

# Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Scoping Consultation 2026

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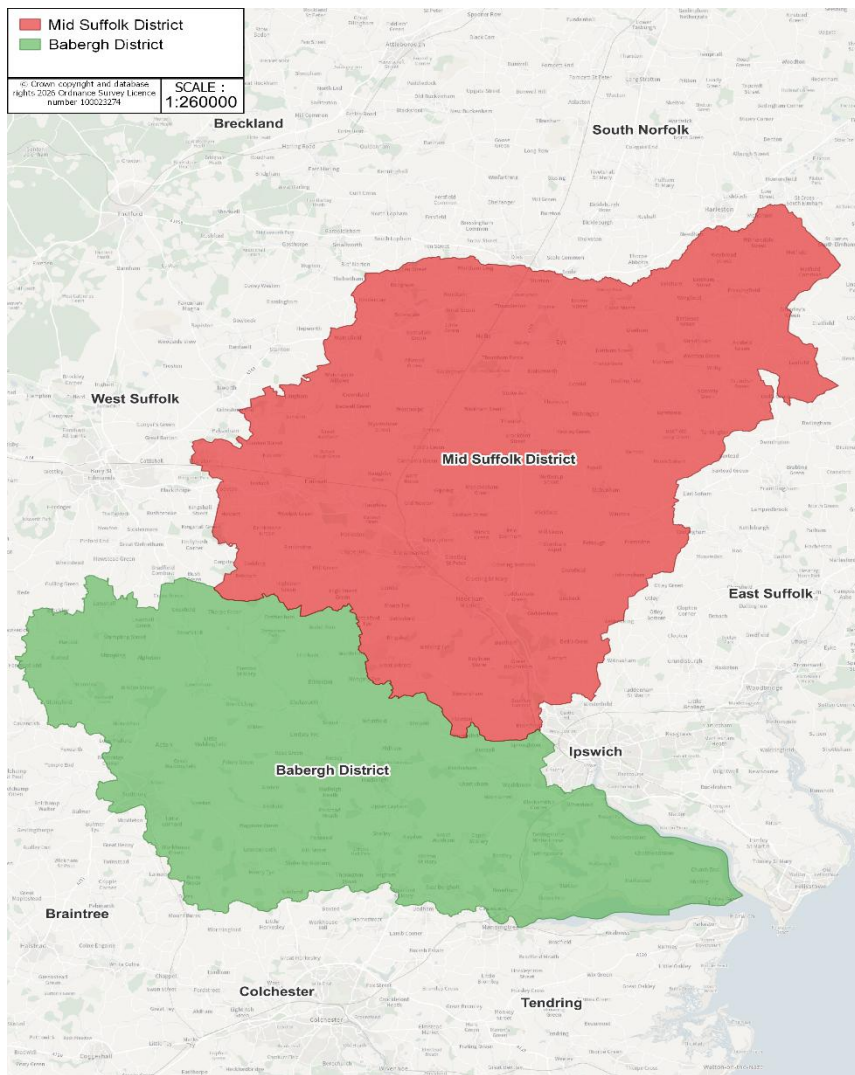
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## What is a scoping consultation?

This scoping consultation is an opportunity for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils to gain views from people that live, work, visit or carry out business in the districts or are statutory consultees. The consultation questionnaire asks a variety of questions to establish what our priorities should be as we start to prepare a new Local Plan.

This document provides some planning context, and we have also published a baseline information document that provides information on the social, economic and environmental factors affecting the districts. Both these documents are for information only and the questionnaire can be completed without reading them.

## What is a Local Plan and why is it important?

Planning involves making decisions about the future of our towns, villages and countryside. The sustainable needs of our current and future communities must also be considered, balancing the need for housing and employment growth whilst ensuring appropriate infrastructure is provided and ensuring the surrounding environment is not negatively affected.

Local authorities are legally required to prepare Local Plans. These plans are essential for promoting sustainable development that aligns with the community's vision and aspirations. Through a Local Plan, councils proactively identify and address the area's development needs, whilst managing the spatial impacts of economic, social, and environmental changes both now and in the future

The policies set out in the Local Plan are very important when deciding planning applications.

## How could the Local Plan affect me?

The new Joint Local Plan will set out the future spatial strategy, i.e. where housing and employment growth will be most appropriately located within the districts and will allocate sites to meet these needs. It will also identify land where development would be inappropriate because of its impact on important environmental or historic assets, and will set out strategies for enhancing town centres and the natural, built and historic environment

## The new Local Plan System

The new Joint Local Plan is being prepared under a new plan-making system introduced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Key features of the new system are:

- Plans must be prepared over a 30-month period (starting from Gateway 1 – see below)
- Ongoing conversations with key stakeholders
- Three gateway check points (see below)
- Early engagement with communities and stakeholders
- Digital first approach, i.e. using new technology to prepare, consult and present the Local Plan
- Councils will need to plan for effective delegation to allow necessary changes for the plan to be made without significant delay through the political approval process.

There are five main stages of plan preparation under the new system;

- Early Work and getting Ready
- Plan Preparation
- Independent Examination
- Adoption; and
- Monitoring.



## National Planning Context

There have been major changes to the Local Planning System, national planning policy and guidance in recent years which will have a big influence on what level of housing growth we must plan for, how Local Plans are prepared and what policies they can contain.

As explained above, this Joint Plan is being prepared under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 which implemented the new, streamlined plan-making system<sup>1</sup> introduced by the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023.

An amended National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2024, which introduced a new 'standard method' for calculating local housing need. This has resulted in significant increases in housing requirements for Babergh and Mid Suffolk. A further update to the NPPF was published for consultation in December 2025, and this may lead to additional changes to national planning policy.

The new Local Plan will be an important part of the wider Development Plan for the Districts, which also includes adopted Neighbourhood Plans and the Suffolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan. In the future, it will sit alongside a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)<sup>2</sup>, which will set out the overall long-term vision and spatial strategy for growth and development across Suffolk and Norfolk.

## Regional planning Context

Councils are required to demonstrate that they have maintained 'effective cooperation' during the plan-making process and have collaborated across their boundaries, including on unmet development needs from neighbouring areas.

Other cross boundary strategic issues which the Councils are collaborating on are:

- Sustainability Appraisals / Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Habitats Regulations Assessments
- Call for Sites and Site Assessments
- Transport
- Stakeholder engagement
- Employment
- Water
- Infrastructure
- Housing Need including Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople
- Potential unmet housing need arising from Ipswich.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/create-or-update-a-local-plan-using-the-new-system>

<sup>2</sup> [Areas for producing spatial development strategies - GOV.UK](#)

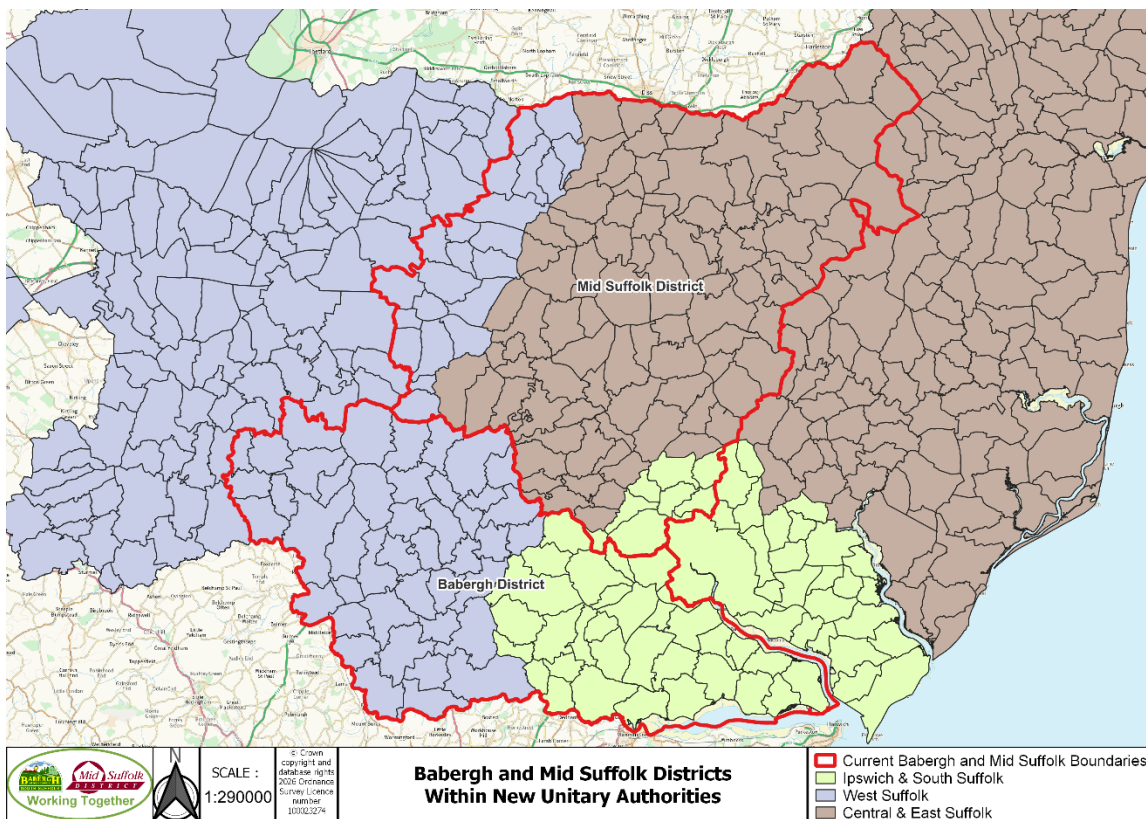
## Local Government Reorganisation

At the same time as a new planning system is being introduced, Local Government in England is also undergoing significant change. In December 2024, the Government announced plans to simplify councils with the aim of making services easier to access and reduce costs, known as Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

Suffolk currently has two tiers of Local Government:

- District and Borough Councils
- Suffolk County Council

In March 2026, it was announced by the Government that from April 2028 there will be three new Unitary Councils: West Suffolk, Central & East Suffolk, and Ipswich & South Suffolk.



Local Plan preparation based on the current administrative boundaries for Babergh and Mid Suffolk will continue with the current Councils being responsible for making decisions on the Local Plan preparation in consultation with the shadow authorities up to March 2028. Thereafter the new Unitary Authorities will become responsible for adopting the final Local Plan.

Suffolk local authorities have been working together on local plan preparation to support a consistent approach and effective cross-boundary working ahead

of Local Government Reorganisation and the creation of three new unitary authorities in April 2028.

Across Suffolk, Local Plan timetables have been aligned and the preparation for the scoping consultation (Regulation 20(4)), the first stage of consultation in the local plan process, worked on collectively. It should be noted that the style of questions asked across Suffolk may vary slightly between authorities to reflect the priorities of individual councils.

The intention is that the outcomes of the scoping consultations will collectively inform the plan-making process and may be carried forward into any new Local Plan boundaries that may result from Local Government Reorganisation.

## **The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Local Planning Context**

### **Development Plan**

The current Development Plan for the Districts comprises:

- Local Plan (current Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 adopted in November 2023)
- Saved policies (Babergh Core Strategy 2014, Babergh Local Plan 2006 and Stowmarket Area Action Plan 2013)
- Suffolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan (adopted 2020 – responsibility of Suffolk County Council)
- Made Neighbourhood Plans.

The development plan is at the heart of the planning system with a legal requirement that planning decisions must be taken in line with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

### **Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation**

The Councils published their Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026 in accordance with Regulation 19 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026. The Notice explains that it is the intention of the Councils to prepare a Joint Plan covering both administrative areas.

The Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation can be viewed on the Councils' websites [www.babergh.gov.uk/jointlocalplan](http://www.babergh.gov.uk/jointlocalplan) and [www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/jointlocalplan](http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/jointlocalplan).

## What have we done so far?

As part of our initial work on the emerging Joint Local Plan, we have begun collecting and publishing evidence on a variety of topics. So far, we have:

- undertaken three ‘call for sites’ exercises
- published a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)
- published a Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment) Scoping Report
- published a Five-Year Housing Land Supply Position Statement.

We will be procuring and publishing the following evidence base documents at various stages of the plan-making process:

Evidence Base Name	
Strategic Environmental Assessment / Habitats Regulations Assessment	Viability Assessment
Landscape Character Assessment	Joint Strategic Housing Needs Assessment
Landscape Sensitivity Assessment	Joint Accommodation Needs Assessment for Gypsy and Traveller, Travelling Showpeople and Boat Dweller Provision
Heritage Impact Assessment of potential site allocations	Transport Study
Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 and Level 2	Air Quality Study
Babergh and Mid Suffolk Settlement Character Study	Air Quality Monitoring of Protected Habitats Sites
Water Cycle Study Level 1 and Level 2	Infrastructure Delivery Plan
Employment Study (Babergh and Mid Suffolk)	Employment Study including Strategic Employment Uses (Suffolk-wide)
Playing Pitch Strategy	Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Study
Built Facilities Audit	Renewable Energy Opportunities
Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy	Housing Land Supply (including Five-Year Land Supply and LP trajectories)
Settlement Hierarchy Review	Open Space Assessment
Settlement Boundary Review	

Updates on progress of the Joint Local Plan are shared on our websites:

<https://www.babergh.gov.uk/joint-local-plan>

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/joint-local-plan>

## Our timetable

[The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2026 Part 2, Regulation 4\(1\)](#) requires that ‘a local plan timetable must contain the following information from the date on which it is first published in accordance with section 15B(8) of the Act’.

The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Timetable is formally published on each Council’s website and please go to [www.babergh.gov.uk/jointlocalplan](http://www.babergh.gov.uk/jointlocalplan) and [www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/jointlocalplan](http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/jointlocalplan) for more information. A summary of the dates in accordance with the published Local Plan Timetable are set out below.

Please note that where precise dates are currently unknown the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month is set out – specific dates will be added once known through future updates to the Timetable.

(a) the date on which the local planning authority will make their notice of intention to commence local plan preparation available under regulation 19(1)	3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2026
(b) the date on which the local planning authority will make a notice of scoping consultation available under regulation 20(1)(b)	5 <sup>th</sup> June 2026
(c) the date on or before which representations will have to be received by the local planning authority in accordance with regulation 20(4) (scoping consultation)	31 <sup>st</sup> July 2026
(d) the date on which the local planning authority will make their self-assessment summary available under regulation 21(3)	1 <sup>st</sup> October 2026
(e) the date on which the local planning authority will make a notice of plan content and evidence consultation available under regulation 23(1)(a)	1 <sup>st</sup> January 2027
(f) the date on or before which representations will have to be received by the local planning authority in accordance with regulation 23(4) (consultation on proposed local plan content and evidence)	1 <sup>st</sup> February 2027
(g) the date on which observations and advice will be sought under section 15CA(3) of the Act in accordance with regulation 26 (gateway 2)	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2027

(h) the date on which the local planning authority will make a notice of proposed local plan consultation available under regulation 27(1)(a)	1 <sup>st</sup> February 2028
(i) the date on or before which representations will have to be received by the local planning authority in accordance with regulation 27(4) (consultation on the proposed local plan)	1 <sup>st</sup> March 2028
(j) the date on which observations and advice will be sought under section 15CA(3) of the Act in accordance with regulation 31 (gateway 3: prescribed requirements assessment)	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2028
(k) the date on which the local planning authority will submit their proposed local plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination under section 15D(1) of the Act	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2028
(l) the date on which the local planning authority will consider adopting the proposed local plan under section 15EA of the Act	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2029