

**Wokingham Borough Council**

**Examination of Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040**

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**Examination webpage:** [Wokingham Local Plan Examination](#)

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## **GUIDANCE NOTE FOR PARTICIPANTS**

### **Purpose**

1. This note is intended to assist those who have made representations in relation to the examination of the Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040 ('the Plan') as part of the pre submission consultation process and who wish to appear in person.
2. Its purpose is to explain the procedural and administrative matters relating to the examination process.
3. 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 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-plans>. There is also a short guide aimed particularly at those taking part in an examination for the first time.
4. The Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination on 28 February 2025. We are the Inspectors who have been appointed to carry out the examination.

### **Programme Officer**

5. Ian Kemp is the Programme Officer for the examination. His contact details are given above.
6. The Programme Officer is independent of the Council and works as an impartial officer of the examination under our direction. The main tasks of the Programme Officer are to liaise with all parties to ensure the smooth running of the examination, to organise the hearings, and to ensure that all documents are recorded and distributed as necessary. Any documentation connected with the examination process should be forwarded to him. Any procedural

questions or other matters that you wish to raise with us prior to the hearings should be directed through the Programme Officer.

## **Examination Hearings**

7. The Part 2 hearing sessions for the Plan will commence at **10.00 am on Tuesday 17 March 2026**. The hearings will take place based on the Matters, Issues and Questions ('MIQs') document, which is published separately.
8. The morning sessions will start at 9.30 am on subsequent days. Afternoon sessions will usually start at 1.30 pm. There will be roughly an hour break for lunch and short breaks mid-morning and afternoon. The sessions will usually finish by 5.00pm although they may continue later if necessary.
9. The hearings will take place at **Wokingham Borough Council Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN**. The draft programme for the hearings is being issued at the same time as this Guidance Note.
10. All documents for the examination, including the evidence base and the procedural material, are accessible from the examination webpage – the link is provided above.
11. Any updates to the hearing programme 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.
12. If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the Programme Officer so that alternative arrangements can be put in place.

## **Inspectors Role and the Examination Process**

13. Our task is to consider the soundness and legal compliance of the Plan, on the basis of the relevant legislation and the guidance contained within paragraph 35 of the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') December 2023. Considering soundness involves examining the Plan to determine whether it is positively prepared, justified, effective, and consistent with national policy.
14. The Plan will be considered against the Framework published on 19 December 2023, due to the transitional arrangements set out in Annex A of the most recent version of the Framework, published in December 2024.
15. It is not part of our role to make improvements to the Plan, provided that it is sound and legally compliant.

## **The Matters and Issues for the Examination**

16. Part 1 hearings took place in November 2025 and covered matters relating to legal compliance and the Duty to Co-operate, strategic transport, the proposed Strategic Development Locations, and the housing requirement and

supply. It is not our intention to revisit these matters. Instead, the Part 2 hearings will cover other matters not addressed during the Part 1 hearings.

17. Participants should be aware that the Council have produced additional documents in connection with the examination. These documents can be found in the Examination Documents section on the examination webpage and representors may wish to take account of these documents in preparing any written statements. Where necessary, our MIQs take account of these additional documents.

### **Representations and Written Statements**

18. The Council should produce an individual written statement for each of the initial matters identified. These should include specific references to supporting evidence where appropriate. The Council is asked to address key points raised in relevant representations when answering the questions.
19. Other participants may, if they wish, submit written statements addressing the MIQs set out for the sessions they are attending which are relevant to their particular representations. There is no need to repeat points already made in representations however and participants may wish to rely on these earlier representations. Others who have made relevant representations but are not participating in the hearing sessions may also submit statements addressing the MIQs. Although again, there is no need to repeat points already made.
20. Separate statements should be submitted for each matter. Please only submit appendices to statements where they are essential. The statement should make it clear why the appendices are relevant. Appendices should have a contents page and be paginated throughout. They should not contain extracts from any publication that is already before the examination. However, such documents should be clearly cross-referenced by providing the examination reference and document title, page and paragraph number.
21. Statements should be limited to no more than 3000 words per matter. They should include the appropriate Matter and Issue number, as well as the name of the representor, at the top of the front page. Unnecessary repetition should be avoided. Statements should not introduce new evidence or arguments, except where this relates to additional post submission evidence submitted by the Council. A flexible approach will be taken to the length of the Council's statements given that they are requested to respond to all points.
22. Any representor who intends to use artificial intelligence in preparing their statement should follow the Planning Inspectorate's guidance available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/use-of-artificial-intelligence-in-casework-evidence>.
23. Electronic copies of any statements and associated appendices (where relevant) should be on A4 paper size. Participants should submit written statements no later than **5.00 pm on Tuesday 3 March 2026**. Late submissions and additional papers are unlikely to be accepted on the day of

the relevant session, since this can cause disruption and result in unfairness and may lead to the hearing being adjourned. In addition, we will not accept any further representations or evidence after the hearing sessions have finished unless specifically requested. Any late or unsolicited material is likely to be returned by the Programme Officer.

## Participation at the Hearing Sessions

24. Anyone may attend the hearing as an observer, but only those who have made representation(s) seeking to change the Plan under Regulation 20 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012 (i.e. when the Council invited representations before submitting the Plan for examination) have a right to appear before, and be heard by, the Inspectors.
25. 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 MIQs. Normally you may only take part in the hearing session(s) that are relevant to your original representation(s).
26. If you have a right to be heard and you wish to exercise that right, you should inform the Programme Officer no later than **5.00 pm on Tuesday 17 February 2026**. **Please indicate which Matter(s) you are seeking 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 Programme Officer 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. A draft programme and list of participants will be prepared which will be regularly updated and available on the examination webpage.
27. 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, we may invite additional participants to take part in the hearing if their participation would assist us in determining the soundness and legal compliance of the Plan.
28. 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.
29. 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).
30. Please let the Programme Officer 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).

## **Omission Sites**

31. Some representations are concerned with what are known as “omission sites”. These are sites which have not been allocated in the Plan for development. Our role is to examine the soundness of the submitted Plan. It is not part of our role to examine the soundness of sites that are not allocated in the Plan. Consequently, we 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 other sessions.
32. Should it be the case that additional sites need to be included in the Plan (for example, because an allocated site is found to be unsound), we will look to the Council to decide which alternative or additional sites should be brought forward for examination.

## **Closing the Examination and Our Report**

33. There are three possible outcomes to the examination:
  - the submitted plan is sound and legally compliant;
  - 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
  - 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 withdraws 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).
34. After the hearings have closed, we will prepare a report to the Council setting out our conclusions and recommendations. Our report will deal with the main issues of soundness and legal compliance, considering the representations made but without responding to each of them.
35. If main modifications are required, adequate consultation would need to take place on them where necessary, so that the rights of interested parties are not prejudiced. Where appropriate, main modifications may also need to be covered by a revised Sustainability Assessment. The Council has suggested a series of changes to the Plan in its Schedule of Proposed Modifications [CD22]. We will consider these and they may be discussed in the hearing sessions, but it is important to recognise that the basis for our examination is the submitted Plan, not including the suggested changes.
36. The examination will remain open until our report is submitted to the Council. However, no further representations or evidence will be accepted after the hearings close, unless we specifically request it. Any late unsolicited material will be returned.

## **Summary of Key Dates**

- **17 February 2026** - Deadline to confirm with the Programme Officer whether you wish to exercise your right to appear at an examination hearing session
- **3 March 2026** - Deadline for submission of hearing statements and any appendices by e-mail
- **17 March 2026** - Hearing sessions begin

*T Hatfield and M Philpott*

INSPECTORS