

The New South Downs Local Plan

Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Local Plan

Frequently Asked Questions and Guidance on making comments

May 2026

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South Downs National Park Authority and the new Local Plan

What is the South Downs National Park Authority and what does it do?

The South Downs was established as a National Park in 2010. The South Downs National Park Authority became the local planning authority for the National Park in 2011, meaning that it has overall responsibility for planning matters within the National Park area. In some cases, it has delegated the determination of planning applications to other bodies known as 'host authorities' (Chichester District Council, East Hampshire District Council, and Winchester City Council). However, it retains direct responsibility for producing Local Plans and other policy documents for the National Park area.

What is the South Downs Local Plan?

The South Downs Local Plan is an award-winning Local Plan. Local Plans set out where future development will take place, such as new homes and locations for business growth, as well as the local policy requirements against which future planning applications will be judged. Local Plans must be based on up-to-date and proportionate evidence about strategic issues facing an area and contain policies and allocations (sites identified for development) to address these issues. The policies and allocations must be informed by a Sustainability Appraisal which assesses them against economic, social and environmental objectives.

What area does the South Downs Local Plan cover?

The Local Plan covers the whole of the South Downs National Park which stretches from Winchester in the west to Eastbourne in the east. The National Park is home to over 113,000 residents, spans 15 different local authority areas across three counties, and has four bustling towns.

Why are we preparing a new South Downs Local Plan?

The Local Plan is an award-winning local plan adopted in July 2019 and sets out the planning policies and allocations (sites identified for development) for the South Downs National Park. Local Plans are required to be reviewed every 5 years, and preparation of the new Local Plan commenced in May 2022. Several aspects of the Local Plan are working well and we will retain these, including the landscape-led approach, ecosystem services and the development strategy of development dispersed across the National Park.

However, we need to ensure the Local Plan is up-to-date and addresses important issues including nature recovery, climate change and supporting local communities to thrive. There is a need to review development needs and provision numbers both at a National Park level and for individual settlements, to ensure the Plan delivers on SDNPA corporate priorities on Nature Recovery, Climate Action and a National Park for All, addresses changes in national policies, and reviews and amends certain policies where they have been problematic to implement. It is also agreed to incorporate policy development on Shoreham Cement Works that was previously part of a separate Area Action Plan.

What has been done so far?

2022

The preparation of the new Local Plan commenced in May 2022 with the updating of the evidence base, including a 'call for sites' in Summer 2022 to inform a Land Availability Assessment.

2023

Early engagement was carried out with town and parish councils from February 2023, including encouraging them to prepare ‘parish priorities statements’ to set out their own local evidence about their areas.

The Housing and Economic Needs Assessment was published in November 2023.

2024

We undertook an ‘early participation’ public engagement on the scope of the new Local Plan from June – September 2024.

We published a number of key evidence base studies at the end of 2024 including: Transport, Renewable Energy, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments, Local Green Space Assessment, and Settlement Facilities Assessment. We also undertook the following regulatory assessments: Habitats Regulations Assessment, Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment) and Equalities Impact Assessment.

2025

The Authority launched its first formal consultation under Regulation 18 between January and March 2025. The process was guided by the bespoke Community Involvement Plan and aimed to gather stakeholder feedback on draft policies and site allocations.

A comprehensive engagement strategy was implemented, including digital notifications to over 1,200 contacts, press releases, website content, promotional videos, and over 20 in-person consultation events across the National Park. The Authority also hosted an online exhibition and recorded webinar to ensure accessibility. In total, more than 1,900 individuals and organisations responded, generating over 3,700 comments—spanning policies, site allocations, and supporting assessments.

All submitted comments have been considered in preparing the Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Local Plan and are available to view on the consultation portal at <https://sdnpalocalplanreview.commonplace.is/> or by reading our [New Local Plan – Regulation 18 Consultation Report](#).

We published further evidence studies including; Visitor Accommodation Review, Housing and Economic Development Needs Addendum, Housing Need in the South Downs, South Downs Economic Profile 2025 and the Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment) is now incorporated into an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) with Health Impact Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment

What does the new Local Plan cover?

The South Downs Local Plan (SDLP) is an award-winning plan. Many aspects of the existing plan are working well and remain relevant and fit for the future of the National Park. These include:

- Its **landscape-led** approach, reflecting the primary purpose of National Park designation;
- An **ecosystems services** approach, recognising that human influences are part of a much wider natural capital system which provides us with goods and services such as clean air and water and food;

- A **dispersed growth strategy**, reflecting the multi-centric character of the many towns and villages spread across the National Park and the need for their communities to thrive and grow sustainably.

However, we need to ensure the Local Plan is up-to-date and addresses important issues including nature recovery, climate change and supporting local communities to thrive. We also need to update the plan considering changes to national policy.

What is the relationship of the new Local Plan with other Plans?

The South Downs Local Plan forms part of the statutory Development Plan which also includes Minerals and Waste Plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs). There are 48 ‘made’ NDPs in the National Park as of 9 April 2026 and several more at earlier preparation stages. These are prepared by Town and Parish Councils, and in some areas Neighbourhood Forums, and provide policies and allocations which complement the Local Plan. Under the currently adopted Development Plan. NDPs plan for about half of the site allocations in the National Park. The preparation of the Local Plan does not affect the status of made NDPs unless - at the point of adopting the new Local Plan - there is a conflict between the Local Plan and an NDP policy. In this instance, the most up-to-date policy takes precedence in decision-making. Other documents of relevance to planning decisions in the National Park include Supplementary Planning Documents such as the South Downs Design Guide and Village or Parish Design Statements, Technical Advice Notes, which provide guidance on how to implement Local Plan policies, and Parish Priorities Statements, which set out what is important to parishes and what improvements they would like to see.

Regulation 19 Stage

What is the Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Stage?

This is a final statutory public consultation on the full version of the new Local Plan before it is submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination. The Authority are asking whether the plan complies with all relevant legislation and meets the ‘tests of soundness’ set in national planning policy. The publication of the Proposed Submission Local Plan is carried out in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) and is often referred to as the Regulation 19 Plan or Regulation 19 stage.

What is in the Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Local Plan?

The Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Local Plan document contains the following:

- An **introductory chapter** explaining the purpose of the new Local Plan and its context;
- The **vision and objectives** for the new Local Plan (as set by the suite of Planning Principles in the updated South Downs Partnership Management Plan (2026-2031));
- The **spatial portrait and strategy** explaining our special qualities and landscape and our approach to development;
- **58 thematic policies (comprising 49 updated policies from the current Local Plan and 9 new policies);**

- **77 site allocations (comprising 23 existing site allocations from the current Local Plan which have not yet been implemented and have been carried over, and 54 brand new site allocations);**

What is the South Downs Partnership Management Plan?

Alongside the preparation of the new Local Plan, the National Park Authority has prepared the new South Downs Partnership Management Plan 2026-2031 which sets out the long-term vision and objectives for the National Park. The remit of the Partnership Management Plan is wider than planning - covering land management and other activities - and it is a plan for all those partners whose actions affect the National Park, not just the National Park Authority. The planning system is a delivery vehicle for many of the Partnership Management Plan's aims and targets so it is important that the Partnership Management Plan and Local Plan align with, and support, each other. The Planning Principles in the Partnership Management Plan are the objectives for this new Local Plan set out in chapter 2 of the Proposed Submission Local Plan.

What does 'tests of soundness' mean?

The draft National Planning Policy Framework 2024 describes Local Plans as 'sound' if they are:

- Positive – the strategy sets out a positive approach to delivering growth which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs, and is based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters. A strategy which does not provide for objectively assessed needs should be considered an exception, and only where it is evidenced that stringent efforts have been taken to meet those needs through cooperation with other strategic planning authorities
- Appropriate – the strategy sets out an appropriate strategy to enable the delivery of sustainable development, taking into account reasonable alternatives, the 10 Year Infrastructure Plan, the National Industrial Strategy, any relevant Local Growth Plan and other relevant strategies;
- Effective – the strategy sets out effective policies for development and there is a reasonable prospect that local plans will be capable of identifying site allocations to implement its spatial strategy. Where spatial development strategies anticipate a change in market conditions which the strategy itself is intended to foster, a proportionate approach should be taken in assessing assumptions for the longer term, given the uncertainty which is likely to surround them. Post-adoption monitoring should be undertaken in such circumstances; and
- Consistent with national policy – the strategy accords with the policies for planmaking in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant, and does not duplicate, substantively restate or modify the content of national policies for decision-making.

Responding to the Consultation

How do I respond to the consultation?

The consultation is open for 6 weeks from 09:00am on Tuesday 12 May 2026 to 23:59pm on Tuesday 23 June 2026. Respondents are encouraged to give their feedback online using the consultation platform at: <https://southdowns-consult.objective.co.uk>

Alternatively, a [Representation Form](#) can be completed and returned to:

planningpolicy@southdowns.gov.uk

Planning Policy Team, South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9DH

What comments are relevant and will be considered by the National Park Authority?

At this stage (Regulation 19) the focus of this consultation is on legal compliance and soundness.

These comments are sent to the Planning Inspectorate to consider during the examination, further modifications are at the discretion of the Inspector.

Why is it important to respond to this consultation?

The Regulation 19 consultation is the last opportunity for people to comment on the new Local Plan before the Authority submits it to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

What happens next?

The Authority will publish a summary of the main issues raised in the consultation and will submit the Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Local Plan along with its Examination Library and all the representations made on the Proposed Submission (Regulation 19) Local Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination. The Secretary of State will appoint an Inspector to undertake an independent examination of the Local Plan. The Inspector, following independent examination, will make recommendations to the Authority on what happens next for the Local Plan. Further detail on the examination process can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-plans>. The Authority's website will be kept up to date as the Local Plan progresses.

Planning for Development

Why are we planning for development (including new homes) in a National Park?

The South Downs National Park is England's most populated National Park with over 113,000 residents living in its market towns, villages, and other settlements. It is important we plan for the future and continued vitality of these towns and villages to support local facilities and ensure there are suitable homes, particularly affordable homes, for local communities.

What is the Land Availability Assessment?

The Land Availability Assessment (LAA) is an essential part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan. The LAA identifies potential land and assesses the availability, suitability and achievability of potential sites. The LAA does not determine whether a site should be allocated for development. However, it does help identify a potential pool of sites for further consideration through a range of technical work. The findings of the LAA have been published and an interactive map showing all sites within the LAA is available here: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-policy/the-south-downs-local-plan-review/evidence-base/homes-and-economy/land-availability-assessment/>

Why does the Local Plan consider development viability?

Viability is about making sure development can realistically be delivered while meeting Local Plan policy requirements. Viability evidence has been used to assess whether the combined impact of requirements — such as affordable housing, infrastructure contributions, environmental standards and design policies — could prevent development from coming forward. Viability testing helps ensure that policies are workable in practice, supporting the delivery of development that meets community needs, provides essential infrastructure, and contributes to creating resilient, well-designed places.

What does a medium dispersed development strategy mean?

The new Local Plan retains the development strategy of the adopted Local Plan for a medium level of growth dispersed across the towns and villages in the National Park. Medium growth means the number of new homes based on the historic delivery rate in the National Park. Dispersed growth means sharing this growth amongst the towns and villages across the National Park and is considered the best way to promote the vitality of these settlements and support the rural economy.

Site Allocations

Why does the consultation include existing unimplemented site allocations?

The consultation includes site allocation policies that are already in the Adopted South Downs Local Plan but have not yet been implemented. They have been through an examination process and found to be sound (i.e. they meet the tests set out in national legislation and policy). There would have to be a significant change in circumstances since the adoption of the South Downs Local Plan in 2019 to justify changing or removing these from the Plan.

In some instances, further evidence work carried out to progress planning applications has established that the capacity of sites needs to be adjusted or some criteria changed or removed because they are not achievable. Please note that some of these allocations will already have planning permission, but allocation policies still need to be retained in the new South Downs Local Plan in case a permission is not implemented, and an alternative proposal is put forward.

Can I still submit a site for development?

Yes – sites for development can be submitted at any time. We request that landowners, site promoters and other stakeholders submit information about additional sites that could have potential for residential or other development over the period to 2042. You can do this by submitting the relevant 'Call for Sites' form that can be downloaded from the website: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-policy/the-south-downs-local-plan-review/evidence-base/homes-and-economy/land-availability-assessment/submit-a-site/>

Why are there proposed site allocations in settlements with Neighbourhood Development Plans?

For the new Local Plan we are required to consider and update the overall need for development across the National Park up to 2042. This assessment is set out in the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA). We are also required to consider all potential sites across the National Park and identify the best sites to meet development needs whilst fulfilling the statutory purposes of the National Park. The Call for Sites and Land Availability Assessment have identified the potential pool of sites for further consideration and technical work to inform the

proposed site allocations. In some instances, there are proposed site allocations in settlements with existing Neighbourhood Development Plan allocations. These proposed allocations are part of planning for the National Park, as a whole up to 2042 (rather than a specific parish need). There are likely to be some settlements with a need, but without capacity to meet that need in the settlement.