

## Examination of the Bristol Local Plan 2022-2040

**Inspectors:** Louise Gibbons, Steven Lee and Benjamin Clarke

**Programme Officer:** Robert Young

**Tel:** 07443 715778

**Email:** [Robert.Young@Bristol.gov.uk](mailto:Robert.Young@Bristol.gov.uk)

**Examination webpage:** [Local plan examination \(bristol.gov.uk\)](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/local-plan-examination)

---

## IN1: Inspectors' Guidance Note – Version 2 (December 2024)

### Introduction

1. The Bristol Local Plan (the Plan) was submitted for examination by Bristol City Council (the Council) on 25 April 2024. We were appointed by the Secretary of State on 13 May 2024 to conduct the examination under section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This note provides initial guidance on the procedural and administrative arrangements for the examination.
2. Further general information about the local plan examination process can be found in the Planning Inspectorate's publication Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations, which is available [here](#). There is also a [short guide](#) aimed particularly at those taking part in an examination for the first time.

### Programme Officer

3. Robert Young is the Programme Officer ("PO") for the examination. He is working under our direction and is independent of the Council. His contact details are given above.
4. The main tasks of the PO are to act as the channel of communication between us, the Council and all the other participants; to liaise with all parties to ensure the smooth running of the examination; to organise the programme of hearing sessions; and to oversee the publication of documents and news updates on the examination website.
5. Any procedural questions or other queries about the examination should be directed to the PO.

### Examination website

6. The examination webpages are all hosted by the Council, and their content is controlled by the Inspectors and the PO. All documents for the examination, including the Plan, policies map, and the Council's supporting and submission documents, will be available on the examination webpage located at

[www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/planning-and-building-regulations/planning-policy-and-guidance/local-plan/local-plan-review/local-plan-examination](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/planning-and-building-regulations/planning-policy-and-guidance/local-plan/local-plan-review/local-plan-examination). Any documents that we publish or ask for will be added to the website in the “Examination Documents” section. Any notes or documents we produce will be added under the “Inspectors’ Documents” section.

7. If any representor does not have access to the internet, they should contact the PO who will endeavour to make alternative arrangements.

### Inspectors’ role

8. Our task is to consider whether the submitted Plan complies with the relevant legislation and is sound. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (paragraph 35) makes it clear that in order to be found sound the Plan must be:
  - a) **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;
  - b) **justified** – an appropriate strategy taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
  - c) **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
  - d) **consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the NPPF’s policies and other statements of national policy, where relevant.
9. It is not part of our role to make improvements to the Plan, provided that it is sound and legally compliant.
10. 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.
11. At the end of the examination, we will prepare a report for the Council setting out our conclusions and recommendations. Our report will deal with the main issues of soundness and legal compliance, taking into account the representations made but without responding to each of them.

## National Planning Policy Framework

12. A revised National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF) was published in December 2023. This included transitional arrangements for local plans. Paragraph 230 of the NPPF states that where plans reached Regulation 19 on or before 19 March 2024, they will be examined under the relevant previous version of the NPPF. The Plan was published under Regulation 19 on 21 November 2023. On that basis, our understanding is that the Plan will be examined under the NPPF published on 5 September 2023.

## Changes to the Plan

13. The starting point for the examination is that the Council has submitted a Plan which the local planning authority thinks is ready for examination<sup>1</sup>. Now that the Plan has been submitted there are only two means by which changes can be made to it:
- as main modifications recommended by us; or
  - as additional modifications made by the Council on adoption.
14. We can only recommend main modifications if they are necessary to make the submitted Plan sound and/or legally compliant. Any potential main modifications will be subject to public consultation before we recommend them in our report, and in some cases, they may also require further sustainability appraisal and habitat regulations assessment.
15. Additional modifications (sometimes also referred to as “minor modifications”) are changes which do not materially affect the policies in the Plan. They may be made by the Council on adoption and do not fall within the scope of the examination.

## Representations made on the Plan

16. The Council has prepared a Statement of Consultation<sup>2</sup>. This includes details of the consultation that has taken place on the Plan and a summary of the main issues raised in the representations.
17. A total of 1,634 representations were made by a total of 436 individuals and organisations under regulation 20 (ie during the consultation held from 21 November to 26 January 2024)<sup>3</sup>. They are all available to view on the examination website. We will take these representations into account in our consideration of legal compliance and soundness. We will not consider representations made to the Council at earlier stages of consultation about the Plan.

---

<sup>1</sup> Section 20(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).

<sup>2</sup> Document CSD006 – Regulation 22(1)(c) Statement of Consultation

<sup>3</sup> Page 7 of Document CSD006

## **Preliminary Questions to the Council**

18. We have asked the Council a number of preliminary questions<sup>4</sup>, the responses to which will aid our understanding of the Plan, evidence and representations. The answers to these will help provide clarity and potentially narrow down the focus of the examination. The Council's responses to any questions will be published on the examination webpages. It is possible we shall ask additional preliminary questions, including in relation to allocations, in due course.

## **Matters, Issues and Questions**

19. Following our consideration of all of the evidence and representations, and the Council's responses to any Preliminary Questions, we will publish the Matters, Issues and Questions that will be the focus of the examination. As with the Preliminary Questions, we may decide to publish those Matters, Issues and Questions in stages.

## **Written statements**

20. When we publish our Matters, Issues and Questions we will ask the Council to provide written statements responding to all of the questions. Representors will also be able to submit written statements responding to questions relevant to the issues raised in their Regulation 20 representations. Deadlines will be set for the receipt of statements by the PO, and there may be different deadlines for different Matters. Late statements will not be accepted.
21. Further information about the format and content of written statements will be published alongside our Matters, Issues and Questions.

## **Statements of Common Ground**

22. Some Statements of Common Ground have been submitted by the Council and are in the examination library. We may decide that it would be helpful if the Council drew up further Statements of Common Ground with particular representors relating to specific parts of the Plan, for example some of the allocations. If that is so, we would advise the Council accordingly and set deadlines by which any such statements should be provided.

## **Other written material**

23. Other than what is specifically requested by us, no further representations, evidence or other written material should be submitted to the examination.

## **Artificial Intelligence**

24. It is understood that Artificial Intelligence could be used to support the process. However, if Artificial Intelligence is to be used, such as in the writing of documents, or creation of plans and images, this should be declared when the information is submitted. Such a declaration should include what systems or tools you have used, the source of the information that the AI system has based

---

<sup>4</sup> Document IN2

its content on, and what information or material the AI has been used to create or alter. Further guidance can be found [here](#).

## **Examination hearing**

25. An important part of the examination will be the hearing sessions that we will hold to help us determine if the Plan is legally compliant and sound and, if not, how it could be modified to ensure that it is. The hearing will allow us to focus on particular parts of the Plan and relevant evidence that we need to ask questions about. Not all parts of the Plan will be discussed at the hearing as for some we will have all of the information that we need in writing.
26. The hearing will be a public event. The venue for the hearing will be confirmed in due course and there may be an opportunity to attend the venue to observe. As well as representatives for the Council, some representors may also participate. However, only those individuals and organisations who have made representations under Regulation 20 seeking to change the Plan have a right to participate.
27. Later in the examination, when we have determined the Matters and Issues that we need to focus on, we will ask representors if they wish to participate. All representors who do wish to participate must respond at that time, irrespective of what they indicated in their Regulation 20 representations. If representors do not respond to the PO by the deadline set, it will be assumed that they do not wish to participate.
28. We will have read the representations and any written statements before the relevant hearing session. Participation is therefore only likely to be necessary if a representor thinks that they will want to respond to questions that we ask or to points that others may make during the hearing. Representors will normally only take part in the hearing session that is relevant to the main issue or issues that they raised in their regulation 20 representations.
29. 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 if we think that would assist us in determining the soundness or legal compliance of the Plan.
30. Dates of the hearing sessions, along with detailed information about how to participate or observe, will be published on the examination website nearer the time. However, a provisional timetable for the hearings, which will commence on Tuesday 25 February, is appended to this note. Representors will be informed at least six weeks in advance of the date of the opening hearing session<sup>5</sup>.

## **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. However, our role is to examine the soundness of the submitted Plan, rather

---

<sup>5</sup> Regulation 24 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

than omission sites. We are unlikely, therefore, to ask any written questions about omission sites or discuss any at the hearing sessions.

### **Site visits**

32. We will carry out site visits before, during, or after the hearing as necessary to inform our assessment of the soundness of the Plan. All site visits will be unaccompanied, unless we need to go onto private land, in which case we will make the necessary arrangements via the PO.

### **Close of the examination**

33. The examination will close when our report is submitted to the Council.

### **Examination programme**

34. A detailed programme, with specific dates, will be published once we have received a response to our Preliminary Questions.

### **Further information**

35. Published information about the preparation and examination of local plans is available as follows:

Relevant guidance – available from <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-plans>

- Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations
- Short guide to taking part in local plan examinations
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Planning Practice Guidance, including the section on Plan-making

Relevant legislation – available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)
- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)

36. Any queries about this note should be taken up with the PO.

*Louise Gibbons Steven Lee Benjamin Clarke*

11 December 2024

---