

## The 'Site Submission' Process

[I am reading from a briefing note prepared by the ABC planning policy team]

### **Local Plan 2030**

The Council is currently reviewing its Core Strategy which sets out the strategic planning framework for development within the Borough. The Core Strategy will be replaced by a new Local Plan which will set out the critical issues facing the Borough as well as the development needs for housing, employment, community facilities and infrastructure over the plan period to 2030.

A key piece of evidence that will support the preparation of the Local Plan is the 'Strategic Housing Market Assessment'. This evidence will help the Council identify the number of new homes required within the Borough over the plan period to meet current and future needs.

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### **Land needed for housing**

The Council will need to make sufficient land available through site allocations in order to accommodate any identified housing need. To assist in this process a 'Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment' (SHELAA) is being undertaken which will make an assessment of land in order to identify land that is available, suitable and has the potential to achieve housing and employment development in the future. As part of this process the Council undertook a 'call for sites' last July to September asking landowners / developers to make the Council aware of any land available for development. A total of 168 'site submissions' were received during this formal consultation period, since then many more sites have been submitted which we are calling 'informal site submissions'. It is important to note that at this stage the Council has not assessed any of these sites or made any decisions about them, this will form part of the next stage of the SHELAA process.

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## **Community views**

An important strand throughout the preparation of the Local Plan is to engage with stakeholders, in particular local communities. The Council will need to make some tough decisions when considering how to distribute development throughout the Borough and community views will form an important part of this process.

For the last year the Council has been consulting with Parish Council's and Community Forums through a 'Plan-it Ashford' exercise to get an understanding of the key issues and challenges currently facing local areas. Some communities are willing or want to absorb a level of development and others feel that they have had their fair share in the recent past. Part of the Council's role will be to balance the wishes of local communities with the need to locate development to the most suitable and sustainable locations.

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Once the Local Plan has been prepared it will be scrutinised at an examination and therefore it is crucial that we have community input throughout its preparation.

Ashford Borough Council has invited Parish Council's and Community Forums to hold events, either in the form of a workshop or exhibition with the aim of assembling local views on the 'site submissions' in their area. If agreement can be reached between the local planning authority and local community on the suitability and deliverability of sites this provides a strong case for the decision-making process at examination.

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## **Next Steps**

The next stage in the process is for the council to undertake a detailed assessment of all 'site submissions' to understand what the site constraints and opportunities are. This will help to identify sites which have particular constraints, such as flooding or environmental designations that will not be taken forward; or sites with limited constraints located close to settlements that need further consideration. The Council will then sieve out the sites that are heavily constrained or isolated and see what is left. This is an ongoing process and it is anticipated that the Council will want to consult with communities through a further round of consultation once the list of sites has been shortened to those sites with a reasonable prospect of delivering development within the plan period.