

High Halden Parish Council

Response to Ashford Borough Council

Ashford Local Plan 2043 — Scoping Consultation (September 2026)

Introduction

High Halden Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the scoping stage of the emerging Ashford Local Plan 2043. This response draws on the Parish Council's Infrastructure Needs Report (attached as supporting evidence), which sets out current and future infrastructure requirements across nine themes, based on evidence gathered locally including Speedwatch data, resident feedback and engagement with local service providers.

High Halden Parish Council will be seeking Section 106 (and, where applicable, equivalent) funding for any development brought forward in the emerging Local Plan, whether within the parish or within the surrounding area, to address the needs identified below.

Chapter 2: Scope of the Local Plan

2.1 What should the Local Plan cover?

Q. What issues and/or challenges does the borough face that could be addressed through the Local Plan? (para 2.1.6)

Response: High Halden Parish Council considers that the following issues, evidenced by conditions in our parish, should be addressed through the Ashford Local Plan 2043:

Rural transport, highways and road safety

- Minimum service standards for public transport in rural parishes. The single Stagecoach service through High Halden (the '2') was reduced in June 2023 and, by 2025, was no longer commercially viable; in this financial year it required subsidies from KCC. The Local Plan should recognise that growth in rural service villages needs a funded transport strategy, not reliance on commercial operators alone.
- A requirement for safe pedestrian crossings on busy through-roads such as the A28 as a condition of housing growth that increases footfall across them — for example, the crossing at Hopes Meadow that was originally required as part of that development's planning permission but has not been delivered.
- A borough-wide approach to Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), developed jointly with parish/town councils and Kent County Council, so rural links are not overlooked in favour of urban schemes.
- Speed management measures (vehicle-activated signs, speed cameras, and lower speed limits near schools, e.g. Church Hill) as a standard consideration for villages bypassed by strategic transport investment, supported by community Speedwatch evidence.

Water, wastewater and environmental capacity

- water supply and wastewater treatment capacity should be tested and evidenced before housing numbers are allocated to a settlement.
- A requirement that developer contributions address existing infrastructure deficits (e.g. low water pressure, ageing pipework, constrained treatment works) as well as the needs generated by new development.

Digital and utility connectivity

- A policy expectation that new development contributes to full-fibre broadband and mobile network improvements in areas with known connectivity 'black spots', such as High Halden, where several areas of the parish have zero mobile signal on some networks.
- Support for community-scale renewable energy generation (e.g. solar) as part of new and retrofitted infrastructure.

Health, childcare and youth infrastructure

- A requirement for health, childcare and youth-provision needs assessments to accompany any significant housing allocation, not only in the main town but in rural service villages. High Halden's pre-school closed several years ago and has not been reinstated, despite clear ongoing demand.
- Recognition that youth provision gaps in rural parishes contribute to anti-social behaviour, and that the Local Plan should support funding routes (e.g. developer contributions) for youth facilities alongside new housing.

Housing mix and affordability

- Clear policy tests for housing mix and genuine affordability in rural parishes, so that development responds to identified local housing need rather than defaulting to larger open-market ('executive') housing.
- Support for community-led housing models as a recognised route to delivering affordable homes in rural areas.

Gypsy & Traveller (G&T) sites

- Recognition of the Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 Consultation, which acknowledged (para 2.3.18):
"...that the rural parishes of Shadoxhurst and High Halden have a high number of G&T sites, accounting for around 50% of the total number of authorised pitches in the borough, and this can often impact on local services."
- On this basis, High Halden Parish Council requests that the Local Plan 2043 exempts High Halden and Shadoxhurst from further increases in G&T permits (both temporary and unauthorised) from 2026 onwards, given the disproportionate concentration of provision already carried by these two parishes and the pressure this places on local services.

Green infrastructure, biodiversity and open space

- A requirement that new development contributes proportionate green infrastructure (allotments, wildflower meadows, play space) rather than relying on existing facilities to absorb increased demand, including additional tree planting along roads such as the A28 for habitat and shading.
- Green buffers: assurance that the aspirations of Policy SP7 'Separation of Settlements' are being met in practice, with a wider spatial strategy needed to prevent the coalescence of Tenterden, St Michael's and High Halden.

Dark skies and light pollution

- High Halden Parish Council asks that Local Plan 2043 carries forward and strengthens the borough's dark skies protections, currently set out in the Dark Skies SPD (2014) and Policy ENV4 of Local Plan 2030.
- Our concern is enforcement rather than the policy itself: much obtrusive lighting falls under permitted development and needs no planning permission at all, and existing conditions (e.g. requiring lighting details, timing controls, light-trespass limits) are not consistently checked once installed. We ask that Local Plan 2043 addresses this through post-completion verification, a clear route for residents/parish councils to report non-compliant lighting, and renewed public awareness.

Community facilities and social infrastructure

- Policy support and funding mechanisms for maintaining and upgrading rural village halls and community buildings, which often predate current safeguarding, accessibility and energy-efficiency standards.
- A re-assessment of what qualifies for Section 106 contributions and the proportion of funding retained by the local authority versus passed to parish-level infrastructure.

General

It needs to be acknowledged that High Halden can only accommodate a wider housing site contribution, if the essential infrastructure that is already at breaking point is seriously upgraded: reliable bus transport to Tenterden and Ashford, and access to medical facilities and school places of the kind already available in larger towns such as Ashford. In the last Local Plan High Halden saw an increase of housing by 25%, excluding ‘windfall’ developments. Subsequently, further development should only be take place where it is proportionate to the capacity of the settlement and where the necessary infrastructure can realistically support the additional population. There is also a need to protect agricultural land, countryside, biodiversity and the character of High Halden.

2.2 What should be the vision for the borough?

Q. What should the vision for Ashford borough include? (para 2.2.6)

Response: High Halden Parish Council considers the vision for Ashford Local Plan 2043 should ensure that:

- Growth is matched by infrastructure delivered ahead of or alongside new homes, not promised for delivery afterwards — rural parishes such as High Halden have experienced housing growth without corresponding transport, water, health, childcare or youth infrastructure.
- Rural service villages are treated as integral to the borough's growth strategy, with the same weight given to their infrastructure and connectivity needs as to the main town.
- The vision explicitly addresses climate resilience and biodiversity net gain alongside housing delivery, consistent with the NPPF's 'Planet' pillar reflected in the Council's Borough Plan 2024–2028.
- The vision commits to protecting and enhancing rural character, safe rural roads, dark skies, and access to nature, alongside enabling appropriate, genuinely affordable housing.
- Measurable outcomes (as required by Policy PM2) include specific, checkable commitments on infrastructure delivery — for example, minimum public transport service levels, connectivity coverage, school/childcare capacity, and monitored compliance with environmental protections such as the Dark Skies SPD's lighting conditions — rather than general aspirations alone.

Chapter 3: Engaging with the community

3.1 How should we engage with residents as we prepare the Local Plan?

Q. Do you have any comments about how we are proposing to engage with residents, businesses and other stakeholders during the Local Plan process?

Response: High Halden Parish Council welcomes the range of methods proposed. We would ask the Council to consider the following in relation to each:

- Digital-first approach (haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk): given the mobile and broadband connectivity gaps evidenced in our Infrastructure Needs Report, a digital-first approach risks under-representing exactly the rural residents whose infrastructure needs are most acute. We support the Council's commitment to continue accepting comments by email and post, and would ask that this is promoted as clearly and prominently as the digital portal, not as a fallback.
- In-person events limited to Regulation 23 and 27 stages: we would ask the Council to consider offering at least one in-person or parish-level briefing earlier in the process (e.g. around Gateway 1),

particularly for rural parish councils, so that local evidence can inform the plan's content before it is largely fixed.

- Email/letter updates via the Local Plan database and social media: these are welcomed, but should be supplemented by direct notification to parish and town councils specifically, given their role as statutory consultees and their ability to cascade information through local channels (parish newsletters, noticeboards, websites) that reach residents who do not use social media.

Q: Are there any other ways that we could publicise the public consultations?

- Notices in parish newsletters, noticeboards and community buildings (e.g. village halls), which reach residents without reliable internet access.
- Direct liaison with parish clerks ahead of each consultation stage, so parish councils can help publicise events locally and flag them at parish council meetings.
- Working with local schools to reach younger residents and families, given the Local Plan's implications for childcare, education and youth provision.
- Locating any in-person events at accessible rural locations (e.g. Tenterden, as used previously) rather than solely in Ashford town centre, given limited public transport from villages such as High Halden.

Q: Are there any groups or communities that you are aware of that find it harder to participate? If so, what steps could we take to help engage those groups?

- Residents in mobile/broadband 'not-spot' areas of the parish, who cannot reliably access the digital-first portal — addressed by maintaining genuinely equal-weight non-digital response routes.
- Older residents and those without private transport, who may struggle to reach in-person events held only in Ashford — addressed by holding some events in or near rural service villages and ensuring public transport or car-sharing options are signposted.
- Working families, single parents and young mothers, who may have limited time to engage with lengthy consultation documents — addressed by providing a short, plain-English summary alongside the full scoping document, and considering evening or weekend engagement slots.
- Younger residents, who are directly affected by future housing, education and youth-provision policy but are less likely to engage through traditional consultation channels — addressed by engaging through schools and youth groups.

Supporting evidence

The Parish Council's Infrastructure Needs Report, covering Transport & Highways, Education, Energy & Connectivity, Water & Sewage, Health & Social Care, Community Facilities, Sport & Recreation, Green Infrastructure/Biodiversity, and Housing, is submitted alongside this response and should be treated as a live evidence base to inform both the Local Plan's content and its infrastructure delivery planning.

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