

Sandwell Local Plan 2 (2026 – 2044)

Scoping Report Consultation

Overview

This is the first stage of consultation in the preparation of the new local plan, Sandwell Local Plan 2 (2026 - 2044).

A local plan sets out how much development is required and where it should go. We need to ensure that the right amount and type of development is directed to the right places.

What is this consultation about?

The purpose of the Scoping Consultation is to provide meaningful early engagement in the plan-making process by seeking views from residents and stakeholders on what the plan should contain and how future engagement should be carried out.

We want your views on the key issues that will shape our borough. We're asking for your thoughts on

- the challenges of planning for more homes,
- the infrastructure needed to support growth,
- how we can protect and enhance our built and natural environments,
- supporting jobs and the economy,
- tackling climate change, and
- creating well-designed, healthy communities.

This will help us decide the content of the new local plan.

To help you respond to the consultation, this document sets out matters that the Council considers are relevant to the preparation of the local plan, in accordance with Regulation 20 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.

The consultation period will run from **27th July** until **11th September 2026**. Read the text and answer the questions in this survey to respond to the consultation. The only questions that are mandatory to answer are those on the next page, "About You".

You can register to receive email updates on the preparation of the Sandwell Local Plan 2 (2026 - 2044) and other development plan documents such as the Design Code on the webpage:

<https://sandwell.oc2.uk/register/process/0>

Set out below are the main areas of consideration we need to address in the new local plan. These are similar to the contents and scope of the current local plan in some cases; this is an opportunity to make your views known on whether anything needs to be revised and what else should be included or addressed as part of the new plan.

We are also inviting people to make us aware of land that could be allocated for new development. The **Call for Sites** exercise is open from 27th July until 30th October 2026 and further details are available on the webpage:

www.sandwell.gov.uk/localplan2

About You

Please provide the following details about yourself to respond to this consultation.

The personal information you provide will be processed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018. This information will only be used for the purposes of the preparation of the local plan as required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, and may be used by the Council to contact you regarding your submission.

Your name, organisation and comments may be made available for public inspection when displaying and reporting the outcome of the statutory consultation stage and cannot be treated as confidential. You will not be asked for any unnecessary information, and **no other personal information will be published.**

To understand more about why we collect your information please visit our privacy notice page at www.sandwell.gov.uk/privacynotices

Questions

Please tell us your full name

Please tell us your organisation (if applicable)

Please tell us your email address in case we need to contact you about your response.

If you want to receive email updates on the preparation of the new Local Plan and other development plan documents, please register separately at: <https://sandwell.oc2.uk/register/process/0>

Please tell us your postcode

Effective Engagement

We want to make sure your voice is heard as the Sandwell Local Plan 2 (2026-2044) develops. To help us do this, we want your views on how we communicate and engage with you, residents, businesses, statutory consultees and other interested parties. Your feedback will inform our Engagement Strategy that will be published later this year.

Government guidance explains that engagement on plan-making should take place through three stages of consultation, of which this Scoping Consultation is the first.

Expected timeline	Consultation Stage	Summary
July-September 2026 (minimum 21 days)	Scoping	To seek views on what the plan should contain and how we should engage with stakeholders going forward.
January/February 2027 (minimum 6 weeks)	Content and evidence	To seek views on the proposed vision, objectives and spatial strategy.
February/March 2028 (minimum 8 weeks)	Proposed Local Plan	To seek views on a fully drafted Sandwell Local Plan 2.

All engagement will be guided by the following principles:

- **Use of mixed methods** including use of digital platforms, posters and articles, and the council's communication channels, so that all people that live and work in Sandwell can influence plan-making.
- **Clarity and accessibility** such as the use of plain English and accessible formats that can be translated into other languages and converted using assistive technologies.
- **Regulatory Compliance** by adhering to the council's Privacy Notice and maintaining a clear audit trail of what personal data is collected and why.

Publicising Engagement

We think that digital platforms are the most effective and efficient way to publicise consultations. Therefore, the main ways we intend to publicise this and future consultations are by:

- Maintaining a database of individuals who have consented to receive updates on plan-making and issuing information by email at key stages of plan preparation.
- Hosting an up-to-date dedicated website that includes key information and relevant documentation at the URL: www.sandwell.gov.uk/localplan2
- Posting on the council's social media channels including Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn.

In addition, we intend to publicise future consultations using non-digital methods including:

- Publishing articles in the Sandwell Herald, which is distributed to around 150,000 postal addresses in the borough.
- Sending letters to individuals who have requested to be contacted by post.
- Providing printed copies of consultation material in public places.
- Offering briefings to Sandwell Councillors.
- Displaying leaflets or posters in public buildings.

Supporting Responses to Engagement

We will endeavour to make it as easy as possible for interested people to respond to future consultations.

Our preference is that consultation responses are submitted digitally using our publicised platforms. This makes it quicker and easier for us to review your response and take it into account when preparing the plan. The platforms will host a full copy of all the consultation material, which will be displayed as a text-based webpage wherever possible.

However, we understand that you may wish to submit your response in another format. We will therefore also provide PDF downloads of future consultation material on a dedicated website alongside a downloadable feedback form that can be returned by email or post. We will provide printed copies of key consultation material in public places alongside a hard copy of the feedback form that can be returned by email or post.

Contact details for the Planning Policy team will be published as part of the consultation material. Interested people who are struggling to respond to the consultation using the methods described above are encouraged to contact the team for assistance.

Summarising and Considering Responses to Engagement

- We will consider all responses received to each consultation. We will prepare a summary of the consultation responses, set out a response to the matters raised in them, and publish this on our dedicated website.
- We will use the responses received to inform the preparation and refinement of the Sandwell Local Plan 2 (2026 - 2044).
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) could be used to summarise comments in situations where large numbers of responses have been received. If this occurs, officers will always sense check, correct and finalise AI summaries before they are published.

Questions

We've outlined above how we intend to publicise future consultations. What other ways should we publicise consultations?

How do you intend to respond to future consultations on the Sandwell Local Plan 2 (2026 - 2044)?

- Digitally using the publicised online platform (our preferred approach)
- By email
- By post

Do you support the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist with summarising consultation responses?
Please provide any comments.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Do you have any other comments that we should consider when preparing our Engagement Strategy?

Introduction

Why are we updating the Local Plan?

The Government requires us to update our local plan to respond to their reforms to the planning system intended to increase the delivery of new homes and support economic growth.

The new local plan will be prepared under a new national system for plan-making. The government has made big changes to how local plans are put together. Their aim is to make the process faster, simpler and to give communities more chances to get involved.

Even under this quicker system, preparing the local plan will still take two to three years. This is because there is a lot of work to do - gathering strong evidence to support the plan; ensuring we meet relevant legislation; working closely with stakeholders and local communities so they can give their views as the plan develops.

We need to consult directly with communities and stakeholders at three key stages. The Scoping Report is the first of those three consultations.

The new system includes what are referred to as gateway checks. These are checkpoints at different stages of the process. They are intended to make sure we are on the right track and have everything we need before moving forward. In this way, if anything needs more work, we can deal with it early, rather than discovering problems later in the process, which will be costly and time-consuming to fix.

The Sandwell Local Plan 2 (2026-2044) will be examined in public by the Planning Inspectorate. An independent Inspector appointed by the government will review the plan, ask questions, and usually hold public hearing sessions. These hearings allow people to give their views in person. It also allows the Inspector to question both the council and other participants, such as developers who want their sites to be included for development. This final stage makes sure the plan is sound before it is adopted and used to guide planning decisions.

The Council will be producing a new-style local plan that will also reflect further changes to the system introduced through proposed updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This was published for consultation in December 2025. Our new local plan will have to be produced within a 30-month period and will be delivered in a searchable electronic format once it is agreed.

The plan will need to set out a vision and a spatial strategy for Sandwell and will focus on site allocations and local spatial policies. General policies of the sort that are usually found in local plans will be replaced by national decision-making policies currently proposed in the draft NPPF, and certain topics will therefore no longer be covered at the local plan level.

What is the process for updating the local plan?

As set out above, and as part of the early stage of preparing the new plan, we are running this Scoping Consultation to:

- gather views on what the Plan should cover, and
- work out how communities and stakeholders should be involved.

We are also running a call for sites exercise at the same time; this will allow us to better understand what land is available for development within Sandwell.

During this period, we will also be updating our evidence base for the plan. This includes work already completed on our green belt and will also involve commissioning further studies that will provide a clearer understanding of the Council's housing and employment needs, as well as for its retailing, environmental and infrastructure objectives.

The two further formal consultation stages cover the following areas:

- Proposed local plan content and evidence - anticipated January / February 2027: this consultation will focus on the draft vision for the plan and its proposed aims and objectives, the proposed spatial strategy and a summary of the evidence gathered or still to be provided.

- Consult on the proposed local plan - anticipated February / March 2028: this will be a consultation on the full draft plan before it is submitted for independent examination.

Full details of the timescales for this work are set out in the Council's Local Plan Timetable, which can be viewed on the local plan web page: www.sandwell.gov.uk/localplan2

This will be kept up to date throughout the period when the new plan is being prepared.

Consultation on the contents of the plan

Specifically, we are seeking initial views on what the next Sandwell local plan should contain and what our approach to engagement should be during its preparation. This includes developing an understanding of the following matters as they affect Sandwell (referred to as **scoping**):

1. The key priorities for the local plan's *vision* and *measurable outcomes* for its successful delivery.
2. The key considerations for identifying how to manage *the level and distribution of development* in Sandwell.
3. The approach to identifying and assessing *potential site allocations*.
4. Identifying those matters that would benefit from being addressed by *local planning policies* that complement the new national decision-making policies.
5. How we can *engage communities and wider stakeholders effectively* during the plan-making process.
6. What new or updated *evidence* will be required to support the next local plan.

We are at the very start of the process of deciding what the new local plan should cover. As such, there are no sites identified or proposed at this stage, although it is very likely that the sites identified in the SLP will be retained, providing they are still available and suitable for continued inclusion. We are looking at how we choose or retain sites at this stage.

Questions

What do you value most about Sandwell?

What sort of development or types of land use could make Sandwell better?

Call for sites

One of the ways we will look at delivering housing and employment land will be to set up a *call for sites*, where we invite landowners and developers to tell us what sites they have available for development now or in the future and whether they want to have them included in the new plan as allocations (sites preserved for specified types of development).

It is important we identify and allocate as many suitable and sustainable sites as possible across the borough, to provide for different types of development and help us meet our shortfalls in housing and employment land. To help us do that, we will use a site assessment process, which will use information from many sources to help us decide which sites are appropriate.

Not all sites identified to us will be considered suitable for built development.

We would like you to tell us about any land or sites you think might be suitable for development, including land you own, and about what other types of sites might be suitable and available in your area. You might want to consider places with good transport links, access to jobs, or where new homes could help regenerate underused or neglected land or help support underutilised local services.

The Call for Sites exercise will run alongside the Scoping Consultation and will close on the 30th of October 2026, which will allow sufficient time for people to identify potentially suitable sites for development.

More details can be found on the Sandwell Local Plan website [www.sandwell.gov.uk/localplan2]

Background

Changes to the national planning system

The Government has made some recent changes to the planning system that will have a direct impact on how we plan for Sandwell's future growth. These are summarised below.

Changes to housing supply

The Government has stated that councils must plan to meet all their local housing needs and a new mandatory method has been introduced for calculating the minimum number of houses local councils need to plan for. The new method is based on a proportionate increase to existing housing stock, with an additional uplift in areas where homes are less affordable and is updated each year in May. In Sandwell, the housing need is currently around **1,417 homes per year** over the plan period 2026 – 2044 (18 years). This means we need to plan for approximately **25,500 new homes** until 2044. Some of this need can be met on sites that are already allocated in our current plan but that have not yet been built on.

In the existing Sandwell Local Plan, we have identified land for 11,901 homes over the period 2024-2041 against a need for 26,350 homes, which represents a shortfall of 14,449 homes.

Changes to Green Belt policy

Government policy now states clearly that if there is a shortage of land for homes, employment use or other development needs, then authorities should review Green Belt boundaries and propose alterations to them (by changing those boundaries to exclude land or sites from the protection offered by green belt) to meet these needs in full, unless the review provides strong evidence that this would fundamentally undermine the overall purposes of the remaining Green Belt in the borough. This can be done in what are called *exceptional circumstances*.

This is a recent policy change and is different to the context in which the SLP was prepared, when the council was able to choose whether to review and alter Green Belt boundaries to help meet development needs. Consequently, during the preparation of the SLP, Sandwell looked at its green belt resource and concluded that despite the borough's considerable shortfall in development land, there was no justification for considering any release of sites within it.

A new category of land called *grey belt* has now been introduced. This refers to land in the green belt that has either been developed on previously, or that doesn't contribute strongly to the following green belt purposes: -

- stopping the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas,
- preventing neighbouring towns from merging into each other,
- protecting historic towns.

Consultants were commissioned to undertake a review of the purposes of Green Belt land within Sandwell earlier this year. The assessment concluded that 16 of the 31 parcels of Green Belt land in Sandwell potentially meet the definition of grey belt. These 16 parcels cover around 223ha (27.3%) of the 818ha of land that was identified as potential grey belt in the review.

A copy of the report has been published alongside this consultation and can be viewed here -

www.sandwell.gov.uk/localplan2

However, this is only the first stage of the process. Meeting the definition of grey belt does not in itself mean that a site is suitable for development. We will again need to weigh up whether having a shortfall of land to meet our development needs means that exceptional circumstances exist to review green belt boundaries. If exceptional circumstances can be justified, consideration will be given to releasing Grey Belt / Green Belt land for development by following the sequential approach set out in the NPPF:

1. previously developed land,
2. grey belt land that is not previously developed,
3. other green belt locations.

Greater commitment to prioritising development on brownfield land

There is a renewed commitment to prioritising the use of brownfield land - sites that have previously been built on - for new development. This approach is intended to encourage the revitalisation and regeneration of urban areas.

Housing land supply

The current local plan, once adopted, demonstrates that it has a five-year housing land supply. This position remains subject to confirmation by the Planning Inspector. However, if a local authority cannot demonstrate with certainty a supply of housing land to meet local needs for the next five years, national planning policies will take precedence when planning applications for new housing sites are considered. This means councils may find it more difficult to refuse planning applications for new housing, even if they go against local preferences and policies.

Promoting economic growth

There is a requirement for the local plan to meet the needs of a modern economy, including identifying suitable locations for uses such as laboratories, gigafactories, data centres, battery energy storage systems, digital infrastructure, freight and logistics. The current local plan identified a shortfall in employment land supply of 185ha; we will update the evidence base to understand the latest position, but it is likely that there will still be a significant shortfall of employment land.

Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)

Spatial development strategies (SDS) are prepared by an elected mayor or a combined authority. They provide strategic policies for the development and use of the land in the area they cover. The intention is that they should help to deliver growth at a scale beyond local planning. The core principle of SDSs mean that they are expected to address primarily housing and infrastructure issues at a higher than local level. SDSs will provide a clear strategic framework that may identify potential areas for growth and infrastructure delivery.

Sandwell is part of the West Midlands Combined Authority, with the next Mayoral election scheduled for 2028. The Mayoral Combined Authority is a Strategic Planning Body under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 and will lead on the preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for the West Midlands region. This will set out a high-level strategy for our long-term growth and the major infrastructure required to support this. Our local plan will need to be in general conformity with the SDS.

The Government has confirmed that emerging SDSs should not delay councils currently preparing their local plans, but it will be important to ensure that Sandwell engages fully in the preparation of the SDS. We have traditionally worked closely with the three other Black Country councils, and across the wider West Midlands on housing and employment issues, when preparing our local plans and where we have undertaken joint evidence base work.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Proposed plans, policies and strategies must be tested using a systematic, high-level process to evaluate their potential environmental effects before being approved. This is usually carried out through the process of SEA. Under the new planning system, the Government is intending to replace SEA and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) with Environmental Outcomes Reports (EORs). However, at the current time these requirements have not been formalised through regulations and, as such the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 continue to apply.

In addition, the requirement for a broader Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating social and economic, as well as environmental considerations, has now been removed. For previous local plan reviews, the Council undertook SEA as part of the sustainability work on the local plan.

As a result, and during this transition period, SEA and HRA will be required to inform preparation of the plan. In the absence of the formal requirement for SA, the Council needs to consider whether it would be prudent to include the consideration of any appropriate social and economic factors, including impacts on health, education and job creation. This will ensure the most holistic assessment of impacts as the content of the updated local plan is considered.

We have completed a screening exercise and determined that an SEA is likely to be required for Sandwell Local Plan 2 (2026 - 2044). A copy of the screening exercise can be found on the webpage:

<https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/localplan2>

The Council will also undertake and keep under review an Equalities Impact Assessment for each stage of the plan's preparation.

Questions

Do you agree with our opinion that Sandwell Local Plan II (2026 – 2044) should be 'screened in' to the Strategic Environment Assessment process?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

If you think a Strategic Environment Assessment is required, what environmental protection objectives should we consider and what other relevant plans or programmes should we take into account?

National decision-making policies

In addition to other changes to the way planning works in England, the draft NPPF for the first time included national decision-making planning policies that are proposed to be used across all local authorities in the country. This is intended to help streamline the planning process and deliver greater consistency over decision-making.

The draft NPPF makes it clear that:

- national decision-making policies should not be duplicated in local plans;
- where local plan policies are inconsistent with national decision-making policy, they should be given very limited weight when decisions on planning applications are being made; and
- the national decision-making policies are intended to shape both how development proposals are designed and how they are determined.

Areas now covered by draft national decision-making policies include:

Sustainable development

- Achieving sustainable development
- Application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development

Climate change and environmental resilience

- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Flood risk
- Coastal change

Housing delivery

- Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- Housing need and delivery tests
- Location-based development presumptions
- Affordable housing principles

Economic development

- Building a strong, competitive and effective economy
- Employment land and commercial development

Town centres

- Ensuring the vitality and viability of town centres
- “Town centre first” approach and impact assessments

Digital and communications infrastructure

- Electronic communications
- Data centres and digital connectivity infrastructure

Energy and water infrastructure

- Renewable and low carbon energy generation, storage and distribution
- Water resources, supply infrastructure and wastewater treatment

Minerals

- Safeguarding mineral resources
- Facilitating the sustainable use and supply of minerals

Effective use of land

- Density and efficient land use
- Brownfield land

- Development within settlements

Green Belt

- Protection of Green Belt land
- Green Belt release, review and development tests
- Golden Rules for Green Belt release

Design and placemaking

- Achieving high-quality, safe and inclusive design
- Design codes and design quality benchmarks

Transport

- Promoting sustainable transport
- Accessibility, active travel and parking

Healthy and inclusive communities

- Access to open space, sport and recreation
- Social and community infrastructure
- Public safety and inclusive places

Natural environment

- Conserving and enhancing biodiversity
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Protection of designated and undesignated sites
- Landscape character and scenic beauty
- Ancient and veteran trees, woodland, soils, agricultural land and ecosystem services

Historic environment

- Conserving and enhancing heritage assets
- Designated heritage assets (listed buildings, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens)
- Undesignated heritage assets
- Archaeology and the historic landscape
- Setting of heritage assets

What this means is that our new local plan does not need to address these issues directly, unless there are very locally specific and evidenced reasons for doing so.

In addition to the thematic policy areas above, the draft NPPF (2025) includes national decision-making policies covering:

- the decision-taking process itself (policy weight, presumption and refusal)
- development viability
- deliverability
- planning conditions and obligations
- infrastructure and mitigation
- environmental assessment regimes
- specific housing subtypes (including traveller, older person, student and self- build housing)
- rural / agricultural development

These additional provisions materially expand the scope of matters controlled by national decision-making policy and limit the potential role of locally derived development management policies.

Local policies for the proposed local plan

Only policies that do not materially conflict or repeat the new national policies identified above can be included in a new local plan, and they must be backed by robust, locally relevant evidence.

Based on the SLP and the policies it currently includes, the following topics could be addressed by locally specific policies, with sufficient robust evidence used to support them:

- **strategic policies** – the development strategy, place-specific regeneration, cultural and community facilities and provision, green belt
- **housing** – allocations, type, density, location, capacity etc., HMOs / protecting family housing
- **employment** – type / capacity / location /etc., future growth markets
- **environment** – protection and enhancement of trees, habitat banks, habitat creation / protection as part of multi-functional allocations, local biodiversity priorities (e.g. SINCs, SLINCs), local geodiversity and UNESCO geopark, local historic environment issues such as industrial heritage
- **waste** – local allocations, safeguarding of sites
- **infrastructure** – type / location / extent etc, gaps in provision, improvements, opportunities
- **climate change** – local heat network opportunities and proposals (e.g. related to Kelvin Way energy from waste facility), local priorities, opportunities for carbon capture etc.
- **the Rowley Hills** – protection from inappropriate development and continued designation as strategic open space, value for nature conservation
- **the local canal network** – its importance for leisure, recreation, infrastructure and the environment
- **health and wellbeing** – need for new facilities, emergency / education / other service requirements, open space provision and protection, playing fields
- **local development management issues** – tall buildings, gateway sites, development standards, design code.
- **specific place-based policies** – regeneration, new opportunities.

We are looking for public input on whether these are the right issues to cover in the new local plan.

If there are other local topics that need to be addressed, that are not dealt with by national policies or under the suggested local policy areas, please let us know.

There are lots of considerations that inform how we decide where development should be located. The factors that shape the right development in the right places include:

- National policy - legal requirements and national planning rules that all councils must follow.
- Development needs - development should be directed to places where it is needed, and where there is market demand. This could include affordable and specialist housing, and land for businesses and investment.
- Role and function of towns and places - development should be directed to places with shops, services and facilities.
- Transport services - development should be directed to places that are well served by buses or trains.
- Community views - what local people, businesses, and organisations tell us is important.
- Land availability - land needs to be available, with a realistic prospect of being developed.
- Land suitability - land needs to be appropriate for the use proposed. Development will need to consider constraints; these include environmental designations, flood risk areas, heritage assets and infrastructure capacity.

- Opportunities - areas where development could bring wider benefits. These could include regeneration, improved services, or job creation.
- Making the best use of land - ensuring development uses land efficiently. Examples include higher densities of development, using brownfield land and using existing infrastructure.

Questions

What locally specific policies could we include? Select all that apply.

- Strategic policies
- Housing
- Employment
- Environment
- Waste
- Infrastructure
- Climate change
- The Rowley Hills
- The local canal network
- Health and wellbeing
- Local development management issues
- Specific place-based policies

What other locally specific policies could we include?

What else do we need to consider in planning for supporting infrastructure?

Order the following supporting infrastructure based on its importance to you.

- New and improved community centres
- Investment in hospitals, health centres and GP surgeries
- Affordable housing
- Parks and open spaces
- New and improved schools
- Better public transport
- Better roads
- Investment in policing and blue light services

The Spatial Strategy for Sandwell

The 'starting point' of a spatial strategy is generally the amount of development that needs to be identified in the local plan - how much housing and employment should we plan to deliver?

Housing

The amount of housing planned to be delivered is known as the **housing requirement**.

Local Housing Need

When preparing options for the housing requirement the starting point is **local housing need**, which the Government has made clear is the minimum amount of housing to be planned for – on this we have no choice.

To assess local housing need, the Government has developed a **mandatory standard methodology**. This involves the consideration of two key datasets:

- a. Existing housing stock – how many homes there are now.
- b. The housing affordability ratio – how 'affordable' that existing housing is.

Using this methodology, we have calculated that in Sandwell (on 21st May 2026) there is an annual local housing need of **1,417** dwellings, equating to **25,506** dwellings over the plan period to **2026-2044**.

Affordable housing

We have been successful in delivering some affordable homes in Sandwell, but we need more. These homes need to be in the right locations to meet the needs of residents. We also need to provide homes that are suitable for different stages of peoples' lives and to help those residents with health or physical requirements.

It has not been possible to include affordable housing on all new housing developments. This includes in areas where there is a clear need for them. This is because some developments would not be viable if they included affordable homes, meaning they might not be able to be built at all. Viability challenges have been a major issue in Sandwell for a long time; they have not gone away, and increased building costs in recent years have not helped.

Sandwell's requirement in 2024 for affordable housing was assessed to be around **365 homes annually**; we will look to update this evidence throughout the production of the latest plan.

Questions

Do you think that the government target to build 25,506 new homes in Sandwell between 2026 and 2044 is too little, too much, or about right?

- Too little
- Too much
- About right

What do you think we need to consider in planning for more homes?

Are there any places in Sandwell that you think could benefit from new homes?

Employment

The amount of employment land to be made available for economic development is known as the **employment land requirement**. The local plan must ensure that the scale of the employment land requirement will meet Sandwell's **local employment land needs** arising from local business growth and inward investment into the borough.

When preparing options for the employment land requirement, the starting point is to understand the demands and opportunities for economic growth in Sandwell. This will be achieved through an Economic Development Needs Assessment, which will describe the borough's local employment land needs and recommend 'reasonable options' for the employment land requirement.

Although there is a standard method for assessing housing need, there is no similar nationally prescribed approach to assessing local employment land need. The methodology used to assess this will therefore reflect national guidance and best practice in assessing local business growth, inward investment and the future growth of the local economy in Sandwell.

Using national employment data from 2024 (NOMIS) and asking CoPilot to analyse it, we can start to see what employment in Sandwell currently looks like:

- *Health and social care* is the largest employment sector
- *Logistics* is a key economic driver
- *Manufacturing* remains a core strength in Sandwell
- *Retail* is a large employment sector, but has undergone structural change since the growth of online shopping and the pandemic in 2020
- *Hospitality* is highly dependent on part-time working

Although there are many other employment-generating activities present in Sandwell, these five broad areas accounted for around 63% of all jobs in the borough in 2024 (NOMIS).

This gives us a broad understanding of where demand may arise for more land and premises over the plan period for specific industries:

- Logistics and distribution (strong growth, B8 demand)
- Advanced manufacturing (retain and modernise B2)
- Business services (emerging office demand)
- Health and care (long-term structural growth)

Both logistics and manufacturing provide more employment on average in Sandwell than in the rest of the UK – around 21 -22% of local jobs, compared to the UK average of 17%.

On this basis, we predict that we will need around **212ha** of land for employment use to the end of the plan period in **2044**.

Questions

Do you think the amount of employment land being planned for is too little, too much, or about right?

- Too little
- Too much
- About right

What types of employment should we be seeking to support and expand in Sandwell?

Where do you think new jobs should be located in Sandwell? Tick all that apply.

- Town centres
- Retail parks and shopping areas
- Near public transport hubs (train stations, bus stops, metro stops)

- **Near motorway junctions**
- **Existing industrial estates and business parks**
- **Regeneration areas (redeveloped or brownfield sites)**
- **Close to where people live**
- **Away from where people live**
- **On greenfield sites on the edge of Sandwell**
- **No preference / jobs should be spread evenly across Sandwell**

Other Considerations

National policy requires that we consider whether any unmet housing or employment land needs are arising in neighbouring areas and whether it would be appropriate and sustainable to accommodate these additional needs in Sandwell.

We are committed to undertaking effective co-operation with neighbouring local councils during the local plan process. However, significant changes are now being implemented in both the plan-making process and in national policy. This makes it difficult to determine where unmet housing or employment land needs might arise in neighbouring areas and whether it would be appropriate or even possible to accommodate any of that overspill need in Sandwell.

Questions

Should Sandwell accommodate new homes and employment land that doesn't fit in other local authority areas?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Should we ask other local authorities to accommodate new homes and employment land that doesn't fit in Sandwell?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

The Natural and Historic Environment

Sandwell's green and open spaces are vital to the character and appearance of the borough, and to the health and wellbeing of its inhabitants. Access to nature, to parks and to areas for leisure and recreation are vital for healthy communities as well as to the wildlife that lives in and visits Sandwell. We are committed to preserving and enhancing these areas wherever possible, and to protecting them from unjustified harm.

As part of this, we will protect areas like Sandwell Valley Country Park and the Rowley Hills against inappropriate development, as well as continue to balance the need for new housing and employment sites with the need to secure the retention of sites with value for nature conservation.

However, given national and more local demands to deliver a higher level of housing development in particular, we may have to consider whether certain areas and sites need to be identified for future development. To do this will be difficult and challenging, so we will need to be very clear about how we go about this. In particular, any greenfield / previously undeveloped sites that may be released for development will need to have undergone a rigorous and balanced assessment before that happens.

Sandwell also has a long industrial history, which has resulted in some areas of very high importance for both local and national built heritage. While the new national policies are designed to address requirements around the historic environment, we may decide there are concerns that we want to control through specific local planning policies.

We are looking for your thoughts on how we should protect the environment, and on what aspects are of most significance to you.

Questions

How should we balance the need for more homes with protecting open spaces, the natural environment and the Green Belt?

What parts of the natural environment are most important to you?

- **Small open spaces in your neighbourhood**
- **Large open spaces like Sandwell Valley Country Park, Warley Woods, Haden Hill Park or Victoria Park (or any other open spaces across the borough)**
- **Trees and woodland**
- **Canals, rivers and watercourses**
- **Areas protected for nature**

Do you think we need a special approach to buildings that relate to historic local industry?

Which parts of the local historic environment are most important to you?

Do you think planning and development should support climate action and green energy in Sandwell?

Vision

The development strategy of the recent SLP seeks to optimise the growth potential of the existing urban area. This includes intensifying development in the strategic and other town centres and making the best possible use of brownfield sites for both housing and employment, in preference to undeveloped or greenfield ones. It is confirmed in the plan that it is not possible to meet all of Sandwell's development needs within the existing urban area or on those brownfield sites that are available. However, under the previous planning rules the council could choose not to allocate any land within the green belt for development.

Draft Vision

While the purpose of this consultation is to find out from you how we should approach development in Sandwell and what the new plan should aim for as its vision, based on our previous work, a new version might address issues such as:

- healthy, inclusive neighbourhoods
- well-connected locations
- revitalised town centres
- high-quality, affordable and adaptable homes
- protection and enhancement of biodiversity and green spaces
- canal network
- industrial and manufacturing heritage
- innovation and technology
- energy security, net-zero carbon technology and buildings
- a growing economy and new jobs and skills

Question

Order the following topics based on their importance to you.

- healthy, inclusive neighbourhoods
- well-connected locations
- revitalised town centres
- high-quality, affordable and adaptable homes
- protection and enhancement of biodiversity and green spaces
- canal network
- industrial and manufacturing heritage
- innovation and technology
- energy security, net-zero carbon technology and buildings
- a growing economy and new jobs and skills

Are there any other topics we should consider when drafting the vision?

Objectives

Sandwell has updated its local plan very recently, and we believe most of the issues we addressed in the SLP are still going to be current considerations for this new one. It also means that we can reuse a lot of the evidence we gathered previously (helping to keep costs down), as well as using our previous objectives to look at what topics the new plan should address.

Relevant objectives in the current local plan are considered below with an indication of the sorts of challenges and opportunities we think we should be addressing as we prepare our updated plan. We have also listed the sorts of evidence we think we will need to produce or update to support the new objectives and policies.

Questions

How can planning and development support high-quality development, which is appropriate for and reflective of Sandwell?

How can we ensure new development promotes healthy and active lifestyles for new and existing communities?

How can we make public places and open spaces more user-friendly and help people feel safer in them?

Obj. No.	Objective	Challenges and opportunities	Key Delivery Mechanisms	Evidence base
1	Housing Boost the supply of homes and meet identified local needs, including affordable and accessible housing	Challenges Lack of suitable sites for different types of housing Inadequate or ageing infrastructure Lack of viability for the provision of accessible, affordable and lower-cost housing Managing issues around the loss of family sized housing and the continued concerns around the proliferation of HMOs in unsuitable locations Opportunities Explore opportunities to deliver sufficient levels of housing, including affordable housing. Explore delivering housing designed to be accessible and adaptable Explore the needs of Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, and opportunities to meet their need.	housing and G&T allocations site identification and assessment; Mixed-use policies; affordable housing policy; accessible / adaptable standards; tenure mix requirements; monitoring outcomes	Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Sandwell Design Guide Site selection and assessment Methodology Call for Sites exercise Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) Public and Sustainable Transport Study / Assessment Viability Study Housing and Employment Land Needs Assessment (HELNA) Urban capacity study Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Viability Study Green Belt Study Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)
2	Economic growth and jobs	Challenges Lack of suitable sites for different types of employment use	employment allocations; mixed-use policies; skills and employment linkage	HELNA Urban capacity study Viability Study

Obj. No.	Objective	Challenges and opportunities	Key Delivery Mechanisms	Evidence base
	Support a strong, responsive and competitive economy	Lack of large sites to accommodate firms wishing to move to Sandwell or local firms wishing to expand / extend their operations Opportunities Highly accessible location with strong links to regional and national markets Tradition of innovation and manufacturing excellence		Green Belt Study Call for Sites exercise
3	Sustainable locations for growth Direct development to sustainable locations to reduce the need to travel and maximise existing infrastructure	Challenges Lack of vacant land [any infrastructure issues] Opportunities Explore potential for developments around transport infrastructure	strategic allocations; accessibility thresholds; transport-led site selection	Site selection and assessment Methodology Urban capacity study Green Belt Study Call for Sites exercise Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)
4	Natural and historic environment Conserve and enhance the natural and historic environment	Challenges Impacts of overdevelopment in urban areas on the local environment Impacts on green belt of the need to find additional sites Impacts on urban and wildlife corridors Opportunities Enabling development to enhance historic environment Surveying nature conservation sites may provide development opportunities	Biodiversity Net Gain; green infrastructure delivery; heritage-led regeneration; West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) projects including Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC); regional habitat bank; LNRS	Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Biodiversity Net Gain Strategy (refresh) West Midlands Habitat Bank / Special Purpose Vehicle work Historic Landscape Character Assessment / Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Nature conservation surveys

Obj. No.	Objective	Challenges and opportunities	Key Delivery Mechanisms	Evidence base
		Incorporating blue and green infrastructure into developments		Green belt study
5	Thriving town centres Promote town centres as the heart of communities through a flexible, mixed-use approach	Challenges Changing spending and shopping habits continuing Impact of vacant properties on vitality and viability Anti-social behaviour and perceived threats to personal safety Opportunities Integrate live work and leisure opportunities Enhance community facilities	Town centre strategies; public realm investment; flexible use policies	Viability Study Town Centres Study Town centres surveys Hot food takeaways / gambling and alternative financial services
6	Safe and resilient communities Create safe, inclusive and resilient places through good design	Challenges Anti-social behaviour Making open spaces more attractive and amenable Opportunities Creating defensible places through good design Increasing inclusivity	Design policies; Secured by Design principles; community infrastructure provision	Design Guide Plans for Towns
7	High-quality design and character Achieve well-designed places that respond to local character and identity	Challenges Viability of development proposals Conflict of density and character Development constraints i.e. flood risk, contamination Opportunities Provide nice places to live	Design codes; Building for a Healthy Life assessment; design review	Design Guide Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Viability Study

Obj. No.	Objective	Challenges and opportunities	Key Delivery Mechanisms	Evidence base
		Incorporate new innovative design that responds to issues		
8	Healthy and inclusive places Enable healthy lifestyles and reduce health inequalities	Challenges Continued poorer life outcomes for residents Deprivation Maintaining cleaner neighbourhoods Opportunities Creating healthier areas Improving access to education and health facilities Improving access to open spaces Reduction of air pollution Creation of walkable communities	Health Impact Assessments; open space standards; active travel infrastructure	Playing Pitch Strategy Indoor / built facilities assessment Open / Green Spaces Strategy Sustainability Assessment (SA) / SEA Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) IDP Health Impact Assessment (HIA)
9	Net-zero carbon development Require development to mitigate and adapt to climate change, minimising emissions and future-proofing growth	Challenges Viability Impacts on residents of pollution and weather extremes Difficult to retrofit High energy prices causing financial constraint to residents Opportunities Reduced energy prices Positive impacts companies designing and manufacturing zero carbon technologies. Energy security	Local plan carbon standards; energy statements; retrofit programmes; viability-tested requirements	Climate Change Strategy Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and Water Cycle Study (WCS) Energy Infrastructure Assessment? Design Guide

Obj. No.	Objective	Challenges and opportunities	Key Delivery Mechanisms	Evidence base
		Energy efficient buildings		
10	Efficient land and infrastructure use Make effective use of land and ensure infrastructure is delivered in a timely manner	Challenges Inadequate or ageing infrastructure Viability Lack of vacant land Opportunities Developments provide required infrastructure Enhance the existing infrastructure Sustainable growth	Brownfield-first strategy; density policies; Infrastructure Delivery Plan; S106 / Community Infrastructure Levy	Design Guide Viability Study IDP

Questions

What are your views on the **proposed objectives**?

Have we identified the right **challenges and opportunities**?

Place-Based Objectives

These objectives provide spatial clarity for local towns and demonstrate that the SLP 2 is deliverable at a local level, through responding to distinct character areas and local regeneration priorities.

West Bromwich

- Maintain West Bromwich's role as the borough's primary focus for growth and regeneration, supporting high-density, mixed-use development around the town centre and co-located transport hubs.
- Strengthen its role as a cultural, social, retail and residential destination through public realm improvements and regeneration of underutilised sites.

Smethwick

- Support regeneration-led development that delivers new homes, employment space and improved environmental quality, particularly along key corridors and canalside locations.
- Protect and enhance heritage assets as a catalyst for place identity and investment.
- Support the delivery of those aspects of the Town Plan linked to development and land use

Oldbury

- Reinforce Oldbury as a service and employment centre, supporting redevelopment of brownfield land for employment-led and mixed-use schemes.
- Improve connectivity between the town centre, residential areas and strategic transport routes.

Rowley Regis

- Deliver housing growth that respects local character and landscape setting, focusing development on accessible and previously developed land.
- Enhance access to green infrastructure and protect the Rowley Hills as a defining environmental asset and Strategic Open Space.

Tipton

- Make the most of the new Midland Metro Extension and promote employment growth and modern industrial development, alongside complementary residential uses where compatible.
- Improve environmental quality and active travel connections between neighbourhoods and employment areas.

Wednesbury

- Support town centre renewal and strategic employment growth linked to the Metro and wider Black Country connectivity.
- Encourage higher-density, well-designed development in accessible locations to maximise transport investment.
- Continue to support the regeneration of the centre through a focus on its heritage and historic aspects.

Questions

Are there any other place-based issues we need to address in relation to Sandwell's towns and centres?

Is there anything else you feel we should consider as we start to prepare to update our Local Plan?