

Shipley & Southwater Joint Neighbourhood Plan FAQs



22 July 2026
Version: 1.1



Frequently Asked Questions

At a glance

The most important point is this: a joint neighbourhood plan area does not, by itself, approve new housing sites or increase the amount of development in either parish.

- No draft joint plan has been written at this stage.
- The current proposal is about the neighbourhood plan area - not about approving specific sites or planning applications.
- A neighbourhood plan cannot be used to block the level of development required by the Local Plan, but it can influence design, local character, green space, infrastructure and how development should fit the area.
- A joint plan could still include different policies for Southwater and Shipley where the evidence shows that different approaches are needed.
- Any final plan would have to go through public consultation, independent examination and a referendum before it could come into force.
- Residents of both parishes will have clear, repeated and meaningful chances to take part.

The proposed joint plan is about giving both communities a stronger, locally prepared planning framework for shared issues - not about giving automatic permission for more development.

What is a neighbourhood plan?

A neighbourhood plan is a community-led planning document. Once made, it forms part of the development plan used when deciding planning applications.

It can cover topics such as housing, design, green spaces, heritage, transport, community facilities, local infrastructure and the character of different places.

Who writes it?

In parished areas, parish councils are the qualifying bodies for neighbourhood plans. For a joint plan, both parish councils would need to work together.

Good practice is to involve residents, landowners, local groups, businesses, statutory bodies and the district council throughout the process.

Is a joint neighbourhood plan already approved?

No. At this stage, the issue being decided is whether Horsham District Council should designate one joint neighbourhood plan area covering the whole of Southwater Parish and the whole of Shipley Parish.

The area designation is an early step in the process. It will identify the area that the future plan will cover.

It does not approve policies, housing numbers, site allocations or planning applications.

What is the current Horsham District Council consultation about?

It is about the proposed neighbourhood plan area designation. Residents are being asked for views on whether the proposed joint area is appropriate.

The consultation runs from 19 June 2026 to 5:00pm on 7 August 2026. Any comments made should be about the application for area designation only.



Frequently Asked Questions

Why were Shipley and Southwater residents not consulted before the joint area application?

The current Horsham District Council consultation is a formal opportunity to comment on the area designation, but the parish councils should also provide local engagement.

In due course, if the area becomes designated, a Shipley-led resident meeting in a Shipley venue, followed by a joint meeting for residents of both parishes, would help people ask questions and hear the same information. A joint website will also be created to include the publication of evidence, meeting notes, options papers and consultation summaries wherever possible.

Why are Southwater and Shipley being considered together?

Southwater and Shipley share planning issues, especially around the boundary between Southwater and Shipley. These include landscape and countryside protection, movement and connectivity, infrastructure planning, and avoiding conflicting policies across parish boundaries.

That does not mean the two parishes are the same. A joint plan can recognise different local character areas and can include policies that apply differently in different places, where evidence supports that approach.

Why weren't the other neighbouring Parishes included?

The current application is for Southwater and Shipley only, as the two parishes share practical planning issues, especially around the boundary of the two parish's given and Southwater's currently uncontrolled outward growth.

Southwater consulted with all boundary parishes to remain open and transparent about the current development approach. Itchingfield made their plan in October 2025. Nuthurst had concerns about the necessary member and staff resources required to effectively manage the plan making process and Broadbridge Heath saw no need now that the Wickhurst Green development has been built. However, working with Shipley was logical given the shared issues experienced by both parishes.

Southwater and Shipley are too different

The parishes are different, and the plan should say so. A joint plan should not apply a Southwater model to Shipley. It should include policies that protect Shipley's rural character and policies that address Southwater's settlement and infrastructure needs.

Shared issues can be dealt with jointly, while local differences are still protected.

Southwater could dominate because it has a larger population

Population difference is a real concern for confidence in the process. There is equal representation on the Steering Group, separate consultation reporting feedback from each parish, dedicated Shipley engagement and parity in decision making, transparent minutes, and clear rules for how disagreements will be handled. The committee will ask Horsham District Council to explain the referendum arrangements early in the process to ensure population is accounted.



Frequently Asked Questions

What happens if there is deadlock or unfair compromise between the two councils?

A Terms of Reference for the Steering Group have been agreed which includes how votes are taken, how disagreements are escalated to both full councils, and how parish-specific policies are agreed.

Will a joint plan mean more development?

A joint neighbourhood plan area should not result in additional development. The currently emerging Local Plan confirms that Neighbourhood plans are not expected to bring any development forward. However, housing targets are outside of our control. Simply merging areas should not increase the need for development. The Plan is a planning tool that can help residents shape how future development is handled.

Does a joint plan merge the two parish councils?

No. A joint neighbourhood plan would not merge Southwater Parish Council and Shipley Parish Council. Each parish council would continue to exist and carry out its normal functions.

Does it change council tax?

No. A neighbourhood plan area designation does not change parish council tax or merge parish finances.

Both Shipley and Southwater already have Neighbourhood Plans, why do they need a new one?

Both Shipley and Southwater's existing plans are important starting points. They should not be dismissed. The evidence, policies and community work should be reviewed and carried forward where they remain relevant.

Any new joint plan would need to go through consultation, examination and referendum before it could replace or update existing policy.

Will money received from the new developments in Shipley be transferred to Southwater, or vice versa?

No. A joint plan does not merge Parish Council finances or create one shared CIL fund. Neighbourhood CIL is passed to the Parish Council in whose area the development takes place; where development crosses the boundary, it is divided proportionately.

Does the joint neighbourhood area change parish boundaries, electoral wards, post town addresses or service areas?

No. It does not move the parish boundary, change anyone's address or postcode, alter electoral wards, school catchments or responsibility for local services. It only defines the area covered by the planning document.



Frequently Asked Questions

What happens to the separate Shipley Neighbourhood Plan and Southwater Neighbourhood Plans made in 2021?

The existing Shipley and Southwater neighbourhood plans continue to have legal status until replaced. However, as they are both more than five years old and, where their evidence or policies are out of date or conflict with newer national or district planning policy, they will carry reduced weight in decision making.

Who decides how much housing the district needs?

Strategic housing requirements are dealt with through national planning policy and the Local Plan prepared by Horsham District Council. A neighbourhood plan must generally fit with the strategic policies in the Local Plan.

This means a neighbourhood plan is not a separate way to impose extra development. It also cannot simply say "no development" if the Local Plan requires growth in the area.

Can a neighbourhood plan stop development?

No. A neighbourhood plan cannot be used to stop or reduce development that is required by the Local Plan. It must meet legal tests known as the basic conditions.

However, it can help influence what development should look like, where it may be best located, what infrastructure is needed, and how local character, landscape, heritage and green spaces should be protected. A neighbourhood plan is considered to have weight in the planning process and framework.

Could the joint plan allocate housing sites?

It could only do so if the councils decide to consider site allocations, if there is evidence to support them, and if residents have been consulted. Nothing is allocated by the area designation itself.

If any sites are considered in the future, they should be assessed transparently. Residents should be able to see the evidence, comment on options, and understand why any option is being considered.

Could the plan support more development than the Local Plan?

A neighbourhood plan can support additional growth if the community chooses that route and if the plan still meets the legal tests. That is not automatic and should not happen without clear evidence and community engagement.

A joint plan area does not, by itself, increase development.

Will the joint plan result in Shipley receiving some of Southwater's housing allocation?

Area designation does not increase development, allocate sites or approve applications. A neighbourhood plan must fit with the Local Plan and cannot invent a separate housing requirement.

If any future site options are considered, they must be evidence-based and publicly consulted on. Under a joint plan, Southwater does not have the authority to force Shipley to take more housing. Both parishes housing allocations will be determined separately by HDC whether a joint plan is embarked upon or not, and has no bearing on what the final numbers will be, or vice versa.



Frequently Asked Questions

What can the plan do to protect rural areas?

A neighbourhood plan can include policies on landscape character, settlement gaps, design, heritage, biodiversity, dark skies, local green spaces, walking and cycling routes, and the relationship between built areas and open countryside.

For Shipley, this means the plan should respect its rural character and its existing evidence base. For Southwater, it means planning positively for the village and its infrastructure needs. Much of the Joint Plan will be dedicated to the separate and individual requirements of both parishes.

Does it approve planning applications?

No. Planning applications would still be decided through the normal planning application process. A made neighbourhood plan would become one of the policies used to help decide those applications.

Are national planning rules changing who decides planning applications?

Yes. From 31 October 2026, a new national scheme will change which applications are decided by planning officers and which may go to Horsham District Council's Planning Committee.

Many smaller or technical applications must be decided by officers. For other listed applications, the starting point will also be an officer decision unless the Chief Planning Officer ("Director of Place") and the Chair of the Planning Committee agree that the application should go to committee and it meets the national test.

Existing local routes, such as a district councillor automatically 'calling in' an application or a set number of objections forcing a committee decision, will no longer be available. Residents and Parish Councils will still be able to comment on applications, and relevant planning comments must still be considered.

Why do these changes make an up-to-date neighbourhood plan more important?

A made neighbourhood plan is not simply advice. It becomes part of the statutory development plan. Whether a planning application is decided by an officer or a committee, the decision-maker must use the relevant development plan policies unless there is a good planning reason to decide differently.

An up-to-date joint plan can place local expectations about design, landscape, countryside, green spaces, settlement identity and infrastructure into the formal policy framework used by planning officers.

The existing Shipley and Southwater neighbourhood plans continue to have legal status until replaced. However, planning policy, evidence and local circumstances change over time. Updating the plans can carry forward useful protections, refresh older policies and address new shared issues.

A neighbourhood plan does not give either Parish Council a veto, guarantee that an application will be refused, or override national policy and the strategic policies in the Local Plan. It does, however, give properly evidenced local policies more formal weight than a general expression of concern on its own.

Sources (position checked 15 July 2026): Gov UK [Planning Committee Reform](#); [neighbourhood planning](#).

Will every policy apply the same way in Southwater and Shipley?

Not necessarily. A joint plan can include area-specific policies. For example, it can recognise Southwater village issues, Shipley rural issues, and shared boundary issues.

The important point is that any different policy approach must be justified by evidence and clearly explained.



Frequently Asked Questions

Will residents see the evidence before decisions are made?

Yes. Evidence will be published in a way that residents can understand. This may include housing evidence, site assessments, landscape evidence, transport evidence, heritage and ecology information, infrastructure evidence and consultation reports. The joint website will also be used to publish meeting notes and consultation summaries wherever possible. Feedback from Shipley and Southwater would be reported separately as well as together.

What is Regulation 14 consultation?

Regulation 14 is the formal public consultation on a draft neighbourhood plan before it is submitted to the district council. It is a key stage where residents can read the draft plan and comment on it.

The draft should be changed where evidence and consultation responses show changes are needed.

What is Regulation 16 consultation?

After the plan is submitted, Horsham District Council would carry out another consultation, often called Regulation 16 consultation. This gives residents and other bodies another chance to comment before the independent examination.

What is the Independent Examination?

An independent examiner checks whether the plan follows the proper process and meets the legal tests. The examiner can recommend changes before the plan can proceed to referendum.

Can the Examiner or Horsham District Council change the draft plan?

Yes, where changes are necessary to meet the legal requirements. The referendum would be on the final version following examination, not necessarily the exact wording originally consulted upon.

What is the Referendum?

The referendum is the public vote at the end of the process. More than 50% of those voting must vote "yes" for the plan to come into force.

The referendum stage is a long way off. Residents will have many opportunities to comment before then.

Can residents who do not use the internet take part?

Yes. Information will be made available in hard copy format, and residents should be able to request copies from Horsham District Council and submit paper comments or contact the parish councils for help.

Can young people, tenants and businesses take part?

Yes. A good neighbourhood plan should listen to the whole community, including young people, older residents, tenants, homeowners, farmers, local businesses, community groups and people who work in the area.



Frequently Asked Questions

Will the plan cover non-planning issues such as community projects?

It can identify community aspirations and projects, but the formal planning policies must relate to the use and development of land. Non-planning projects can be listed separately so they are not confused with planning policy.

Where can I send comments on the current area designation consultation?

At the time of writing, comments can be submitted through Horsham District Council's consultation process. Comments must be received by 5:00pm on 7 August 2026. Residents should check the [Horsham District Council](#) website for the current details before submitting.

Will residents vote separately on each policy?

No. The referendum asks whether the final neighbourhood plan as a whole should be used to help decide planning applications. Residents do not vote separately on individual policies. However, residents will be consulted on throughout the neighbourhood planning process and will be able to express their views and submit feedback well in advance of the Independent Examination and Referendum stages.

What happens if residents vote against the joint plan?

If a majority of those voting vote "no", the joint plan would not come into force and none of its updated policies would become part of the statutory development plan.

The existing Shipley and Southwater Neighbourhood Plans would technically remain in force. However, both are more than five years old and, where their evidence or policies are out of date or conflict with newer national or district planning policy, they will carry reduced weight in decision making. Both parishes would have less ability to influence future development.



Frequently Asked Questions

What happens next?

The Stages	What is covered
1. Area designation consultation	Horsham District Council consults on whether the proposed joint neighbourhood area is appropriate.
2. Area designation decision	Horsham District Council decides whether to approve, refuse or amend the proposed area.
3. Governance and engagement plan	If the area is designated, the parish councils should agree how the work will be managed and how residents will be involved.
4. Early engagement	Residents help identify issues, priorities and concerns before policies are written.
5. Evidence gathering	The group gathers evidence on housing, design, landscape, heritage, biodiversity, transport, infrastructure and community needs.
6. Options and draft policies	Possible policy options are considered and discussed publicly.
7. Draft plan consultation - Regulation 14	A draft plan is published for formal consultation. Residents can comment on the wording and evidence.
8. Revisions and submission	The plan is revised and submitted to Horsham District Council with supporting documents.
9. District council consultation - Regulation 16	Horsham District Council runs a further consultation on the submitted plan.
10. Independent examination	An examiner checks the plan and may recommend changes.
11. Referendum	If the plan passes examination, residents vote. More than 50% of those voting must vote yes for the plan to be made.
12. Plan made	If approved at referendum, the plan becomes part of the development plan used to decide planning applications.



Frequently Asked Questions

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Area designation	The formal approval of the geographical area that a neighbourhood plan would cover.
Basic conditions	The legal tests a neighbourhood plan must pass, including general conformity with strategic local policies and regard to national policy.
Consultation statement	A document that explains who was consulted, what they said and how the plan-makers responded.
Development plan	The set of planning policies used to decide planning applications. A made neighbourhood plan becomes part of this.
Independent examiner	A planning professional appointed to check whether the draft neighbourhood plan meets the legal requirements.
Local Plan	The district-wide plan prepared by Horsham District Council. It sets strategic planning policies and housing requirements.
Neighbourhood plan	A local planning document prepared by the community through the parish council or neighbourhood forum.
Regulation 14	The formal consultation on a draft neighbourhood plan before it is submitted to the district council.
Regulation 16	The consultation carried out by the district council after the neighbourhood plan is submitted.
Referendum	The public vote near the end of the process. More than half of those voting must vote yes for the plan to come into force.
Site allocation	A policy that identifies a specific site for a particular kind of development. It must be justified by evidence and consultation.