

Examination into the soundness of the Horsham District Local Plan 2023-2040

GUIDANCE NOTE FROM THE INSPECTOR

The hearings on the above plan will commence at 10.00am on Tuesday 21 April 2026 and will form part of my examination into the soundness of the Plan.

Introduction

1. I am the Planning Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to examine the soundness of the Horsham District Local Plan 2023-2040. I have prepared this guidance note. Its purpose is to explain the procedural and administrative matters relating to the examination.
2. The Programme Officer (PO) for the Examination is **Kerry Trueman**. She is acting as an independent officer for the examination, under my direction. Kerry will be responsible for organising the programme of hearings, maintaining the examination library, recording and circulating all material received, and assisting me with procedural and administrative matters. She will also advise on any programming and procedural queries. Any matters that the Council or representors wish to raise with me should be addressed to the Programme Officer. She can be contacted at programmeofficer@horsham.gov.uk.
3. Information about the progress of the examination and links to documents are provided on Horsham District Council's website: <https://www.horsham.gov.uk/planning/local-plan/local-plan-examination>

The Inspector's role

4. My task is to consider the soundness and legal compliance of the plan, on the basis of the relevant legislation and the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF). By virtue of the transitional arrangements in paragraphs 234 and 235 of the 2024 version of the NPPF, the relevant national planning policies under which the plan will be examined are those of the December 2023 Framework.
5. I shall examine the Plan to determine whether it is:
 - (a) *positively prepared* – based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements;
 - (b) *justified* – an appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence;
 - (c) *effective* – deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working;
 - (d) *consistent with national policy* – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the NPPF's policies.
6. Further details of the examination process are set out in [Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations](#), the latest version of which is dated 27 November 2025. See for details of where to find this document and other useful publications and advice.
7. The plan was submitted for examination on 26 July 2024. I was appointed to examine the plan on 28 January 2026 in place of the previous Inspector, Luke Fleming.
8. Although some hearings were conducted by the previous Inspector, I have started the examination afresh, and my starting point for the examination is that the Council have submitted what they consider to be a sound plan, as the NPPF requires. Those seeking changes must demonstrate why they consider the plan to be unsound, by reference to one or more of the tests of soundness.

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9. I will seek to address unresolved issues concerning the soundness or legal compliance of the plan through the examination hearings, and through consideration of written submissions. It should be emphasised that my role is not to improve the plan, but to determine whether or not it meets the soundness tests.
10. The plan was submitted under the constraints imposed by the requirement for water neutrality, which meant that it did not make full provision for local housing need. The water neutrality issue has now been addressed, and I have asked the Council in accordance with the relevant National Planning Policy Framework to review its evidence and establish a housing requirement figure for the plan period and identify sites which will meet the area's identified housing need, including a proportion of housing need that cannot be met within neighbouring areas (principally Crawley).
11. The first week of hearings which will begin on 21 April 2026 will consider the matter of the housing requirement and related issues, and will also consider business, industrial and logistics needs.
12. **In view of the particular circumstances of this examination, I have not produced separate "matters, issues and questions" for the first set of hearings. Rather, the subjects to be covered are set out in the draft agenda which accompanies this guidance note.**
13. Following the first set of hearings, in connection with the re-appraisal of the plan's housing requirement, the Council will go through a process of site appraisal and selection, sustainability appraisal and other necessary work in line with its letter and attachments (HDCJB01, 01a and 01b).
14. This process, together with the written dialogue that I will have with the Council on the plan's development management policies, will result in proposals for main modifications to the plan. Main modifications are changes that are required to make the plan sound. A schedule of main modifications will be produced which will be subject to consultation. It is anticipated that, following that consultation, a second set of hearings may need to take place. If these are necessary, they are anticipated to take place in September 2026.
15. After the final set of hearings has closed, I will prepare a report for the Council with my conclusions. My report will deal with the main issues concerning the soundness of the plan, taking into account all the representations received. It will not deal with the detail of each individual representation. My report will recommend modifications to make the plan legally compliant and sound.
16. The Council may then formally adopt the plan, incorporating the modifications which I recommend.

Number of representations

17. 1639 valid representations were received on the plan.

Progressing your representations

18. Representors may have already indicated whether their views should be dealt with in written form or whether they feel that they need to come and discuss them orally at a hearing session. **However, in order to participate in a particular hearing session you must inform the Programme Officer by 5pm on 26 March 2026, citing which session(s) you wish to participate in.** In doing so it is important to understand that written and oral submissions will carry the same weight and I will have equal regard to views put at a hearing or in writing. Participation at a hearing session will only be useful and helpful to me if you need to participate in a discussion concerning the soundness or legal compliance of the plan. The housing topics will be of a technical nature. In the interests of fairness to other participants, no additional request to appear at hearing sessions will be accepted after the date specified above, unless there are special circumstances justifying it.

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19. The right to participate in a hearing extends only to those who have proposed changes to the plan in order to make it sound and legally compliant. There is no need for those who have supported the plan to take part in the hearings.
20. The hearing sessions will be live streamed and recorded and made available through the Council's website to enable people to follow the discussions. I may invite additional participants to participate in the hearings where I think they are needed to enable the soundness of the Plan to be determined.
21. Those who wish to proceed by written means can rely on what they have already submitted. The original representations should have included all the points and evidence necessary to substantiate them, so there will be no need to submit further material based on the original representations.
22. However, for participants in the hearings, an opportunity does exist to submit further written material in the form of a hearing statement. This should be limited to responding to the matters I have identified in the attached draft agenda. Further details regarding hearing statements are set out below. If any person or organisation wishes to submit a further written statement, an electronic copy should be supplied to the Programme Officer by **5pm on Friday 10 April 2026**. A separate statement should be supplied for each matter addressed; please do not combine responses to more than one matter within a single statement.

The hearing sessions

23. The first week of hearing sessions for the examination will take place at the following location:

**Albery House
Springfield Road
Horsham
RH12 2GB**

24. A draft agenda for the first week of the hearings is being issued at the same time as this guidance note. It will be updated if necessary before the hearing sessions. The programme may be amended, so participants should check the Council's website for any changes.
25. The hearings will take the form of a series of discussions based on the matters that I have identified. They will concentrate only on the major topics; many of the more detailed matters are being dealt with in writing.
26. I will lead the hearings and go through the identified topics by means of a structured discussion. This will be in the form of questions from myself and responses from the participants. I will concentrate on the issues that I need to hear more about. The emphasis will be on testing for soundness. The aim of the hearings is to enable me to gain the information necessary to come to a firm conclusion and decision on the agenda items.
27. Please take careful note of the following bullet points.
 - Participation is arranged through the Programme Officer. In the interests of efficiency the Programme Officer and I will seek to allocate participants to sessions where we consider they would make the most effective contribution.
 - Where several different people or groups have submitted similar representations on the same matter, the Programme Officer will ask prospective participants to nominate a single spokesperson.

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- Short hearing statements will be welcomed (see below for details).
- There will be no formal presentation of evidence, as I will have read all the relevant representations and statements beforehand, and will expect all the other participants to have done so.
- There is no cross-examination and is very common for people to participate without professional or legal representation.
- However, participants may be supported by legal and professional experts if they wish, who will be treated as part of their team.
- In the interests of efficiency it may be necessary to restrict the number of participating individuals from each team. Participants should nominate one well-briefed spokesperson to speak for them. Exceptions to this will be made where barristers have been appointed or where two or three technical experts are necessary to explain the evidence.
- The hearings will be inquisitorial rather than adversarial and will be short and focused with careful control over the discussion and the time taken.
- For each topic or sub-topic I will set out the matters to be covered and then invite individuals to make their contribution in response to the points I have raised.
- Be aware that for some topics I may go round the table only once.
- Counter argument is acceptable where it adds to the evidence but contradiction for the sake of it is not encouraged.
- I will intervene to stop the unnecessary repetition of points.
- Participants should respond to the questions raised rather than simply reading out their already submitted written representations.
- All participants will have an equal opportunity to contribute but for each topic the Council will have the final say.
- No more evidence can be submitted once the hearing session has closed, except with my agreement.

The hearing timetable

28. The hearings will open at 10.00am on Tuesday 21 April 2026.

29. The hearing sessions will normally start at 10.00am and 2.00pm each day, but these times may vary if longer or shorter sessions are necessary. Short breaks will be taken at convenient points in the mid-morning and mid-afternoon, and lunch will usually be taken at about 1.00pm. It is the responsibility of individual participants to ensure that they are present at the correct time and are fully committed to attend the whole hearing session to which they have been invited; latecomers may not be admitted. The proceedings of each hearing session will be livestreamed and recorded and will be accessible from a link on the Examination webpages. This will allow those who wish to follow the hearings but who are not invited as participants to follow the discussions. This link will be added in due course:

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

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30. Documents prepared by the Council are available to view on, or download from, the Council's website. As additional examination documents are produced, including participants' hearing statements, they will be added to the library. The library will therefore include all the documents that you are likely to need to refer to. If anyone is in any difficulty gaining access to documentation, please contact the Programme Officer.

Hearing statements

31. The following provisions should be carefully read and followed. Otherwise statements will be returned.
32. Short written statements may be produced by each representor. There should be one separate statement for each matter. Each statement can cover any of the issues identified in the Inspectors' Matters and Issues but should not stray beyond those issues. Written statements for the hearings must be:
- clearly headed with the name of the representor;
 - limited to no more than 3,000 words per matter (except for those produced by the Council), but additional relevant appendices may be attached;
 - confined to the issues and questions that I have identified;
 - no longer than is necessary to deal with their subject matter;
 - clearly related to the original representation whilst avoiding unnecessary repetition.
33. **The Council's initial appraisal of its position on the housing requirement will be available from Thursday 26 March 2026. This is so that participants can consider it and address it in their hearing statements.**
34. Hearing statements from all participants for the first week of hearings should be emailed to the Programme Officer to arrive by **5pm on Friday 10 April**. All participants should adhere to the timetable for submitting statements.
35. It is helpful for statements to be based on the most recent evidence.
36. Late submissions and additional material (other than that invited by us) are unlikely to be accepted on the day of the relevant session. If material is not received by the deadlines stated below, the PO will assume that you are relying only on the original representations.
37. Please email electronic versions of all statements and appendices to the Programme Officer [PO] in Word or PDF format: email address: programmeofficer@horsham.gov.uk
38. Please only submit appendices to statements where they are essential. The statement should make it clear why they are relevant. Appendices should have a contents page and be paginated throughout. They do not need to contain extracts from any publication that is already before the examination, provided the relevant parts of those documents are adequately cross-referenced. The 3,000-word limit does not apply to appendices, but they should respect the aim of succinctness.
39. The Council must produce statements dealing with all my issues and questions. The Council's statements are not subject to the 3,000-word limit, but they should still be succinct.
40. Hearing statements will be posted on the Examination website, 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.

Statements of common ground

41. Where relevant, the Council and participants are strongly encouraged jointly to produce statements of common ground, to assist with the understanding of relevant matters, clarify where

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there is agreement, and to identify or resolve areas of dispute. These will enable the hearing to concentrate on the key issues that need further testing to establish whether the plan is sound. They could, for example, include agreed wording of a suggested change to a policy, agreed factual information, or clearly-identified points of disagreement. Statements of common ground should be submitted by **5pm on Friday 10 April 2026**. Exceptionally I may accept a statement of common ground beyond this date should it help to clarify a particular matter.

Site visits

42. I will undertake site visits relevant to the examination. These will generally take place unaccompanied by any other parties, unless I need to arrange access to private land.

Closing the examination

43. The examination will remain open until my report is submitted to the Council. However, no further representation or evidence will be accepted after the final hearings sessions have closed, unless I specifically request it. Any late unsolicited material will be returned.

Finally

44. I emphasise:

- I will have equal regard to representations made in writing and those made orally at the hearings;
- any further statements must focus on my matters, issues and questions and there must be separate statements for each matter;
- be aware of the need for succinctness, respecting the letter and spirit of the 3,000 word limit, and the other requirements; and
- the deadline for the submission of statements must be adhered to.

Jonathan Bore

INSPECTOR

13 March 2026

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ANNEX A

Sources of relevant documents and advice

A. The Council's website

All documents and information for the Local Plan examination are available on the Council's website at:

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

Please contact the Programme Officer if you have any difficulty accessing or locating documentation.

B. Relevant legislation

These documents can be searched for and found at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk>:

C. Guidance from the Planning Inspectorate

Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations (November 2025). This can also be found at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk>