

Reading Borough Council

Examination of the Reading Borough Local Plan Partial Update

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Inspector's Guidance Note

4 August 2025

Introduction

1. The Local Plan Partial Update Pre-Submission Draft dated November 2024 (LPPU) was submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination on 9 May 2025. This Guidance Note sets out procedural aspects of the Examination.

The role of the Inspector

2. I have been appointed by the Secretary of State. My role is to determine whether the LPPU satisfies legal requirements under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and associated regulations, and whether the LPPU is sound. To be sound, the LPPU must be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. The starting point is the assumption that the Council has submitted what it considers to be a sound Plan. Those seeking changes must demonstrate why the LPPU is unsound by reference to one or more of the tests of soundness set out at paragraph 35 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) published on 5 September 2023. I will aim to work with the Council and all participants in the Examination in a positive and pragmatic manner.

The role of the Programme Officer

3. The Programme Officer for the Examination is Jane Greenway. She can be contacted regarding the Examination at:

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4. The Programme Officer acts as an impartial officer of the Examination between the Inspector and everyone involved; liaises with all parties to ensure the Examination's smooth running; ensures that all documents received are recorded and mounted on the Examination website; and keeps the Examination library up to date.
5. Any participant who does not have access to the internet should contact the Programme Officer so that alternative arrangements can be discussed. All procedural questions or other matters that you wish to raise with the Inspector prior to the hearing sessions should be made through the Programme Officer.

The Examination

6. The Framework requires that Local Plans are prepared in accordance with the Duty to Co-operate, meet legal and procedural requirements and are 'sound'. As part of this, I will need to determine whether or not:
 - The Council has complied with the Duty to Co-operate under Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended);
 - The LPPU has been prepared in accordance with the Council's Local Development Scheme and Statement of Community Involvement;
 - The LPPU has been subject to an adequate Sustainability Appraisal;
 - The requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 have been complied with, having regard to relevant national policy and guidance, and if an appropriate assessment has been carried out where necessary; and
 - Relevant publicity and procedural requirements have been met.
7. The Framework states that Plans are 'sound' if they are:
 - **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;
 - **Justified** - an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
 - **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
 - **Consistent with national policy** - enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

Making Changes to the LPPU

8. Once submitted for Examination, there are only two means by which changes can be made to the LPPU:
 - Main Modifications recommended by the Inspector; and
 - Additional Modifications made by the Council on LPPU adoption.
9. The Inspector can recommend Main Modifications if they are necessary to resolve problems that would otherwise make the LPPU unsound, or not legally compliant. Main Modifications are changes which, either alone or in combination with others, would materially alter the LPPU or its policies. Any

potential Main Modifications must be subject to public consultation, with further sustainability appraisal where necessary, prior to the report being finalised.

10. The Council would be able to make Additional Modifications prior to adopting the LPPU provided these do not materially alter the policies i.e. they are of a minor nature dealing with factual updates or typographical errors for example. This would be a matter entirely for the Council. I will not be considering such Additional Modifications during the Examination and they will not form part of my report.

Modifications suggested by the Council and others

11. The Council has produced a List of Changes to Submission Draft [LP002]. As the Council has confirmed that this list has not been subject to any public consultation, I will not have regard to this document during the Examination.
12. Changes to the LPPU suggested by the Council, or any other participants, may be discussed, where appropriate, at the relevant hearing session.

Hearing sessions

13. The hearings are part of the Examination of the LPPU and it is intended that the hearing sessions will take place for Stages 1 and 2. The hearings for Stage 1 are timetabled to take place **online on 11 and 12 November 2025**. No sitting dates have been finalised for Stage 2 hearings as yet. Detailed instructions on how to attend virtual sessions are not available at this point. These will be published in due course.
14. At each stage, the hearing sessions will be informal, yet structured events. The hearings will be round table discussions led by the Inspector. Participants may choose to be professionally represented at the hearings, but there will be no cross-examination or detailed presentation of evidence.
15. The Stage 1 hearings will be split into online sessions of no more than 1.5 hours. There will be a comfort break mid-morning and mid-afternoon and a lunch break of no less than 45 minutes.
16. A Provisional Hearings Programme for Stage 1 hearings has been produced and mounted on the Examination website. It is likely that the detailed programme will change closer to the hearings. Any changes will be mounted on the Examination website. It is the participants' responsibility to check the website and ensure that they attend the appropriate Matters.
17. The participants for each Matter will be those who made relevant representations to the Publication (Pre-Submission) Draft Plan consultation (Regulation 19 consultation) and have confirmed to the Programme Officer that they wish to speak. Each session will be arranged by Matter and Issue. It is important that participants check that they have been allocated to the correct

session, contacting the Programme Officer if unsure. If anyone has any specific needs in relation to attending a particular session, please let the Programme Officer know in advance.

Participating in the hearings

18. The ability to speak at the hearings is not available to all but is limited to either those with a legal right or those specifically invited by the Inspector. Those that have made a valid representation seeking a change to the LPPU (an objection) have the right to make their case at the hearings if they have indicated their wish to do so. However, written representations carry as much weight as evidence given at the hearings. Participation at a hearing session will only be useful and helpful to us if you wish and need to take part in debate and are seeking a specific change to the LPPU.
19. The hearings will be open to the public to observe but only invited participants who previously made representations objecting to relevant parts of the LPPU will be able to speak. An agenda for each hearing will be circulated to participants in advance and will be placed on the website.
20. The Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQ) will form the basis of the discussions at hearing sessions. Stage 1 MIQ have been published alongside this Guidance Note.
21. If representors wish to participate in the hearings, please let the Programme Officer know by email which hearing sessions you wish to speak at. Please refer to the specific stage, relevant Matter number and representation if possible. **The deadline for notifying the Programme Officer regarding participation in the hearings is 5 September 2025.**
22. **Please note:** You should only attend a hearing session where you have made a relevant representation seeking a change to the LPPU. If you do not contact the Programme Officer by this date, it will be assumed that you do not wish to speak at the hearings.
23. A final draft Provisional Hearings Programme for each stage will be published on the Examination website approximately one week prior to hearings for that stage. It is the responsibility of the participants to check the progress of the hearings on the Examination website or by contacting the Programme Officer, and to ensure that they are present at the relevant hearing.

The submission of hearing statements

24. The Council should produce an individual written statement for each Matter, addressing the Stage 1 MIQ. They should include specific references to supporting evidence where appropriate. The Council is also asked to address key points raised in representations.

25. Please note that an initial letter was issued by the Inspector in June 2025 [EX001]. The Council responded to this letter in July 2025 [EX002 – EX009]. Representors are advised to have regard to these documents when drafting any hearing statements.
26. Other participants may, if they wish, submit written statements addressing the Stage 1 MIQ for the hearings they are attending which are relevant to their representations. There is no need to repeat points already made in representations. Participants may wish to rely on these earlier representations. Others who have made relevant representations but are not participating in the hearings may also submit statements addressing the MIQ.
27. If preparing statements, the Council has responded to the representations which may assist representors in understanding the Council's position. The schedules of representations by policy with the Council's responses are available within the Council's Statement of Consultation [LP006].
28. Statements for the hearings should be succinct (**no more than 3,000 words long for the whole statement**), concentrating on responding only to the specific questions raised and clearly related to the original representation. All hearing statements submitted **must use paragraph and page numbers** to allow for ease of reference during hearings. There is no need to include extracts from the LPPU, other Examination documents or those in the public domain such as the Framework or Planning Practice Guidance. If referring to documents, clear cross-referencing will suffice.
29. The Council does not have to observe the 3,000 word limit as it will need to respond to every question and issue within each Matter. However, the Council's responses should be succinct, while covering the key points.
30. In preparing hearing statements you should clearly identify the numbered question(s) you are seeking to answer. In addition to answering the relevant question(s), where a representor is seeking a specific change to the LPPU in order to make it sound, suggested wording should be set out in their hearing statement. However, this is only likely to be possible/appropriate for representors seeking a limited and focussed change to the LPPU.
31. Separate hearing statements should be submitted for each Matter. Separate hearing statements should not be submitted in a single document. The word limit does not include appendices, but these should only be included where directly relevant and necessary and should also be as succinct as possible.
32. The hearing statements should be sent to the Programme Officer as **one electronic copy of each statement**. For the Council and other participants, **the deadline for receipt of written hearing statements for Stage 1 hearings is 14 October 2025**.

33. Each deadline must be adhered to for the hearings on the relevant Matters to proceed as planned. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely late submissions will be accepted. It should be made clear who is submitting the hearing statement and the relevant Matter.
34. Hearing statements will be posted on the Examination website, so that they are available to all. They will not be circulated directly to participants. However, anyone who is unable to access them on the Examination website may request copies from the Programme Officer.
35. Other than the hearing statements and Statements of Common Ground, no further information or documents should be submitted to the Examination unless specifically requested. Any unsolicited items will be returned.

Statements of Common Ground

36. Statements of Common Ground are welcomed where these would identify agreement and disagreement. They could include agreed wording of a suggested change to a policy, factual information, or points of disagreement.
37. Where possible, Statements of Common Ground should be submitted alongside hearing statements. If you intend to submit Statement(s) of Common Ground, please make the Programme Officer aware of this in advance of their submission. **The deadline for receipt of Statements of Common Ground for Stage 1 hearings is 14 October 2025.**

Consideration of alternative sites

38. Alternative sites that have been put forward, but not selected for allocation by the Council, are known informally as omission sites. The Examination's purpose is to consider whether the submitted LPPU is sound. The focus will be on whether or not the process for selecting the allocated sites is sound. This is likely to involve looking at the site selection process, including the underlying evidence base, and the soundness of individual sites including deliverability where they are challenged. Those promoting omission sites will be allowed to put arguments on these issues but not to promote the merits of their own site.
39. It is not my role to examine the soundness of omission sites, and such sites will not normally be discussed in detail at the hearings. Should the situation arise that additional site(s) are needed, I will look to the Council in the first instance to decide which alternative site(s) should be brought forward for Examination.

Site visits

40. As part of my assessment of the LPPU's soundness, I will visit sites and areas during the Examination. These visits will be unaccompanied unless I need to

arrange access to private land. The Programme Officer will make the necessary arrangements with the relevant parties in such circumstances.

Closing the Examination

41. Following the hearings, the relevant findings will be set out in my report, or as Interim Findings. My report will be sent to the Council at the end of the Examination and will set out the conclusions, and where necessary, any Main Modifications required to make the LPPU sound and/or legally compliant.
42. The Examination will remain open until my report is submitted to the Council. During this time, no further written submissions or evidence will be taken into account unless specifically requested.

Further information

43. Further information on the Examination of Local Plans can be found in:
 - The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
 - The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
 - The Planning Inspectorate's Local plans: the examination process (July 2025) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-plans>
 - The Planning Inspectorate's Local plans: taking part in examinations (August 2024) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-in-local-plan-examinations>
44. Please contact the Programme Officer if you have any further queries.

Joanna Gilbert

INSPECTOR

Overview of Key Dates

Date	Event
4 August 2025	Issue of MIQs for Stage 1 Hearings
5 September 2025	Deadline for confirming participation in Stage 1 Hearings
14 October 2025	Deadline for electronic submission of all Stage 1 Hearing statements and any relevant Statements of Common Ground
4 November 2025	Final draft programme published for Stage 1 Hearings
11 and 12 November 2025	Stage 1 Hearings take place