

# Local Plan - Questions and Answers

7 January 2026

## How can I have a say on the new Local Plan and the proposed sites?

Thank you to everyone who commented on our new Local Plan (formally known as the Regulation 18 consultation) in late 2025. We received nearly 5,000 online comments from residents and organisations. In addition, we received many written comments. This consultation is now closed. However, there will be further opportunities to have your say.

We will publish all Local Plan responses (without personal information) on this website later in the New Year. All the comments will then be analysed and considered before we publish a final draft of the Local Plan in summer 2026 for further public comments (formally known as the Regulation 19 Publication).

The revised Local Plan will be submitted to Government for examination by the end of 2026.

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## What is the Local Plan and why do we need it?

Every local authority needs a Local Plan. In very broad terms, a Local Plan will guide what can be built and where over a minimum 15-year period.

Local Plans set out how much housing, employment land and infrastructure is needed during the lifetime of the Local Plan and where it should be provided. It should seek to include enough land to meet the Government's housing target.

The development sites should be in the most suitable locations. Local Plans should also include proposals to protect and enhance the natural and built environment.

Once adopted, the Local Plan is used to make decisions on planning applications.

## What if we don't have a Local Plan?

Development will still take place. However, we will not be able to decide where development should go, and we will be less able to require developers to fund new schools, open space, road upgrades and other infrastructure that is needed to support new development.

## Do we have to meet the Government's housing target?

In short yes and we must show we have done everything possible to try and meet the housing target. This is mandatory, and only where evidence-based studies and responses (usually from technical consultees), show the target cannot be met, can we deliver a lower number lower of houses. The Government is also very clear that if the housing target is not met, it expects us to use Green Belt land (even potentially land that has not been redefined as Grey Belt) to meet the housing target.

### **What would happen if the Council ignored the Government's housing target?**

The Government has made it clear in national planning policy that we are expected to meet the housing target in full. Any shortfall would need to be robustly justified and is likely to be subject to significant challenge. If we were to ignore it, the Planning Inspector is likely to recommend that the new Local Plan should be withdrawn from examination.

### **Was land put forward in the recent consultation the Council's preference?**

Land included in the draft Local Plan was as a result of us asking landowners to put forward sites to meet the mandatory housing target. Any landowner could put forward land for consideration. Sites that were deemed unacceptable, due to planning or location constraints, were not included in the draft Local Plan. The whole point of the Regulation 18 consultation was to receive residents' feedback and evidence as to why any of these sites might be suitable or unsuitable for future development. No decisions have been made at this stage.

### **Why can't the houses be built elsewhere?**

We cannot force landowners to put their sites forward for development. We are reliant on them coming forward voluntarily.

The sites in the Local Plan were put forward by landowners and were deemed acceptable through the site assessment process. The Regulation 18 consultation also asked for residents to suggest land that had not been considered, and where the owner was open to putting forward their land for development.

Any newly submitted land will be considered in the next stage of the Local Plan, and the publication of the final Regulation 19 consultation later in 2026.

### **Why can't existing built-up areas accommodate the new housing?**

The Government has set us a target of 17,175 new homes over 15 years.

We know from our studies there is not enough land within our built-up areas to meet this new housing target.

As a result, we must look at land in the Green Belt to help deliver the Government's housing target.

### **What are Grey Belt sites?**

The Grey Belt is a new concept introduced by the Government in December 2024, through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This document defines what Grey Belt is and sets out the approach that we are required to follow.

In addition, the Government has published guidance on how to assess whether land in the Green Belt can be considered Grey Belt. This has been used in drawing up our Grey Belt evidence.

Sites which are considered Grey Belt must be in sustainable locations if they are to be included in the Local Plan. Work on the Grey Belt is available as part of our evidence base.

### **Who is responsible for the abolition of local Green Belt protections and reclassification of Grey Belt land?**

The Government introduced new criteria for reassessing Green Belt land in the updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2024. This is Government policy and all local planning authorities are legally required to follow the Government methodology in determining if the land is Grey Belt. This is not optional.

As such, all land put forward by landowners for inclusion in the Local Plan was independently assessed by a planning consultancy on our behalf against the new Government reclassification criteria.

### **What is the breakdown of new homes?**

Our Local Plan looks to address the Government's new housing target of 17,175 new homes.

We are considering two options. Both options include sites within and on the edge of existing settlements. These include some Green Belt sites on previously developed land/brownfield or have been identified as Grey Belt. Together they will deliver approximately 11,500 homes.

Both options also include homes that already have permission (called extant sites), and unplanned sites (called windfalls), which add around a further 4,000 homes.

In addition, option 2 includes Pedham Place, which could deliver approximately 2,500 homes. The total approximate figures for both options are as follows:

Option 1: 16,000 homes

Option 2: 18,000 homes

We are likely to need a surplus of sites (a 'buffer') just in case some of the sites do not progress to the next stage and are not submitted for planning permission. This is something the Government requires, and it is important as it will ensure we have sufficient sites available to meet our housing target.

### **Who would build the new homes?**

Most new homes would be built by developers, this can be small scale developers building single dwellings, through to the developers of larger sites. A small number will be built as self-build or custom-build housing.

### **How many of the new homes would be affordable?**

Affordable housing refers to housing for sale or rent for those who cannot afford to buy housing on the open market.

As part of the Local Plan, we will be setting thresholds when we expect a site to contribute to affordable housing as well as the type and quantity of affordable homes.

This includes 50% affordable housing for major proposals (developments with 10 or more homes) on Grey Belt sites, compared to a target of 30% on brownfield sites within our settlements and 40% on greenfield sites.

We cannot say how many affordable homes will be built at this time, but we can set out how many and what type we expect a developer to build.

### **How many new socially rented homes (sometimes called council housing) are being proposed?**

We will seek to secure socially rented homes as part of the affordable housing requirements. Given the need for affordable homes, and to maximise social rented accommodation, where a site is required to provide affordable homes, we will be seeking 80% of them to be social rented. This provides the most affordable option and is the tenure which meets the housing needs of those households on our Housing Register. For the remaining 20%, we will be seeking affordable home ownership, with a focus on shared ownership. We do not have specific figures for the quantity that will be secured at this time.

### **Can I apply for any of the new affordable homes?**

For all types of affordable homes, there will be some eligibility criteria, and in some instances, this will include having a local connection.

Social housing will be available through the [Housing Register](#).

Other forms of affordable housing may be provided by housing associations. They may offer shared ownership properties for sale. You will need to apply to them directly.

First Homes or Discount Market Housing are usually sold by house builders or resold by the homeowner.

### **What about the impact on infrastructure?**

In developing the new Local Plan, we have looked at the District's current and future infrastructure requirements. This is informed by technical studies and engagement with key stakeholders e.g. Kent County Council.

This will be set out in our emerging Infrastructure Delivery Plan. This is a live document that will continue to develop in conjunction with our Local Plan.

## **Can I look at the supporting or background documents?**

As part of the emerging Local Plan, we have developed an [evidence base](#).

## **What other consultations have taken place?**

We ran two previous consultations. The first Local Plan consultation (16 November 2022 until 11 January 2023) focused on optimising densities and maximising opportunities in existing settlements, including on brownfield land. However, the District is unable to meet the housing target within the existing developed areas, and there is a severe shortage of housing, particularly affordable housing.

The second consultation was the Plan 2040 Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation, which ran for seven weeks from 23 November 2023 until 11 January 2024. This took a more District-wide approach, focusing on optimising development opportunities in our existing towns and settlements but also considering the potential contribution of Green Belt land, in exceptional circumstances.

Since the second consultation, there were changes at a national level, including a new approach to calculating our housing target figure and revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (2024), including the introduction of Grey Belt.

This necessitated a review of our proposed development strategy in the Local Plan and further consultation.

## **What is the timeframe for producing the new Local Plan?**

We consulted on the new Local Plan from 23 October until 11 December 2025. This was the Regulation 18 consultation.

Once we have considered the comments, we will publish a revised version of the Local Plan, which will be published in summer 2026. This is called the Regulation 19 publication. By the end of 2026, we intend to submit it for examination by the Planning Inspectorate. This submission will include all the comments submitted as part of the Regulation 19 publication.

The timetable for the examination, which will include public hearings, will be set by the Planning Inspectorate. The examination is expected to take place in 2027. Find out more about [Local Plan examinations](#).

If the Planning Inspector concludes the Local Plan is sound, we will adopt it and it will be used to help determine planning applications.

## **Can I submit a site for inclusion in the Local Plan?**

We ran a targeted call for sites in 2025, which focused on brownfield and Grey Belt land. Sites submitted at that stage and previous call for sites submissions were assessed for allocation in the Local Plan.

The Regulation 18 consultation also asked for residents to suggest land that had not been considered and where the owner was open to putting forward their land for development. We are not now calling for further sites to be submitted.

**If a site was submitted to the 'call for sites', will it automatically feature in the Local Plan?**

No. The Local Plan proposes to allocate the most suitable sites that are in accordance with the Local Plan Development Strategy.

**When will planning applications be submitted for site proposals?**

This would be a matter for the landowners and developers.