

Southborough and High Brooms Neighbourhood Plan

First consultation event on 18th September 2023

Table of Contents

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?	1
Introduction.....	2
About Southborough and High Brooms.....	2
Consultation results	7
Next steps.....	10



What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

A Neighbourhood Plan is a planning policy document, comprising a set of planning policies, to:

- Establish a vision for the parish
- Set out how land should be used in the parish
- Help to determine planning applications within the parish

It is prepared with the community. Ultimately it will form part of the Development Plan for the Borough and the policies will carry equal weight to Local Plan policies in decision

making. It can also contain community aspirations / projects. It can set out how any developer contributions are spent locally.

Introduction

Southborough Town Council applied to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for the designation of a neighbourhood area under The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 on 21 June 2023. The area proposed covers the whole of the parished area of Southborough and is the first step for Southborough Town Council in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. The borough council approved the neighbourhood area on 11 August 2023.

As a next step in preparing their plan, the town council invited local people to attend a launch event held in the Civic Centre on Monday 18th September in the evening. Following extensive advertising on two large notice boards outside the centre, other local noticeboards, in local shops and on social media, approximately 60 people attended.

After an introduction from the chair of the town council's Neighbourhood Plan working group Cllr Brian Dury, they followed two presentations from planning consultant Alison Eardley AssocRTPI and community planner Jim Boot, residents were invited to put their issues and ideas onto six themed tables:

1. Transport
2. Local Heritage
3. Nature, Landscape, Views, Environment, Climate
4. Housing
5. Employment, Business, and the High Street
6. Community & Well Being

188 comments were made, providing a strong idea of the top issues in the area of which the top priority was the empty buildings on the High Street although other ideas were for improved walking and cycling, more community spaces, better facilities at the allotments and traffic matters. An analysis of these is made later in this report.

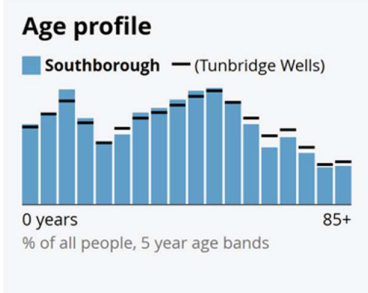
This reports sets out some statistical information about Southborough and High Brooms, some examples of planning policies the plan might include by topic, the steps involved in preparing the plan, the National Planning Policy Framework, some background on the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan, TWBC's proposed policy for S&HB and the next steps (taken from the slides shared on the night).

It also describes some of the consultation and community engagement approaches and tools the town council and the working group may wish to adopt in developing their plan. The full set of slides from the evening are listed in Appendix A.

About Southborough and High Brooms

Southborough has a population of approximately 12,000 (2021 census). The main settlement is the town of Southborough, which is mainly urban in character and forms what is referred to as the Main Urban Area of the borough alongside Royal Tunbridge Wells. Also within the parished area is High Brooms, which is designated as a Neighbourhood Centre and offers a range of services and facilities. The Limits to Built Development (LBD) of Southborough merge with the parish of Bidborough to the north west, and with Royal Tunbridge Wells to the south and south east.

Your Neighbourhood Plan area aligns with the parish boundary



- Key facts:**
- 12,000 residents
 - 4,900 households
 - Ageing population
- Notable features:**
- A26 cuts through centre of the parish
 - Borders with Bidborough to the north-west and Royal TW to the south/south-east
 - Large conservation area to north of the parish area, which includes Southborough Common
 - Wooded farmland and forested plateau
 - 66% in green belt
 - 64% in High Weald AONB
 - Areas of Flood Zones 2 and 3

There are three types of planning policies that S&HB might include in the NP. These are:

Site allocation policies

- Policies that allocate specific parcels of land for development, which might be housing or other uses.

Criteria-based policies

- Policies that are applicable to a range of planning applications and which set out the detailed criteria that should be followed.

Safeguarding policies

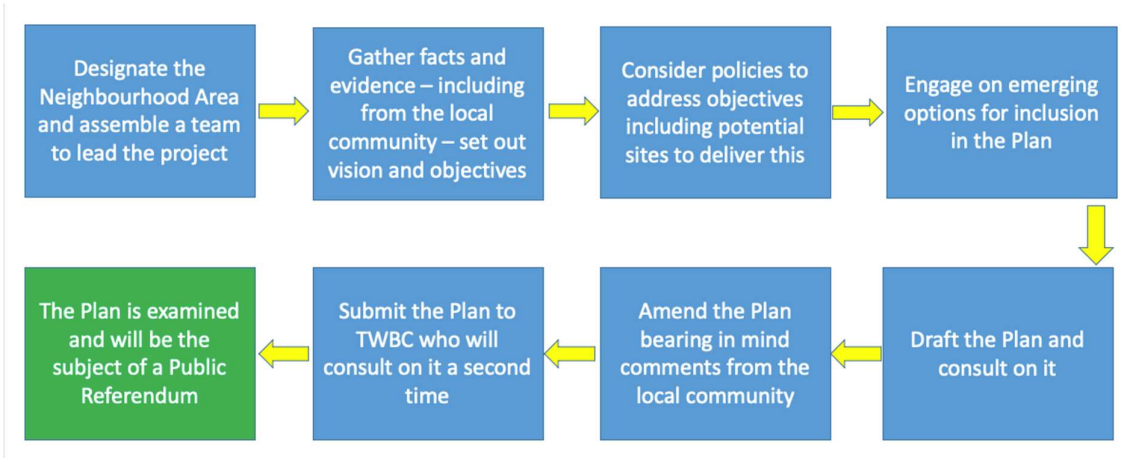
- Policies which safeguard land against inappropriate uses, such as a Local Green Space policy.

Taking these in the themes or topics that the working group has proposed these might include:

Topic Area	Potential policy areas (not exhaustive, but to give some ideas)
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting out where development should be directed – potential to allocate sites • Housing mix, type, tenure, affordability
The natural environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying ‘special’ green spaces and protecting them in perpetuity • Mapping out ‘green/blue spaces and corridors’ and identifying areas that should be improved/better linked • Safeguarding special views and viewpoints from development • Tackling flood risk • Promoting sustainability – e.g. community-scale energy schemes etc.
The built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of development - to reflect local character, include sustainable design features, wildlife friendly features

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying buildings/structures that are historically important
Community facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying where additional provision/ expansion is needed.
Getting around	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying where improvements might be made to walking / cycling paths to encourage more people to walk/cycle locally – 10 minute village concept Car parking – provision, electric charging points
Local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting sustainable tourism Safeguarding important employment sites Supporting opportunities for flexible working / start-ups etc.

While there are different approaches to developing NPs the flow diagram below is typical of most NPs:



Typically, depending on the complexity of the plan, time and resources available, most plans take 18 months to ten years to progress from start to the end point of a referendum, when everyone on the electoral roll within the town council area gets to vote on whether to accept or reject the plan. If supported by a majority of votes at the referendum the plan is then ‘made’ and will be adopted by TWBC.

Alison, then summarised the main reasons for developing a NP:

- The document is developed by a Town or Parish Council (or Neighbourhood Forum) setting out how land should be used and developed in the neighbourhood in future.
- Unlike a Local Plan, it is not a mandatory requirement to have one
- However the policies must be **in conformity** with the paragraphs (the rules!) set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and in general conformity with the strategic policies in the TWBC Local Plan.
- They are usually valid for 15 to 20 years, and there is no requirement to update them although areas are encouraged to review them after five years.
- Sets out policies that are very specific to the local area and can include, but does not have to, site allocations.

A complicating factor is that TWBC doesn’t have an up to date Local Plan which means that developers can make a case for new developments on sites not currently allocated –

although S&HB is protected from such speculative development by being largely within the Metropolitan Green Belt and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is however, expected that the TWBC Local Plan will be adopted in the coming months. It is at present in its final draft and sets out a Strategy for S&HB as follows:

Policy STR/SO 1

The Strategy for Southborough

The development strategy for Southborough is to:

1. Set Limits to Built Development for Southborough on the Policies Map (Inset Map 3) as a framework for new development over the plan period;
2. Build approximately 42 new dwellings on two sites (Policies AL/SO 1 and AL/SO 3), including affordable housing, allocated in this Local Plan in the plan period. Of these sites, AL/SO 1 already has planning permission for 16 dwellings;
3. Identify the Southborough Hub recreation area as a local sports hub as part of the Sports Strategy;
4. Protect and retain the public car park(s) within Southborough, as defined on the Southborough Policies Map;
5. Retain an appropriate mix of uses within the town centre, as defined on the Policies Map, and support proposals which would contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre;
6. Seek developer contributions, either in kind (normally land) and/or financial, from residential schemes to be used towards the provision of:
 - a. one new health facility to replace an existing facility;
 - b. new play space provision to reduce gap in access to provision;
 - c. enhancements to natural green spaces at Barnetts Wood and Southborough Common;
 - d. additional natural green space and food growing areas/allotments;
 - e. recreation and sports provision at Hawkenbury (site allocation Policy AL/RTW 19) and/or at Land at and adjacent to Rusthall Recreation Ground, Southwood Road, Rusthall (site allocation Policy AL/SP 2);
 - f. other necessary mitigation measures which are directly related to the development and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind.

As can be seen the strategy for S&HB is very high level and it will be down to the NP to set out the local context in detail. The current situation is:

- The 16 homes at Speldhurst Avenue Road Allotments have been completed
- The 26 flats proposed at Baldwin Lane have not yet been completed
- In addition, there is an allocation for a hotel at Mabledon

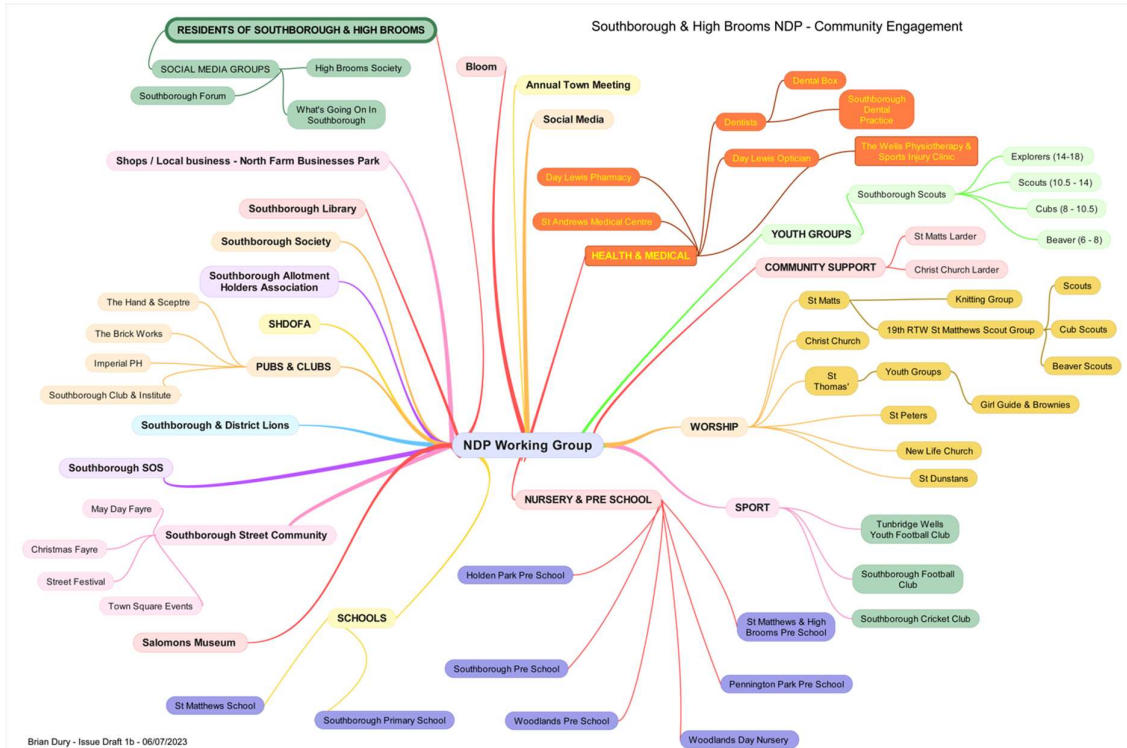
Community engagement

Jim then gave an overview and some ideas on community engagement. As well as the NP, the area will have to produce a Consultation Statement setting out how they have consulted with local residents, other stakeholders such as businesses, community groups, developers and neighbouring councils such as Bidborough. Community engagement and consultation requires a lot of energy and some innovation to make it relevant and important and some groups are harder to involve than others. The launch event was a great start but the area will also need to think about how it engages young people, particularly 18-30 year olds and

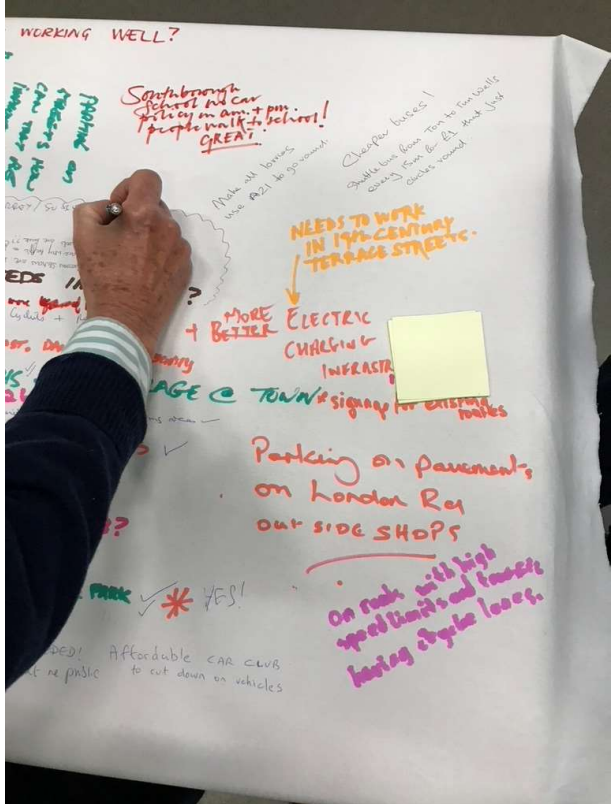
minority groups such as disabled people, Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Jim said that the the most successful plans are a partnership, where the local councils and community jointly plan and design (see below):

	Initiate	Plan	Implement	Maintain
Self-help Community control	Community initiates action	Community plans alone	Community implements alone	Community maintains alone
Partnership Shared working and decision making	Authorities & community jointly initiate action	Authorities & community jointly plan and design	Authorities & community jointly implement	Authorities & community jointly maintain
Consultation Authorities ask community for opinions	Authorities initiate action after consulting community	Authorities plan after consulting community	Authorities implement with community consultation	Authorities maintain with community consultation
Information One way flow of information Public relations	Authorities initiate action	Authorities plan and design alone	Authorities implement alone	Authorities maintain alone

Cllr Brian Dury has prepared a mind map showing all the groups in S&HB that could be engaged in the NP process:



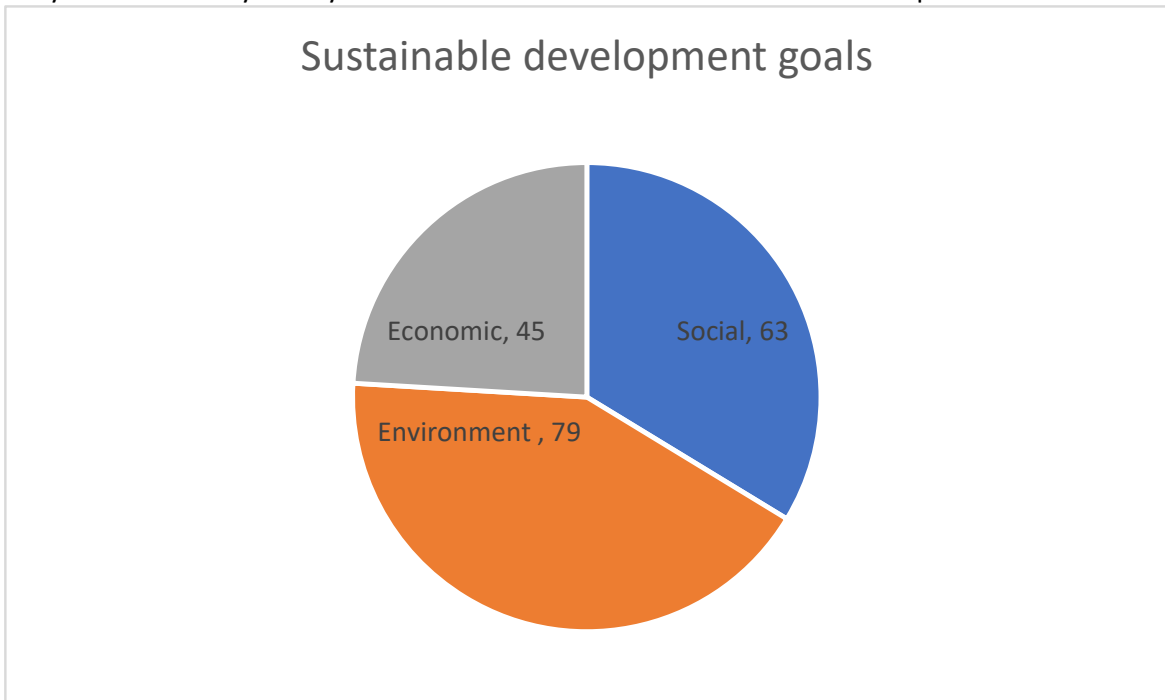
Consultation results



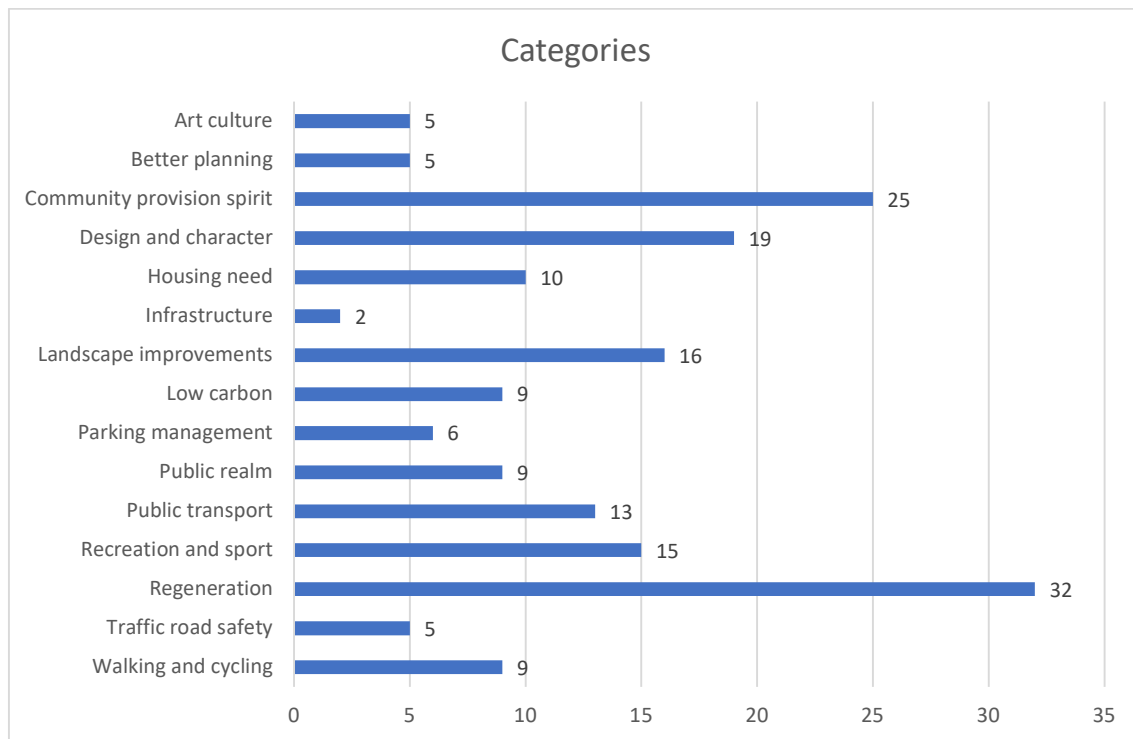
On the evening participants were asked to give their ideas on what was working well (good) in S&HB, what needs improving (bad) and their dreams or visions for the future. The responses were evenly distributed across the six topics.



They were also fairly evenly distributed across the three sustainable development themes:



When broken down into sub-categories, it becomes clear that the regeneration of the High Street, shops and vacant or unused buildings was the most commonly raised issue followed by support or improvements to community provision and community spirit:



Design and character including celebrating the High Brooms brick vernacular was also well supported. This is an area where the NP can move quite quickly as the town council have applied for Technical Support to develop Design Codes in the next few months – prior to the NP being adopted.

It is also good to look at the specific issues raised by participants. These are listed in Appendix B. Here are some examples:

- *Using abandoned buildings as houses instead*
- *Community garden / space St Peter's churchyard*
- *Adventure playground for older children in Crundwell Road*
- *More public transport needed to North Farm / Knights Park / Tunbridge Wells hospital*
- *None of the developments say ordinary homes for ordinary people*
- *Homes need to be genuinely affordable*
- *Southborough is really good - thanks - compared to other areas - lets also be positive*
- *Can we have more bridle paths for horses, cyclists and pedestrians*
- *Parking on streets - how can that be improved*
- *Community orchard - fruit and nuts*
- *Need skate park and legal graffiti wall*
- *Amount of buildings that are empty / derelict but not doing anything, some for years (10+). What can be done?*
- *Smarten up High Street. Look to Tenterden and Faversham for sympathetic design codes.*
- *Could industrial park be moved to other side of railway and used for housing - reduce traffic through High Brooms*

Next steps

The planned next steps include:

- A **community workshop** on 25th October in the evening to dive into the topics in more detail.
- It is hoped that **task and finish / working groups** can be set up (following the 25th October) to gather further **evidence** and also help to develop a community survey to reach out to a larger proportion of the community.
- As well as meetings, **walkabouts** are a good way of involving people in for example identifying important local green spaces for protection and the character and good design, and two of these are to be planned in the autumn.
- These will then culminate in a **vision and objective setting** workshop to be held either this or the other side of Christmas.