



1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1. This pre-submission consultation plan has been prepared by Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council on behalf of those who live and work within the parish. The plan sets out a vision for the future and is supported by a set of planning policies and a series of projects. The plan has been informed by the strategic policies in the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Local Plan, against which it needs to be in general conformity. In accordance with the neighbourhood planning regulations, this plan has been prepared through extensive community consultation.
- 1.2. The draft strategic Local Plan policy STR/CR1 sets out proposals for the delivery of an additional 818-918 homes on 14 sites in the parish between the plan period 2017-2037. Of these, planning permission has already been passed for 64 houses on 2 sites.
- 1.3. The neighbourhood plan area was designated in July 2016 and covers the parish of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst. The parish contains a hierarchy of small-scale settlements typical of a Wealden landscape: at the centre lies the small historic market town of Cranbrook, to the north east of which sits the village of Sissinghurst, and the hamlets of Hartley and Colliers Green lying to the south and north west respectively. These main settlements are interspersed with numerous historic farmstead settlements and set within gentle rolling countryside and remnants of ancient woodland. Within the parish lies a watershed between the two main river systems of the Medway and the Rother. From here the Crane Brook rises and flows north through the centre of Cranbrook, and beyond to join the Hammer Stream just east of the parish boundary.
- 1.4. Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish has a wealth of heritage and culture dating back centuries and is largely nestled within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with the north of the parish lying in the equally beautiful Low Weald.

- 1.5. Being within the High Weald AONB confers national importance on the landscape. It contains one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in North West Europe. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee states, 'It is an outstandingly beautiful landscape cherished by people for its scenery, tranquillity and wildlife.' The settlements nestle harmoniously within their landscape setting where wedges of countryside penetrate right into the town and villages particularly along the Crane Valley. There are three conservation areas within the Parish and the internationally renowned Sissinghurst Castle.
- 1.6. It is an historic green and leafy landscape, with many trees and hedgerows, ponds, and streams. It is in a "fruit belt" character area, with a mixture of small pasture, arable and mixed fruit farms.
- 1.7. As custodians of this incredibly special place it should be protected and safeguarded at all costs for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.
- 1.8. Cranbrook is a vibrant and extremely attractive small rural town nestled in the Crane Valley. Historically, it grew prosperous through the woollen and cloth trade during the Medieval and Tudor period. It is characterised by its distinctive and varied architecture and many independent shops and businesses. It has a range of services and facilities, including four schools (one with a small theatre), two children's nurseries, a supermarket, a museum, a library, health, leisure and sports facilities, places of worship, public green spaces, a small community facility and a number of free car parks. Public transport is limited to a couple of bus routes. A network of pedestrian routes connects the town centre to the outlying residential areas and the countryside beyond, including the High Weald Landscape Trail. A Sustrans cycle route runs just to the south of the parish through Bedgebury Forest. The nearest railway station is 6 miles away at Staplehurst with services to London, Tonbridge, Ashford, Canterbury, and the Kent coast.
- 1.9. Sissinghurst is a small close-knit village with the Milk House Pub and local convenience shop at its heart. It also has a primary school, a community hall, a children's nursery, a takeaway outlet, and several playing fields, and has one bus service. The internationally renowned Sissinghurst Castle and Gardens lies just to the north east of the village and is a major draw for tourists. Hartley is largely a residential linear hamlet, historically grown because of a railway station (now closed). A small number of facilities include a café and farm shop, fishmonger, and children's nursery.
- 1.10. Colliers Green is a small, dispersed hamlet with a primary school at its centre. Other small hamlets in the parish include Golford, Flishinghurst and Swattenden. Over the past 30 years or so, the diversification of agriculture locally has been an economic necessity and has led to several new business ventures grow up around farmsteads, including food processing and farm shop retail, plus other related service, and leisure activities.

Pre-submission consultation

- 1.11. This is the Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation draft of the neighbourhood plan. Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Parish Council wants to know the views of the people who live, work, or carry on business in the parish. The statutory pre-submission consultation period runs for eight weeks from midday on Friday 16th October 2020 until midday on Friday 11th December 2020, inclusive.
- 1.12. Under normal circumstances a series of face-to-face drop-in events would have been held across the parish at various locations for residents to see details of the draft Plan and find out how to comment. Due to the ongoing coronavirus crisis such events are now not mandatory. Instead, the Parish Council have publicised the draft plan consultation through a special edition of the Parish Cake magazine, which was sent to every household in the Parish in September 2020.
- 1.13. A full copy of the Draft Plan, an explanatory video and the response questionnaire is available on the NDP website:
- <https://cranbrookandsissinghurstndp.co.uk/>
- 1.14. Two online information sessions have been organised for Wednesday 4th November 2020 at 7.30pm and Wednesday 2nd December 2020 at 7.30pm. Details of how to book for these events are on the website.
- 1.15. Further “drop-in” virtual events via Zoom will be happening throughout the consultation period. Check the website for details.
- 1.16. For those without access to the internet, hard copies of the draft plan will be available for loan upon request, as well as paper copies of the comments form.
- 1.17. Please telephone 0300 770 2262 to leave your details, and someone will return your call.
- 1.18. This is your opportunity to comment on the Neighbourhood Plan. It is important that you say whether you like what is in it, or whether you would like to see changes.
- 1.19. Please send your answers, views, and opinions to the parish council before the end of the eight-week consultation period. We would welcome your comments.

Revisions to the draft plan

- 1.20. Once the Regulation 14 consultation period is closed, the parish council will gather all the comments received and produce an official Consultation Statement, listing all the views and opinions and how the plan is to be amended, if appropriate, as a result.

Submission to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

- 1.21. The revised neighbourhood plan, together with the Consultation Statement, a statement of the Basic Conditions and an environmental statement (if required) will then be formally submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, the local planning authority.

Independent examination

- 1.22. The plan will then be published for a further six-week period of consultation, after which an independent planning inspector will be appointed to examine the plan in a series of public meetings. Should the independent planning inspector find the neighbourhood plan to be in conformity with the basic conditions, then it will go forward to be the subject of a referendum, to be voted upon by the residents of the parish.