improving public transport and the environment and working towards our Net Zero aims. Whilst it is not a planning document, the identified priorities will inform the development of our transport policies.

7. Infrastructure

Infrastructure policies will ensure that new development contributes appropriately to local and strategic infrastructure requirements. The inclusion of a strategic policy to coordinate infrastructure provision across the District is central to this aim, as is working with providers to ensure the provision of the right infrastructure in the right place, at the right time.

Policies will be based on a clear understanding of infrastructure needs at a District-wide and local level, to assist in the allocation of developer contributions, through mechanisms such as the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Spending Board. It is important that stakeholders are made aware of infrastructure needs, how these have been identified and the associated costs of provision.

The Infrastructure chapter will promote mechanisms to ensure the needs arising from major development schemes are identified at the pre-application stage and can be met. Policies are likely to require the submission of infrastructure strategies with proposals for major development schemes, to address requirements and ensure that infrastructure solutions are 'designed in' at an early stage.

An Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) will be drafted to inform the policies in this chapter and officers are considering the potential to consult on changes to the CIL Charging Schedule alongside the emerging Local Plan. The aim of these changes would be to bring forward appropriate infrastructure to support local communities and future growth.

8. Landscape and the Natural Environment

The District has a high quality landscape with more than 60% of land within the Kent Downs or High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is important to ensure that development will conserve and enhance the natural environment and the landscape character of the District. New development will be expected to respect and enhance the distinctive landscape character of the AONB and development proposals should take account of the relevant management plan and associated guidance, to produce sensitive and carefully designed schemes.

The Local Plan will also support appropriate proposals and projects which provide improvements to the natural environment, increase public enjoyment and provide health benefits, both at the landscape and the local scale.

9. Wildlife and Nature

The District has many nationally designated biodiversity sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and many irreplaceable habitats. These designated areas play an important role in the ecosystem of the District and are supplemented by a number of locally designated areas. The District's Local Wildlife Sites and Nature Reserves will be protected for their biodiversity and ecological value.

Biodiversity is not confined to designated and protected areas and therefore areas of biodiversity value and habitats will be protected and created and must be incorporated into new development. The Local Plan will support the principle of Biodiversity Net Gain for new developments.

Access to the natural environment and areas of high biodiversity value can also have a positive impact on health and wellbeing and assist in reducing social and health inequalities. We are supportive of projects such as community led habitat management, health walks and wildlife/nature experiences, especially those which encourage children and young people to engage with the natural environment.

10. Design

Design is now at the forefront of national planning policy and our local policies are being updated to demonstrate the values of our residents and how new development will reflect the character of the District. We will be ambitious in ensuring that all elements of the Local Plan are successfully achieved through design, be clear about what development should deliver and how good design will be measured. As more information is released in the coming months regarding the changes to national planning policy on this subject, we will continue to evolve the policies.

11. Heritage

This chapter will consider the historic environment and build on the evidence base from Historic England and our own Historic Environment Review. The government, as part of forthcoming reforms, has indicated that local policy should not repeat national guidance where it is unnecessary. As the designated historic environment is well covered in the NPPF, these policies will focus on the identification and management of non-designated heritage assets in the District.

12. Climate Change

This chapter will explain how the Local Plan will help to tackle climate change. The Council has committed to working with communities to reduce carbon emissions to net zero across the District and the Local Plan has been identified as a key driver in achieving this aim. Policies will seek to reduce the carbon impact of developments by ensuring sustainable building practices, champion the implementation of renewable energy resources and ensure new development supports climate resilience. Carbon sequestration schemes will also be supported in appropriate locations.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation is not limited to built development and features throughout the Local Plan, influencing policies related to design, flood risk and water management, open space and biodiversity.

13. Flooding

Policies in this section will cover the following aspects:

Water Management

Promotion of water efficiency and ensuring new development does not lead to a deterioration of existing watercourses. A series of options will be provided to enhance the natural function and habitats of watercourses.

Flooding

Taking account of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, policies will discourage development in areas of flood risk, including those areas affected by surface water flooding. Proposals incorporating areas of flood risk will be encouraged to maximise wildlife and habitat opportunities. We will also consider the information to be provided in support of major schemes and appropriate flood risk mitigation.

Sustainable Drainage

Ensuring that new development incorporates natural flood alleviation, sustainable drainage provision and appropriate measures to manage surface water run off. It will also inform the requirements for sustainable drainage systems (SuDs) and ensure the appropriate long term management of any SuDs system.

14. Healthy Communities

The emerging Local Plan will promote the health and wellbeing of residents, workers and visitors to the District, through its role in shaping the built and natural environment. The quality of the built and natural environment can directly influence healthy behaviours and have positive impacts on reducing health inequalities. For example, good quality housing in a sustainable location with access to open space can positively benefit social networks and opportunities for active travel.

Some of the District's most pressing health challenges such as obesity, poor mental health issues, physical inactivity and the needs of an ageing population can be alleviated or even prevented through the planning, design, construction and management of spaces and places. The Local Plan will contain a specific policy on healthy communities, requiring all new development to contribute towards a healthy built environment and to improve health inequalities. Qualifying planning applications will also be required to submit a Health Impact Assessment. Health and wellbeing will also feed into other policies in the Local Plan to ensure a comprehensive approach.

15. Leisure and Open Space

This chapter will seek to retain and enhance the District's existing open spaces and sports and leisure facilities. It will seek to maximise opportunities to provide new facilities and open spaces, where there are identified deficits. The importance of open spaces for the District's character will be acknowledged. Further to this, it will be noted that sports and leisure facilities and open spaces make a significant contribution to residents' physical and mental wellbeing.