

Settlement Hierarchy 2026 Addendum

Sevenoaks District Council

July 2026

The Settlement Hierarchy 2025 process

1. The Settlement Hierarchy was published in September 2025 and is a key technical document forming part of the Local Plan evidence base.
2. Work was undertaken to update the 2022 iteration of the Settlement Hierarchy, with a full update to the scoring, which was consulted upon with all District Councillors.
3. Comments received were reviewed and these suggestions were included in the reasonable alternatives section of the Settlement Hierarchy 2025 document, which sets out if they were taken forward or not, and why. Following this the methodology was sent to the Portfolio Holder for Development and Conservation for sign off, in March 2025. It was considered an important part of the process that the methodology be confirmed prior to settlement-specific work being undertaken, to maintain impartiality and consistency across the District's settlements.
4. Officers then worked to create settlement-specific audit proformas, which were sent out to Town and Parish Councils to assist in providing data on services and facilities within their areas. When received, these were checked against independent research by officers and scored in accordance with the scoring methodology in the relevant proforma.
5. The document was published in September 2025.
6. This addendum has been prepared to address comments received as part of the Regulation 18 consultation on the emerging Local Plan (Autumn 2025) and otherwise on the Settlement Hierarchy, and to fix errors and clarify the information within the document.

Regulation 18 Local Plan Consultation

7. The Regulation 18 consultation on the emerging Local Plan (Autumn 2025) ran for seven weeks. Whilst this focused around the main Local Plan document, policies and site allocations, the consultation also invited comment on the evidence base documents, including the Settlement Hierarchy.
8. The summary of received responses to the Regulation 18 consultation on the Settlement Hierarchy is as follows:

Respondents flagged that the Settlement Hierarchy's scoring places undue emphasis on train stations while neglecting service reliability, frequency, step-free access and walking or cycling safety, as well as raising concerns that bus routes receive credit despite limited coverage and weekend services. It is highlighted that critical services such as police, fire, digital connectivity and climate resilience factors are omitted from the methodology, and facility counts overlook capacity, quality and usability of schools, surgeries and parks. It is perceived that inconsistent settlement boundaries, Green Belt assessments and missing methodology tables undermine transparency, prompting calls for refined weightings, distance buffers, qualitative criteria and confirmation from infrastructure providers to ensure robust, evidence-based planning.

Changes made in the Settlement Hierarchy document

Location in document	Change
Executive summary Table, Tables 2, 3, paragraph 7.13, and Appendix A	Two points were added to Horton Kirby's proforma to for the primary school that was missed. This increase in score by two points for Horton Kirby means this settlement moved up one place but remained within the same Settlement Hierarchy category of a Hamlet. The tables in the document have been updated to reflect this.
The executive summary Settlement Hierarchy and NB paragraph	The Settlement Hierarchy and NB document have been corrected to clearly state which settlements are washed over by the Green Belt.
Table M2	Rock Hill removed from this list as it is part of Well Hill (including Rock Hill) and does have a recorded population.
Paragraphs 4.16 and 4.17	Clarification on how settlement boundaries were used to assist in scoring the information from the audits was added, including a list of settlements without defined boundaries.
Paragraph 5.3	Clarification that where services are within walking distance of a one settlement lie within another settlement boundary in the district, these have not been included.
General edits	Spelling errors, incorrect paragraph and table numbers have been corrected.

Suggestions not taken forward

9. The changes that were considered but not taken forward are in the overleaf table:

Suggestion	Reason
Climate and geographical factors such as flood risk, water supply constraints, topography, and walkability to be taken into consideration for the hierarchy.	This is an addendum to the Settlement Hierarchy, so we are unable to change the scoring methodology. These factors are regarded separately and while considered important do not make a whole settlement less sustainable for the purposes of this hierarchy. As a technical quantitative document, qualitative data such as walkability is much harder to record. In all settlements, when relevant, these factors and constraints are considered as part of any planning application. The scoring methodology will be fully reviewed in the next update to the settlement hierarchy.
Changes to the walking distance used in the Settlement Hierarchy and references to the '15-minute city' concept.	This is an addendum to the Settlement Hierarchy, so we are unable to change the scoring methodology. The methodology was designed to assess all settlements consistently and therefore required a standardised walking distance to be applied across the District. A distance of 1.2km was used for the audit. While this represents the upper end of what is generally considered a reasonable walking distance, it is a widely accepted measure of accessibility threshold in planning. The references to the '15-minute City' concept, also known as a '20-minute neighbourhood', was used as an indicator of access to services within walking distance, rather than applying city planning concepts broadly across rural settlements. Services were only included for scoring when they were on a safe walking route (i.e. where there is a Public Right of Way, or pavement, for the entirety of the route). The scoring methodology will be fully reviewed in the next update to the settlement hierarchy.
Changes to scoring methodology to allow an additional point for secondary schools.	This is an addendum to the Settlement Hierarchy, so we are unable to change the scoring methodology. An additional point in each settlement with a secondary school would not change the category they are in. The scoring methodology will be fully reviewed in the next update to the settlement hierarchy.

Changes to scoring methodology to award points to other services not currently included.	This is an addendum to the Settlement Hierarchy, so we are unable to change the scoring methodology. The scoring methodology will be fully reviewed in the next update to the settlement hierarchy.
Change rail scoring and consider NPPF well-connected stations definitions.	This is an addendum to the Settlement Hierarchy, so we are unable to change the scoring methodology. The methodology of this scoring system allows for a gradient of scoring, and capped scoring for settlements only within cycling distance of a station, rather than the binary yes or no for a station meeting the well-connected station definition. Station scoring only makes up a portion of the scoring a settlement is audited for and is only one part of consideration of sustainable settlements. Comments were made regarding levels of services, distance to, and accessibility at a number of stations including in Edenbridge, Leigh and the overall weighting of the train station scoring. Having considered these comments, it is considered appropriate to keep the scoring in line, as it is in with the methodology in the document. The scoring methodology will be fully reviewed in the next update to the settlement hierarchy.
Change/fix bus scoring	The audit process for the Settlement Hierarchy means that all services represent the services during that snapshot. Therefore, these can't be rerun as services change. It is worth noting these bus service numbers also included school only and on-demand bus services which are often overlooked by those who don't use them but are important as they help support sustainable travel in rural locations for those who often have no car options. Due to the way the methodology was created this does not allow for changes in scoring related to coverage and reliability. This is an addendum to the Settlement Hierarchy, so we are unable to change the scoring methodology. The scoring methodology will be fully reviewed in the next update to the settlement hierarchy.

Removing Settlements from the Settlement Hierarchy	This is a technical document that captures all settlements in the district and is factual to the period in which the audits were undertaken. This document is part of the evidence base for the Local Plan, used by Development Management, and used for other Planning work as needed. Comments were received regarding the inclusion of Fawkham within the Settlement Hierarchy. Having considered these comments, it is considered appropriate to retain the settlement in the document. The audit applies a consistent methodology across all settlements and seeks to provide a comprehensive record of the district at the time the surveys were undertaken.
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