

Examination of West Berkshire Local Plan 2022-2039

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IN2: INSPECTOR'S PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS TO THE COUNCIL

Introduction

In order to provide clarity and potentially narrow down the focus of the examination, the Council is asked to provide **brief** responses to the following Preliminary Questions relating to general and procedural matters and the Plan's strategic policies. Where necessary, reference should be made to the main relevant evidence available in the examination library.

If consideration of any of my Preliminary Questions leads the Council to conclude that a main modification is needed to make the Plan sound or legally compliant, please set out suggested revised wording using ~~striketrough~~ and underlined text.

A response from the Council is requested by **midday on Friday 23rd June 2023**.

I may publish a subsequent note in due course setting out Preliminary Questions relating to the site allocations and development management policies in the Plan.

Representors are not being asked to respond to any of the Preliminary Questions at this stage. In due course, when I have considered the Council responses to my Preliminary Questions, I will publish the Matters, Issues and Questions that will be the focus of the examination. Representors will then be able to submit written responses to the Matters, Issues and Questions that are relevant to their regulation 20 representations.

Duty to cooperate

The Duty to Cooperate Statement¹ provides information about engagement with local planning authorities and prescribed bodies on strategic matters² during the preparation of the Plan in the context of section 33A of the 2004 Act.

PQ1. What were the strategic matters that the Council needed to address during the preparation of the Plan?

PQ2. What were the main mechanisms that were used to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis with the relevant local planning authorities and other prescribed bodies to address the strategic matters during the preparation of the Plan?

PQ3. Have any local planning authorities or other prescribed bodies made representations under regulation 20, or subsequently in discussions about the duty to cooperate statement of common ground, that claim the duty to cooperate has not been complied with?

PQ4. What, if any, outstanding strategic matters are subject to ongoing discussions with any local planning authorities or other prescribed bodies and what is the latest position with regard to those?

Public consultation

Section 19(3) of the 2004 Act requires the Council to prepare the local plan in accordance with its statement of community involvement.

PQ5. (a) Is the Council satisfied that it prepared the Plan in accordance with its statement of community involvement?
(b) Were any concerns raised in representations made under regulation 20 that consultation failed to comply with the statement of community involvement or other legal requirements?

Equalities

Public authorities are required under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the following aims when exercising their functions:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic³ and persons who do not share it; and

¹ CD11.

² A "strategic matter" is (a) sustainable development or use of land that has or would have a significant impact in at least two planning areas, including (in particular) sustainable development or use of land for or in connection with infrastructure that is strategic and has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas, and (b) sustainable development or use of land in a two-tier area if the development or use is a county matter or would have a significant impact on a county matter [section 33A(4) of the 2004 Act].

³ Age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

An Equality Impact Assessment of the Plan was carried out⁴. This concludes that the Plan will have a positive impact on all people with protected characteristics through the delivery of housing (including affordable housing) and employment; improved transport and accessibility; and the provision of improved, and safe access to, open space, recreational, health, education, leisure, community and faith facilities and services. The assessment also found no evidence that the Plan will have a negative impact on people with protected characteristics.

PQ6. Were any concerns raised in representations made under regulation 20 that the Plan is likely to adversely affect persons who share relevant protected characteristics as defined in s149 of the Equality Act 2010?

Habitat regulations assessment

The habitat regulations assessment⁵ finds that the Plan, in combination with other plans and projects, has the potential to have significant effects on the integrity of the River Lambourn, Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain, and Kennet Valley Alderwoods Special Areas of Conservation. However, the assessment concludes that those in-combination effects can be avoided through a combination of strategic and proposal-specific mitigation measures.

The Duty to Cooperate Statement⁶ advises that the approach to the habitats regulations assessment has been developed in conjunction with Natural England; they agreed with the Council's initial screening opinion; the final assessment document has been developed following that screening; and the Council has requested entering into a statement of common ground with Natural England.

PQ7. Which policies in the Plan contain the strategic and proposal-specific mitigation measures that will ensure that significant effects on the integrity of the River Lambourn, Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain, and Kennet Valley Alderwoods Special Areas of Conservation will be avoided?

PQ8. (a) Are there any significant outstanding concerns from Natural England (or other representors) about the habitat regulations assessment?
(b) If so, what are they and what is being done to resolve them?
(c) When is the statement of common ground with Natural England expected to be finalised?

Viability assessment

Local plans should be informed by a proportionate assessment of viability that takes into account all relevant policies, and local and national standards, including the cost implications of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and section 106. The

⁴ CD10.

⁵ CD8.

⁶ CD11.

assessment should demonstrate that the total cumulative cost of all relevant policies will not undermine deliverability⁷. The Plan is supported by viability evidence⁸.

PQ9. (a) Does the viability evidence make reasonable assumptions about the cost of meeting all of the policy requirements included in the Plan along with any other relevant national standards?

Does the viability evidence make reasonable assumptions about (b) the value of development, and (c) the price a willing landowner would be likely to sell their land for?

(d) Does the evidence indicate that the total cumulative cost of all relevant policies will not undermine the viability of the development that the Plan assumes will take place during the plan period?

Climate change

Section 19(1A) of the 2004 Act requires development plan documents (taken as a whole) to include policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the planning authority's area contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change.

PQ10. Which policies in the Plan are designed to secure that the development and use of land contributes to the mitigation of, and/or adaptation to, climate change?

Superseded policies

Regulation 8 parts (4) & (5) require that the policies in a local plan must be consistent with the adopted development plan unless the plan being examined contains a policy that is intended to supersede another policy in the adopted development plan and the plan states that fact and identifies the superseded policy.

Appendix 7 sets out a schedule of policies in the West Berkshire District Plan 1991-2006, the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026, and the Housing Site Allocations DPD 2006-2026 that will be superseded by policies in the Plan. However, at the end of Appendix 7 is a list of policies in the Housing Site Allocations DPD 2006-2026 that "have not been carried forward" as part of the Plan.

PQ11. (a) How are each of the sites listed in Appendix 7 that "have not been carried forward" designated on the submission Policies Map⁹?

(b) Which policies in the Plan are relevant to those designations?

(c) Is it the intention that those site allocation policies that are not carried forward be superseded by policies in the Plan?

Strategic priorities

⁷ PPG ID: 10 (2019).

⁸ VIA1a to VIA1f (Autumn 2022).

⁹ CD2.

Local planning authorities must identify the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in their area¹⁰.

PQ12. What are the Council's strategic priorities for the development and use of land in West Berkshire?

Strategic policies

Plans must include, and explicitly identify, strategic policies to address the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in their area having regard to national policy and guidance relating to the purpose and nature of strategic and non-strategic policies¹¹.

The Plan contains 24 strategic policies. These vary in their purpose and nature, some relating to specific geographic areas and others to thematic issues.

Neighbourhood plans will be required to be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the Plan once it is adopted.

PQ13. Do each of the policies SP1 to SP24 meet the criteria for strategic policies set out in national policy and guidance?

Strategic policies SP13 to SP15 list sites allocated for residential development in different parts of the District, and SP21 lists sites allocated for employment development. Chapter 8 of the Plan is entitled "Non-strategic site allocations", and contains policies for the sites listed in SP13 to SP15 and SP21 (other than the two strategic sites subject to policies SP16 and SP17).

PQ14. (a) What is the purpose of policies SP13 to SP15 and SP21?
(b) Do those policies create ambiguity as to whether the allocations listed within them are subject to a strategic policy that a neighbourhood plan would need to be in general conformity with?

Neighbourhood plans

Paragraph 1.14 in the Plan refers to two made neighbourhood plans: Stratfield Mortimer (2017) and Compton (2022). Policies SP13 to SP15 refer to seven other designated neighbourhood areas: Cold Ash; Newbury; Burghfield; Tilehurst; Hermitage; Hungerford and Lambourn.

PQ15. (a) What is the expected timetable for the preparation of neighbourhood plans in each of the designated neighbourhood areas in the District? (b) Please provide a map of the District indicating the locations of each of the designated neighbourhood areas.

¹⁰ Section 19(1B) of the 2004 Act.

¹¹ NPPF 17 to 23 and 28, and PPG ID-41-076-20190509.

National policy requires strategic policies to set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development and any relevant allocations¹².

Policies SP13 to SP15 includes a zero requirement figure for all of the designated neighbourhood areas currently without a made neighbourhood plan other than Hungerford and Lambourn which have figures of 55 and 25 respectively.

PQ16. Please clarify how the housing requirement figure for each of the designated neighbourhood areas reflects the overall strategy for the pattern and scale of development and any relevant allocations.

Key Diagram

National policy expects local plans to indicate broad locations for development on a key diagram¹³.

PQ17. Does the Plan include a key diagram? If not, what is the justification?

References to guidance and other documents

Various policies in the Plan refer to guidance and other documents that do not form part of the statutory development plan. The way such documents are referred to varies. For example, policy DM44 requires cycle and motorcycle parking to “be provided in accordance with” a Council document; a document relating to Electric Vehicle Charging Points to be “taken into account”; and the design and layout of parking spaces to “follow” the Council’s highways design guide. Whilst such documents may be material planning considerations, it is unlikely that a policy in the Plan requiring development to “comply with” or “be in accordance with” such documents could be justified. A more appropriate phrase may be for development to “have regard to” such documents.

PQ18. Please identify all the references in Plan policies to documents that do not form part of the statutory development plan. Where necessary, potential modifications to the policy wording should be drafted to ensure that the policy is justified in terms of the weight it requires decision makers to give to such documents.

Plan period

The Local Development Scheme¹⁴ indicates that the Plan is expected to be adopted in September 2024. This means that strategic policies to 2039 would not be consistent with national planning policy which expects them to look ahead over a minimum 15 year period from adoption¹⁵.

¹² NPPF 66.

¹³ NPPF 23.

¹⁴ CD9.

¹⁵ NPPF 22.

PQ19. What is the justification for the strategic policies in the Plan not looking ahead a minimum 15 year period from adoption as expected by national policy?

PQ20. If I were to conclude that the Plan needs to be modified to look ahead over a minimum 15 year period from adoption, which policies would need to be modified and in what way?

Reasonable alternatives

Local planning authorities are required to consider “reasonable alternatives” during the preparation of local plans¹⁶. These should take account of the objectives and geographical scope of the plan¹⁷.

PQ21. What were the reasonable alternatives considered during the preparation of the Plan in terms of:

- (a) The amount of housing, economic, and other development to be accommodated.
- (b) The spatial strategy for accommodating that development, including the settlement hierarchy and the approach to allocating land in the vicinity of the Atomic Weapons Establishments.
- (c) The sites allocated in the Plan.
- (d) The strategic and non-strategic development management policies in the Plan.

Atomic Weapons Establishments (AWE)

Policy SP4 states that planning permission is likely to be refused for development in the Detailed Emergency Planning Zones of AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield and sets out consultation arrangements for different types of development in the 5km Outer Consultation Zones and 12km Consultation Zones for those establishments. The zones are defined on the Policies Map and indicated on maps in Appendix 3.

PQ22. What, if any, development is proposed on allocations in the Plan in

- (a) the Detailed Emergency Planning Zones and
- (b) the 5km Outer Consultation Zones around AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield?

Flood risk

Paragraph 4.8 of the Sequential Test Report¹⁸ states that all sites considered to be reasonable alternatives for accommodating the proposed growth identified in the Plan have been assessed for flood risk and that the allocations are appropriate from a flooding perspective.

PQ23. Are any of the allocations in the Plan within flood zone 2 or flood zone 3, or otherwise identified as being at risk of flooding? If so, summarise how the site

¹⁶ NPPF 35b and The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations).

¹⁷ SEA Regulation 12(2).

¹⁸ WAT5.

passed the sequential test and exception test, and clarify whether the development proposed on the allocation could be located away from the areas at risk of flooding.

Housing Requirement

To determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance – unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals. Strategic policy-making authorities should establish a housing requirement figure for their whole area, which shows the extent to which their identified housing need can be met over the plan period¹⁹.

Policy SP12 states that provision will be made for 8,721 to 9,146 net additional homes between 2022 and 2039 (513 to 538 per year) and goes on to advise that the target of 538 does not constitute a cap to development.

Paragraph 6.2 of the Plan states that local housing need calculated using the standard methodology is 513 dwellings per year based on 2022 data. Paragraph 6.5 refers to Reading Borough Council having identified a shortfall of 230 dwellings in their current local plan period to 2036. Paragraph 6.7 refers to a review of the Reading local plan being required by 2024 and the principle of meeting any unmet need in the Western Berkshire housing market area. Paragraph 6.9 refers to 5% on top of local housing need to boost supply and to have some built-in flexibility.

PQ24. (a) What is the minimum housing requirement figure for the District – 513 or 538 dwellings per year?
(b) Does the Plan intend to meet the shortfall of 230 dwellings identified by Reading Borough Council in the period to 2036?
(c) Is the intention that the annual five year housing requirement will be calculated on the basis of 513 or 538 dwellings per year?

Housing supply for the plan period

Paragraphs 6.11 to 6.23 in the Plan describe various sources of housing land supply:

- Allocations in existing plans retained and included in the Plan
- Allocations in existing plans that are at an advanced stage of construction (not included as allocations in the Plan)
- Unallocated sites that have planning permission
- Windfall allowance for sites of fewer than 10 dwellings
- Sites to be allocated in neighbourhood plans
- New allocations in the Plan

The Plan does not seem to set out what the overall total supply of net additional dwellings is expected to be from those sources. The Housing Background Paper includes a summary table that indicates a total supply of 9,137 net units as at 31 March 2022²⁰.

¹⁹ NPPF 60 and 65.

²⁰ HOU6 Table 3.4

PQ25. (a) Is the overall land supply identified in the Plan expected to have capacity for a total of 9,137 net additional dwellings in the period 2022 to 2039?
(b) Is that land supply expected to be sufficient to ensure that the housing “target” of 9,146 dwellings can be met during that period?

Five year housing land supply

Planning policies should identify a supply of specific, deliverable sites for years one to five of the plan period with an appropriate buffer. The Council will need to update annually a supply of specific, deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years’ worth of housing against the housing requirement in the Plan once it has been adopted²¹.

Appendix 8 in the Plan sets out a housing trajectory. Further details about the trajectory are included in the Housing Background Paper²².

PQ26. What was the five year housing land requirement, including an appropriate buffer, on 1 April 2022 based on an annual requirement of (a) 513 and (b) 538 dwellings per year?

PQ27. What was the five year supply of specific, deliverable sites on 1 April 2022? This should be broken down into overall figures for
(a) sites with full planning permission and sites with outline planning permission for fewer than 10 dwellings;
(b) other specific identified sites; and
(c) any windfall allowance.

PQ28. For each site that falls into category (b) referred to in PQ27 above, what is the Council’s clear evidence that housing completions will begin in five years?

PQ29. Does the housing trajectory demonstrate that a supply of specific, deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years’ worth of housing against the housing requirement in the Plan will be maintained annually?

Major development in North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Policy SP2 states that planning permission for major development in the AONB will be refused other than in exceptional circumstances and sets out various criteria to inform decision making for such proposals. Policy SP15 lists 10 allocations for residential development comprising 10 or more homes in the AONB (5 of which are allocations carried forward from the existing adopted plan). A total of 334 homes are proposed on those 10 sites. Chapter 5 of the Housing Background Paper²³ sets out what the Council considers to be the exceptional circumstances to justify allocating

²¹ NPPF 68 and 74.

²² HOU6 Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

²³ HOU6.

the 10 sites for major residential development in the AONB based on the tests set out in NPPF 177.

PQ30. Is it the intention that proposals for the development of the 10 allocations in the AONB will be required to demonstrate exceptional circumstances at the time of the planning application? Or will proposals that meet the requirements of the relevant site allocation policy, along with other relevant policies, be deemed to be in accordance with the development plan and consistent with national policy?

Policy SP15 sets a requirement for the Hungerford and Lambourn neighbourhood plans to identify sites for 55 and 25 homes respectively.

PQ31. Is it expected that the requirements for 55 homes in Hungerford and 25 in Lambourn will be met through major developments on sites identified in the neighbourhood plans? If so, would those neighbourhood plans be expected to demonstrate exceptional circumstances to justify the allocations and/or would this be required at the planning application stage?

Sandleford Park and North East Thatcham strategic site allocations

Policy SP16 allocates the Sandleford Park strategic site to the south of Newbury for a residential development comprising approximately 1,500 dwellings. Policy SP17 proposes that approximately 1,500 dwellings be completed in the plan period on the North East Thatcham strategic site.

NPPF 22 advises that where larger scale developments, including significant extensions to existing towns, form part of the strategy for the area, policies should be set within a vision that looks ahead at least 30 years to take into account the likely timescale for delivery.

PQ32. (a) Are either of the Sandleford Park or North East Thatcham strategic sites expected to continue to be developed after 2039?
(b) If so, how many additional homes to the 1,500 referred to in the Plan are expected on the site(s) and in what timescale?

PQ33. Are policies SP16 and SP17 set within a long term vision that takes into account the likely timescales for delivery of the Sandleford Park and North East Thatcham strategic sites?

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation

National policy expects strategic policies, as a minimum, to provide for objectively assessed needs to be met including the housing needs for different groups in the community²⁴.

²⁴ NPPF 11b and 62.

Table 7 in the Plan identifies a net shortfall of 30 pitches for gypsy and traveller accommodation between 2021 and 2038. Paragraph 11.29 identifies a need for 4 transit pitches to accommodate 8 caravans.

Paragraph 11.31 refers to a number of transit pitches on an existing site being converted to permanent pitches. Policy RSA24 allocates a site at New Stocks Farm, Paices Hill, Aldermaston for the replacement of 8 transit pitches with 8 permanent pitches. Paragraph 11.32 refers to a Council operated site being refurbished and having 17 pitches when it reopens. Paragraph 11.33 refers to a number of authorised small private traveller sites in the district. It is not clear how those sites, or the changes described to them, would help to address or otherwise affect the identified need for 30 additional permanent and 4 transit pitches.

Paragraph 11.35 advises that a separate development plan document will be prepared to address the longer term need for gypsy and traveller pitches and for transit sites with the intention that it will be adopted in 2027.

PQ34. How will the existing and allocated gypsy and traveller sites in the district contribute to addressing the identified shortfall of 30 pitches between 2021 and 2038 and the need for 4 additional transit pitches? How many permanent and transit pitches are expected to be required on land outside the existing authorised and allocated sites?

PQ35. If the Plan does not make provision to meet in full the identified need for additional gypsy and traveller accommodation in the plan period 2022 to 2039, what is the justification?

Travelling Showpeople

Table 8 in the Plan identifies a need for 24 plots for travelling showpeople between 2021 and 2038. Paragraph 11.34 advises that there is currently one yard for travelling showpeople in the district and that any need that does arise can be accommodated on that yard. Policy RSA24 allocates a site at Long Copse Farm, Enborne for 24 plots.

PQ36. Does the Plan identify sufficient suitable land to allow the identified need for 24 plots for travelling showpeople to be met during the plan period?

Wheelchair accessible homes

Policy SP18 requires around 10% of new market homes to meet the wheelchair users standard M4(3). Paragraph 6.72 refers to evidence indicating a need for around 1,200 such homes. The Homebuilders Federation's representation challenges that evidence and suggests that the need is actually for around 620 homes. National planning guidance outlines the evidence required to justify such policy requirements²⁵.

²⁵ PPG ID: 56-007-20150327.

PQ37. Is the requirement in policy SP18 for around 10% of new market homes to meet the wheelchair users standard M4(3) justified by adequate and proportionate evidence consistent with national policy and guidance?

Affordable homes

Paragraph 6.78 refers to a need for 330 affordable homes per year. Policy SP19 sets out the following requirements for the provision of affordable homes in market-led development schemes:

- 20% on sites of between 5 and 9 dwellings
- 30% on brownfield sites of 10 or more dwellings
- 40% on greenfield sites of 10 or more dwellings

National planning guidance advises that an increase in the total housing figures included in the plan may need to be considered where it could help deliver the required number of affordable homes²⁶.

PQ38. (a) Based on the housing supply identified in the Plan, approximately how many affordable homes are likely to be delivered on market-led development schemes in accordance with the requirements of policy SP19?
(b) How does this relate to the number of affordable homes identified as being needed during the plan period?
(c) What consideration was given to increasing the Plan's housing requirement in order to help deliver the number of affordable homes identified as being needed?

National policy states that provision of affordable housing should not be sought for residential developments that are not major developments, other than in designated rural areas (where policies may set a lower threshold of 5 units or fewer). Paragraph 6.75 in the Plan seems to indicate that most, but not all, of West Berkshire is a designated rural area.

PQ39. Which parts of the District are not designated rural areas? Is the intention that the requirement for providing affordable homes on sites of between 5 and 9 dwellings would apply to those areas? If so, what is the justification?

Sustainable Homes

The Planning and Energy Act 2008 allows local planning authorities to set energy efficiency standards in their development plan policies that exceed the energy efficiency requirements of the building regulations. However, such policies must not be inconsistent with relevant national policies for England.

National planning policy expects development to be planned for in ways that help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location, orientation and design. Any local requirements for the sustainability of buildings should reflect the Government's policy for national technical standards²⁷.

²⁶ PPG ID: 2a-024-20190220.

²⁷ NPPF 154b.

Current national planning guidance (updated in 2019) states that development plan policies can set energy performance standards for new housing that are higher than the building regulations, but only up to the equivalent of Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes (approximately 20% above former building regulations)²⁸. Current building regulations now require standards that are higher than Level 4 of the former Code for Sustainable Homes.

Policy DM4 requires all residential development to meet the following minimum standards of construction:

- Achieve the carbon Target Emission Rate set by the Future Homes Standard once this is confirmed by central government; in the meantime achieve 63% reduction in carbon emissions by on-site measures as compared to the baseline emission rate set by Building Regulations Part L 2021 (SAP 10.2).
- Equal to or less than 15kWh/m²/year space heat demand target, evidenced by the Building Regulations Part L SAP Fabric Energy Efficiency metric.

Policy DM4 goes on to state that all residential development should include onsite renewable, zero and low carbon energy technologies to achieve net zero carbon operational energy (regulated and unregulated) on site, or it will be required to address any residual carbon emissions by a cash in lieu contribution.

PQ40. (a) Are the requirements relating to energy efficiency, space heat demand, net zero carbon operational energy, and carbon offsetting for all residential development consistent with national policy?
(b) If not, which parts are inconsistent, what is the justification for setting different requirements in West Berkshire, and would such requirements comply with the Planning and Energy Act 2008?

Need for industrial and warehouse development

Paragraph 7.8 refers to an identified need for a minimum of around 91,000 sqm of industrial floorspace (around 23 hectares of land) to 2039. Paragraph 7.13 refers to demand for larger B8 distribution and logistics uses particularly at motorway junctions. Paragraph 7.9 indicates that the sites allocated in the Plan for employment development (listed in policy SP21) will go some way to meeting the identified need for employment floorspace although there remains a shortfall due to a lack of suitable available sites.

PQ41. In total, how much net additional industrial and warehouse floorspace is expected to be provided on
(a) the employment allocations listed in policy SP21 and
(b) designated employment areas, other existing employment sites and any other land?
(c) What is the overall shortfall expected to be against the identified need for a minimum of around 91,000 sqm of floorspace?

Office development

²⁸ PPG ID: 6-012-20190315.

National policy expects office developments to be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations, and only if suitable sites are not available on out of centre sites. Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up to date local plan²⁹.

Paragraph 7.4 in the Plan refers to an identified need for a net increase in office floorspace of around 51,000 sqm to 2039. Paragraph 7.7 refers to a lack of suitable sites for office developments and little to no viability in the market. The approach in the Plan is therefore to safeguard existing office space (policies SP20 and DM32); promote offices on redevelopment sites within and on the edge of town centres (policy SP22); and support office developments on relevant allocated sites, in designated employment areas, suitably located employment sites and suitable sites within settlement boundaries (policy SP20). Policy DM32 states that new office proposals within a designated employment area will not be required to satisfy the sequential test.

PQ42. What is the “identified shortfall in supply” of office floorspace (referred to in paragraph 7.7)?

PQ43. Is the approach in policies SP20 and DM32 to office developments outside town centres consistent with national policy? If not, what is the justification?

Appendix 6: How policies are applied in a neighbourhood planning context

PQ44. (a) What is the purpose of including the information in Appendix 6 in the Plan? (b) Is it entirely consistent with relevant legislation and national policy and guidance?

Appendix 9: Glossary

PQ45. Are all of the definitions in the Plan’s Glossary consistent with those in NPPF Annex 2? Please identify any definitions that are different.

Strategic and local road networks

National policy advises that development should only be prevented if it would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the strategic road network would be severe. Local plans should ensure that any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to any acceptable degree³⁰.

National Highways representation³¹ suggests that the transport evidence is not sufficiently developed to demonstrate that the Plan is sound with regard to impacts

²⁹ NPPF 87.

³⁰ NPPF 110 and 111.

³¹ Email 3 March 2023.

on the strategic road network (M4 and A34) and identification of any necessary mitigations that would have a reasonable prospect of delivery within the relevant timescales. Furthermore, a number of specific substantive issues are identified with the transport modelling undertaken. A number of steps are suggested to address the concerns raised. The Duty to Cooperate Statement indicates that the Council is working towards a statement of common ground with National Highways³².

Hampshire County Council's representation³³ raises concerns about the impact the development proposed in the Plan, including the 1,500 homes on the Sandleford strategic site (policy SP16), could have on the A339 in Hampshire. They suggest that any evidence provided about the provision of access to the A339 should consider wider strategic routes including the A34.

Network Rail's representation³⁴ advises that development of the North East Thatcham strategic site (policy SP17) will lead to increased use of the Thatcham level crossing where the barriers are down for 50% of the time and peak period queues form on both sides of the railway. They suggest that a viability assessment be carried out which includes a road bridge to replace the level crossing to ensure that the required infrastructure is provided to mitigate the impact of the development.

PQ46. Could the Council:

- (a) Advise if any further work relating to the impact of the Plan on the strategic and local road networks may be necessary and, if so, what that work would be and the date by which it is expected to be completed.
- (b) Indicate a date by which a statement of common ground may be agreed with National Highways.
- (c) Advise on any actions being taken to address the concerns raised by Hampshire County Council about the potential impacts on the A339.
- (d) Advise on any actions being taken to address the concerns raised by Network Rail about the Thatcham level crossing.

Denison Barracks and RAF Welford

National policy expects planning policies to recognise and support development required for operational defence and security purposes and ensure that operational sites are not affected adversely by the impact of other development proposed in the area³⁵.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation representation³⁶ advises that in addition to AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield, which are subject to specific policies in the Plan, there are operational sites at Denison Barracks and RAF Welford. They suggest that to be effective and consistent with national policy, an additional policy should be included in the Plan relating to development within those operational sites and to non-defence related development nearby.

³² CD11 March 2023.

³³ Letter 3 March 2023.

³⁴ Letter 28 February 2023.

³⁵ NPPF 97.

³⁶ Letter 3 March 2023.

PQ47. Does the submitted Plan contain unambiguous policies so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals within and in the vicinity of the operational sites at Denison Barracks and RAF Welford? If not, would the modification proposed by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation ensure that the Plan is sound?

Historic England

Historic England's representation³⁷ suggests that modifications are required to policy SP9 and associated reasoned justification and policies SP17 and RSA22. They also suggest that allocations RSA2 and RSA17 are not sound as they are not based on proportionate evidence relating to the historic environment.

PQ49. (a) Does the Council agree with Historic England that modifications to policies SP9, SP17 and RSA22 are essential to ensure soundness? If not, please indicate how the issues raised can be satisfactorily addressed by other policies in the Plan, national planning policy, and/or other means such as national guidance or legislation.

(b) Does the Council agree that a more detailed heritage impact assessment is required to justify allocations RSA2 and RSA17? If not, why not (and are any modifications required to the wording of those policies to ensure that they are effective with regard to heritage assets)?

Environment Agency and Thames Water

The Environment Agency's representations³⁸ suggest that modifications to various policies in the Plan, including SP1, SP5, SP7, SP11, DM5, DM6, DM20, DM24, DM25, DM28, DM29 and DM37 as well as some site allocation policies, are required to ensure that they are sound. They also suggest that the Plan should include an additional policy specifically relating to watercourses.

Thames Water's representations³⁹ suggest that modifications to policies SP6 and DM7 and site allocation policies are required to ensure that they are sound.

PQ48. For each policy that Environment Agency and Thames Water refer to, does the Council agree that modifications are essential to ensure soundness or legal compliance? If not, please indicate how the issue raised can be satisfactorily addressed by other policies in the Plan, national planning policy, and/or other means such as national guidance or legislation.

William Fieldhouse

22nd May 2023

³⁷ Letter 3 March 2023.

³⁸ Representation forms dated 2 and 3 March 2023.

³⁹ Letter and representation forms dated 28 February 2023.