

The Otford Society Residents' Survey on Sevenoaks District Council's Emerging Local Plan

Introduction

Otford boasts over 3,000 years of continuous occupation, from Bronze Age settlements and a large Roman villa, to Saxon battles and a grand Tudor palace built by Archbishop William Warham in 1514, later favoured by Henry VIII. Key historic features include the scheduled remains of Otford Palace which is an Ancient Monument of national significance, alongside listed structures like the village pond and the Conservation Area encompassing medieval street patterns, mature trees, hedges, and archaeological sites.

The residents of Otford feel that this rich heritage merits strong protection from inappropriate development, such as large-scale housing on Green Belt land, out-of-scale buildings, or proposals eroding open spaces and character. The Otford Society was formed to represent the views of the residents of Otford with respect to development in and around the village as well as to foster a local sense of community spirit.

Survey Background

On 23rd October 2025 Sevenoaks District Council published an Emerging Local Plan which included substantial developments both within and in close proximity to the village. The Otford Society were keen to understand the views of local residents and conducted an online survey between 23rd October and 7th December 2025. The survey was designed to be unbiased and was seeking views on proposals contained in the Sevenoaks District Council Emerging Local Plan. The Society wanted to give residents the opportunity to agree or disagree with the proposed developments and to highlight any concerns, or equally any advantages of the proposals. There were 416 responses to the survey and the results are summarised in the following sections of this document.

Summary of Results

Do you support the building of 1,500 new houses between Bat & Ball & Dunton Green?

| | Answer | Responses | Percent |
|---|--------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Yes | 17 | 4% |
| 2 | No | 384 | 92% |
| 3 | I'm Not Sure | 15 | 4% |

If 1,500 houses are built between Bat & Ball & Dunton Green would you have any concerns in the following areas: (tick all that apply):

| | Concern | Responses | Percent |
|---|---|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Congestion, local traffic and access issues | 401 | 96% |
| 2 | Pressure on local services (e.g. schools & medical services) | 394 | 95% |
| 3 | Destruction of Green Belt | 372 | 89% |
| 4 | Loss of valuable farmland | 307 | 74% |
| 5 | Deterioration in air quality | 314 | 75% |
| 6 | Merging between Otford & Sevenoaks & loss of village identity | 356 | 86% |
| 7 | Building of houses in areas prone to flooding | 306 | 74% |
| 8 | The scale of development will harm our local community | 353 | 85% |
| 9 | None of these | 11 | 3% |

If 1,500 houses are built between Bat & Ball & Dunton Green do you see any of the following benefits: (tick all that apply):

| | Potential Benefit | Responses | Percent |
|---|--|-----------|---------|
| 1 | The provision of much needed housing in the area | 66 | 16% |
| 2 | The potential for local employment opportunities | 35 | 8% |
| 3 | Potential for new infrastructure improvements | 61 | 15% |
| 4 | The enlargement our local community | 12 | 3% |
| 5 | None of these | 310 | 75% |

Do you support the building of 150 new houses on land adjacent to Hale Lane?

| | Answer | Responses | Percent |
|---|--------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Yes | 30 | 7% |
| 2 | No | 336 | 81% |
| 3 | I'm not sure | 50 | 12% |

If 150 houses are built on land adjacent to Hale Lane would you have any concerns in the following areas: (tick all that apply):

| | Concern | Responses | Percent |
|---|--|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Congestion, local traffic and access issues | 387 | 93% |
| 2 | Pressure on local services (e.g. schools & medical services) | 373 | 90% |
| 3 | Destruction of Green Belt | 350 | 84% |
| 4 | Loss of valuable farmland | 274 | 66% |
| 5 | Air quality | 276 | 66% |
| 6 | The scale of development will harm our local community | 305 | 73% |
| 7 | None of these | 19 | 5% |

If 150 houses are built on land adjacent to Hale Lane do you see any of the following benefits: (tick all that apply):

| | Potential Benefit | Responses | Percent |
|---|---|-----------|---------|
| 1 | The provision of much needed housing in the village | 80 | 19% |
| 2 | The potential for local employment opportunities | 21 | 5% |
| 3 | Potential for new infrastructure improvements | 33 | 8% |
| 4 | The enlargement our local community | 18 | 4% |
| 5 | None of these | 319 | 77% |

Do you support the building of 7 new houses in Ryecroft Rd?

| | Answer | Responses | Percent |
|---|--------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Yes | 114 | 27% |
| 2 | No | 187 | 45% |
| 3 | I'm not sure | 114 | 27% |

Summary of Additional Comments & Sentiment Analysis

Summary

Respondents were able to enter free text responses at the end of the survey and the key themes mentioned have been extracted using AI tools.

Key Themes

- **Green Belt and Environment:** Frequent objections to reclassifying green belt as "grey belt," citing loss of farmland, wildlife habitats (e.g., pollinators, bats, birds), biodiversity, and floodplains near River Darent. Many argue it contradicts national policy and harms mental health via reduced green spaces.
- **Traffic and Infrastructure:** Roads (e.g., Rye Lane, Telston Lane, Pilgrims Way) described as inadequate for extra vehicles, causing gridlock, safety risks, and pollution. Concerns include frequent closures, narrow lanes, and no viable access for sites like Hale Lane.
- **Public Services:** Overstretched GPs, schools (Otford Primary oversubscribed), hospitals, and utilities (water shortages, hosepipe bans, sewage capacity). Doubts about developer promises for new facilities.
- **Village Identity:** Fear of Otford losing rural charm, becoming a "suburban estate" or merged with Sevenoaks/Dunton Green, eroding heritage and community feel.
- **Water and Flooding:** Repeated mentions of depleted aquifers, ongoing bans, and flood risks on proposed sites, questioning sustainability amid climate change.

Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment is **predominantly negative (90%+ of responses)**, with strong anger, frustration, and despair (e.g., "insanity," "catastrophic," "ruin our village"). Words like "concerned," "oppose," "destroy," and "fight" dominate. Positive/neutral views (minority) accept modest infill housing or new towns elsewhere, conditional on infrastructure upgrades and brownfield prioritisation.

| Theme | % Mentions (Est.) | Sentiment Tone |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Green Belt Loss | 70% | Highly Negative |
| Traffic Congestion | 65% | Negative |
| Services Strain | 50% | Negative |
| Water/Flooding | 40% | Negative |
| Support Limited Build | 10% | Neutral/Conditional |

Actions Requested of The Otford Society in Survey Responses

Respondents overwhelmingly urge the Otford Society to actively oppose the proposed housing developments, represent village interests, and fight to preserve green belt land and infrastructure.

Key Requests

- **Oppose and Fight Developments:** Repeated calls to "fight these proposals," "stop these developments," "block this proposal," and "mobilise every resource to stop these plans," targeting sites like the 1500 homes, Hale Lane, and Ryecroft Road.
- **Represent the Village:** Explicit requests to "represent the village against these proposals," "represent our village as the historic heritage community," "represent the interests of the Otford Village Community," and "stand up and fight to preserve Otford as a village."
- **Advocacy and Lobbying:** Write to MPs (e.g., Laura Trott), local representatives, Sevenoaks District Council (SDC), and Kent County Council (KCC); highlight grey belt flaws; demand proof of local housing need.
- **Raise Awareness and Mobilise:** Hold regular meetings, coordinate responses, raise awareness of plans' scale/impacts, partner with groups like Kent Wildlife Trust, and keep residents informed on progress.
- **Promote Alternatives:** Push for brownfield sites first, small-scale infill, infrastructure upgrades (e.g., bypass, GPs, schools) before building, and green initiatives to keep land protected.

Sentiment on Society's Role

Strong support for ongoing efforts ("keep up the good work," "thank you for fighting this," "you're doing a great job"), with praise for awareness-raising but demands for louder, unified action against "destructive" plans.

| Action Category | Example Quotes (Paraphrased) | Frequency (Est.) |
|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| Oppose Developments | "Fight/stop/block plans" | High (60%+) |
| Represent Interests | "Represent village/heritage" | Medium (40%) |
| Lobby Authorities | "Write to MP/SDC" | Medium (30%) |
| Awareness/Mobilise | "Hold meetings/partners" | Low (20%) |
| Alternatives | "Brownfield/infrastructure" | Low (15%) |

Conclusions & Immediate Actions

It is clear that an overwhelming majority of respondents are against the large proposed developments proposed in SDC's Emerging Local Plan. Opposition to the plans appears to be related to the size and scale of developments with 92% being against the largest development (SEV24) and 81% opposed to the houses adjacent to Hale Lane (OT2). This indicates that residents are certainly not all against development, but that they have strongly held concerns about the likely impact on the village. Whilst a minority of residents mentioned the need for housing in the area, it is notable that a large majority of residents (75% - 77%) saw no benefits at all in the proposed large scale developments. The top concern expressed in the survey (93%) is about congestion, local traffic and access issue. The level of concern about pressure on local services was very high at 90% and residents also feel strongly about destruction of the Green Belt with 84% mentioning this.

Based on strong evidence from the survey that residents feel the need to be represented in this matter, the Otford Society has concluded that it should take the following immediate actions:

1. To set up a separate sub-committee, the "Otford Protection Committee" to formulate plans for objecting to the proposals.
2. To hold a vote of members to authorise the use of the Village Protection Fund to fight the inappropriate developments which currently holds around £50,000.
3. To formulate a robust response for submission to Sevenoaks District Council as part of the Public Consultation.

All three of these actions have been completed and The Otford Protection Committee is already working on other activities such as holding sessions to help residents complete their own consultation responses and the erection of large banners at key locations in the village. The committee is also working on the recruitment of domain experts in preparation for a response at the Regulation 19 stage of the Local Plan and has worked with other local groups to commission expert reports as part of the Regulation 18 submission.