



UPDATE ON THE DRAFT LOCAL PLAN

Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) are continuing to progress the development of its emerging Local Plan following the Regulation 18 consultation between July and September last year.

The response to this consultation was extraordinary. A staggering **1,860 submissions** were received from residents, statutory bodies, community organisations and developers, and as a consequence, Council Officers are still working through an unprecedented amount of feedback.

A clear message has started to emerge from the consultation so far. Residents are overwhelmingly concerned about the lack of vital infrastructure needed to support the scale of proposed housing growth. They are clear that any new development **must** be matched with the right investment in essential services.

Navigating a Challenging Landscape

The plan-making process has not been without its complications. As mentioned previously; several landowners withdrew proposed sites in Weyhill and Appleshaw and of course, Hampshire County Council declined the sale or land swap of Danebury School sports pitches, which impacted on the proposal for development around Stockbridge. This has resulted in TVBC revisiting its spatial strategy and exploring alternative options.

Given these changes and the sheer volume of feedback, TVBC will now be carrying out a further 'supplementary' Regulation 18 consultation in the **Summer 2026**. This will give residents an additional opportunity to shape the updated proposals before the plan moves to its final stages.

A Tight National Timetable

Once the consultation process has been finalised, TVBC must submit its draft Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate by Christmas 2026. The Inspector will then assess whether the plan is 'sound', 'unsound' or 'requires modification'.

This timetable, however, comes with its own unique challenges. Missing the deadline will mean starting the development process again under the government's new planning system, which comes into effect next year. The revised planning system intends to speed up the planning process, but it comes with risk as the permitted timeframe to prepare a new Local Plan will shrink from five years, to just two and a half years. Concerns are already being raised that such a compressed timetable will significantly reduce opportunities for public engagement, and limit consultation with major stakeholders such as the Department of Education and Department of Health.

Duty to Cooperate, Regional Pressures and further National Policy Shifts

Further changes in policy are also afoot. Under the current planning system, councils must meet a 'Duty to Cooperate'. This is a legal requirement to work with neighbouring authorities on strategic issues such as housing need and infrastructure. Although the government intends to remove this duty under the new planning system next year, councils will still be expected to collaborate and find cross-boundary solutions. This is particularly important given the pressures our neighbouring authorities are facing. New Forest District Council (NFDC) are currently in the process of developing their next Local Plan. However, it is currently **8,900 homes short** of its assessed housing need. Wiltshire Council previously submitted their Local Plan to the Inspectorate but were informed at the beginning of March that they needed to withdraw their submission because the underpinning evidence was out-dated. Whilst Wiltshire may decide to challenge this outcome, the Planning Inspector has advised that they need to submit an uplifted plan under the new, much faster planning system next year.

To add to Test Valley's woes, all of this is unfolding alongside a further revision to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was recently out for consultation - a process which all three of our parish councils have now formally responded to. Although the emerging NPPF will introduce changes, its core principles and significantly elevated housing targets will be retained.

These troubling developments are putting TVBC under real pressure and underline the importance of TVBC progressing its plan within the current framework to avoid setbacks.

Local Action

Unsurprisingly, all of these changes have prompted the formation of many new community action groups and forums including: our own Pan Parish Planning Forum (of Longstock, Houghton and Stockbridge), the A342 Group, the Anton Forum and a new action group in Romsey, where the revised housing targets have instigated an astonishing **40% increase** in projected housing numbers. The formation of these groups reflects the strength of feeling and growing determination of local communities to have a meaningful say in the planning process.

Looking Ahead – Your Voice Will Be Essential

Test Valley's landscapes, villages and heritage are under a real threat and it's clear that our communities care deeply about protecting what makes this area so unique.

We will continue to keep you updated as the draft Local Plan develops and will of course notify you of the dates for the supplementary Regulation 18 consultation when they become available. Your involvement will be absolutely crucial in shaping the proposals that come forward - every response and piece of feedback genuinely does influence the direction of the plan.

Please know that we are incredibly grateful for the commitment you have shown so far - together, we can ensure that the future of our borough reflects the values, character and identity that make the Test Valley so very special.

Cllr Derek Hallé (Chairman of the Pan Parish Planning Forum) says:

"With national policy shifting, neighbouring authorities under strain, and Test Valley's timetable tightening, it has never been more important for our communities to stand together. The Pan Parish Planning Group will continue to challenge, scrutinise and advocate on behalf of our parishes to ensure that the Local Plan is fair, evidence-based and genuinely reflective of local priorities."

"Our villages are facing some of the most significant planning pressures in a generation and the strength of feeling within our communities is unmistakable. People are worried, and rightly so, about what could be lost. The Pan Parish Planning Group will continue to fight for a Local Plan that protects our landscapes, respects our unique heritage and reflects the values of the people who call this place home."

Cllr Angie Fillipa of Longstock Parish Council adds:

"Across our three parishes, people care deeply about the landscapes, heritage and sense of place that makes this area so special. The pressures we now face are real and our communities are feeling it. The Pan Parish Planning Group is determined to stand with residents every step of the way, ensuring their voices are not only heard but truly shape the future of this area"

"Amid the many pressures now facing the Test Valley, one thing remains constant: the commitment of our communities to safeguarding the places they value. The Pan Parish Planning Group will continue to provide a steady, evidence-based voice throughout this process, ensuring that residents' concerns are clearly represented as the Local Plan evolves."