

Ipswich Borough Council

Engagement Strategy for the Ipswich Local Plan

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IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

1.1 Ipswich Borough Council is preparing a new Local Plan for Ipswich covering the period 2026-2045.

1.2 The Local Plan helps guide decisions about future development in the area. It looks at what the area needs and what opportunities are available. It covers topics such as housing, jobs, services, and the environment. The Plan shows where new development should happen and where it should be limited or not allowed. Councils are legally required to prepare a Local Plan.

1.3 The preparation of a Local Plan affects a wide range of people and organisations. Effective engagement is therefore an important part of the plan-making process.

1.4 This Engagement Strategy sets out how Ipswich Borough Council will engage residents, businesses, consultation bodies, infrastructure providers and other interested parties during preparation of the new Local Plan.

1.5 The Strategy sits alongside and supports the Council's wider approach to communication and community engagement, as set out in the Council's Community Engagement Strategy and Communications Strategy. In particular, it reflects the Council's commitment to putting residents at the heart of its work and providing opportunities for communities to help shape decisions that affect them.

It establishes:

- the purpose and objectives of engagement;
- the audiences the Council will seek to engage;
- the principles that will guide engagement;
- the methods the Council may use;
- the approach to accessible and inclusive engagement;
- how feedback will be considered and reported.

2. Purpose of the strategy

2.1 This Engagement Strategy has been prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 and having regard to relevant government guidance on plan-making and engagement.

2.2 The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that engagement in preparation of the Ipswich Local Plan is effective, efficient and meets all statutory requirements under plan-making.

2.3 The Council wants people to have opportunities to influence the Ipswich Local Plan at points where their participation can make a difference.

2.4 It is not intended to prescribe every individual engagement activity at the outset. Different issues, stages and audiences will require different levels of participation and will be tailored accordingly.

Objectives

2.5 The objectives of the Engagement Strategy are to:

- provide clear and accessible opportunities for people and organisations to participate in preparation of the Local Plan;
- provide different ways to engage, recognising that people have different needs and circumstances;
- ensure engagement is proportionate, timely and focused on stages where participation can meaningfully inform the Plan;
- meet the statutory requirements for consultation and engagement throughout the plan-making process; and
- demonstrate how Valid Representations have been considered and how engagement has informed preparation of the Local Plan.

3. Understanding Ipswich

3.1 It is not intended to prescribe every individual engagement activity at the outset. Different issues, stages and audiences will require different levels of participation and will be tailored accordingly.

3.2 Government guidance identifies baseline demographic information as an important consideration when preparing and updating an Engagement Strategy.

3.3 Ipswich is a compact urban Borough with a diverse population and significant differences between neighbourhoods. A single engagement method is therefore unlikely to reach all sections of the community.

3.4 The 2021 Census and Suffolk Observatory highlighted a number of characteristics particularly relevant to engagement:

- Population and age: Ipswich had a population of around 139,600 in 2021. The Borough has a relatively young population, with a median age of 38, compared with 40 for England.
- Diversity: Ipswich is an increasingly diverse Borough. In 2021, 84.3% of residents identified within the White ethnic group, compared with 88.9% in 2011, with growing Asian, Black and Mixed ethnic populations.
- Disability: Around 19% of residents identified as disabled and limited either a little or a lot in their day-to-day activities, highlighting the importance of accessible engagement.
- Housing: Ipswich has significant private and social rented sectors. Around 23% of households privately rented and around 21% socially rented their homes in 2021.
- Deprivation and inequality: Ipswich experiences higher levels of deprivation than other parts of Suffolk, with significant differences between neighbourhoods. Suffolk Observatory analysis identifies Ipswich as the most relatively deprived local authority area in Suffolk.
- Differences across the Borough: Borough-wide figures can mask significant differences between individual neighbourhoods in deprivation, health, education and other characteristics.

What this means for Local Plan engagement

3.5 These characteristics indicate that a single approach to engagement will not be appropriate for all communities.

3.6 Different communities may experience different barriers to participation, and the most appropriate methods of engagement are likely to vary depending on the stage of plan preparation, the issues being considered and the communities affected.

3.7 In seeking to engage, the Council may therefore consider:

- using a combination of digital, written and face-to-face engagement where appropriate;
- providing accessible and non-digital opportunities to participate;
- whether additional or targeted engagement would help reach communities or areas that are less well represented through wider consultation; and
- how different housing, social and economic circumstances may affect people's ability or willingness to participate.

3.8 The Council will use the baseline profile, along with the findings from the Scoping Consultation (see Section 6 of this document) and monitoring of participation at each subsequent stage, to refine its approach as preparation of the Local Plan progresses.

4. Who we will engage

4.1 The target audience for Local Plan engagement is very broad. It includes people and organisations directly affected by planning decisions, as well as those with expertise, responsibilities and interests relevant to the future development of Ipswich.

Residents and communities

4.2 The Council will seek to engage people living in Ipswich throughout preparation of the Local Plan. This will include opportunities for residents and community groups to contribute their views on the future development of the Borough and the places they live.

Businesses and the economy

4.3 The Local Plan has an important role in supporting Ipswich's economy and the future development of the Borough, including the town centre, employment areas and other centres.

4.4 The Council will seek to engage businesses, landowners, employers, business representative organisations and other economic stakeholders to understand their needs and perspectives.

Infrastructure and service providers

4.5 The Council will engage organisations involved in delivering infrastructure and public services to help ensure that infrastructure requirements are understood and considered alongside future growth.

Specific Consultation Bodies and General Consultation Bodies

4.6 The Council will engage Specific Consultation Bodies and General Consultation Bodies as required by the Regulations.

4.7 The organisations falling within these categories are defined under Regulation 2.

4.8 Specific Consultation Bodies identified under Regulation 2 include various statutory bodies, infrastructure providers and neighbouring authorities.

4.9 General Consultation Bodies include:

- voluntary organisations whose activities benefit people living or working in the planning authority's area;
- organisations that represent people who share a Protected Characteristic; and
- organisations that represent local businesses.

5. Strategic and cross-boundary engagement

5.1 Ipswich has close functional relationships with surrounding areas, and many strategic matters extend beyond the Council's boundary.

5.2 Strategic engagement will take place throughout the preparation of the Local Plan rather than being confined to individual consultation periods.

5.3 The Council will work with neighbouring local planning authorities and other relevant organisations on strategic planning matters.

5.4 To support effective joint working, the Council will look to prepare Statements of Common Ground.

5.5 Where a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) is in operation and the Council is required to consider whether the proposed Local Plan is in general conformity with it, the Council will undertake the consultation required by the Regulations.

5.6 Where required, this consultation will begin and end on the same day as consultation on the proposed Local Plan.

6. Local Plan stages and opportunities to engage

6.1 The Local Plan is prepared through a number of stages established by legislation and government guidance.

6.2 To provide greater clarity and advance notice of opportunities to participate, the stages of Local Plan preparation and the current timetable are published on the Council's website: **Local Plan Timetable**.

6.3 The principal engagement stages are:

- Scoping Consultation (including Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Consultation)
- Consultation on Proposed Local Plan Content and Evidence (including the relevant SEA Report)
- Consultation on the Proposed Local Plan (including the relevant SEA Report)
- Public Examination
- Any consultation required during Public Examination

Scoping Consultation

6.4 The Council undertook a Scoping Consultation (including SEA Scoping Consultation) between July and September 2026.

6.5 The Scoping Consultation provided an early opportunity for communities and stakeholders to help shape:

- what the Local Plan should contain;
- how the Council should engage during preparation of the Plan.

6.6 Feedback from the Scoping Consultation has helped identify how the Council can make future engagement as accessible, clear and effective as possible.

6.7 Respondents highlighted the importance of:

- providing sufficient notice and time to participate;
- offering opportunities to engage at different times and in different ways;
- using clear, concise and accessible consultation materials;
- providing a range of digital, online and in-person opportunities to participate;
- making consultation opportunities widely visible and easy to access; and
- clearly explaining how feedback has been considered and how it has influenced the Local Plan.

6.8 These findings have directly informed this Engagement Strategy and will help shape future consultation and engagement as preparation of the Local Plan progresses.

Consultation on the Proposed Local Plan Content and Evidence

6.9 Following the publication of the summary of the Scoping Consultation, the Council will prepare a draft vision and proposed spatial strategy, which will then be subject to further statutory consultation.

6.10 The Council will make available and invite Valid Representations on:

- a draft vision and proposed measurable outcomes;
- any proposed aims and objectives;
- a proposed spatial strategy approach;
- a summary of the evidence the Council intends to gather and details of any evidence already gathered; and
- any other matters the Council considers appropriate for consultation, which may include initial draft policies, including site allocation policies.

6.11 This consultation will run for a minimum period of six weeks.

6.12 Following this consultation, the Council will consider the Valid Representations received and publish a summary of the consultation before progressing to Gateway 2.

6.13 Gateway 2 is one of three mandatory gateways within the new Local Plan process. At Gateway 2, a Planning Inspector will review the Council's progress and provide observations and advice to help identify and address any potential issues before the Proposed Local Plan is prepared.

Consultation on the Proposed Local Plan

6.14 Following publication of the Gateway 2 observations and advice, the Council will undertake a statutory public consultation on the proposed Local Plan. This is the final draft version of the plan which the Council is intending to submit for Public Examination.

6.15 The Council will make available and invite Valid Representations on:

- the proposed Local Plan;
- a map of the proposed Local Plan policies;
- details of the evidence gathered;
- a summary of the main issues raised through previous statutory consultations and how these have been addressed.

6.16 This consultation will run for a minimum of eight weeks.

6.17 Following this consultation, the Council will consider the Valid Representations received, publish a summary of this consultation and make any necessary updates to the Local Plan and supporting evidence before progressing to Gateway 3.

6.18 Gateway 3 is the final mandatory gateway before the proposed Local Plan can be submitted for independent examination. The Planning Inspectorate will assess whether the proposed Local Plan has met the prescribed requirements and is ready to proceed to examination.

Submission and Public Examination

6.19 Following completion of the proposed Local Plan stage, the Council will submit the proposed Local Plan and relevant supporting documents for Public Examination.

6.20 The Council will publish and notify interested parties of Submission in accordance with the statutory requirements.

6.21 A Planning Inspector will examine whether the proposed Local Plan meets the relevant legal and policy requirements.

6.22 The Public Examination may include hearing sessions. Information will be published about:

- the Public Examination process;
- Public Examination documents;
- hearing sessions;
- participation arrangements;
- correspondence from the Inspector will be made publicly available through appropriate channels.

6.23 Where further consultation is required during the Public Examination, including consultation on modifications to the proposed Local Plan, the Council will undertake this

in accordance with the relevant requirements and any directions from the Planning Inspector.

7. How we will engage

Accessible and inclusive engagement

7.1 Where further consultation is required during the Public Examination, including consultation on modifications to the proposed Local Plan, the Council will undertake this in accordance with the relevant requirements and any directions from the Planning Inspector.

7.2 The Council will seek to ensure that Local Plan consultations are accessible to all stakeholders.

7.3 Measures will include:

- presenting information clearly and concisely;
- using plain language wherever possible;
- providing alternative formats on request;
- providing translated information where appropriate;
- ensuring venues used for Council-organised engagement are accessible;
- retaining opportunities for non-digital participation;
- considering the timing and location of events;
- offering different methods for submitting Valid Representations;
- using maps and visual information to explain spatial proposals;
- working with organisations representing groups who may face barriers to participation.

7.4 Contact details will be provided so that individuals can request assistance or reasonable adjustments to enable participation.

Digital engagement

7.5 Digital methods provide an efficient way of making information widely available and enable people to participate at a time convenient to them.

7.6 A digital-first but not digital-only approach will be adopted to make engagement flexible, convenient and easier to fit around people's lives, particularly recognising Ipswich's relatively young and working-age population and the time constraints identified through the Scoping Consultation.

7.7 Methods may include:

- the Council's Local Plan webpages;
- the Council's Local Plan online consultation portal;
- email notifications;
- electronic newsletters;

- social media;
- online questionnaires;
- webinars / virtual meetings.

7.8 The Council will have regard to the relevant government guidance and the Regulations on the use of the above methods.

7.9 Digital engagement will not be relied upon exclusively. It will be supported by other non-digital methods as appropriate to reach different communities and to ensure inclusivity.

In-person engagement

7.10 In-person engagement can provide opportunities for dialogue and enable complex issues to be explored in greater depth.

7.11 Depending on the stage and purpose of engagement, approaches may include:

- drop-in events;
- attendance at existing community meetings/events;
- workshops;
- stakeholder meetings;
- targeted engagement with particular groups and organisations.

Written communication

7.12 The Council will retain support for non-digital methods of communication and participation.

7.13 These may include:

- letters;
- paper response forms;
- notices;
- newsletters;
- press releases;
- consultation materials available at appropriate locations.

8. How we will use and report feedback

8.1 The Council will review all Valid Representations (comments) received and consider the issues raised as part of the preparation of the Local Plan.

8.2 The Council recognises that the formal process for making Valid Representations may present barriers to participation for some people. Wider engagement methods can therefore provide opportunities for discussion and participation, but where comments are to be formally considered as Valid Representations, they must be submitted in writing.

8.3 Recognising feedback from the Scoping Consultation, the Council will seek to provide clear information about how Valid Representations have been considered and how they have informed the preparation of the Local Plan.

8.4 During the preparation of the Local Plan, it is not possible for the Council to provide an individual response to every representation received, however, all Valid Representations will be reviewed and considered.

8.5 Following each consultation stage, the Council will publish a statement summarising the main issues raised and explaining how these have been taken into account in preparing the Local Plan.

8.6 The Council reserves the right not to publish, or to redact, content that is considered abusive, offensive, discriminatory, defamatory or otherwise inappropriate.

9. What engagement can and cannot influence

9.1 The Council reserves the right not to publish, or to redact, content that is considered abusive, offensive, discriminatory, defamatory or otherwise inappropriate.

9.2 The Local Plan cannot address every issue affecting Ipswich. Some matters raised through consultation may fall outside the scope of the Local Plan or relate to services and decisions that are the responsibility of other organisations.

9.3 Where practicable, the Council will identify this and, where appropriate, direct the matter to the relevant services.

10. Monitoring and review

10.1 The Strategy will be reviewed at appropriate points and updates made as necessary.

11. Glossary

Evidence
Information and analysis used to understand Ipswich and inform the policies and proposals in the Local Plan. Evidence can cover subjects such as housing, employment, infrastructure, transport and the environment.

Gateway 1
Gateway 1 is the first mandatory gateway in the new Local Plan process. It is a self-assessment undertaken by the Council to confirm that the necessary arrangements are in place to begin preparing the Local Plan, including the proposed timetable, resources, evidence requirements and approach to engagement. Gateway 1 marks the formal start of the 30-month plan preparation period.

Gateway 2
At Gateway 2, a Planning Inspector will review the Council's progress and provide observations and advice to help identify and address any potential issues before the proposed Local Plan is prepared.

Gateway 3
Gateway 3 is the final mandatory gateway before the Local Plan can be submitted for independent examination. The Planning Inspectorate will assess whether the proposed Local Plan has met the prescribed requirements and is ready to proceed to examination.

General Consultation Bodies
Organisations defined by the Regulations. These include voluntary organisations whose activities benefit people living or working in the area, organisations representing people who share a Protected Characteristic, and organisations representing local businesses.

Local Plan
A statutory planning document that guides future development. It considers what an area needs and the opportunities available and covers matters such as housing, jobs, infrastructure, services and the environment. It identifies where development should take place and where it should be limited or not allowed.

Local Planning Authority
The public authority responsible for carrying out local planning functions for an area. Ipswich Borough Council is the Local Planning Authority for Ipswich.

Planning Inspector
An independent person appointed to examine the Local Plan following its Submission and assess whether it meets the relevant requirements.

Protected Characteristic
A characteristic protected from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. General Consultation Bodies can include organisations representing people who share a Protected Characteristic.

Public Examination
The independent assessment of the Local Plan by a Planning Inspector following its

Submission. The Inspector considers whether the Plan meets the relevant legal and policy requirements.

Regulations
The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.

Scoping Consultation
An early stage of preparing the Ipswich Local Plan. The Council's 2026 Scoping Consultation provided an opportunity for communities and stakeholders to comment on what the Local Plan should contain and how the Council should engage during its preparation.

Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)
A strategic planning document covering a wider geographical area. Where an SDS applies, the Council may be required to consider whether the Local Plan is in general conformity with it.

Specific Consultation Bodies
Organisations identified in the Regulations that the Council is required to engage where relevant. They include statutory bodies, infrastructure providers and neighbouring authorities.

Statements of Common Ground
A document used to record areas of agreement and, where relevant, disagreement between the Council and other organisations on strategic planning matters. The Council may prepare Statements of Common Ground to support effective joint working during Local Plan preparation.

Submission
The stage at which the Council formally submits the proposed Local Plan and its supporting documents for Examination.

Valid Representations
Also known as ‘duly made representations’. These are formal written comments for a Local Plan consultation, submitted during the advertised time and in the prescribed format and in accordance with the Council’s Privacy Notice. Valid representations must be attributable to an individual or organisation and are recorded and considered as part of the statutory plan-making process, which includes being published in the public domain.