

This Report will be made public on 21 May 2026

Report Number **C/26/06**

From: Councillor Jim Martin, Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy
Date: 1 June 2026
Status: Key Decision
Responsible Officer: Adrian Tofts, Strategy & Policy Manager

SUBJECT: LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE AND GOVERNMENT'S PLANNING REFORMS

SUMMARY: This report outlines the government's recent local plan reforms and asks the Cabinet Member to approve an updated timetable for the preparation of the council's new local plan. Delegated authority is sought for the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to publish key documents that will enable the council to begin early stages of the new local plan, now that regulations to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act have been published.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To meet the requirements of the new plan-making system for local plans prepared under the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 and to comply with new plan-making regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/26/06.
2. To approve the receipt of Local Plan Implementation Funding to support the council's local plan process.
3. To approve the 2026 Local Plan Timetable included in Appendix 1 for publication and submission to MHCLG as necessary.
4. To delegate authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to update the 2026 Local Plan Timetable on a monthly or more frequent basis and publish and submit the updates throughout the preparation of the local plan.
5. To delegate authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to publish the council's notice of intention to begin plan-making.
6. To delegate authority to undertake the 'scoping stage' consultation to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy.
7. To delegate authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to publish the Gateway 1 self-assessment, and any other necessary supporting evidence, and submit to MHCLG as necessary.

- 8. To note that Cabinet approval will be sought for the statutory consultation on the proposed local plan content and evidence.**
- 9. To delegate authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to approve, publish and submit the gateway 2 assessment materials and publish the appointed person's advice.**
- 10. To note that Cabinet approval will be sought for the statutory consultation on the proposed local plan.**
- 11. To delegate authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy, to approve any changes to the local plan following comments received during the statutory consultations at the proposed local plan content and evidence and proposed local plan stages.**
- 12. To delegate authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to approve, publish and submit the gateway 3 assessment materials and publish the appointed person's advice.**
- 13. To delegate authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to submit the local plan to the Secretary of State for examination once gateway 3 is successfully completed.**
- 14. To delegate authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy, to make any necessary main modifications to the local plan and to consult on the main modifications.**

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Officers have provided updates on the government's planning reforms in reports to Cabinet on 25 September 2024 (ref: [C/24/31](#)) and 12 February 2025 (ref: [C/24/80](#)).
- 1.2 The report of 12 February 2025 asked Cabinet to approve a local plan timetable, which sets out key dates for the preparation of the council's new local plan. The then Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, had instructed all local planning authorities to submit new local plan timetables to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) no later than 6 March 2025. Cabinet approved the [local plan timetable](#) and it was submitted to MHCLG by the deadline.
- 1.3 The 2025 local plan timetable proposed that the council would prepare a local plan under the new system brought in by the 2023 Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (LURA). The timetable assumed that regulations to the LURA would be published in summer/autumn 2025 to allow a formal start to the process in November 2025, as was stated by government. The council was also waiting for national decision-making policies to be published in a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was expected in spring 2025. However, there were significant delays to the publication of these documents, and the timetable therefore needs to be amended.
- 1.4 This report updates the Cabinet Member on reforms that have been brought in since the report of February 2025. The Cabinet Member is asked to approve the revised local plan timetable set out in **Appendix 1**. The Cabinet Member is also asked to give authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to publish and submit key documents to enable early progress with the council's local plan to the new timetable, as set out in the recommendations above.
- 1.5 The Cabinet Member is asked to note that:
 - It is proposed to establish a cross-party Planning Policy Steering Group to provide increased member oversight of the local plan process – this will be the subject of a separate report to the Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy.
 - It is anticipated that the proposed plan content and evidence will be taken to Cabinet in September 2027 to ask for Cabinet's approval to undertake public consultation.
 - It is anticipated that the proposed local plan will be taken to Cabinet in April 2028 to ask for Cabinet's approval to undertake public consultation.
 - If local government reorganisation proceeds to the current timetable, the final local plan is likely to be adopted by the new unitary authority for the Folkestone & Hythe district, but the local plan provides the opportunity to guide the new authority's planning strategy into the future.

2. GOVERNMENT'S LOCAL PLAN REFORMS

- 2.1 This section outlines local plan reforms introduced since the Cabinet report of February 2025: the publication of the new NPPF; the publication of local plan regulations; and the introduction of spatial development strategies (SDSs).
- 2.2 Local plans produced under the new system are intended to focus on allocating sites for development. Currently, local plans typically have a suite of general development management policies, but the reforms are intended to largely replace these with the national decision-making policies set out in the new draft NPPF. The aim is for local plans to be more focused, prepared to a shorter timescale (30 months) and to be reviewed regularly.
- 2.3 In a letter of 16 December 2025 to local authority Leaders about the reforms, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Steve Reed, stated that:

“These changes are designed to make planning policy easier to use, underpin the development of faster and simpler local plans, and be more directive of decision-making in support of both appropriate housing and commercial development.”

- 2.4 Currently, local plans are examined at the end of the process, and a local planning authority will only find out if its plan is ‘sound’ when it receives a report from the planning Inspectors who have examined the plan. Under the new system there will be three ‘gateways’ which are intended to identify any problems earlier in the process. The government intends to introduce templates and standardisation into plan preparation, alongside other reforms to the process.

Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 2.5 The new draft NPPF was expected in spring last year but was published on 16 December 2025. The [draft NPPF](#) has been substantially rewritten from the previous version published in December 2024. The new NPPF features 133 policies presented in topic-based chapters which are individually numbered according to chapter heading.
- 2.6 Policies are divided into 52 ‘plan-making’ policies and 81 ‘decision-making’ policies. ‘Plan-making policies’ are intended to govern the preparation and examination of plans, including local plans, minerals and waste plans and new spatial development strategies (see paragraphs 2.10-2.17 below). ‘Decision-making’ policies are intended to govern decisions on planning applications. The introduction to the NPPF says that the national decision-making policies *“are a material consideration in making these decisions and should be read alongside the policies in the development plan.”*
- 2.7 Although the draft policies in the NPPF may be amended following the consultation, they do give an indication of the government’s intentions for the new local plan system. The new NPPF particularly emphasises that new style local plans should be focused on site allocations to meet

development needs and that they should be prepared to a 30-month timetable. The government states that the final version of the NPPF will be published this summer.

Local Plan Regulations 2026

- 2.8 The government had stated that the new system would be activated through secondary legislation in ‘summer/autumn 2025’. In fact, an outline of the regulations, a [Plan-making regulations explainer](#), was published on 27 November 2025. The [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations](#) themselves were only laid before Parliament on 4 March 2026 and came into force on 25 March 2026. These were accompanied by an [Explanatory Memorandum](#), which was published alongside the regulations on 4 March 2026.
- 2.9 The regulations set out the procedures for preparing, examining and adopting a new local plan; this process is outlined in section 5 below.

Spatial development strategies

- 2.10 In the past local plans had to be prepared in accordance with the Regional Spatial Strategy for the area. The strategy for south east England, The South East Plan, was published in May 2009. However, Regional Spatial Strategies were abolished by the coalition government through the 2011 Localism Act. After a legal challenge to the abolition, Regional Spatial Strategies were finally revoked in 2013. There has therefore been no strategic planning system in place in England for more than a decade. Cross-boundary issues were intended to be addressed by local planning authorities through the ‘Duty to Cooperate’ introduced by the Localism Act; in practice, however, it has been extremely difficult for authorities to resolve sub-regional issues through their local plans, and many plans have been rejected by Inspectors for failing the duty.
- 2.11 In a Written Ministerial Statement made on 27 November 2025 ([UIN HCWS1104](#)), Matthew Pennycook, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning, highlighted that the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act does not include the Duty to Cooperate:

“Instead, the new system will rely on revised national policy and the new tier of strategic planning to ensure effective co-operation between plan-making authorities.”

- 2.12 Although the duty has been removed, the Minister stated that:

“Local planning authorities should continue to collaborate across their boundaries, including on unmet development needs from neighbouring areas, and we expect Planning Inspectors to continue to examine plans in line with the policies in the NPPF on ‘maintaining effective co-operation’.”

- 2.13 The [Planning and Infrastructure Act](#), which received Royal assent on 18 December 2025, sets out new provisions for strategic planning in England. The Act requires strategic planning authorities to prepare spatial

development strategies (SDSs) and allows the Secretary of State to create strategic planning boards.

- 2.14 The Act states that SDSs should specify infrastructure of strategic importance for supporting or facilitating development, mitigating, or adapting to, climate change and promoting or improving the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of the area. The strategies should specify the amount and distribution of housing, affordable housing and other types of accommodation. The Act makes provision for publishing timetables for the preparation, consultation, examination, adoption and monitoring of SDSs. One of the 'tests of soundness' for local plans, set out in policy PM15 of the draft new NPPF, is that they should be *"in general conformity with any adopted spatial development strategy for the area."*
- 2.15 The government published [proposed geographies](#) for SDSs on 12 February 2026. It is proposed that a spatial planning board should be created for Kent and Medway to prepare an SDS for the combined area.
- 2.16 Although general provisions for SDSs have been introduced through the 2025 Act, regulations are still awaited. The government states that:
- "Secondary legislation ... is expected to be laid before Parliament breaks for summer recess, and at this point we will commence the SDS provisions in the Act, meaning that the duty to produce an SDS will become active."*
- 2.17 SDSs are expected to be produced over the next three years and be adopted by April 2029. If this is achieved, they would be prepared to a similar timeline to the first local plans produced under the new system.

Government intervention in the plan-making process

- 2.18 The government has powers to intervene in the plan-making process under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. In his statement of 27 November 2025 ([UIN HCWS1104](#)), the Minister highlighted that:
- "The government is committed to taking tough action to ensure local authorities have up-to-date local plans in place. While we hope the need will not arise, we have made clear that we are willing to make full use of available intervention powers – including taking over a local authority's plan making directly – if local plans are not progressed as required."*
- 2.19 On 13 February 2026, the Minister [wrote to Buckinghamshire Council](#) stating that, as the council had not adopted a local plan in the six years since it was created, he was directing it to publish a revised local plan timetable that would achieve the milestones set out in his letter.
- 2.20 On 6 March 2026 the government published a [list of 39 local planning authorities](#) that will be required to make rapid progress with new local plans because they do not have up-to-date plans that meet their area's local housing need in full; Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is included in this list, although its local plan was only adopted on 10 December 2025. The

government states: *“If you fail to make progress with your plan-making, the government will consider intervening to accelerate plan progress.”*

- 2.21 On 5 February 2026, the Minister wrote to Three Rivers Council in Hertfordshire expressing concern that the local plan the council was proposing to approve for consultation would only meet 56 per cent of the district’s housing need. The Minister directed the council to halt work on the plan. He followed this with a [further letter](#) sent on 18 March 2026, in which he directed the council to include in the plan, as a minimum, seven additional site allocations previously rejected by the council, so that the plan can meet approximately 85 per cent of the housing need. The council was instructed to review its evidence base to accommodate the new sites and to meet dates for plan preparation that were set out in the Minister’s letter.

3. LOCAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

- 3.1 On 14 January 2026 the government announced the launch of a local plan implementation fund, which would be available to local authorities taking forward a local plan under the new system. There was a period of only two weeks to apply, and applications had to be submitted by 28 January 2026. A funding bid was submitted, and on 25 March 2026 the council heard that it had been awarded £108,474.

3.2 Recommendation 2 of this report asks the Cabinet Member to approve receipt of the Local Plan Implementation Funding.

- 3.3 The funding requires the council to meet certain deadlines regarding the notice of intention and gateway 1 assessment (see section 4 below). However, the government has introduced requirements for all councils to publish their notice of intention by December 2026 at the latest, so the timetable below is only around six months in advance of the default position for all other councils proceeding under the new system.

4. LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE

- 4.1 Folkestone & Hythe’s new local plan will be the primary development plan document for the district when it is adopted. It will replace both the Places and Policies Local Plan (2020) and the Core Strategy Review (2022).
- 4.2 The new system puts in place a 30-month plan-making process. The 30-month period begins from when the local planning authority undertakes the first gateway assessment.

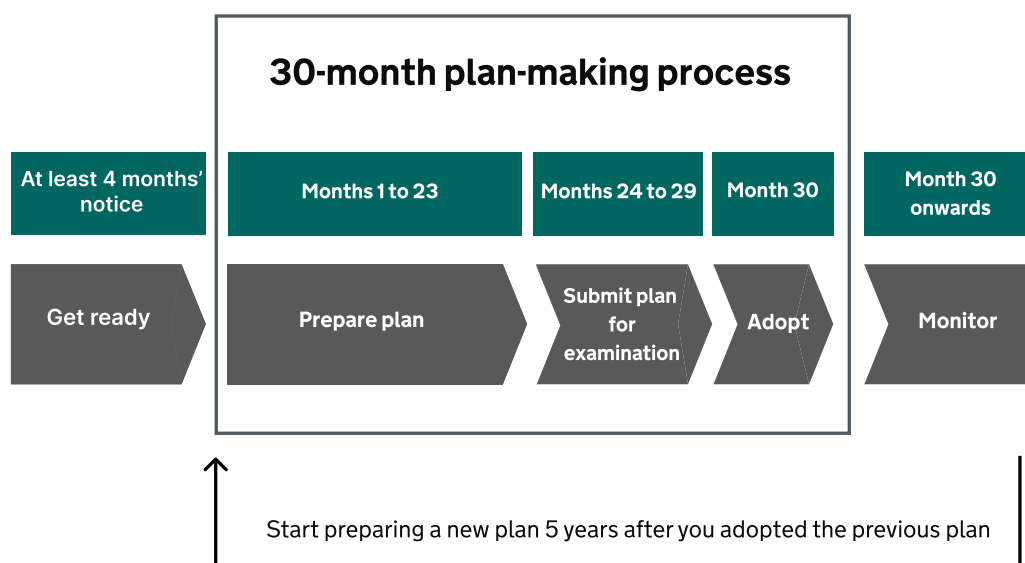


Figure 1: Overview of the new local plan process (MHCLG)

- 4.3 The proposed timetable for preparing the new local plan is set out in the Local Plan Timetable in **Appendix 1** and is summarised below. Section 5 below provides more detail on the different stages of plan preparation.

Stage in Local Plan Process	Date
Before the 30-month process starts	
Notice of Council's intention to commence local plan preparation.	June 2026
Scoping Consultation	September to October 2026
Gateway 1: self-assessment of readiness for local plan preparation	Publish October 2026
Start of 30-month plan-making timetable	
Months 1 to 23: prepare the plan	
<i>Publish summary of scoping consultation</i>	<i>December 2026</i>
<i>Plan visioning, strategy development and evidence gathering</i>	<i>November 2026 to July 2027</i>
Consult on the proposed plan content and evidence (6 weeks)	September to October 2027
<i>Prepare draft local plan document, decide on preferred spatial strategy and sites, evidence gathering, develop local plan map</i>	<i>October 2027 to January 2028</i>
<i>Publish summary of consultation on proposed plan content and evidence.</i>	<i>January 2028</i>
Gateway 2: observations and advice from an appointed person	February 2028
<i>Revise draft local plan document in light of observations received at gateway 2</i>	<i>March 2028 to April 2028</i>

Stage in Local Plan Process	Date
Consult on the proposed local plan (8 weeks)	May 2028 to June 2028
<i>Analyse feedback, make changes to finalise local plan submission materials</i>	<i>July 2028 to August 2028</i>
<i>Publish summary of the consultation on the proposed local plan</i>	<i>August 2028</i>
Gateway 3: prescribed requirements assessment by an appointed person	September 2028
Months 24 to 29: submit plan for examination	
Date of submission to the Secretary of State for independent examination	October 2028
<i>Six-month examination process (timetable determined by the Planning Inspectorate)</i>	<i>October 2028 to March 2029</i>
Month 30 to 31: adopt plan and publish policies map	
Adoption	April 2029
Publish policies map	April 2029

Figure 2: Proposed new local plan timetable – key stages

5. NEW LOCAL PLAN PROCESS

- 5.1 While the general process for preparing the new local plan was outlined in the report to Cabinet in February 2025, the recent publication of the local plan regulations, the plan-making regulations explainer and the explanatory memorandum now provide further details. Key features are highlighted below.
- 5.2 The sections below set out where it is proposed that Cabinet approval will be sought. Given the 30-month timetable, the recommendations ask the Cabinet Member to delegate some procedural steps to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to approve. It is proposed, however, that a new Planning Policy Steering Group is set up to provide greater member oversight of the local plan process.

Local plan timetable

- 5.3 The regulations require local planning authorities to prepare a ‘local plan timetable’ for the preparation of the local plan, to report to government against defined milestones. (This replaces the Local Development Scheme required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 5.4 The milestones in the timetable should include when plan-making steps are undertaken, when consultation periods begin and end, and when outputs following gateways and examinations are published. Local planning authorities must revise their timetable to bring it up to date, where necessary, at least every month.

- 5.5 **Recommendation 3 asks the Cabinet Member to approve the updated Local Plan Timetable included in Appendix 1 for publication and submission to MHCLG as necessary.**
- 5.6 **Recommendation 4 asks the Cabinet Member to give delegated authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to update the local plan timetable, on a monthly or more frequent basis, throughout the preparation and examination of the new local plan.**

Notice of intention to commence

- 5.7 Local planning authorities must publish a 'notice of intention to commence local plan preparation' at least four months before publishing their self-assessment summary for gateway 1. This is intended to give communities, and other stakeholders advance notice of plan-making.
- 5.8 **Recommendation 5 asks the Cabinet Member to give delegated authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to publish the council's notice of intention to commence plan-making.**
- 5.9 It is anticipated that this will be by 31 June 2026.

Scoping consultation – no set time period

- 5.10 Local planning authorities must invite representations on what their local plan should contain and how future engagement should be carried out, through a 'scoping consultation'. Key consultees are defined in the regulations, but the public may also make comments. The scoping consultation must conclude before the local planning authority publishes its self-assessment summary at gateway 1. The regulations do not specify a minimum consultation period for this stage. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will need to be undertaken alongside this early scoping stage.
- 5.11 For its scoping consultation, the council can draw on the results of previous public engagement exercises, including consultation undertaken for the Corporate Plan 'Our District, Our World', the District-wide Carbon Strategy and recent consultation on the council's Economic Strategy.
- 5.12 The regulations require the local authority to consult on how it engages the public and other interested parties in the preparation of the local plan. This requirement replaces the need to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. (The council's current [Statement of Community Involvement](#) was published in 2022.)
- 5.13 **Recommendation 6 asks the Cabinet Member to delegate authority to undertake the 'scoping stage' consultation to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy.**
- 5.14 It is anticipated that consultation will run from September to October 2026.

Gateway 1 self-assessment

- 5.15 A key feature of the new system is that there will be three gateway assessments before the plan is submitted for examination.
- 5.16 The regulations specify that the gateway 1 assessment is a 'self-assessment' undertaken by the local authority. The self-assessment must include details of the local plan timetable, project management and governance arrangements, the proposed approach to consultation and engagement, the anticipated content of the plan and any obligations arising from the SEA regulations.
- 5.17 This stage will not be subject to a formal assessment by the Planning Inspectorate, although authorities may choose to submit materials to MHCLG. The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) offers optional support with gateway 1.
- 5.18 **Recommendation 7 asks the Cabinet Member to give delegated authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to publish and submit the gateway 1 self-assessment materials.**
- 5.19 It is anticipated that submission for gateway 1 will be by 31 October 2026.

Consultation on proposed local plan content – 6 weeks

- 5.20 Following the completion of the gateway 1 self-assessment, local planning authorities should begin to draft the local plan. During this period, authorities are required to consult on the proposed content and evidence for their local plans for not less than six weeks.
- 5.21 This consultation should include:
- A proposed vision for the area and measurable outcomes; there should be no more than ten measurable outcomes, designed to monitor progress towards meeting the local plan vision.
 - Any proposed aims and objectives of the local planning authority, including how it proposes to achieve the vision.
 - A summary of the proposed approach to the planning policies, which could include proposed site allocations.
 - A summary of evidence intended to support the local plan.
 - Any further supporting information that the authority considers appropriate.
- 5.22 It is anticipated that materials for consultation on the proposed local plan content will be taken to a Cabinet meeting in September 2027 for approval to begin the consultation. It is anticipated that consultation on the proposed local plan content will take place from September to October 2027.
- 5.23 **Recommendation 8 asks the Cabinet Member to note that Cabinet approval will be sought for the statutory consultation on the proposed local plan content and evidence.**

Gateway 2: observations or advice from an appointed person

- 5.24 Following the publication of the summary of consultation on the proposed local plan content and evidence, the local planning authority must seek observations and advice from a person appointed by the Secretary of State – the expectation is that a Planning Inspectorate (PINS) Inspector will be the ‘appointed person’ – at the gateway 2 assessment.
- 5.25 **Recommendation 9 asks the Cabinet Member to give delegated authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to approve, publish and submit the gateway 2 assessment materials and publish the appointed person’s advice.**
- 5.26 It is anticipated that the Gateway 2 assessment will take place in February 2028.
- 5.27 After receiving the appointed person’s observations and advice, the local planning authority must publish them and make them generally available to anyone who is required to be notified.

Consultation on proposed local plan – 8 weeks

- 5.28 If the authority successfully passes gateway 2, it will then finalise the local plan ready for submission. Before submission, it must consult on the proposed local plan for a period of not less than eight weeks.
- 5.29 Consultation materials must include:
- The proposed local plan.
 - A map of proposed local plan policies.
 - Details of the evidence gathered to support the local plan.
 - Details of the previous consultations, including a summary of the main issues raised in the consultations.
- 5.30 A summary of this consultation must be published before authorities can begin gateway 3. This should include the main issues raised by the consultation and how the authority has had regard to the representations.
- 5.31 It is anticipated that materials for the consultation on the submission local plan will be taken to Cabinet in April 2028 for approval. It is anticipated that consultation on the proposed local plan will then take place from May to June 2028.
- 5.32 **Recommendation 10 asks the Cabinet Member to note that Cabinet approval will be sought for the statutory consultation on the proposed local plan.**
- 5.33 **Recommendation 11 asks the Cabinet Member to give delegated authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy, to approve any changes to the local plan following comments received during the statutory consultations at the**

proposed local plan content and evidence and proposed local plan stages.

Gateway 3: prescribed requirements assessed by an appointed person

- 5.34 Following consultation on the submission plan, the regulations require the local authority to undertake a third gateway assessment. The regulations require the authority to seek observations and advice from an appointed person, expected to be a PINS planning Inspector.
- 5.35 **Recommendation 12 asks the Cabinet Member to give delegated authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to approve, publish and submit the Gateway 3 assessment materials and publish the appointed person's advice.**
- 5.36 This final gateway is intended to support faster local plan examinations by assessing that legal requirements have been met and confirming that the authority is ready to proceed to examination. To help this process the authority must submit a 'statement of compliance' to demonstrate how the plan meets the prescribed requirements. The authority must also submit a 'statement of soundness' detailing how the evidence demonstrates that the local plan is sound.
- 5.37 It is anticipated that the Gateway 3 assessment will take place in September 2028.
- 5.38 The appointed person must provide their conclusions as to whether the requirements have been met. If the authority meets the requirements, it must publish a statement confirming that gateway 3 has been completed and publish the submission documents.

Submission of the local plan

- 5.39 If the prescribed requirements are met, the local authority will then submit the local plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination.
- 5.40 **Recommendation 13 asks the Cabinet Member to give delegated authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control to submit the local plan to the Secretary of State for examination if Gateway 3 is successfully completed.**
- 5.41 It is anticipated that the local plan will be submitted for examination in October 2028.

Examination of the local plan

- 5.42 The purpose of the examination is to determine whether the local plan is 'sound', in line with the 'tests of soundness' set out in the NPPF.
- 5.43 Policy PM15 in the new draft NPPF sets out five tests of soundness for local plans:
- i) Positive – the plan sets out a positive approach to delivering growth to meet the development needs of the area.

- ii) Appropriate – the plan sets out an appropriate strategy, taking into account reasonable alternatives.
- iii) Realistic – the plan sets out realistic policies, based on joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters and that site allocations are deliverable.
- iv) Consistent – the plan accords with national policies in the NPPF, and does not duplicate, substantively restate or modify the content of national policies.
- v) Conformity – the plan is in general conformity with any adopted spatial development strategy for the area.

5.44 From the point of submission, the timetable for the examination is determined by the planning Inspectors. Under the new system the government envisages that local plan examinations will take six months. (Currently, examinations typically take much longer; the examinations for the council's Places & Policies Local Plan and Core Strategy Review each took almost 24 months from submission to receipt of the Inspectors' reports.)

5.45 It is anticipated that the examination will be held from October 2028 to March 2029.

Inspector's report

5.46 If the plan is found 'sound', the Inspector will issue a report stating that the plan is sound, with or without main modifications. (In almost all cases under the current system, Inspectors recommend main modifications.) Main modifications will be consulted with interested parties.

5.47 **Recommendation 14 asks the Cabinet Member to give delegated authority to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy, to make any necessary main modifications to the local plan and consult on the main modifications.**

Adoption of the local plan

5.48 If the local authority receives a favourable report from the planning Inspectors, it can then make the modifications recommended by the Inspector and proceed to adoption. It is anticipated that, if the local government reorganisation proceeds to the current timetable, the local plan would be adopted by the new unitary authority for the Folkestone & Hythe district in April 2029.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The council's revised draft local plan timetable (in **Appendix 1**) clearly sets a very challenging timetable, although this timetable is required to meet the government's objectives for local plan preparation and the guidance for the new system.

6.2 Several of this report's recommendations ask the Cabinet Member to delegate authority for various stages of the process to the Chief Officer Planning and Building Control, so that the timetable can be met. The government's [guidance](#) on creating new local plans sets out a number of principles, one of which is to:

"- secure efficient sign offs at key stages of the process - to make this happen, work with senior leaders to plan effective delegation and identify necessary changes (for example, to change the council's constitution or standing orders)"

6.3 However, it is proposed to set up a cross-party Planning Policy Steering Group to oversee the drafting of the local plan, which will provide increased member oversight. This is the subject of a separate report to the Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy. Key local plan stages will be taken to Cabinet in 2027 and 2028 to seek approval for consultation. Given the timescales, it is likely that the final local plan will be taken to members of the new unitary authority for adoption (see below).

6.4 As set out in the report, the council has been awarded funds from the government's Local Plan Implementation Fund which will provide additional resources for the local plan. It should be noted, however, that this will only meet a small part of the local plan costs, and the local plan will continue to place pressure on the council's budget over the coming two to three years.

6.5 There are considerable uncertainties with the timetable, given that a new spatial development strategy for Kent and Medway is likely to be prepared in parallel with the local plan, and that local government reorganisation will take effect during this period.

6.6 Despite these uncertainties, local authorities are instructed to proceed quickly with creating new local plans. In his letter to local authority Leaders of December 2025 (see paragraph 2.3 above), Steve Reed stated:

"We expect local planning authorities to continue to work towards the adoption of an up-to-date local plan as soon as possible and the roll-out of Spatial Development Strategies should not distract local planning authorities from this vital work."

6.7 Regarding local government reorganisation, Jim McMahon, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, said in a statement to Parliament on 3 June 2025 (ref: [UIN HCWS676](#)):

"... I continue to expect local planning authorities to work towards the adoption of an up-to-date local plan as soon as possible. Local Government Reorganisation should not hinder this essential work; and neither should the introduction of a new legal framework for local plan-making later this year, or our strategic planning reforms."

6.8 If the timetable for local government reorganisation remains as currently planned, the vesting day of the new unitary authority for the Folkestone & Hythe area is likely to take place shortly before consultation on the submission plan, before the plan is submitted for examination. This is not

a unique situation, however, as local government reorganisation is likely to affect many of the front-runner authorities preparing the first local plans under the new system.

6.9 The new unitary authority for the Folkestone & Hythe district will need to take forward any local plans that are already in preparation for its area. This has happened elsewhere, where new unitary authorities have been formed from county and district authorities. Dorset Council, for example, was created on 1 April 2019, replacing five lower tier councils and a county council. The new council adopted the Purbeck Local Plan in July 2024, although the plan was largely prepared by the former Purbeck District Council and was submitted for examination in January 2019, a few months before the new unitary council was formed. During its first year of operation, Dorset Council also adopted the Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (BCP) Minerals Site Plan and the Dorset and BCP Waste Plan, although both plans were prepared and taken to examination by former minerals and waste planning authorities for the area.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

7.1 A summary of the perceived risks follows:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
That the council cannot meet the deadlines set out in the local plan timetable.	High	Medium	The council will adopt a project management approach to plan preparation to highlight any departures from the timetable. More resources may need to be deployed if the plan falls behind schedule. As one of the first authorities to prepare a plan under the new system, officers are likely to engage closely with MHCLG officials during the preparation of the plan and can raise any issues.

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Significant changes in legislation and Government planning policies and guidance	High	Low	Maintain dialogue with MHCLG and PINS. Update local plan as necessary throughout the process.
Plan found unsound by PINS at examination	High	Medium	Secure informal advice from PINS at key stages of the plan-making process. Create robust evidence base to defend the plan from challenge.
External challenge of the plan-making process from third parties	High	Medium	Follow best practice and take legal advice where necessary.

8. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

8.1 Legal Officer's Comments (KP)

Under section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended), the Council is required to prepare and maintain a Local Development Scheme (LDS) setting out the timetable for the preparation of its Local Plan. Failure to make adequate progress and comply with requirements could result in Government intervention including directing plan preparations or taking over plan making functions.

The proposals set out in this report satisfy current requirements and reflect the updated plan making framework introduced by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 and associated regulations. The implications of ongoing reforms to the planning system will need to be monitored along with the timetable and processes to ensure compliance with current legislation and national policy.

The recommendations to delegate authority will enable timely and responsive progression of the plan making process, including compliance with statutory requirements.

8.2 Finance Officer's Comments (SM)

There are no immediate budget pressures arising. The early stages of Local Plan preparation will be funded by £108,474 of external grant funding, which is conditional on meeting specified delivery milestones. Any costs beyond the scope of the grant will be managed within existing budgets or considered through future budget and financial monitoring processes.

8.3 **Diversities and Equalities Implications (AT)**

No direct equalities implications. The new local plan will be subject to an equality impact assessment at all stages of its preparation.

8.4 **Climate Change Implications (AT)**

No direct climate change implications arising from this report. The local plan will include policies for mitigating and adapting to climate change within the scope of the national decision-making policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

9. **CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting

Adrian Tofts, Strategy & Policy Manager
Telephone: 01303 853438
Email: adrian.tofts@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Proposed draft 2026 Local Plan Timetable