

Wealden Local Plan: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why do we need to review the existing plan?

We are reviewing the Core Strategy Local Plan because when we adopted the plan in 2012/13 we were unable to meet the housing numbers required at the time due to environmental constraints and committed to a review starting in 2015.

Who decides how many houses we need?

The number of dwellings we need is calculated using a government formula to provide something called the Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN). This is based on a range of factors including census data and economic growth. We also have to consider accommodating any under supply from our neighbouring authorities.

So how many houses do we need?

Over the plan period the Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN) for Wealden is 735 per annum plus we need to seek to accommodate our neighbours undersupply if possible.

Our proposal is that across Wealden we can sustainably accommodate a maximum of some 19,950 dwellings (which includes those already approved and allocated under the current plan) whilst continuing to protect the environment. But in order to do this the plan period needs to be extended to run until 2037. The total of some 19,950 proposed dwellings equates to 832 per annum from 2013 to 2037.

Within the total of 19,950 some 7,200 dwellings have already been approved or allocated under the current plan. We are therefore proposing to provide some 12,750 houses in addition to what is already expected. This equates to 580 dwellings per annum from 2015 to 2037.

Within the numbers we are accommodating some 2,300 houses on behalf of our neighbours through to 2037.

What would happen if we proposed smaller housing numbers?

We would be unable to resist planning applications for higher numbers as the OAHN is a publicly available figure which, without evidence to the contrary, we are required to meet.

How have we worked out where these should go?

Our recommended option has been arrived at by looking at what growth towns and villages and settlements across the district are able to accommodate after adjusting the figures to ensure we protect Wealden's outstanding environmental assets. These include Ashdown Forest and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

We have also considered where we can improve the district for the benefit of Wealden's residents and businesses by encouraging growth and change.

What about the houses that have already been approved – do they count towards the numbers?

The plan period we are proposing runs from 2013 to 2037 – planning approvals since April 2013 will count towards the total required.

Why are all the houses going in the south of the district?

We need to balance the need for housing and economic development with the need to protect and enhance the District's national important environmental assets, particularly Ashdown Forest and AONB, which are mainly in the north of the District so we are limited in how many dwellings we can put there. Our recommended option is therefore to put the majority of the houses in the south.

How important is it to improve the A27?

Very important, we know that a lot of people travel from south Wealden north on the A22 potentially damaging the Ashdown Forest. We need to make the A27 a quicker route to encourage its use if we are to significantly increase housing numbers in the south of the District. This will also help improve the south coast economy.

How will we be protecting Wealden's environment through the plan?

We are recommending an approach which balances housing need and economic development with policies which will protect the environment that makes Wealden so unique.

Some houses are planned for the AONB – why isn't that being protected?

We are protecting the AONB to a very great extent. The national planning policies do not specifically exclude the AONB although there are more stringent tests before planning approvals can be given and we will apply these to ensure development is necessary before allowing it in the AONB. It should be noted that even National Parks such as the SDNPA will still be required to deliver sustainable housing growth within their boundaries.

How are we protecting Ashdown Forest?

We are protecting Ashdown Forest through policies to prevent any development which takes place within an area which might otherwise damage this internationally recognised Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area.

What are the Issues, Options and Recommendations document?

This is our document which sets out our recommended plan for development across the District for the period though to 2037. It sets out the options we have considered and our recommended approach. These are now going to be tested through the consultation period and we will review and revise the document once the consultation has finished.

When does the consultation take place?

From 19 October to 30 November 2015.

How can people provide their views to the consultation?

Electronically through our website, by writing to us, or by attending the exhibitions we are running across the District.

How are windfalls – homes approved in addition to the main developments planned – counted?

Any windfalls since April 2013 will count towards the totals. We are currently unable to track windfalls to individual settlements but will be updating our systems to allow this going forward. Any planning commitments or completions that take place after April 2015 can be taken into account in terms of general growth requirements.

What if I don't agree with the proposals?

The proposals are our recommendations and we are formally consulting on them from 19th October to 30th November. Now we want the public to give us their views so please take part in this consultation.

Why are we providing houses for others outside of Wealden?

We are required under Duty to Cooperate to work closely with our neighbouring authorities and, where possible, to accommodate any under supply of housing that they might have. Like us they have developed a Local Plan which says what their housing numbers should be and whether they can accommodate them. However, they are more constrained by a lack of suitable development space which is affecting house prices and growth opportunities.

How will we ensure that the infrastructure to support the housing gets put in place?

We will be collecting developer contributions to provide infrastructure – for example, road improvements, schools, health and community facilities – and working with partners like the County Council, the Highways Authority and CCGs. We have set up a Revolving Infrastructure Fund to ensure that work begins on the new facilities without having to wait for all the contributions from developers. It should be noted that CIL contributions will not provide all of the necessary infrastructure funding and not all developments will be subject to CIL contributions. We will be working with partners to access additional sources of funding for the infrastructure needed.

How will we make sure we provide affordable housing for those who need it?

We have proposed an affordable housing policy which will help to ensure that housing at an appropriate cost is provided across the District. This is not always deliverable from all developments due to financial viability issues but the policy will ensure we maximise affordable housing wherever we can.

What are the plans for providing jobs to go with the houses?

As a part of the Local Plan recommendations we are setting out where we believe employment land should be and will encourage developers to deliver this. We are keen that

jobs go with housing to reduce the high level of commuting outside the District which currently occurs.

What are plans for shops and social leisure facilities?

We have also included plans for additional retail space and leisure facilities in our recommendations to keep town centres vibrant and to develop community facilities.

What is the presumption in favour of sustainable development?

This is part of the national planning policies and states that if a development is shown to be sustainable there should be a presumption that it will be approved unless there are other valid reasons for it to be refused. This will mean sustainable development proposals will be allowed ahead of the plan making process but any such housing developments approved will count against overall housing numbers.

What is the objectively assessed housing need?

This is the formula set by the government which we are required to use to determine how many additional dwellings are needed in Wealden.

What is a development boundary?

For some settlements we propose a boundary around the settlement within which development can take place if applications come forward. These settlements are considered to be sustainable and have the best access to services and public transport. Outside of the boundary only very exceptional applications would be approved.

How does the Wealden Local Plan fit with Neighbourhood Plans?

A number of Neighbourhood Plans are being developed across Wealden but none are adopted yet. When they are, the Neighbourhood Plans will need to generally comply with Wealden's Local Plan but they can set more detailed policies felt to be appropriate for that location within the Local Plan framework.

Are the recommended options the same as planning policies?

No the recommendations are not planning policies, they are for testing and there are further stages in the process before they become planning policies.

What would happen if we didn't produce an updated Local Plan?

There would be a development free for all with applications being approved, if not by Wealden then by the Planning Inspector, in places we felt were inappropriate and without consideration of the needs of Wealden as a whole. We would be in a reactive mode with little hope of resisting what we believe would be inappropriate developments. Developing and adopting the Wealden Local Plan will allow us to be proactive and manage growth in Wealden whilst protecting the environment and providing infrastructure to support it.

What happens next?

After the consultation has closed, we review and update the plan on the basis of the consultation responses to produce a version to be put forward for examination and adoption. This version, called proposed Submission Wealden Local plan, is then issued for

further review of the consultation responses is submitted for Public Examination by the Planning Inspectorate, leading to adoption by the Council. We hope to complete this whole process by the end of 2017.

- 17 September 2015