

NEDRA Summary of Key Points from the Sevenoaks District Council Development and Conservation Committee 24 September 2024

Housing Targets & Planning Concerns:

- The government's new method for calculating housing targets has raised Sevenoaks' requirement from 704 to **1,113** new homes per year, **a 58% increase**. This means the district must deliver 6,000 more homes than originally planned over the next 15 years. The quota has now gone **from 10,500 homes to 16,500**. If that increase is applied to Edenbridge pro-rata, the numbers in the existing draft Local Plan could rise from 1534 new homes to **2424** new homes.
- Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) is concerned that this method doesn't consider local needs and conditions accurately. They believe it overestimates housing needs due to its focus on existing housing stock rather than local affordability.
- As Edenbridge is expected to face a significant increase in housing under the new local plan, concerns were raised about whether the town has the capacity to absorb this level of development without overwhelming its character and existing infrastructure.

Infrastructure & Community Input:

- The Infrastructure Development Plan is in progress, with providers being consulted. However, much of the planning depends on knowing where future growth will be concentrated.
- The council emphasised the importance of public engagement in planning decisions. They are reflecting on past consultations and aiming to make future processes more inclusive to gather feedback from all community members.
- The council acknowledged that residents in Edenbridge have expressed dissatisfaction with their representation in discussions. The council said it is crucial to make sure that everyone across the district understands how they can voice their concerns and be part of the consultation process. They aim to improve public engagement to ensure that communities like Edenbridge have a voice.

Local Plan & National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

- The council will have to **go back to Regulation 18 and do it again** due to the significant uplift in mandatory housing figures.
- The council's Local Plan is being updated, but **its submission has been delayed until 2026** to align with changes in national planning policy. Once the new NPPF is published the local plan timetable will need to be adjusted accordingly.
- SDC is advocating for a transition period to adjust to the new rules before approving new developments, especially around understanding the definition and implications of grey belt land.

Local Planning and Grey Belt Areas:

- SDC is currently investigating the potential of using "grey belt" land for development. They have appointed a consultant to analyse these areas and plan to call for sites that fit within this category.
- While they are exploring these options, SDC has faced criticism for not fully assessing the potential of brownfield sites, land that has been previously developed and could be repurposed for housing. This criticism highlights concerns that the council might not be prioritising brownfield development as much as it should.

Upcoming Discussions

- The next council meeting (5 December 2024) will focus on updates to the Local Plan, community infrastructure priorities, and reviewing the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to ensure that development contributes fairly to local improvements.