

Examination of West Berkshire Local Plan 2022-2039

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IN38: main modifications consultation

Introduction

Examination hearings were held between 8 May and 3 October 2024. The Council has responded to all of my action points, the last response being published on 15 October 2024¹. A revised schedule of the Council's proposed main modifications, along with updated sustainability appraisal and habitat regulations assessment reports, are now being finalised by the Council.

Main modifications consultation

For the reasons that I have set out in previous notes, and will be explained more fully in my final report, I am satisfied at this stage of the examination that the main modifications proposed by the Council in response to my action points are all necessary to address soundness issues and will be effective in so doing. However, this is without prejudice to my final conclusions which will ultimately be made having regard to representations in response to the forthcoming public consultation, in addition to all of the evidence currently before me.

The Plan was submitted for examination in March 2023 and, for various reasons, it has taken over one and a half years to reach this stage. The Government has recently reiterated the importance of getting up to date plans in place as soon as possible, and to avoid unduly protracted examinations². The Council should therefore carry out public consultation on the proposed main modifications, changes to the policies map, and updated sustainability appraisal and habitat regulations assessment reports as soon as possible. This should be for a minimum six week period and be undertaken having regard to the Council's Statement of Community Involvement in a similar manner to that in which it would be carried out under regulation 19.

¹ EXAM61 response to IN37 (action points from October hearing sessions).

² Letter from Matthew Pennycook (Minister of State) to Paul Morrison (Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-plan-examinations-letter-to-the-chief-executive-of-the-planning-inspectorate-july-2024>

Representations about the consultation documents should be sent to the Council, not the Programme Officer. Information about how to make representations will be provided on the Council's website, with links to that from the examination website.

At the end of the consultation period, the Council should forward the representations to the Programme Officer as soon as possible. **Within four weeks of the end of the consultation period** the Council should then submit a report listing all of the representations; a brief summary of the main issues raised; and the Council's brief response to those main issues. I will consider all of the representations, and the Council's responses to them, before finalising my report.

Unless I consider it essential to deal with substantial issues raised in representations about the proposed main modifications, or to ensure fairness, no further hearing sessions will be held after the consultation period.

My report and recommendations

At the end of the examination I will send my report to the Council. If I have been asked to do so by the Council, this will recommend the main modifications that I conclude are necessary to make the Plan legally compliant and sound as required by section 20(7C) of the 2004 Act.

The Council should therefore confirm in writing that it wishes me to recommend modifications to the Plan to make it legally compliant and sound. This could be done when it has finalized the main modifications schedule and other documents for public consultation, or when it submits its report of the main modifications consultation.

Additional (minor) modifications

The Council can make minor changes to the Plan when it is adopted in addition to the main modifications. Such changes ("additional modifications") would not materially affect the Plan's policies and proposals, but rather would relate to matters such as typographical errors, minor editing, and factual or name changes. These would not be matters for my consideration.

Queries

Any queries about the consultation exercise should be taken up with the Council, rather than the Programme Officer.

William Fieldhouse

22 October 2024