

Update and News

September 2026

Governments new planning policies and our Local Plan

Yet more changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) have been made by the government. The new version is a statement of policy which came into effect immediately – it is not debated in parliament beforehand. Government continues to pursue the idea that 300,000 housing units can be completed every year without end. That figure was last reached in the late 1960s and won't be in the foreseeable future.

The new NPPF is even more focused on producing more housing than the previous ones. It is the policy straitjacket within which district councillors and officers have to work, if we are to persuade a planning inspector, whose job is to implement government policy, to approve the Local Plan.

It's been suggested that not having a new Plan will make it easier to oppose development because there won't be any approved sites. That is plain wrong. Numerous appeals against refusal of planning permission have succeeded in the 6 or so years since the last draft Plan failed precisely because there has been no up-to-date plan. Currently every planning application is measured against the government's maximum housing target for Wealden, whereas our Plan seeks to gain approval for a lower figure (about 65% of the current maximum). Our actual housing need should drive planning not a "top-down" figure.

Furthermore, having a Local Plan is a legal requirement. One Kent local authority recently refused to submit its plan and has been firmly warned by government of the consequences of failing to submit.

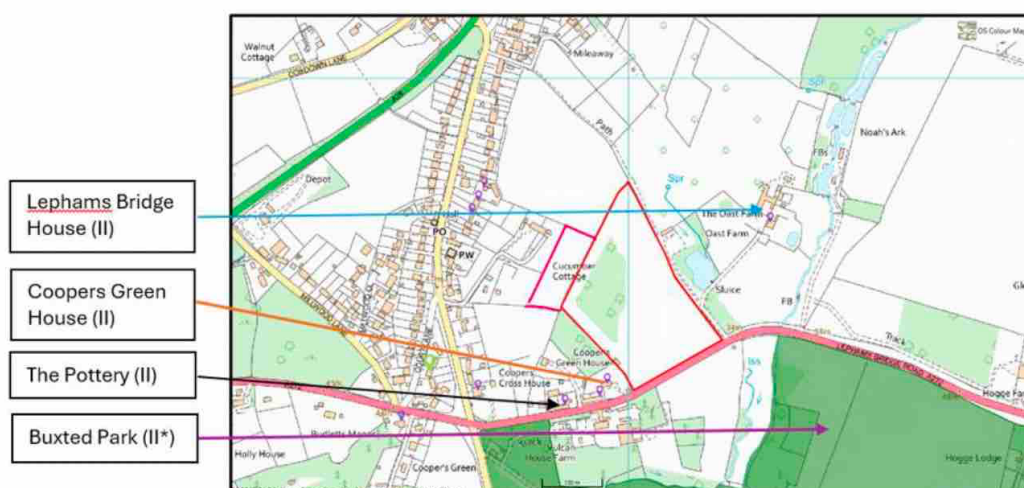
Of course, the Plan is more than about sites for possible development. The draft Plan seeks to deliver a range of policies designed to improve the standard of what gets built; that the excess of so-called executive homes does not continue; that precious water won't continue to be wasted; that we will have stronger powers to refuse or delay development if the water companies won't be able to cope with it; and that nature (such as ancient woodland) can be better protected.

The Council will vote on 18th September on whether to have the final consultation on the draft Plan that the law requires. If the vote is 'yes', the consultation will be underway and will end on Monday, 2nd November. This consultation is about whether the Plan is legal, not about preferences or objections to particular proposals or sites (unless the objection is a legal one). Responses will need to be made in writing – we won't be holding public meetings or exhibiting this time round as they don't really lend themselves to issues of legality. After that it is submitted to Planning Inspectors for approval.

Councillor Ward Budget

As you will know from previous updates, I have had £10,000 to be able to provide small grants to local groups in Buxted. In 2025/26 all the available funds were invested in Buxted. This year I have so far used £9,000 to provide a car parking area for the Buxted Allotments, sports activities for High Hurstwood School, a new gazebo for the Buxted Horticultural Association and insurance cover for the Buxted Together group. I would like to ensure that the remaining money is used, so please don't hesitate to get in touch if you or anyone you know would like to discuss this.

Developer appeals Wealden planning decision



Following the refusal by Wealden Councillors of the planning application for 75 houses on land north of the A272 at Coopers Green, I can confirm that the developer has lodged an appeal. This is an interesting case as the appeal for an adjacent site (the Walled Garden) was rejected by Planning Inspectors largely due to its impact on the heritage assets shown on the map above. The Planning Committee agreed with my contention that it would be inconsistent to then agree an application which impacted on the same heritage assets, already accepted by a previous Inspector. We will await to see their decision this time round.

Crowborough Camp

Despite the earlier suggestions by the Home Office that the Crowborough Camp for asylum seekers would be open for only one year, you may have seen that this has now become three additional years. Attempts in some quarters to paint Wealden Council as responsible for the actions of the Home Office are far from the truth. At every turn our attempts to get information prove difficult and it's clear that the Home Office have neglected to work with our local communities in any significant way.

In the latest twist, last week the Home Office announced that it is applying to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government for planning permission (IE not Wealden Council) to continue to use the Camp to house asylum seekers, using something called the Urgent Crown Development procedure. As the application is to the Ministry, all decisions will be made by the Minister, and not by the Council. The first question for the Minister is whether the legal test for urgency is met. The Council says it isn't, basically because any urgency has been created by the Home Office's own unexplained delay, not by external factors. The Council's case on urgency is set out in a letter that was sent to the Ministry the day after the announcement, and which you can read here: <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/CB-Ltr-to-MHCLG-293B-030926-REDACTED.pdf>.

Local Government Re-organisation

You may have seen that Government has paused proposals to reorganise how local councils are organised. This has only happened in the past few days and we await further information. It seems to mean that the establishment of a single 'unitary' authority is now delayed and will not happen in 2028 as planned. It seems likely that the Wealden Council elections due in May next year, will now go ahead, but how long these councillors will actually remain in place is unclear.

Please don't hesitate to **contact me** to discuss these or any other issues.

Contact me on cllr.graham.shaw@wealden.gov.uk

Wealden's website is www.wealden.gov.uk