

Local Plan Issues & Options Responses

A summary of the main messages arising from
the Issues and Options consultation undertaken
between 27 October and 8 December 2025

Waverley Local Plan - Issues and Options Consultation 2025

Summary of Issues raised

Prepared by	Waverley Borough Council
Consultation period	27 October to 8 December 2025
Purpose	To provide a summary of the main messages arising from the Issues and Options consultation,

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

Waverley Borough Council undertook an Issues and Options consultation on the new Local Plan between 27 October and 8 December 2025. The consultation invited comments on the broad planning choices facing the borough, including the spatial strategy, environmental protections, housing, transport, town centres, infrastructure and climate-related matters.

This report is intended as a high-level summary of the Issues and Options consultation. It draws out the main themes and ranked priorities for the preparation of the local plan to consider from the representations received to give a clear flavour of responses

There were 2,641 individual comments made by 165 respondents. The largest respondent groups were individual Waverley residents, developers/landowners/agents, and town and parish councils.

Individual representations have been published separately on the Council's consultation portal website. This report does not seek to respond to individual comments, but summarises the main themes arising from the consultation.

1.2 Respondents

A total of 165 respondents are recorded in the consultation. In total, 1,990 comments were submitted through the Council's online consultation platform, and 651 were submitted by email. The respondent base includes both general consultees and specific bodies, with particularly strong participation from residents, development interests, and local councils.

Respondent group	Unique respondents
Individual (Waverley Resident)	61
Developers, Landowners and Agents	31
Individual (Other)	17
Town and Parish Councils (Waverley)	15
Leisure, Arts and Culture Groups	8
Local Authorities adjoining Waverley	5
Residents Association or Group	5
Conservation Groups	3

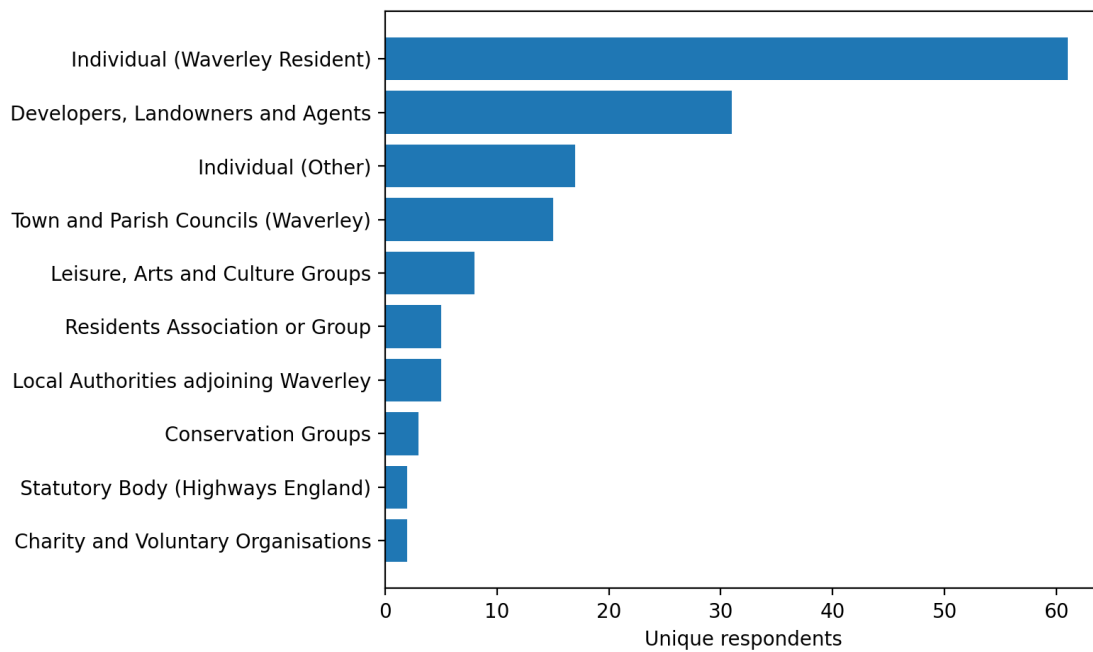


Figure 1 – Main respondent categories by unique respondent

1.3 Overall direction of the Local Plan

Across the consultation there was broad agreement that the Local Plan needs to be evidence-led, infrastructure-led and realistic about both the scale of housing need and the borough's constraints. Respondents repeatedly asked the Council to avoid presenting any one development route as a complete solution and a blended strategy will be required.

Brownfield development and growth in the main towns and larger villages attracted the strongest support in the ranking exercise. However, the comments show that this support was qualified; many respondents said brownfield capacity will not be enough on its own, while growth in the main settlements must not simply translate into over-concentration in places already under pressure.

Settlement extensions and new settlements were more polarising. Many residents and parish/town council's responses raised concerns about coalescence, loss of countryside, traffic and strain on services. By contrast, many development interests argued that strategic edge-of-settlement growth, and in some cases a new settlement, may be the only realistic way to deliver housing and infrastructure at scale.

A recurring issue was the settlement hierarchy. Respondents generally supported using a settlement hierarchy as a planning tool but said the evidence base needs updating and should not be treated as a simple proxy for increasing development capacity within that settlement. Service quality, infrastructure capacity, environmental constraints and functional relationships between settlements were all considered as factors that must be considered alongside the hierarchy.

1.4 Environment, landscape and climate

Environmental protection was one of the strongest themes running through the consultation. Respondents consistently emphasised the importance of avoiding harm to sensitive areas, protecting landscape character, and safeguarding biodiversity, green and blue infrastructure, accessible green space and the distinct separation between settlements.

Flood risk, groundwater conditions and wider climate resilience were repeatedly raised. Many respondents wanted the Local Plan to direct development away from the highest-risk locations, apply the sequential approach robustly, and embed climate adaptation into site selection and design rather than treating it as an afterthought.

There was strong support for giving climate change and net zero a central role in the Plan. Measures frequently supported included higher energy efficiency, low-carbon heating, renewable energy, sustainable construction, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, subject to viability, deliverability and careful siting.

Views were divided on how far environmental designations should constrain growth. Many respondents regarded the Green Belt, National Landscape and other local designations as major limits on where development should go. Others argued that the consultation material risked presenting the constraints from these designations too absolutely and called for a more nuanced, evidence-based assessment, including consideration of grey belt and site-specific mitigation.

1.5 Homes and communities

Housing responses showed a clear tension between the need to plan positively for growth and concerns about whether the standard method housing figure can realistically be accommodated in Waverley without unacceptable harm. Many town/parish councils and residents argued that the level of need appears undeliverable in a highly constrained borough. Developers and some statutory or neighbouring LPAs, however argued that the Plan must still start from meeting identified need in full unless there is robust evidence to justify any shortfall.

Despite those differences, there was substantial common ground on the type of housing respondents want to see. The strongest message was the need for more genuinely affordable housing, especially social rented homes, smaller dwellings, accessible homes and accommodation suited to older people, younger households and downsizers.

Many respondents also supported a mix of site sizes and housing types, including small and medium sites, regeneration opportunities and higher densities in the most sustainable locations. At the same time, there were repeated calls for density to be context-led and sensitive to local character rather than applied uniformly across the borough.

Town and parish councils, neighbourhood plans and local democratic input were frequently referenced as important to shaping locally distinctive outcomes and ensuring that housing growth reflects the circumstances of particular places.

1.6 Movement, infrastructure and services

Infrastructure and transport capacity were among the most consistent concerns in the consultation. Across many questions, respondents stated that healthcare, schools, water supply, wastewater, highways, public transport and digital connectivity are already under significant strain and should not be treated as secondary matters.

The phrase 'infrastructure first' captures much of the consultation response. Many respondents said growth should only be planned where there is a credible route to infrastructure delivery, with clearer evidence, stronger coordination with providers, and more transparency about phasing and funding.

Transport comments emphasised congestion hotspots, poor bus services, car dependency in rural areas, and the need for much better walking and cycling connections. There was strong support for integrating the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) into site selection and masterplanning so that active travel is embedded from the outset.

Several responses also highlighted cross-boundary issues, particularly in relation to strategic roads, service catchments, commuting patterns and the wider implications of local government reorganisation. This reinforced the message that infrastructure planning will need to look beyond borough boundaries.

1.7 Town centres, employment and local facilities

Responses on town and local centres showed that these places are valued not only for shopping, but as community, cultural and economic hubs. Historic character, independent businesses, public realm quality and the role of centres as places for everyday social interaction all featured strongly.

There was broad support for town centres adapting to changing retail patterns through mixed uses, reuse of vacant units, homes above shops and a greater leisure, cultural and service offer. At the same time, respondents wanted the Council to retain strong protection for core retail and commercial frontages in the most important shopping areas.

Housing in town centres was generally supported where it is well designed, of appropriate scale and does not undermine active frontages, employment space or community facilities. This was often linked to wider support for brownfield reuse, regeneration and reducing car dependency.

Employment and the local economy were raised regularly across the consultation, including the need for space for small businesses, better integration of jobs and homes, and recognition that the spatial strategy should not focus on housing delivery alone.

1.8 Ranking questions

The consultation included a number of ranking questions. These give a useful indication of the relative priorities expressed by respondents who chose to answer them. The weighted results are shown below.

Preferred Growth Approaches

Brownfield development achieved the highest weighted score. The results also showed support for strategic-scale options, including a new settlement and growth focused around the main towns and larger villages. Options involving smaller village growth and some forms of settlement extension attracted lower or more mixed support. This should be read alongside the written comments, which show significant concern about coalescence, infrastructure capacity and landscape impact, but also recognition from some respondents that edge-of-settlement growth may be necessary to meet housing need.

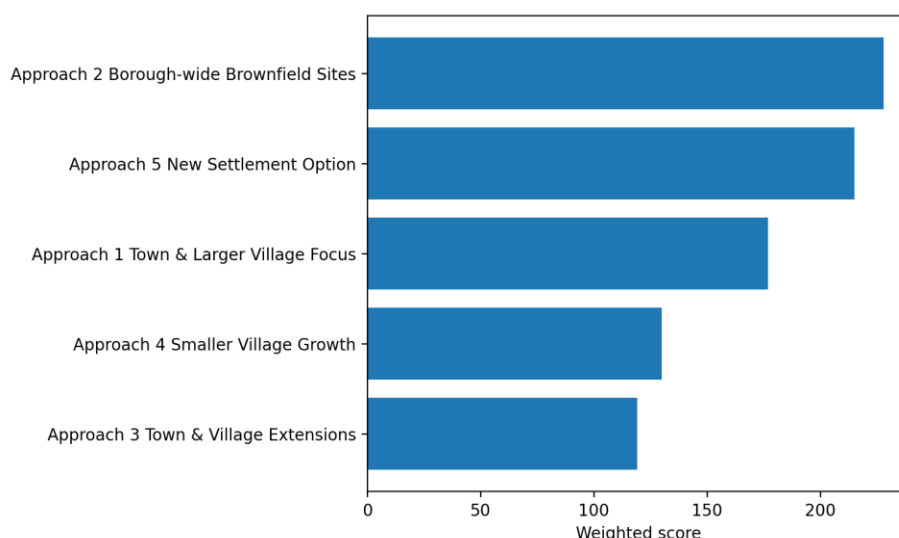


Figure – Q6 - Preferred Growth Approaches

Town Centres Priorities

The strongest priority for town centres was protecting primary retail and commercial frontages. Homes above shops, reuse of vacant units and more flexible uses outside the Primary Shopping Areas (PSA) also performed strongly, pointing to support for adaptation rather than unmanaged change.

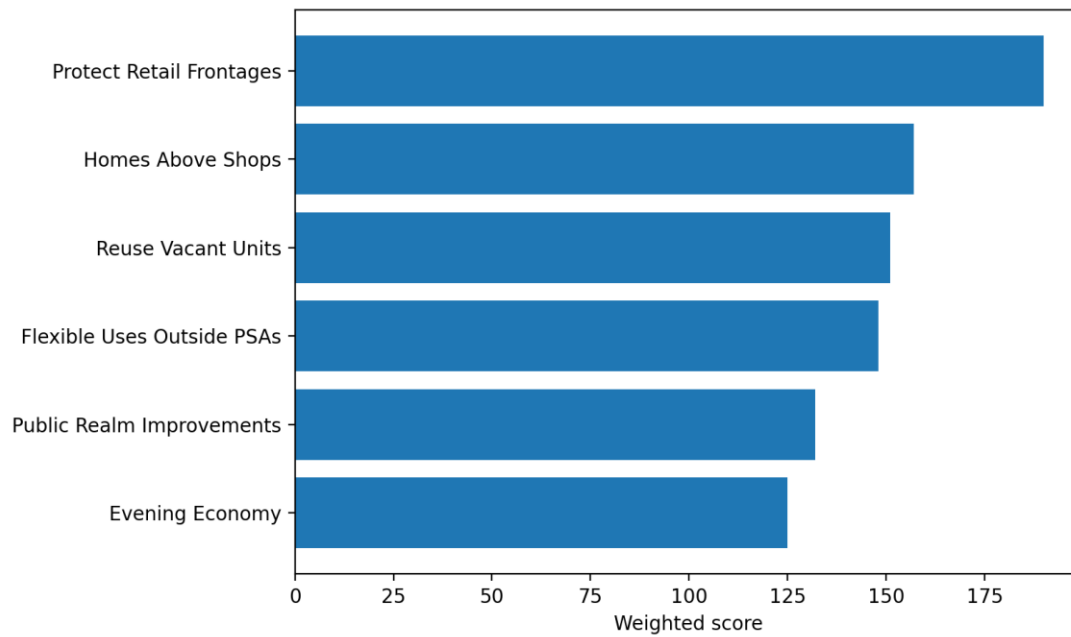


Figure – Q54 (a) - Town Centres Priorities

New Development Priorities

Providing community infrastructure within new development was the clearest priority. Design quality and transport network improvements were also strongly supported, alongside affordable housing and environmental sustainability.

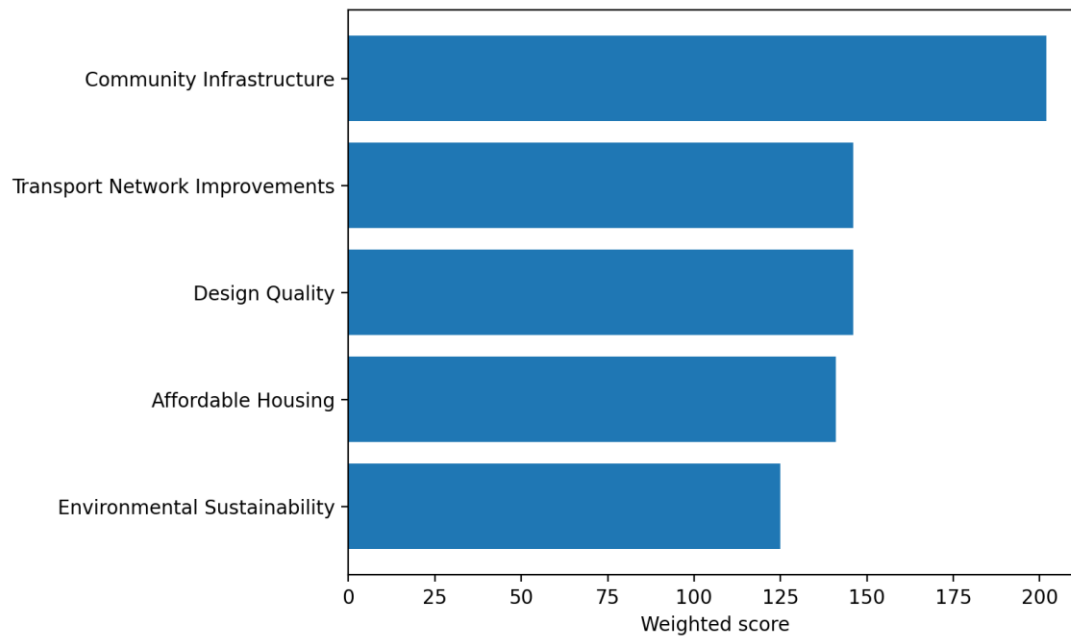


Figure – Q64 - New Development Priorities

Net Zero Priorities

Energy efficiency standards were the highest ranked net zero priority. Other frequently supported measures included sustainable construction, low-carbon heating and community renewables. This suggests that respondents placed greatest emphasis on reducing energy demand in new development, while also supporting wider measures to decarbonise buildings and energy supply.

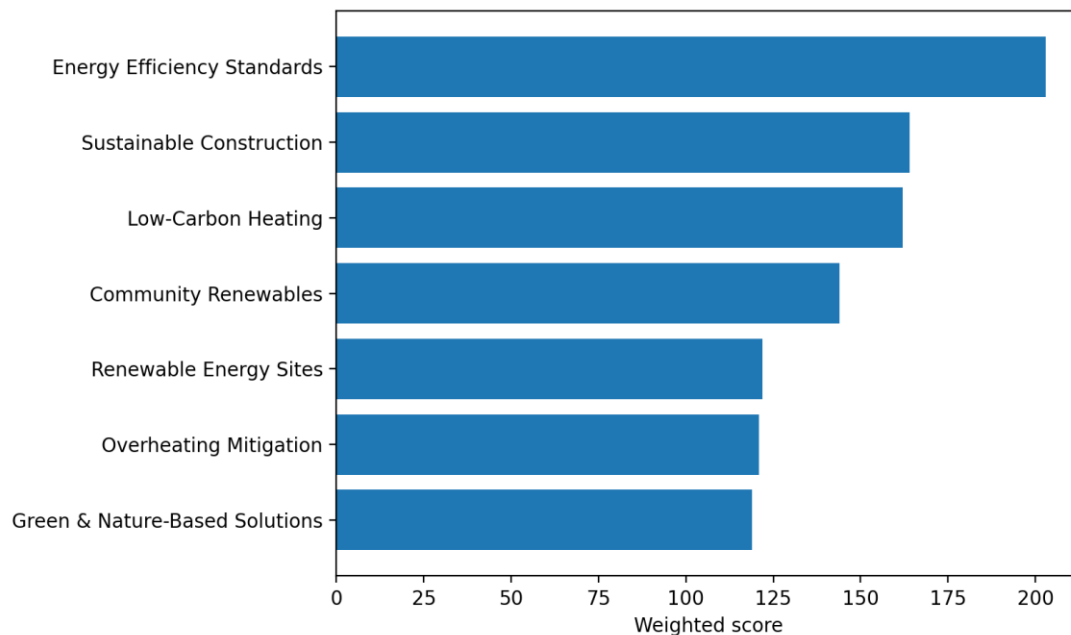


Figure – Q67 - Net Zero Priorities

1.9 Overall conclusions

Taken as a whole, the Issues and Options consultation points toward a Local Plan that will need to balance growth, provide environmental protection and deliver infrastructure much more explicitly. The Local Plan is unlikely to be able to rely on a single spatial approach. Respondents recognised, albeit from different perspectives, that the strategy will need to consider a combination of brownfield development, growth in sustainable settlements, carefully assessed settlement-edge opportunities and wider strategic options, all tested against infrastructure, environmental and deliverability evidence.

The clearest message for the preparation of the Local Plan to consider is the need to:

- update the evidence base;
- explain more clearly how infrastructure, phasing and delivery will work;
- show how affordable housing and smaller homes will be secured; and
- set out how environmental constraints, flood risk and climate resilience will influence spatial choices.

The consultation responses broadly reinforce the importance of the key issues identified in the Issues and Options consultation document, including housing need, infrastructure, transport, environmental quality, climate resilience, town centres, local character and engagement with communities and stakeholders.

Appendix 1 – Summary of main consultation themes by topic

The table below provides a high-level summary of the main themes identified from the consultation responses by topic. It is intended to complement the summary above and should be read alongside the full schedule of representations.

Topic	Comments	High-level summary
Settlement Hierarchy	89	• Hierarchy supported in principle - Most respondents agree a settlement hierarchy is a useful planning tool for directing growth to the most sustainable locations. • Evidence base is outdated - Many respondents considered that the 2012 hierarchy needs updating to reflect changes in services, transport provision, housing growth, infrastructure capacity and environmental constraints. • Top-tier settlements broadly accepted - Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Cranleigh are generally supported as higher-tier settlements, though many stress this should not automatically equate to unlimited growth capacity.
Views on Each Approach to Growth	62	• A recurring point was that a blend of approaches is unavoidable; no single option is deliverable alone. • Brownfield-first widely supported in principle, but repeatedly described as insufficient, slow and viability-constrained. • Approach 3 (settlement extensions) is the most polarising:
Avoiding Harm to Sensitive Areas	64	• Strong support for proactive environmental protection, not just mitigation, embedded in local policy • Early Sustainability Appraisal (SA)/ Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and plan-level screening essential to inform spatial strategy and site selection • Designated sites (Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Landscape) must receive robust, locally defined protection and enhancement
Role of the Green Belt	47	• Two opposing views: protect the Green Belt “as-it-is” versus a review of it to consider releasing targeted grey belt to help meet housing need • Strong call for fine-grained Green Belt Assessment to identify parcels that perform weakly against purposes

Topic	Comments	High-level summary
		Repeatedly made view that Surrey Green Belt is outdated; need site-by-site assessment of habitat/biodiversity and separation role
Meeting Housing Need	89	- Communities/parishes strongly challenge to the government's assessed housing need because the constraints of the Green Belt/National Landscape/infrastructure make it unrealistic and risks "wrong homes in wrong places" - Developers/agents and some authorities stress the Plan must be positively prepared to meet local housing need in full, with buffers, and evidence-led justification for any shortfall - Repeated calls for more genuinely affordable, smaller homes and downsizing homes, not executive-family stock
Affordable Housing Priorities	44	- Strong call for social rent / council housing as the main solution; widespread scepticism of developer-led "affordable" - Preference for genuinely affordable rented homes (social rent levels) over discount-to-market products - Need for smaller homes (studios, 1-2 beds) for young adults, single workers, essential workers, and downsizers
Housing Densities	52	- Support for higher density in the right places: town centres, around stations/transport hubs, and brownfield land - Strong "local context" test: density should respond to character areas; vary within large sites; avoid fixing densities borough wide - Infrastructure must keep up: higher densities mean more demand for services, access, transport, wastewater, schools and biodiversity mitigation
Key Transport Issues	68	- Cumulative impacts & "infrastructure must be provided first": assess combined growth effects; don't let development proceed without mitigation/infrastructure (especially Road A3 of the Strategic Road Network). - Rural bus provision: repeated calls for more frequent, longer-hours, reliable bus services; critique of hourly/Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)HRA/on-demand being inadequate.

Topic	Comments	High-level summary
		Active travel investment: segregated cycle tracks, safe crossings, continuous walk/cycle links from new sites to centres/schools/stations; cycle parking.
Value of Centres	34	- Historic character & heritage: strong support for conservation, design quality and heritage-led regeneration. - Independent businesses: preference for local shops, cafés, pubs and services over national chains. - Community role: town centres as social hubs for daily life, events and interaction.
Local Needs	43	- Infrastructure-first approach required before further growth - Severe constraints in water supply, wastewater, and drainage capacity - Acute shortages of secondary schools, SEND provision, and GP/dental services
Climate Resilience in Development	45	- Climate mitigation and adaptation embedded across all policies - Flood risk, groundwater protection and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) as non-negotiables - Nature-based solutions and green/blue infrastructure
Vision & Objectives	13	- Support for sustainability - General support for the vision's focus on climate action, active travel and public transport. - Housing need - Strong concern that the vision does not clearly prioritise meeting housing needs in full, particularly affordable housing. - Scale of growth - Mixed views on whether the level of growth is realistic or unavoidable and must be planned for positively.