



Somerset
Council

Somerset Local Plan

Draft Engagement Strategy

(Regulation 20 Scoping Consultation version)

19 June 2026

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1. Purpose, legal context and compliance

This Engagement Strategy, and accompanying Consultation and Activities Plan, has been prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026. It sets out to fulfil the requirements of the new local plan system, including the *National Planning Policy Framework*, Planning Practice Guidance, the *Getting ready to prepare a new plan* guidance, and advice produced by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), including the *Local Plan Route Mapper and Toolkit*.

The approach to engagement has been designed to be meaningful, proportionate and front-loaded, in line with the principles set out in the Government's emerging 30-month local plan-making process and avoiding unnecessary duplication of consultation. A digital-first approach has been adopted, supported by targeted in-person and bespoke engagement where this adds value or is necessary to reach specific groups.

It forms the Council's **formal strategy for engaging communities, stakeholders and statutory bodies in the preparation of the Somerset Local Plan** and is submitted as part of the evidence necessary to pass **Gateway 1** in the reformed plan-making process.

The Strategy sets out:

- how and when stakeholders will be engaged;
- how engagement activities will be inclusive, proportionate and purposeful;
- how the Council will use a digital-first but accessible approach;
- how feedback will shape the Local Plan at each stage.

2. Having regard to Government guidance

This Engagement Strategy has been prepared **having full regard to government guidance** on plan-making and engagement, including:

- the *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*, particularly sections on plan-making, early community involvement, and strategic cooperation;
- the *Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)*, including the guidance on plan preparation, community involvement, and the duty to cooperate;
- the government's *Getting ready to prepare a new plan* guidance, which requires local planning authorities to establish a clear strategy for engagement prior to Gateway 1; and

- the *PAS Local Plan Route Mapper and Toolkit*, which emphasises early, proportionate and purposeful engagement.

In preparing this Strategy, the Council has also taken account of emerging best practice, examples from other unitary authorities, and learning from the previous district-level plan-making processes. This ensures Somerset’s approach is not only compliant with national guidance, but effective, modern and suited to a diverse and largely rural county.

3. Introduction

Somerset Council has begun the preparation of a Local Plan for the unitary authority of Somerset. The Council’s own governance processes and involvement of communities and stakeholders is key to preparing a Local Plan for the Council. The Local Plan will look to allow sustainable growth that meets the needs of our communities and protects and enhances the things we value most.

The Council will therefore work closely with communities and stakeholders in preparing the new Local Plan, carrying out a range of engagement and consultation activities throughout its preparation, following the Council’s core principles of being “a listening, empowering council” and “a collaborative council”, as set out in the [Council Plan 2023-2027](#).

This Topic Paper seeks to set out: governance and project management structures; Local Plan stages and key milestones; a framework for engagement; and our approach to working with our neighbouring Local Planning Authorities (LPAs).

It is important that we involve communities and those affected by the Plan at an early stage in the process, when it is possible to make a difference. The Council seeks to take an inclusive and proactive approach to engagement, providing the opportunity for all to engage in the plan-making process.

The Local Plan goes through various stages of preparation, and it is important to clearly set out how and when people can become involved. A summary of these stages is set out in Section 3.

As part of the preparation of the Local Plan, the Council has produced a Consultation and Engagement Activities Plan (Appendix 1), which is a “living” document, updated as

evidence and issues emerge. This will enable the Council to engage in a targeted, meaningful and responsive way with stakeholders and communities to ensure that input and discussion happens at the right time to inform the direction of the Plan.



4.Context

The Council is legally required to produce and periodically review Local, Minerals, and Waste Plans. Until a new Local Plan for Somerset is adopted, existing plans remain in place. The Council is required to adopt a development plan by 1 April 2028, as set out in the structural change order when the authority was created.

The current [Local Development Scheme \(February 2025\)](#) seeks to ensure submission within this timeframe to avoid penalties such as reduced New Homes Bonus or intervention by the Secretary of State. The Government plans to replace New Homes Bonus and consult on this in early 2025.

Significant planning reforms followed the election of a new Government in July 2024, including a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024, with further proposed revisions set out in December 2025, and the new Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026. These regulations introduce a 30-month timeframe, with changes to local plan production and examination

processes, along with a requirement to produce Spatial Development Strategies on a more regional basis.

While the proposed revisions to the NPPF and new Regulations take away the statutory “duty to cooperate”, the practice of working collaboratively with neighbouring authorities, infrastructure providers and other relevant plan-making authorities on cross-boundary matters remains. This is set out in PM10, Maintaining cooperation between plan-making authorities, the proposed revision to the NPPF (December 2025).

5. Local Plan Stages and Key Milestones

The process of producing a Local Plan involves various stages, each of which entail consultation/communication with stakeholders and communities. The stages and timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan is set out in the Council’s [Local Development Scheme \(LDS\)](#)¹ and is summarised in the diagram above. This is accompanied by an indication of key milestones.

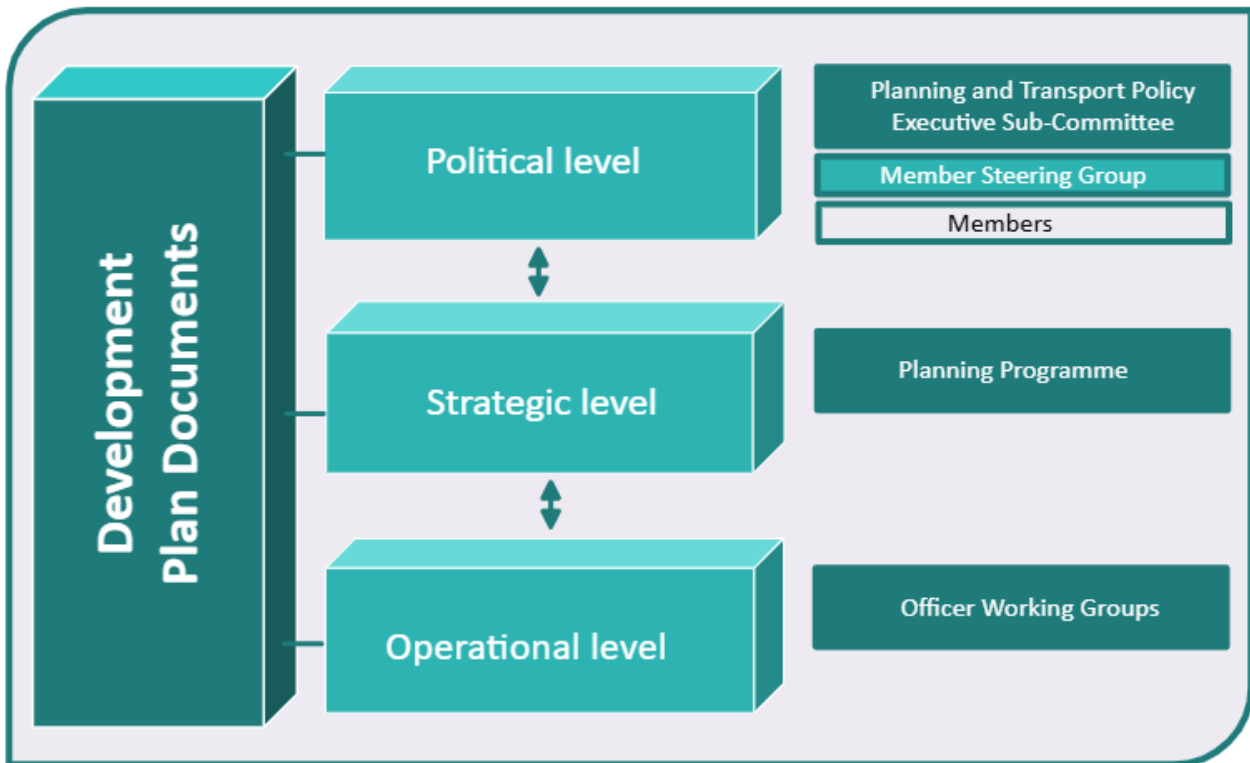
		ACTIVITY	KEY MILESTONES	DATE
EXPLORE		Pre-commencement	<i>Early engagement and visioning exercises</i> <i>Call for sites and sites assessments</i> <i>Gather evidence base</i>	Jan 2024 – Nov 2027
SET THE SCENE	1	Publish Local Plan Timetable	REG 8	10 April 2026
	2	Notice of Intention to Commence	REG 19	10 April 2026
	3	Run Scoping Consultation	REG 20	19 June 2026 – 24 July 2026
	4	GATEWAY 1	REG 21	30 Oct 2026
	5	Publish summary of Scoping Consultation	REG 22	6 Nov 2026
HAVE	6	Consultation on proposed Local Plan content and evidence	REG 23	10 Sept 2027 – 29 Oct 2027

¹ www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/local-development-scheme/

	ACTIVITY	KEY MILESTONES	DATE
	Consultation on Draft SA Draft HRA/AA	SEA Reg 13 / HRA duties	
	Publish summary of proposed Local Plan content and evidence	REG 24	May 2027 – Nov 2027
	Prepare “map of proposed Local Plan policies”	REG 25	May 2027 – Nov 2027
	Draft remaining policies		May 2027 – Nov 2027
	7 GATEWAY 2	REG 26	19 Nov 2027
	Prepare final Draft Plan	<i>Iterate the Plan</i> <i>Committee sign-off</i>	Nov 2027 – Feb 2028
PUBLICATION	8 Consultation on proposed Local Plan	REG 27	10 March 2028 – 28 April 2028
	Consultation on Final SA Final HRA/AA	SEA Reg 13 / HRA duties	
	9 Consult on conformity with SDS (where this is adopted)	REG 28	10 March 2028 – April 2028
	Publish summary of consultation on proposed Local Plan	REG 30	28 May 2028
	Finalise Plan		May 2028 – July 2028
SUBMISSION	10 GATEWAY 3	REG 31-33	7 July 2028
	11 Submit for Examination	REG 34 <i>With final SA/HRA</i>	8 Sept 2029

		ACTIVITY	KEY MILESTONES	DATE
EXAMINATION		Examination	<p>REG 35-37</p> <p><i>Examination including hearing sessions and consideration of representations</i></p> <p><i>Inspector's Report</i></p> <p><i>Recommendations and modifications</i></p> <p><i>Consultation on Main Modifications to the Plan</i></p>	Sept 2028 – Dec 2028
ADOPTION	12	Adoption	<p>REG 39</p> <p>Report to Full Council for adoption of the plan</p>	16 March 2029
		Publish policies map		16 March 2029

6. Governance and Project Management Structure



	Who	When	How	Objective
Political Level	Planning and Transport Policy Executive Sub-Committee	Decisions at key milestones	Council Governance protocol	Council decision-making in line with the Constitution
	Local Plan Member Cross-Party Steering Group	Project gateways	Officers will report to the Steering Group at key milestones in the development of the Plans Comments and advice will be provided to the Lead Member and Executive Sub Committee Members for consideration	To consider and comment on documents that relate to the Local Plan, including impact assessments.

	Who	When	How	Objective
			Outcome of discussions will be reported back to Steering Group	
	Members	Briefings and workshops at key milestones and key pieces of evidence	Microsoft Teams briefings and in person workshops Briefing note	Update on the development of the LP Q&A
Strategic Level	Planning and Transport Policy Board	Every 2 months	Ratify LP process. Lead Executive Members on the Sub Committee and Senior Officers from across the authority	Strategic steer Escalate risks or issues for consideration
		Monthly highlight report to the Communities, Place and Economy Project Board, including: risks, resources review, finance, operational delivery		Strategic steer Escalate risks or issues for consideration

	Who	When	How	Objective
Operational Level	Thematic Officer Working Group	Meets every 3 weeks, or more, if required	Senior Officers from across the authority	Strategy development/ interventions and activities. To include relevant officers with technical knowledge
	Creating Communities Officer Working Group	Monthly meetings	Subject matter expert officers with a land use based interest	To align service area and Council-wide visions and objectives, and to scrutinise policy direction at key stages of the production of policy documents and delivery plans. To discuss how specific strategic sites can be more effective in delivering on multiple service area objectives.

The preparation of the Local Plan will be aligned with the preparation of other relevant strategies for the Council, and where possible, engagement and consultation will be aligned.

The planning policy team will meet with other services within the Council on a regular basis at the “Operational Level” through the Officer Working Group and Creating Communities Officer Working Group (CCOWG), to ensure alignment with policy, strategy and engagement/consultation activities.

The services involved in these groups include:

- Planning Policy (including minerals and waste)
- Placemaking and Projects
- Development Management
- Highways and Transport
- Active Travel
- Economic Development
- Town Centre Management
- Building Control
- Climate and Carbon Neutrality

- Biodiversity
- Lead Local Flood Authority
- Coastal Protection Authority
- Public Health
- Affordable Housing and Enabling
- Cultural Services
- Equalities
- Strategic Asset Management
- Communications
- Education
- Children’s services
- Adult services
- Health and Social Care

7. Scoping consultation

As required by government guidance for the new plan-making system, Somerset Council is undertaking a **Scoping Consultation** prior to Gateway 1. This represents the formal starting point of the Local Plan and provides the opportunity for communities and stakeholders to shape both:

1. **What the Local Plan should contain;** and
2. **How the Council should engage with stakeholders during its preparation.**

This Scoping Consultation seeks views on:

- the proposed scope and coverage of the Local Plan, including key themes such as housing, the economy, climate change, natural environment, infrastructure, health and rural communities;
- the types of policies the plan should include;
- the timetable and evidence-gathering approach;
- preferred and accessible methods of engagement for different individuals and groups;
- how the Council can reach under-represented groups and seldom-heard voices.

The Council will notify and invite views from:

- the general public;
- all **specific consultation bodies** as defined in planning regulations;
- all **general consultation bodies**, including voluntary and community organisations;
- **under-represented groups**, as identified in Section 7 of this document;
- neighbouring local planning authorities and other strategic bodies.

Methods include a digital consultation via Citizen Space, targeted emails and letters, Plan-it Newsletter articles, press releases, social media content, Town and Parish

briefings, Local Community Network discussions, Member workshops, and targeted outreach to under-represented groups.

The outcomes of the Scoping Consultation will be summarised in a **Scoping Consultation Report**, which will inform:

- the refinement of the Local Plan scope and priorities;
- updates to this Engagement Strategy;
- the detailed programme set out in the Consultation and Activities Plan.

8.Strategic Approach to Engagement

There are a variety of ways in which communities and stakeholders can become involved in the preparation of the Local Plan. The minimum requirements for consultation and engagement are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.

This iteration of the Engagement Strategy follows previous work that has been done to shape the strategy through extensive collaboration with members and senior officers in accordance with the Council's governance arrangements for the Local Plan.

The following groups provided feedback and direction in developing the Strategy and the wider engagement programme:

- the **Planning and Transport Policy Executive Sub-Committee**, which provides political oversight at key milestones;
- the **Local Plan Member Steering Group**, which has reviewed and advised on engagement priorities, methods and sequencing;
- Member workshops and briefings, including sessions on early engagement, visioning and the Call for Sites process;
- the **Planning and Transport Policy Board** and the **Communities, Place and Economy Programme Board**, which provide strategic and corporate oversight;
- the cross-service **Officer Working Groups** and the **Creating Communities Officer Working Group**, ensuring alignment with service strategies, equality responsibilities and statutory functions.

Feedback from these groups has directly shaped:

- the engagement methods and timing set out in the Consultation and Activities Plan;
- the focus on under-represented groups;

- the balance between digital and traditional engagement methods;
- the structure and content of the Scoping Consultation.

This collective input has ensured that the Strategy is realistic, deliverable, inclusive and aligned with wider Council priorities.

Appendix 1 sets out our Consultation and Engagement Activities Plan, a comprehensive range of options that can be used for consultation and engagement purposes for the Local Plan. We aim to reach as many people and groups as possible within the staff and financial resources available and seek to do so in a flexible and responsive way.

As the evidence base evolves, we will respond flexibly to the issues and options that arise to ensure that we are engaging with the right people at the right time. At the beginning of the Local Plan preparation process, it is difficult to anticipate precisely what will arise, but our Consultation and Engagement Activities Plan (Appendix 1) sets out what we will do for each stage of the process, as well as additional activities if financial and staff resources allow.

The tables contain information relating to:

- The possible methods of consultation and engagement proposed at each stage of the Plan making process;
- The stakeholders and community groups to be engaged;
- The scope of the engagement and consultation; and
- The desired outputs for each stage of the process.

The engagement will be carried out on strategic cross-cutting issues for the Council area as a whole, as well as more specific place-based dialogue.

Engagement will involve a variety of different groups, including Local Community Networks, Members, Parish and Town Councils, community groups, key stakeholders, landowners, and under-represented groups.

After each stage of Local Plan development, the consultation and engagement activities will be set out in a summary report. The report will reflect on the activities that have taken place and the issues and opportunities that are emerging, to recommend refinements to consultation and engagement activities for the following stage. Finally, we will produce a Consultation and Engagement Statement which will summarise and reflect on all the activities that have taken place throughout the plan preparation process and be submitted alongside the Submission Local Plan for examination.

Pre-commencement: Explore

At the time of revising the Engagement Strategy, this phase of the Local Plan process was complete. The aim was to ensure that all interested parties and relevant groups were aware of the launch of the new Local Plan, its context, purpose, and the ways in which they could be involved in its preparation. The Council sought an understanding of initial views from stakeholders and communities through a variety of means, such as mail outs, press releases, webinars, online activities and meetings. The Somerset Plan-it newsletter was the preferred mechanism for keeping stakeholders and members of the public updated on Local Plan preparation. Subscription for this continues to be available via the following link:

<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSC/subscriber/new>

Stages 1 to 5: Set the scene

The Council will publish the Local Plan timetable; notice of intention to commence; and run the **Scoping Consultation**. This stage will focus on early engagement with the public, statutory bodies and other stakeholders, inviting feedback on matters including how to engage with them throughout the plan-making process and what the Plan should contain.

Engagement at this stage focuses on early awareness-raising, scoping of issues, and understanding initial views to inform the development of the Local Plan vision, priorities, evidence base and next stages of plan preparation. Following the consultation, the Council will publish a **Scoping Consultation Report** setting out key matters, including: the main issues raised; and responses to any comments received.

Stages 6 to 7: Have your say

During the preparation of the **Proposed (Draft) Local Plan** content, officers will continue to collaborate with key stakeholders to address issues that cross Local Planning Authority boundaries and fall within the remit of other statutory consultees. Targeted meetings with LCNs, Members, Town and Parish Councils, community groups, key stakeholders and landowners will inform the content of the Proposed Plan.

Work at this point builds on early engagement undertaken during previous stages and focuses on scoping the content of the Local Plan, refining key issues and priorities, and informing the development of spatial strategy options and supporting evidence.

Work with stakeholders to prepare and maintain “statements of common ground”, recording the cross-boundary matters being addressed; and progress towards addressing them.

At this point the Proposed (Draft) Plan will be published, and formal consultation on this document will be carried out for a period of at least 6 weeks in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.

During this consultation, the Council will particularly seek representations on:

- The draft vision and any proposed aims and objectives
- The proposed spatial strategy
- A summary of the evidence the Council plans to collect, plus information about any evidence the Council has already collected.
- Scope and level of detail for the SEA Environmental Report
- Other elements, including initial draft policies

Following the consultation, the Council will publish a Report setting out key matters, including: the main issues raised; and a response to any comments received.

Stages 8 to 9: Publication

Having taken account of responses received from the previous consultation stages and the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal, the **Proposed Local Plan** will be published for a 8-week period in accordance with Regulation 27 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 which seeks representations on the soundness of the plan.

This stage provides communities, stakeholders and statutory consultees with the opportunity to make representations on the draft vision, spatial strategy, policies and supporting evidence before the plan is finalised for publication and submission.

Engagement at this stage reflects national policy expectations for transparency, accessibility and meaningful participation, and is designed to ensure that representations can be clearly understood, recorded and taken into account in refining the Local Plan.

During this consultation, the Council will particularly seek representations on the soundness of:

- The Proposed Local Plan
- The map of the proposed Local Plan policies, site allocations and designations
- Details of the evidence
- The SEA Environmental Report

During this consultation period, the Council will consult with the proposed Heart of Wessex Combined Authority, on general conformity with the Spatial Development Strategy for the region.

Following the consultation, the Council will publish a Report setting out key matters, including: the main issues raised; and a response to any comments received.

Stages 10 to 11: Submission

At this stage, the Draft Plan and accompanying documents are submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for Independent Examination.

Stage 11: Public examination

An independent Inspector holds an Examination into the soundness of the Plan and the associated Sustainability Appraisal and evidence. The Examination hears evidence from those making representations on the Draft Plan on any of the key issues or questions highlighted by the Inspector.

Stage 12: Adoption

Following the Examination, the Inspector will issue a report, recommending whether or not the Plan can be adopted. The report may also recommend 'main modifications' that are necessary for the plan to be adopted. There is a further consultation on any main modifications. If the report is positive, and the recommended modifications are accepted, the Council will be able to formally adopt the Plan at Full Council.

9. Processes to maximise responses from a diverse range of stakeholders

Processes to Maximise Responses From a Diverse Range of Stakeholders

Somerset Council is committed to ensuring that engagement with the Local Plan is inclusive, accessible and reflective of the diversity of communities across the county. In line with national guidance, the Council will use a **digital-first but not digital-only** approach, supported by a range of traditional engagement methods.

To maximise responses from a broad range of stakeholders, the Council will:

- use Citizen Space as the central digital platform for consultation and feedback;
- maintain regular communication through the Plan-it Newsletter, website updates, and social media channels;

- provide printed materials, including posters, leaflets and notices in libraries, community venues, Parish newsletters and Local Community Network meetings;
- offer in-person engagement opportunities, including drop-in sessions, workshops and community events;
- ensure accessibility through Easy Read materials, alternative language formats, accessible venues and proactive responses to individual accessibility requests;
- work closely with schools, colleges, youth groups and the Youth Parliament to encourage and facilitate engagement from children and young people;
- engage faith groups, ethnic minority groups, rural communities, Gypsy and Traveller communities, and disability advocacy organisations using tailored approaches;
- utilise Town and Parish Councils, Local Community Networks and community connectors to widen reach at the most local level.

These processes ensure that the Local Plan reflects the views of a wide range of people and organisations, including those whose voices are seldom heard in traditional planning consultations.

10. Strategic cooperation and cross-boundary working

Effective strategic planning across local authority boundaries will play a vital and increasing role in delivering sustainable growth. In preparing the Local Plan, Somerset Council will work collaboratively with neighbouring authorities, infrastructure providers and other relevant bodies to address strategic matters that operate at a wider-than-local scale.

Cross-boundary strategic matters relevant to the Local Plan may include, but are not limited to, meeting housing needs across the functional housing market area, strategic transport connectivity, flood risk and water management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the provision of strategic social, green and physical infrastructure.

Policy and legislative context

The former statutory Duty to Cooperate, introduced by the Localism Act 2011, has been removed from legislation. In line with the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 and the **proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2025)**, strategic cooperation is no longer assessed as a standalone legal requirement.

Instead, the draft NPPF embeds strategic cooperation within the **plan-making tests of soundness**, particularly whether a Local Plan is:

- **Positively prepared**, including whether it seeks to meet development needs at the appropriate strategic scale; and
- **Effective**, meaning that it is deliverable over the plan period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters.

Somerset Council will therefore address strategic cooperation as an integral part of producing a sound Local Plan, focusing on outcomes and deliverability rather than procedural compliance.

Maintaining effective strategic cooperation

The draft NPPF (December 2025) emphasises that strategic policy-making authorities should collaborate to identify the strategic matters that need to be addressed in their plans and to ensure that policies are aligned as far as possible where strategic relationships exist.

In preparing the Local Plan, Somerset Council will:

- Work collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities and other relevant strategic bodies to identify and address cross-boundary strategic matters;
- Engage with infrastructure providers, county-wide and regional bodies, combined authorities and other prescribed organisations to inform the spatial strategy and infrastructure planning;
- Use joint working to help determine where additional strategic infrastructure is required and how development needs that cannot be met wholly within Somerset may be addressed elsewhere, or how unmet needs from neighbouring areas may be taken into account where appropriate;
- Seek to align policies across administrative boundaries where strategic matters overlap, unless there is clear justification for divergence.

Effective and ongoing cooperation will be used to inform a **positively prepared, justified and effective strategy**, capable of being delivered over the plan period.

Statements of Common Ground

To support transparency and demonstrate effective joint working, Somerset Council will prepare and maintain one or more **Statements of Common Ground (SCGs)**.

The purpose of the SCGs will be to:

- Identify the strategic cross-boundary matters relevant to the Local Plan;

- Record areas of agreement and disagreement with neighbouring authorities and other strategic bodies;
- Set out how strategic matters are being addressed, managed or resolved through plan policies, infrastructure planning or other mechanisms;
- Demonstrate how effective joint working has informed the Local Plan’s strategy and delivery framework.

The SCGs will not be used as a checklist of meetings or consultations. Instead, they will provide a concise, proportionate record of **key strategic issues, actions and outcomes**, with signposting to relevant evidence where appropriate.

Statements of Common Ground will be made publicly available and updated at key stages of plan preparation, reflecting the ongoing nature of strategic cooperation. They will form part of the evidence base supporting the Local Plan’s examination, helping to demonstrate that the plan is **effective and deliverable**, including in relation to cross-boundary matters.

Strategic partners and prescribed bodies

Somerset Council will engage with a range of strategic partners and relevant bodies as part of its approach to effective joint working, including (but not limited to):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbouring Local Planning Authorities • The Environment Agency • Historic England • Natural England • Civil Aviation Authority • Homes England • NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Health Service • Office of Rail Regulation • National Highways • Marine Management Organisation • Local Enterprise Partnership² • Local Nature Partnership |
|---|---|

Engagement with these bodies will be proportionate and focused on matters where strategic alignment and collaboration are necessary to support a sound and deliverable Local Plan.

² From April 2024 the core functions of LEPs have been transferred to combined and local authorities.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transfer-of-local-enterprise-partnership-lep-core-functions-to-combined-and-local-authorities>

11. Engaging with underrepresented groups

Somerset Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out the approach to engaging with under-represented groups, acknowledging that: "Some groups are harder to engage than others and traditional consultation methods may not be effective, and, in some cases, further support may be necessary. The Council will endeavour to take account of barriers faced by groups or individuals."

We have identified a range of under-represented groups that we need to make extra effort to engage with in the preparation of the Local Plan, as illustrated in the text box below. Consultation with, and participation from, these groups will be targeted depending on the nature of the local policy.

Under-represented groups the Council will seek to engage with

Young people

Children and young people have not traditionally been involved in planning issues. Involvement could be encouraged through initiatives linked to University Centres, local Further Education colleges, schools and youth groups or other voluntary and community organisations. To effectively engage young people, information should be accessible, relevant and engaging.

Ethnic minorities

Further work needs to be done to ensure that people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds are engaged and informed in the planning process. Voluntary and community organisations representing ethnic minorities will be routinely consulted.

Faith communities

We also want to ensure that people from a wide range of faith backgrounds are engaged in the planning process. Work undertaken by other initiatives within the Council will be used to guide us in the best ways to engage faith communities. This may include disseminating information through places of worship.

Disabled people

We will seek ideas and feedback from disabled individuals as well as local and national organisations representing disabled people to ensure that community consultation is inclusive and their views are obtained. We will ensure that all community involvement

events are fully accessible, and will always respond to any accessibility requests in a positive way by providing Easy Read documents where appropriate.

Gypsies and travellers and boat dwellers

We will involve gypsy and traveller groups and boat dwellers, particularly as part of the policy evidence gathering process. We will consult members of the gypsy and traveller and boat dwelling communities, particularly where issues are of direct relevance.

People living in rural areas

Residents in rural areas may not have easy access to council offices and may have less access to community events depending on where these are held. We aim to build on Local Community Networks in order to disseminate information and attain feedback at the most local level possible. The development of e-consultation within the Council will ensure that consultation reaches a wider audience. Information, posters and leaflets will be provided for display on village notice boards and in community libraries and mobile libraries for those who may not have access to the internet.

Small business owners

Small businesses have an important role in the local economy. However, there is evidence that small business owners often do not have the time or resources to spare to become involved in planning issues. To overcome this, organisations representing small businesses will be consulted.

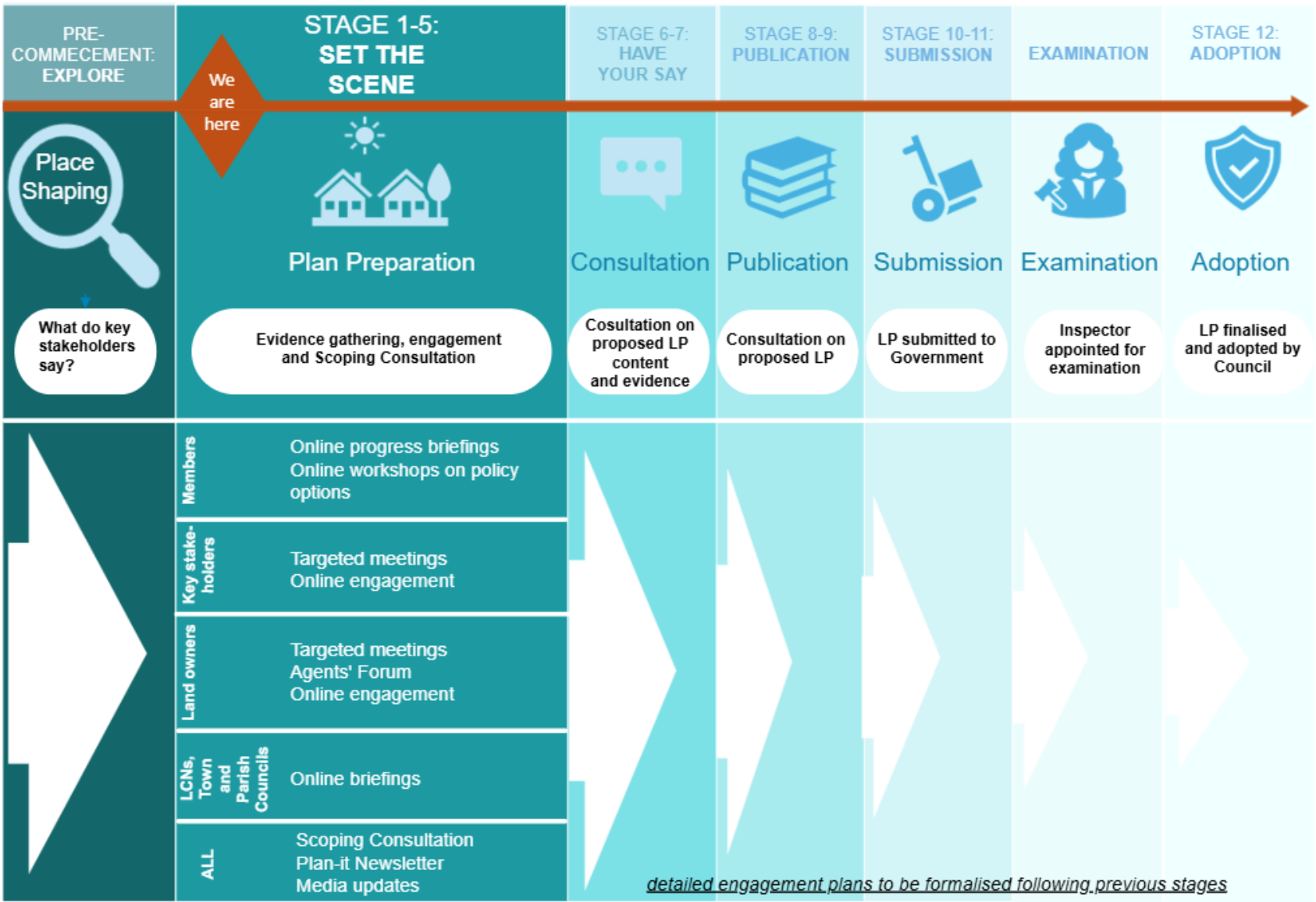
Appendix 1: Consultation and Engagement Activities Plan

Our Consultation and Engagement Activities Plan sets out what we will do for each stage of the process, as well as additional activities if financial and staff resources allow.

Please note that this is a live document and will be updated at the end of each stage in order to prepare for the next stage as evidence and issues emerge. This will enable the Council to engage in a targeted, meaningful and responsive way with stakeholders and communities to ensure that input and discussion happens at the right time to inform the direction of the Plan.

Version control

Date	Version	Overview of changes	Prepared by	Signed off by
8/08/24	1		Thandi Povall	Kate Murdoch
6/05/25	2	Update to progress flowchart. Column added to table, “activities completed” Update to table, Stage 2 Moved table to Excel Spreadsheet (now embedded in Word doc)	Thandi Povall	Kate Murdoch
12/03/26	3	Update to reflect proposed changes to the NPPF, including new Regs and Gateways	Thandi Povall	



PRE-COMMENCEMENT: EXPLORE

At this point in the Local Plan process, engagement and consultation aims to ensure that all interested parties and relevant groups are aware of the launch of the new Local Plan, its context, purpose, and the ways in which they can be involved in its preparation. The Council will seek an understanding of initial views from stakeholders and communities through a variety of means, such as mail outs, press releases, webinars, online activities and meetings. The Somerset Plan-it newsletter is the preferred mechanism for keeping stakeholders and members of the public updated on Local Plan preparation. Subscription is available via the following link: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSC/subscriber/new>

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
Comms	Council-wide	<p>Ongoing Plan-it Newsletter</p> <p>Additional activities (if resources permit)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media - Press releases - Parish/Town - Newsletters 	<p>Inform interested parties about the context of the new Local Plan, its launch, the accompanying proposed engagement strategy, and details on how to get involved in its preparation.</p> <p>Set the new Local Plan within context of the new Council, the new Corporate Strategy, the Local Transport Plan and other strategies</p> <p>These activities are considered necessary and proportionate to ensure early awareness of the Local Plan, to scope key issues and opportunities, and to inform subsequent plan-making stages. Engagement methods have been selected to maximise reach and effectiveness while avoiding unnecessary duplication of formal consultation.</p>	<p>Plan-it Newsletter:</p> <p>Issue 1 4/09/23</p> <p>Issue 2 6/11/23</p> <p>Issue 3 19/12/23</p> <p>Issue 4 1/02/24</p> <p>Issue 5 6/03/24</p> <p>Issue 6 30/04/24</p> <p>Issue 7 9/07/24</p> <p>Issue 8 29/10/24</p> <p>Issue 9 10/12/24</p> <p>Issue 10 20/02/25</p>
Engagement	<p>Planning and Transport Policy Exec Sub-committee</p> <p>Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets (PFH)</p>	<p>Ongoing Programmed regular committee meetings and PFH meetings.</p>	<p>The Planning and Transport Policy Exec Sub-committee and PFH provide a steering function in the Planning Policy Governance arrangements.</p> <p>Answer questions and agree approach to the new Local Plan.</p> <p>Agree Members' role in engaging with local communities.</p>	<p>8 Apr 2025 10.00 am</p> <p>11 Feb 2025 10.00 am</p> <p>8 Oct 2024 10.00 am</p> <p>13 Aug 2024 10.00 am</p> <p>27 Jun 2024 2.15 pm</p> <p>23 May 2024 2.00 pm</p> <p>16 Apr 2024 10.00 am</p> <p>14 Feb 2024 2.00 pm</p> <p>25 Jan 2024 2.00 pm</p> <p>19 Dec 2023 10.00 am</p>

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
Engagement	Members	Vision and high-level strategy Webinar followed by Q&A and workshop Additional activities (if resources permit) In-person workshop and Q&A on vision and high-level strategy	Inform members about the context of the new Local Plan, its launch, the accompanying proposed engagement strategy, and details on how to get involved in its preparation. Answer any initial questions. This webinar will be recorded, publicised in our Plan-it Newsletter and available to view on our website	Member Briefing – Local Plan update 10/10/24 Informal Exec Briefing – Local Plan Engagement Update 16/12/24 Member Briefing – Engagement and Call for Sites 9/01/25 Member Workshop – Early Engagement 22/01/25 Early Engagement Exploratory Workshops with Somerset Members, LCNs, Local Councillors and seldom-heard groups (10/02/25, 11/02/25, 24/02/25, 25/02/25)
Engagement	Key stakeholders Council-wide	Engagement on vision and key themes - Targeted meetings with key stakeholders- Online engagement e.g. through Citizen Space Additional activities (if resources permit) - Drop-in-sessions at Council offices and libraries- Workshops on key themes and vision for the Local Plan	Seek comments from interested parties on key themes.	Early Engagement Exploratory Workshops with Somerset Members, LCNs, Local Councillors and seldom-heard groups (10/02/25, 11/02/25, 24/02/25, 25/02/25) Call for sites engagement: Natural England and SC officers on “Ecology and nature Recovery” 23/01/25 SC officers on Economic Development 24/01/25 SW Heritage Trust, Historic England and SC officers on Historic Environment 28/01/25 National Highways and SC officers on Highways, Transport and Access 29/01/25 Public Health 29/01/25 Minerals and Waste 30/01/25 Health and Safety and Risk Management 30/01/25 Environment Agency and SC officers on Flood Risk, Drainage and Coastal Change 3/02/25 Education 4/02/25 NHS 12/02/25
Engagement	Town and Parish Councils Local Community Networks	Engagement on vision and key themes - Online questionnaire- Online presentation with Town and Parish Council Clerks Briefing note for LCNs Additional activities (if resources permit) - Attend each LCN meeting - Workshops with LCNs and City, Town and Parish Councils	Inform Local Community Networks, including Town and Parish Councils, about the context of the new Local Plan and engagement activity. Seek understanding of key issues facing local areas, and opportunities in the local area. Key issues for discussion comprise: - Context of the Local Plan - Local priorities - Key issues and opportunities in local areas - Infrastructure priorities- Open spaces- Methodology for settlement hierarchy- Evidence required to better understand issues raised. - Desire and capacity of parishes to feed into the new Local Plan, eg through local area assessments, site searches etc	Local Plan Update to City, Town and Parish Clerks 12/06/24 Local Plan Update to City, Town and Parish Clerks 16/08/24 Online engagement with City, Town and Parish Councils on the role and function of settlements and open spaces 21/10/24 to 17/11/24 Video presentation and workshop material delivered to LCNs:- Avalon and Polden 10/02/25- Dowsborough 29/01/25- South East 20/02/25- Wells and Rural 13/01/25- Burnham 21/02/25- Crewkerne and Ilminster 21/02/25- Hestercombe 12/02/25- Levels and Moors 30/01/25 Early Engagement Exploratory Workshops with Somerset Members, LCNs, Local

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
				Councillors and seldom-heard groups (10/02/25, 11/02/25, 24/02/25, 25/02/25)
Engagement	Under-represented groups and community groups Young people	Engagement on vision and key themes - Email information to relevant community and volunteer groups - Social media- Quick polls Additional activities (if resources permit) - In-person or online meetings- Workshops/ other engagement depending on group- Articles for community newsletters - Leaflets for community events - Distribution of posters for village noticeboards Online or in-person activities with Further Education colleges, schools and youth group	Engagement with under-represented and seldom-heard groups is intended to ensure that a broad range of views inform the Local Plan from the outset. Feedback will be used to:inform the emerging Local Plan vision and priorities;identify place-specific issues and opportunities;highlight gaps in the evidence base; andshape the design of future engagement and consultation stages.Engagement activities will be accessible and inclusive, including provision of Easy Read materials and alternative formats where requested. Outcomes will be recorded and reported within the Consultation Statement.	Early Engagement Exploratory Workshops with Somerset Members, LCNs, Local Councillors and seldom-heard groups (10/02/25, 11/02/25, 24/02/25, 25/02/25) 1:1 meetings with seldom-heard individuals and groups: Langport Business Group Reverend from Yeovil Rural/agricultural groups trustee Homelessness charity Citizens Advice Bureau Somerset Chamber of Commerce Video presentation and interactive worksheets sent to all schools in Somerset 5 – 22 March 2025
Cross-boundary matters	Prescribed Duty to Cooperate Bodies and neighbouring authorities	Ongoing - Email - Online meeting	Engagement with prescribed bodies and neighbouring authorities is undertaken on an ongoing basis to comply with the Duty to Cooperate. Early engagement focuses on identifying strategic cross-boundary matters, evidence requirements and areas of potential agreement. This stage of engagement will inform the preparation of Statements of Common Ground, setting out the matters being addressed collaboratively, the actions required, and the timetable for resolution. Strategic issues identified through this process will directly inform the scope and content of the Local Plan and its supporting evidence.	Introductory email 25/03/25 Meeting to identify issues with Dorset 28/04/25 Somerset Local Plan DtC with LPA Neighbours 20/05/25
Call for sites	Landowners / agents	Newsletter Citizen Space Agents Forum	Request submission of potential sites for housing, economic land, renewable energy, Biodiversity Net Gain, phosphate mitigation and other uses through Citizen Space.	Online call for sites – 13 January to 24 February 2025 Agents Forum 17 January 2025

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
<p>Gateway 1 alignment</p> <p>Stage 1 provide the basis for Gateway 1 by: establishing awareness of the Local Plan and its scope; - identifying initial issues, priorities and opportunities raised by communities and stakeholders; - clarifying evidence requirements to address matters raised through engagement; - identifying strategic cross-boundary matters and areas for collaboration; and - informing the next stages of Local Plan preparation, including the development of the vision, spatial strategy options and engagement programme.</p> <p>Outcomes from Stage 1 engagement will be summarised within the Consultation Statement and will inform decisions on the scope, content and timing of subsequent plan-making stages.</p> <p>The effectiveness of engagement activities will be reviewed following completion of this phase, to identify lessons learned and opportunities for improvement. This will inform the design and delivery of engagement at subsequent stages of Local Plan preparation.</p>				

STAGES 1 TO 5: SET THE SCENE

The Council will publish the Local Plan timetable; notice of intention to commence; and run the Scoping Consultation. This stage will focus on early engagement with the public, statutory bodies and other stakeholders, inviting feedback on matters including how to engage with them throughout the plan-making process and what the Plan should contain.

During this phase, the purpose is to better understand the key issues the Plan should address, to inform policies and allocations in local areas. Following the consultation, the Council will publish a Scoping Consultation Report setting out key matters, including: the main issues raised; and responses to any comments received.

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
Comms	Council-wide	<p>Ongoing Plan-it Newsletter</p> <p>Additional activities (if resources permit)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media - Press releases - Parish/Town - Newsletters 	<p>Provide all communities and stakeholders with updates on progress relating to the preparation of the Local Plan.</p> <p>Provide a summary of outcomes from engagement sessions and consultation activities through a Consultation Report.</p> <p>Provide a link to any available evidence produced to date. Provide details regarding future engagement and consultation activities.</p>	
Engagement	<p>Planning and Transport Policy Exec Sub-committee</p> <p>Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets (PFH)</p>	<p>Ongoing Programmed regular committee meetings and PFH meetings.</p>	<p>The Planning and Transport Policy Exec Sub-committee and PFH provide a steering function in the Planning Policy Governance arrangements.</p> <p>Answer questions and agree approach to the new Local Plan.</p> <p>Agree Members' role in engaging with local communities.</p>	
Engagement	Local Plan Cross-Party Member Steering Group	<p>Ongoing Programmed regular meetings.</p>	<p>The Local Plan Cross-Party Member Steering Group is an informal, cross-party advisory body that works with officers to review evidence, explore options, and provide political insight to support Executive decision-making on the Somerset Local Plan, without holding any formal decision-making powers.</p>	

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
Engagement	Members Officers	<p><i>Spatial strategy options/ Scoping consultation development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Briefings - Webinar followed by Q&A - Workshop <p><i>Additional activities (if resources permit)</i></p> <p>In-person workshop and Q&A</p>	<p>To discuss scope of, and spatial strategy options for, the Local Plan.</p> <p>This engagement is intended to support understanding of the emerging evidence base, identify any gaps or additional requirements, and inform the development of spatial strategy options and policy scope. Feedback will be used to refine evidence, test assumptions and shape the next stage of plan preparation.</p>	
Engagement	Town and Parish Councils Local Community Networks	<p><i>Ongoing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan-it Newsletter - Targeted engagement on proposed options <p><i>Additional activities (if resources permit)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-person or online meetings - Workshops/ other engagement 	<p>Share evidence collated so far with Parishes, including transport and place assessment work.</p> <p>Seek update on potential for Neighbourhood Plan updates.</p> <p>Seek comments on how to engage during the plan-making process; and what the Plan should contain. Provide information on next steps in Plan preparation, and further opportunities to engage with the process.</p> <p>Activities are designed to inform plan preparation and option development, rather than to seek views on detailed policy wording.</p>	

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
Engagement	Under-represented groups and community groups Young people	<p><i>Evidence and spatial strategy options</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email information to relevant community and volunteer groups - Social media - Quick polls - Youth parliament <p><i>Additional activities (if resources permit)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-person or online meetings - Workshops/ other engagement depending on group - Articles for community newsletters - Leaflets for community events - Distribution of posters for village noticeboards - Online or in-person activities with Further Education colleges, schools and youth group 	<p>Seek comments on how to engage during the plan-making process; and what the Plan should contain. Provide information on next steps in Plan preparation, and further opportunities to engage with the process.</p> <p>This engagement is intended to support understanding of the emerging evidence base, identify any gaps or additional requirements, and inform the development of spatial strategy options and policy scope. Feedback will be used to refine evidence, test assumptions and shape the next stage of plan preparation.</p>	
Consultation	Key stakeholders Council-wide	<p><u>Local Plan Scoping Consultation.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeted meetings with key stakeholders - Online engagement e.g. through Citizen Space or Placemaker 	<p>Seek comments from key stakeholders on how to engage during the plan-making process; and what the Plan should contain.</p>	
Cross-boundary matters	Prescribed Bodies and neighbouring authorities	<p><i>Ongoing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email - Online meeting 	<p>Engagement with prescribed bodies and neighbouring authorities continues during this phase, to progress discussions on strategic cross-boundary matters. This includes sharing emerging evidence, spatial options and scoping consultation material, and identifying areas of agreement and disagreement. Outcomes from this engagement will inform the ongoing preparation of Statements of Common Ground and will be reflected in the Local Plan's strategic policies and supporting evidence.</p>	

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
Call for sites	Landowners / agents	Newsletter Citizen Space Agents Forum <i>Additional activities (if resources permit)</i> - In-person meetings - Workshops on key themes	Share evidence and seek feedback on 'call for sites' assessment. Consider any further information requirements. Start to discuss potential site and policy options. Provide information on next steps in Plan preparation, and further opportunities to engage with the process.	

Gateway alignment

Engagement during this phase supports progression through the plan-making process by:

- refining understanding of key issues and priorities identified at during previous phases;
- informing the scope and content of the Local Plan, including the vision, objectives and spatial strategy options;
- testing and refining the evidence base;
- progressing cross-boundary discussions with neighbouring authorities and other key stakeholders; and
- preparing the basis for formal consultation.

Engagement outcomes will be summarised in the Consultation Statement and used to inform decisions on the preferred approach taken forward.

STAGES 6 TO 7: HAVE YOUR SAY

During the preparation of the Proposed (Draft) Local Plan content, officers will continue to collaborate with key stakeholders to address issues that cross Local Planning Authority boundaries and fall within the remit of other statutory consultees. Targeted meetings with LCNs, Members, Town and Parish Councils, community groups, key stakeholders and landowners will inform the content of the Proposed Plan.

Work with stakeholders to work collaboratively on cross-boundary matters continues; and progress towards addressing them.

At this point the Proposed (Draft) Plan will be published, and formal consultation on this document will be carried out for a period of at least 6 weeks in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.

During this consultation, the Council will particularly seek representations on:

- The draft vision and any proposed aims and objectives
- The proposed spatial strategy
- A summary of the evidence the Council plans to collect, plus information about any evidence the Council has already collected.
- Scope and level of detail for the SEA Environmental Report
- Other elements, including initial draft policies

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
REG 23 Consultation	Council-wide	<p>Ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan-it newsletter - Social media - Press releases - Parish/Town Council newsletters - Posters in libraries - Online consultation (Citizen Space) - Youth Parliament activity <p>Additional activities (if resources permit)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Webinars - LCN meetings - Drop-in events - Targeted engagement with seldom-heard groups and young people in particular 	<p>Inform interested parties about content of Draft Local Plan, and how to submit representations.</p> <p>Formal statutory notification of published Draft Local Plan and consultation.</p> <p>This consultation seeks representations on the content of the Proposed (Draft) Local Plan, including the vision, objectives, spatial strategy, draft policies and evidence. Representations will be considered in refining the plan prior to publication.</p> <p>Formal consultation is undertaken using a digital-first approach to ensure transparency, accessibility and efficient management of representations. Digital methods are supported by targeted engagement activities to ensure inclusive participation and awareness across communities and stakeholder groups.</p> <p>Inclusive participation Targeted engagement with under-represented groups and young people is undertaken to support awareness of the consultation and to enable participation in making representations on the draft plan. Reasonable adjustments and accessible formats will be provided where requested.</p>	
Cross-boundary matters	Prescribed Bodies and neighbouring authorities	<p>Ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email - Online meeting 	<p>Engagement with prescribed bodies and neighbouring authorities continues alongside the Regulation 23 consultation to ensure strategic cross-boundary matters are addressed.</p>	

Progression and next steps

Engagement during this phase ensures that:

- all interested parties have the opportunity to make representations on the Proposed (Draft) Local Plan;
- representations are transparently recorded and considered;
- the Local Plan can be refined and prepared for publication and submission; and
- Dialogue with neighbouring authorities and other key stakeholders on cross-boundary and strategic matters continue to be addressed collaboratively.

Outcomes from this stage will be documented in the Consultation Statement and will inform the preparation of the Submission version of the Local Plan.

STAGES 8 TO 9: PUBLICATION AND EXAMINATION

Having taken account of responses received from the previous consultation stages and the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal, the Proposed Local Plan will be published for a 8-week period in accordance with Regulation 27 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 which seeks representations on the soundness of the plan.

During this consultation, the Council will particularly seek representations on the soundness of:

- The Proposed Local Plan
- The map of the proposed Local Plan policies, site allocations and designations
- Details of the evidence
- The SEA Environmental Report

During this consultation period, the Council will consult with the proposed Heart of Wessex Combined Authority, on general conformity with the Spatial Development Strategy for the region.

What?	Who?	ACTIVITIES	SCOPE	ACTIVITIES: COMPLETED
REG 27	Council-wide	<p>Ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan-it newsletter - Social media - Press releases - Parish/Town Council newsletters - Online engagement (Citizen Space) <p>Additional activities (if resources permit)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Webinars - LCN meetings - Targeted engagement 	<p>Formal statutory notification of the publication of the Submission Version of the Local Plan</p> <p>Those who made comments at the Reg 18 stage will also need to be notified.</p>	

Stage 4: Key Outputs

- Ensure all interested parties and relevant organisations are aware of the publication of the Submission Version of the Local Plan, its context, scope, and the ways in which they can make representations
- Ensure under-represented groups are aware of how to engage
- Understanding how engagement with all parties has contributed to the Submission Plan
- Clarity on the next steps of Local Plan preparation including examination
- Continued working relationships with key stakeholders
- Preparation of Consultation Statement to record outcomes of engagement and consultation