

Examination of the Reading Local Plan

GUIDANCE NOTE

Introduction

1. The purpose of this Guidance Note is to explain procedural and administrative matters relating to the examination of the Reading Local Plan (LP).

Examination Hearings

2. Hearing sessions into the Reading LP will commence on 25th September 2018. The hearings will take place based on agendas which will be available shortly in advance of the event.

A pre-hearing meeting is not being held. Participants are advised to make use of the Examination website www.reading.gov.uk/localplanexamination where further information including relevant documents can be found.

Inspector's Role

4. Louise Gibbons has been appointed to consider the soundness of the LP. Her role is to consider whether or not the LP is sound and if the requirements of the relevant legislation and regulations have been met.
5. The Inspector will focus on the soundness criteria set out in paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012), i.e. whether the LP has been positively prepared, is justified, effective, and consistent with national policy. Please note it is not the role of the Inspector to make improvements to the Plan that are not necessary to make it sound.

Programme Officer

6. The Programme Officer for the examination is Jane Greenway, who can be contacted on 07855126484; E-mail: Programme.Officer@reading.gov.uk; Address: Programme Officer, Planning Section, Reading Borough Council, Civic Offices, Reading, RG1 2LU.
7. For the purpose of the Local Plan Examination, she is independent of the Council and works under the direction of the Inspector. Her responsibilities include organising the programme for the examinations, liaising with all parties to ensure the smooth running of the examination, maintaining the examination library, and ensuring that all documents are recorded and distributed. Documents connected with the examination process should be forwarded to her.
8. Any procedural questions, suggestions or difficulties should be raised with the Programme Officer and, if necessary, she will take them up with the Inspector.

The normal method of communication will be by e-mail and all documentation will be available electronically, accessed via the examination website.

The Examination Process

9. The starting point for the examination is that the Council has submitted what it considers to be a sound plan. The examination will focus on the Matters and Issues identified by the Inspector who will have regard to individual representations insofar as they relate to matters of soundness. The Council will rely on the evidence it has collected in preparing the LP to demonstrate the soundness of the Plan.
10. Those seeking changes to the Plan have to demonstrate why it is not sound and how the suggested changes would make it sound. Those who have made representations should have already decided whether their views can be dealt with in written form or if they need to present them orally at a hearing session. Both methods carry equal weight.
11. **Please note:** Normally, only those who made representations on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan (November 2017) and that are seeking a change to the LP are entitled to participate in the hearing sessions.
12. The Inspector will seek to ensure that the Matters and Issues document is available on the examination website no later than 30th July 2018.
13. Could all respondents that are seeking a change to the Plan and wish to participate in the hearing session(s) where relevant to their representation please inform the Programme Officer which Matter, Issue and Question(s) discussion they wish to attend by 10th August 2018.
14. A draft Programme and list of participants will be prepared and updated as participants are confirmed. The Final Programme will include an 'Any other Matters' sessions.
15. It is open to the Council and any representor to submit further statements in advance of the hearings. However this is not a requirement and you may rely on your original representations if you wish. If further statements are submitted these should only focus on the Matters and Issues that the Inspector identifies in so far as they are relevant to the considerations already raised in your representation(s). Any such statements should be sent to the Programme Officer for receipt by 12th September 2018.

16. The requirements for each statement are as follows:
 - Statements should be limited to 3,000 words per issue. Generally there should be no need for appendices and no need to duplicate the content of documents already included as part of the Examination Library.
 - Three hard copies of each statement at A4 size are required with paragraph and page numbers included. Any plans should be folded so as not to exceed that size. An electronic version of the statement is also required in PDF format with all documents being submitted to the Programme Officer. Statements should include, at the top of the front page, the appropriate Issue number and name of representor.
17. The need for succinct submissions is emphasised. Unnecessary detail and repetition should be avoided. It is the quality of the reasoning that carries weight, not the bulk of the documents. Nonetheless, it is vital that the fundamental elements of cases are set out clearly and succinctly – matters should not be raised at the hearings that have not already been raised.
18. Further discussion between the Council and representors is strongly encouraged – ideally leading to Statements of Common Ground. Please keep the Programme Officer informed about progress with preparation of such statements.
19. Representors who wish to proceed by written means do not need to take any further action; they can rely on what they have already submitted in writing. However, if any party wishes to submit further written evidence in support of their position, this should be focussed on the Issues and submitted within the above timescale (12th September 2018).
20. Before the start of the hearing sessions the Inspector may raise questions directly with the Council on any points that are relevant to the examination. Any such exchanges of correspondence are placed on the examination website as examination documents.
21. As the purpose of the examination is to consider if the submitted plan is sound the focus of the examination is whether or not the process and methodology followed by the local planning authority in arriving at the spatial strategy and selecting the allocated sites is sound. Accordingly, in respect of specific sites, the examination will focus on both the process of site selection, including the underlying evidence base, and the soundness of individual sites. Where relevant

the promoters of omission sites will be allowed to put arguments forward on the soundness of the allocated sites but not to promote the merits of their own site.

21. If it is concluded that additional sites are needed or if proposed sites are not sound then the Council will be invited to put forward alternatives. Alternatively if the site selection process as a whole is unsound then the Council should be invited to fix it and re-run the process.

Hearing Arrangements and Procedure

23. The hearing sessions will commence at 10.00 am on Tuesday 25th September 2018 and the following week on Tuesday 2nd October 2018 at Reading Town Hall, Blagrove Street, Reading RG1 1QH, in the Soane Space. Hearing sessions will be programmed for Tuesday-Friday with Friday as an overspill day if needed. Please regularly check the Programme for updates on dates and approximate times of Hearing sessions together with any changes in venue details.
24. The hearings are open to the public and interested persons to attend, even if they are not taking part. Any changes to the arrangements will be advised to participants who should also keep in touch with the Programme Officer and regularly check the examination website.
25. The hearings will generally take the form of round table sessions, providing an informal setting for dealing with issues by way of a discussion led by the Inspector. There will be no formal presentation of evidence or cross examination. Please keep the Programme Officer informed about who will be speaking at the sessions.
26. The Inspector is required to run the examination hearings as efficiently as possible, minimising repetitious debate but allowing adequate time for discussions on key issues. The aim is for a series of focused hearings leading to the production of a short, focused report.

Site Visit Arrangements

27. The Inspector will make site inspections. Normally these site visits will be unaccompanied and unannounced unless the Inspector intends to enter private land or buildings. Both a Council representative and the representor will be present on any necessary accompanied visits but these will not provide an opportunity to discuss the merits of individual sites or issues.

Close of the Examination and the Inspector's Report

28. After completion of the hearings the Inspector will submit a report to the Council with her conclusions and recommendations as quickly as possible after the close of the hearing sessions. This will deal with the main issues concerning the soundness of the LP, taking into account representations received although it will not deal with each representation individually.
29. The examination remains open until the report is submitted to the Council. However, once the hearing sessions are completed the Inspector can receive no further information from any party, unless it is a matter on which further comments have been requested by her. Any unsolicited items will be returned to the sender.
30. If Main Modifications to the plan are necessary to make it sound then it is hoped that many, if not all, will be based on proposals put forward by the Council in response to points raised and suggestions discussed during the examination.
31. The Inspector will consider suggested changes from the Council in the same way as they will consider changes put forward by other parties. If main modifications are proposed by the Council adequate consultation will need to take place on them where necessary, so the rights of interested parties are not prejudiced. Where appropriate, main modifications may also need to be covered by a revised Sustainability Appraisal.

Examination Library

32. Throughout the examination process, the Programme Officer will maintain an examination library of Core Documents. The List of Core Documents will be updated as required during the process and will be posted on the Examination website.

KEY DATES:

Monday 30 July 2018	Inspector's Matters and Issues to be published.
Friday 10 August 2018	Representors wishing to be heard / attend hearings to inform Programme Officer and clarify which Matter and Issue(s) is relevant to their representation(s).
Friday 7 th September 2018	Initial draft programme to be published.
Wednesday 12 September 2018 (5pm)	Hearing Statements to be submitted to Programme Officer.
Friday 14 September 2018	Hearings Programme to be finalised & published.

Monday 18 September 2018	Agendas to be published.
Tuesday 25 September 2018	Hearings Commence for two consecutive weeks (with additional overspill week starting 16 th October 2018 if needed).

Louise Gibbons

Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State to examine the Reading Local Plan