

Q&A

Why is a Neighbourhood Plan being prepared?

The purpose of the Paddock Wood Neighbourhood Plan is to help improve the quality of life and environment for the community as a whole. The Neighbourhood Plan will be set in the context of the new Local Plan being prepared by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

The emerging Local Plan sets housing targets for new development in and around Paddock Wood, as well as seeking to 'rejuvenate' the town centre. The Neighbourhood Plan can seek to influence the form and quality of the new development, so that this reflects local character and qualities, as well as delivering new infrastructure, such that new development that does come forward is the very best for Paddock Wood.

Importantly, because the Neighbourhood Plan has and will continue to be produced with input from the local community, it will reflect local issues, concerns and aspirations. It will have very real potential to influence change for the better – and more so than any other documents prepared before.

More than 900 communities across the country have successfully completed and had a Neighbourhood Plan 'made' as planning policy for their area. Many more are in progress, including those at examination. In total, 2,700 communities have or are working on Neighbourhood Plans.

Who is preparing the Neighbourhood Plan?

The Neighbourhood Plan is being led by a Steering Group set up by the Town Council and comprising a range of residents and local organisations. Extensive consultation and public engagement has been undertaken over the past few years and is central to the approach taken to prepare the Plan.

Don't we already have a Neighbourhood Plan for Paddock Wood?

Work on the Neighbourhood Plan commenced in 2015 following legislation introduced through the Localism Act of 2011 allowing communities to come together and have a greater say in how their areas might change over time.

Extensive consultation was undertaken on a Neighbourhood Plan between 2015 and 2018. However, as this was taking place so Tunbridge Wells Borough Council began preparing a new Local Plan. The scale of future growth in this and its implications for the Neighbourhood Plan needed considering.

The Steering Group has taken the view that the Neighbourhood Plan represents an excellent opportunity for the Paddock Wood community to shape future change and help direct investment in new infrastructure. Work on the Neighbourhood Plan is now recommencing.

What is being proposed for Paddock Wood in the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan?

The new Local Plan proposes that approximately 4,000 new homes are delivered on the edge of Paddock Wood, expanding the town outwards both north and south of the railway line. This is in addition to those sites which already have planning permission and are under

construction. Land for new employment uses is also proposed, as is 'rejuvenation' of the town centre. More information on the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan can be found via the Borough Council website:

<https://beta.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan>

Can't the Neighbourhood Plan be used to stop development?

No. Government policy does not allow this, it has to plan for the amount of new development set by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for Paddock Wood. But, the Neighbourhood Plan can be used to make sure that future development in Paddock Wood reflects the characteristics and qualities of the area that we value and enjoy, and brings as many benefits as possible to Paddock Wood.

What will the Neighbourhood Plan do?

It will give local residents a say in planning decisions and will set out policies that will be used by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to determine planning applications. There is no set format for what should be addressed in a Neighbourhood Plan, nor how long it should be, but it can cover a large number of important local issues including housing and design, landscape, green space and heritage assets, access, local services and facilities.

Aren't there already policies in the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan for Paddock Wood?

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is preparing a new Local Plan for the entire borough. This was subject to consultation in late 2019 with the next version due for publication in Spring 2020. This will then be subject to examination.

The new Local Plan identifies Paddock Wood as an area of major growth and new development. The Neighbourhood Plan provides scope to influence the shape of future growth, as well as establishing policies for Paddock Wood as a whole, providing more locally based policies than set out in the Local Plan. This can cover aspects such as important views, the natural setting, access and movement.

What is the focus for the Paddock Wood Neighbourhood Plan?

Following work undertaken so far, including ideas and feedback received at public consultation events, a set of six main policy themes have been identified for Paddock Wood. These are:

1. To promote a healthy town centre with a mix and range of activities, and attractive public spaces.
2. To protect and enhance areas of important green space, strengthen important areas of biodiversity and natural habitats.
3. To promote high quality design that enhances the character of Paddock Wood, locally historic buildings and structures.
4. To enhance existing sports and leisure facilities, and deliver new sports provision, including opportunities for team sports.
5. To make it safer and easier for all people of all ages and abilities to move around, particularly by foot and by car, with improved access to the countryside and important local facilities.

6. To deliver supporting infrastructure, such as affordable housing, schools, healthcare and flood mitigation, alongside new housing development.

What is this round of consultation for?

We are asking you to review the vision and six main policy themes that emerged from previous consultation events and, in light of the scale of growth in Paddock Wood proposed in the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan, whether these remain relevant. If you agree this will help ratify the areas of focus for the Neighbourhood Plan so that we can prepare planning policies.

We'd also like to know whether you have any other views or ideas for consideration in the Neighbourhood Plan and which could be used to influence and inform future planning applications.

Once a draft plan and set of policies have been prepared we will ask for your feedback again before submitting the Neighbourhood Plan for independent examination.

What is the examination?

The Plan will be subject to consultation before it is submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, who will arrange for it to be scrutinised by an independent planning examiner. The examination will consider whether the Plan aligns with national and local policies in respect of sustainable development. If the examiner is happy that the Neighbourhood Plan has followed due process, a referendum will take place.

What is the referendum?

Everyone who is eligible to vote in Paddock Wood will have the chance to say whether they think the Neighbourhood Plan should be used to begin shaping future change and determining planning applications. If more than 50% of people who turn out to vote are in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan then it will become part of formal planning policy for Paddock Wood.

Where can I find out more about Neighbourhood Planning?

Central Government regularly publishes a Neighbourhood Planning newsletter which can be accessed online via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/notes-on-neighbourhood-planning>

Information and advice is also available via the Locality website:

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/>

For information on Neighbourhood Plans in Tunbridge Wells:

<https://beta.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/neighbourhood-plans>