

## **Horsham District Local Plan 2023-2040**

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**Programme Officer:**

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**Examination Webpage:**

<https://www.horsham.gov.uk/planning/local-plan/local-plan-examination>

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14 October 2024

## **EXAMINATION GUIDANCE NOTES**

### **Introduction**

1. The Horsham District Local Plan 2023-2040 Regulation 19 – January 2024 (the Plan) was submitted for examination on 26 July 2024. I have been appointed by the Secretary of State to conduct the examination. This note provides guidance on the procedural and administrative arrangements for the examination. Further information on the examination process can be found in the Planning Inspectorate's publication 'Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations' which is available via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-plans>

### **Programme Officer**

2. Kerry Trueman is the Programme Officer (PO) for the examination. She is working under my direction and is independent of the Council. Her contact details are given above.
3. The main tasks of the PO are to communicate between the Inspector, the Council and representors and hearing participants liaising with all parties to ensure the smooth running of the examination. Any questions or other matters that you wish to raise should be directed to the PO.

### **Examination Webpages and library**

4. The examination webpages and library content is controlled by the Inspector and the PO. All documents for the examination, including the evidence base and the procedural material, are published on the examination webpage – the link is provided above. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the PO so that alternative arrangements can be put in place.

## **The Inspector's Role**

5. My role is to consider whether the submitted Plan (the Plan) complies with the relevant legislation and is sound. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (paragraph 35) makes it clear that in order to be found sound the Plan must be:
  - a) positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
  - b) justified – an appropriate strategy taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
  - c) effective – deliverable over the plan period and based on effective joint working on cross boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
  - d) consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the NPPF's policies and other statements of national policy, where relevant.
6. It is not my role to make improvements to the Plan, provided that it is sound and legally-compliant.

## **The NPPF**

7. The Government (on 30 July 2024) commenced a consultation seeking views on its proposed approach to revising the NPPF. It is important to note that notwithstanding any future changes to national policy, current national policy is that the Plan is examined under the transitional arrangements set out in the NPPF (December 2023) in paragraphs 228 to 230. This means that the Plan will be examined against the version of the NPPF published in September 2023. When I refer to the NPPF it is therefore the September 2023 version unless I indicate otherwise.

## **Outcome of the Examination**

8. There are three possible outcomes to the examination:
  - a) the submitted plan is sound and legally compliant;
  - b) the submitted plan is not sound and/or legally compliant but could be made so by changes (known as main modifications), if necessary, following the preparation of additional evidence; or
  - c) the submitted plan is not sound and could not be made sound by changes. If so, we would be likely to recommend that the Council withdraw the plan. The same would apply if there is a failure of legal compliance which cannot be remedied (for example, a failure to comply with the duty to cooperate).
9. After the hearing has closed, I will prepare a report for the Council setting out my conclusions and recommendations. My report will deal with the main issues of

soundness and legal compliance, taking into account the representations made but without responding to each of them.

### Changes to the Plan

10. The starting point for the examination is that the Council have submitted a plan which they think is ready for examination. Now that the Plan has been submitted there are only two means by which changes can be made to it:
  - a) as main modifications recommended an Inspector; or
  - b) as additional modifications made by the Council.
11. I can only recommend main modifications if they are necessary to make the submitted Plan sound and/or legally-compliant. Any potential main modifications must be subject to consultation before I recommend them, and in some cases they may also require further sustainability appraisal, and Habitats Regulations Assessment.
12. Additional modifications (sometimes also referred to as “minor modifications”) are changes which do not materially affect the policies in the Plan. They may be made by the Council on adoption and do not fall within the scope of the examination. The Council is accountable for any additional modifications that are made.
13. The Policies Map is not defined in legislation as a development plan document. This means that we have no powers to recommend Main Modifications directly to it. However, as the role of the Policies Map is to illustrate geographically the application of policies in the Plan, if the geographical illustration of a policy is flawed, the policy will be unsound. In such circumstances, I would ask the Council to draw up a proposed change to what is shown on the submission Policies Map.

### Representations made on the Plan

14. The Council has prepared a Regulation 22 Consultation Statement which includes details of the consultation that has taken place on the Plan, and a summary of the main issues raised in the representations. A full set of the representations made on the Plan at the pre-submission (Regulation 19) stage has been provided to and I will take them all into account. The legislation does not require me to take account of any representations made at any earlier stage, including under Regulation 18.

### Examination hearing and Programme

15. The examination hearing, which forms part of the examination of the Plan, will commence at 0930 on Tuesday 10 December 2024 at the **Main Conference Room at: Horsham District Council, Parkside, Chart Way, Horsham, RH12 1RL** and continue on the following days:  
  
Tues-Thurs 10-12 December with Fri 13 in reserve,  
Tues-Thurs 17-19 December, with Fri 20 in reserve,

Tues-Thurs 14-16 January 2025, with Fri 17 in reserve, and  
Tues-Thurs 21-23 January, with Thurs 23 & Fri 24 in reserve, if needed.

16. Each hearing day will start at 0930 and will aim to finish no later than 1730, with sessions normally starting at 0930 and 1400 each day. All those who wish to speak (participate) at the Hearing sessions should confirm this in writing with the Programme Officer by 1700 on Friday 1 November 2024. The deadline for receipt of written statements for ALL Matters to be considered at the Hearing sessions is 1700 on Friday 22 November 2024.
17. Discussion at the hearing will be based on my matters, issues and questions which have been issued alongside this guidance note. A draft/provisional hearing programme has also been issued alongside these notes. Updates to the hearing programme, if required, will be available on the examination webpage. It is the responsibility of individual participants to check the latest timetable and to ensure that they are present at the correct time.

### **The scope of my examination, and omission sites**

18. Some representations are concerned with what are known as “omission sites”. These are sites which have not been allocated in the Plan for development. However, my role is to examine the soundness of the submitted Plan. It is not part of my role to examine the soundness of sites that are not allocated in the Plan. Consequently, I do not propose to hold a hearing session dealing specifically with sites that have not been allocated in the Plan, or to discuss the merits of omission sites at any hearing sessions.

### **Attending the hearing**

19. Anyone may attend the hearing as an observer, but only those who have made representation(s) seeking to change the Plan have a right to appear before, and be heard by, the Inspector.
20. Written representations carry the same weight as those made orally at a hearing session. Participation at the hearing is therefore only likely to be beneficial if you have specific points to contribute on the published matters, issues and questions. Normally you may only take part in the hearing session(s) that are relevant to your original representation(s).
21. If you have a right to be heard and you wish to exercise that right, you should contact the PO by 1700 on Friday 1 November 2024 indicating which session(s) in the published hearing programme you wish to participate in. You must do this regardless of what you may have indicated in your original representation(s). Please note that if you do not contact the PO by that date, it will be assumed that you do not wish to appear and be heard, and you will not be listed as a participant.
22. Representors who are not seeking changes to the Plan, including those who have made representations supporting it, do not have a right to take part in the hearing. However, I may invite additional participants to take part in the

hearing if I consider that their participation would assist me in determining the soundness and legal compliance of the Plan.

23. To ensure that there is sufficient space, organisations participating in the hearing sessions will normally be allocated one seat at the table, with members of their team “hot-seating” as necessary. Similarly, the Council should limit the number of its representatives at the table to those needed to deal with the topic under discussion.
24. Where several representors or organisations who have similar points to make wish to attend the hearing, it would assist us if they would arrange to be represented by one or two spokesperson(s). Please let the PO know as soon as possible if you have any specific needs or requirements to enable your attendance at and/or participation in the hearing session(s).

### **Hearing statements**

25. The Council should produce a statement for each hearing session responding to all the identified matters, issues and questions.
26. Representors should only submit hearing statements if they have points to make on the identified matters, issues and questions. Statements should be concise and focussed, and in any event must contain no more than 3,000 words for each matter. If you wish to submit a statement covering more than one matter a separate statement for each matter covered should be submitted. Statements should:
  - a) clearly identify (by reference number/letter) which specific matters, issues and questions are being answered;
  - b) only answer the specific matters, issues and questions which are of direct relevance to your original representation(s);
  - c) not introduce new evidence or arguments.
27. Please refrain from commenting on matters which go beyond the scope of my questions.
28. Appendices should only be included if they are directly relevant and necessary and should not be used as a means of increasing the word-count. In this regard, do not submit further statements in the guise of appendices. If you need to refer to a large document that is not on the examination webpage, please contact the PO as it may be more efficient for it to be added to the webpage rather than attached to a statement.
29. The Council statements should also be focussed and succinct. However, because the Council has to answer every issue and question, it may be necessary to go over the limit of 3,000 words per matter.
30. It is intended that all examination documents will be electronic versions. Please email electronic versions of your statement(s) and any appendices to the PO in Word or PDF format by 1700 on Friday 22 November 2024.

31. If you are unable to email your statement, please contact the PO so that alternative arrangements can be made.
32. Hearing statements will be posted on the examination webpage after the above deadline, so that they are available to all participants and anyone else who wishes to read them. Because they will be available in this way, they will not be circulated directly to participants. Anyone who is unable to access them on the webpage should contact the PO.
33. Once the date for submitting hearing statements has passed, no other written evidence will be accepted, unless I specifically request it. In fairness to other participants the hearing sessions should not be used to introduce additional or new evidence.

### **Statements of Common Ground**

34. In the context of the duty to co-operate, the NPPF (paragraph 27) expects one or more statement(s) of common ground (SoCG) to be produced documenting the cross-boundary matters being addressed and progress in co-operating to address them.
35. It is often also useful for SoCGs to be drawn up between the Council and other public bodies, other participants or site promoters to confirm specific matters that have been agreed, particularly if those matters have previously been the subject of representations raising soundness or legal compliance issues. SoCGs should also helpfully highlight matters that remain in contention, or the position regarding individual allocated sites.
36. If any further SoCGs are to be prepared or finalised, then they should, wherever possible, be completed by 1700 on Monday 11 November 2024 and published as examination documents so that other representors are aware of their contents before submitting their hearing statements. This should not preclude the Council from continuing to engage on outstanding issues with other bodies and updating any SoCGs as necessary.

### **Conduct of the hearing sessions**

37. The hearing sessions will be based on the identified matters, issues and questions. Each hearing session will deal with these by way of a structured discussion which I will lead, taking an inquisitorial approach. There will be no formal presentation of cases or cross-examination. Participants may, if they wish, bring professional experts with them. although this is not essential. Where written evidence provides me with the information we need on a particular issue, I will explain that and may not consider that issue further at the hearing session.
38. Discussion at the hearing sessions will focus on the issues that I need to hear further discussion about, in order to reach conclusions on the soundness and legal compliance of the Plan, and on any potential need for main modifications. I will make brief introductory comments on the issues to be covered and then invite individuals to respond to specific questions. I will have

read all the relevant representations and statements beforehand and will expect other participants to have done so as well. The hearing sessions are not an opportunity to repeat a case already set out in written representations.

### **Site Visits**

39. I will carry out site visits before, during, or after the hearing as necessary to inform my assessment of the soundness of the Plan. All site visits will be unaccompanied, unless it is necessary to go onto private land, in which case I will make the necessary arrangements via the PO.

### **Close of the examination**

40. The examination will close when my report is submitted to the Council. However, unless I specifically request them, no further representations or evidence will be accepted after the hearing sessions have finished. Late or unsolicited material may be returned.

### **Summary of Key Dates**

- Matters, issues and questions, draft hearing programme and Inspector's guidance note published - 14 October 2024
- Deadline to confirm with the PO whether you wish to exercise your right to appear at an examination hearing session – 1700 Friday 1 November 2024
- Deadline for submission of SoCG – 1700 Monday 11 November 2024
- Deadline for submission of hearing statements – 1700 Friday 22 November 2024
- Hearing sessions start – 0930 10 December 2024

### **Further Information**

Further information about the preparation and examination of Local Plans is available as follows:

- Relevant guidance – available from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-plans>
- Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice>
- Short guide to taking part in local plan examinations  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-in-local-plan-examinations>
- National Planning Policy Framework  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- Planning Practice Guidance  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

## Examination of the Horsham District Local Plan 2023-2040

- including the section on Plan-making  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making>
- Relevant legislation – available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended), The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)

41. If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact the PO.

L Fleming

INSPECTOR