

INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE HANDBRIDGE

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

EXAMINER: Andrew Mead BSc (Hons) MRTPI MIQ

Conor O'Gorman
Chair Handbridge Neighbourhood Forum

Catherine Morgetroyd
Cheshire West and Chester Council

Via email

Examination Ref: 01/AM/HNP

24 February 2025

Dear Mr O'Gorman and Ms Morgetroyd

Following the submission of the Handbridge Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Plan) for examination, I would like to clarify several initial procedural matters. I also have a number of questions for Handbridge Neighbourhood Forum (HNF) and Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaCC), to which I would like to receive a written response(s) by **Monday 10 March 2025**, if possible.

1. Examination Documentation

I can confirm that I am satisfied that I have received the draft Plan and accompanying documentation, including the Basic Conditions Statement; the Consultation Statement; the Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment and Marine Plan Screening Determination for Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan; and the Regulation 16 representations, to enable me to undertake the examination.

2. Site Visit

I will aim to carry out a site visit to the neighbourhood plan area during week commencing 3 March 2025. The site visit will assist in my assessment of the draft Plan, including the issues identified in the representations.

The visit will be undertaken unaccompanied. It is very important that I am not approached to discuss any aspects of the Plan or the neighbourhood area, as this may be perceived to prejudice my independence and risk compromising the fairness of the examination process.

I may have some additional questions, following my site visit, which I will set out in writing should I require any further clarification.

3. Written Representations

At this stage, I consider the examination can be conducted solely by the written representations procedure, without the need for a hearing. However, I will reserve the option to convene a hearing should a matter(s) come to light where I consider that a hearing is necessary to ensure the adequate examination of an issue, or to ensure that a person has a fair chance to put a case.

4. Further Clarification

From my initial assessment of the Plan and supporting documents, I have identified a number of matters where I require some additional information from HNF and CWaCC.

I have six questions (1.-5.b)) seeking further clarification, which I have set out in the Annex to this letter.

I would be grateful if you can seek to provide a written response(s) by **Monday 10 March 2025**.

5. Examination Timetable

As you will be aware, the intention is to examine the Plan (including conduct of the site visit) with a view to providing a draft report (for 'fact checking') within around 6 weeks of submission of the draft Plan. However, as I have raised a number of questions, I must provide you with sufficient opportunity to reply. Consequentially, the examination timetable may be extended. Please be assured that I will aim to mitigate any delay, should it arise, as far as is practicable. The IPe office team will seek to keep you updated on the anticipated delivery date of the draft report.

If you have any process questions related to the conduct of the examination, which you would like me to address, please do not hesitate to contact the office team in the first instance.

In the interests of transparency, may I prevail upon you to ensure that a copy of this letter is placed on the HNF and CWaCC. websites.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Andy Mead

Examiner

ANNEX

From my initial reading of the Handbridge Neighbourhood Development Plan, the supporting evidence and the representations that have been made to the Plan, I have the following six questions (1.-5.b)) for HNF and CWaCC. I have requested the submission of responses **by Monday 10 March 2025**, although an earlier response would be much appreciated. All of the points set out below flow from the requirement to satisfy the Basic Conditions.

1. Date of submission to CWaCC

Question to HNF and CWaCC

I note that the Regulation 16 consultation began on 19 December 2024, but that the CWaCC web site states two dates for the end of the consultation period: 3 February 2025 and 7 March 2025. Which one is correct and on what date was the Plan submitted to CWaCC?

2. Policy HNP1

Question to HNF and CWaCC

Noting the Regulation 16 representation from CWaCC, it seems to me that Policy HNP1 should be modified by amending the first sentence of the second paragraph to: "Development proposals that lie within or *adjacent* to the Network ..., etc". Does the HNF and CWaCC agree?

3. Policy HNP4

Question to HNF

Policy HNP4 includes the sentence "*All proposals for new commercial, community, apartments or retail development shall provide safe and secure cycle storage and facilities for mobility scooters*". Given the comprehensive guidelines for cycle parking in the CWaCC Supplementary Planning Document: Parking Standards dated February 2022, is this section of Policy HNP4 necessary?

4. Policy HNP7

Question to HNF.

CWaCC suggest amending the second sentence of Policy HNP7 to "All new development should, *where applicable* ...". Does the HNF have any comments?

5. Policy HNP12

a) Question to HNF.

CWaCC suggest deleting the final phrase of the following Clause in Policy HNP12. "A iii. Development is consistent with the scale and social and cultural function of the Centre and is not of an industrial or other use that should be located in a town centre identified in Local Plan (Part One) policy ECON2." Does the HNF have any comments?

b) Question to HNF and CWaCC.

The first sentence of Clause D appears confused. Perhaps there is a typographical error or superfluous word: do the HNF and CWaCC have comments on the following suggested phrasing?

"Development proposals that require loss of ground floor floorspace in a local retail unit, or pub or drinking establishment to facilitate access to upper floor residential ... etc."