

Cornelie Usborne

Report to Parish Councils, January 2024

THE LOCAL PLAN – Update

A Local Plan guides Wealden District Council (WDC) when to permit or refuse proposals for development in relation to housing, employment, retail and more, alongside other documents such as Neighbourhood Plans. Most of you know that Wealden is without an up-to-date Local Plan, after a previous submission failed to pass the government's inspection in 2019.

Housing targets

The Government requires Wealden to permit 1200 new homes to be built each year for 20 years, more than the Alliance and most residents would want. However, the Local Plan must be approved by the government's Planning Inspector, so it must carefully follow the government's rigid rules.

Just before Christmas, the government said the targets were only "an advisory starting point". For WDC to choose a lower target they need to prove that our population and housing market are exceptional when compared to other Districts.

Why is a Local Plan necessary at all?

Without it, a planning 'free-for-all' will continue. Developers can apply for permission to build wherever they like, and it's much harder for Planning Committees to refuse. A Local Plan makes it easier to ensure that development happens only on sites included in the Plan. It will also allow WDC to insist on lower carbon emissions, improved building standards, water conservation, better design, and more protection of nature and biodiversity. WDC also hope to increase the proportion of affordable housing, and smaller houses reflecting local need.

There's a General Election coming up, and a new government may change the targets. It looks unlikely; if anything, targets may be strengthened.

Public consultation

On February 8th there will be an Extraordinary Full Council meeting at WDC offices (webcast online). The draft Local Plan will be debated and brought to the vote. If it passes, consultation with the public will begin. To receive updates and take part in the consultation process, please register here: <https://consult.wealden.gov.uk/kse/>.

Once the consultation ends, all the comments made on the document will be reviewed and used to feed into the next draft of the Plan. There will be a further consultation on the Plan around Winter 2024 before it gets submitted for Examination by an independent Inspector.

New Fund for rural businesses

The Rother and Wealden Rural Business Grants Scheme offers match-funded grants of up to £50,000 to help create jobs, increase productivity and adopt new technology.

The scheme launches on Friday, January 12, and closes on December 31, 2024, or when all funds are allocated. www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/support/grants/ruralbusinessgrants

The draft East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2024 – 2050

Please have your say on the future of transport in the County. The consultation closes 25 February 2024: <https://consultation.eastsussex.gov.uk/economy-transport-environment/local-transport-plan-4-2024-2050/consultation/intro/>

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