

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE
BLACON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Blacon Neighbourhood Forum (Blacon Neighbourhood Alliance)

EXAMINER: Andrew Freeman BSc (Hons) DipTP DipEM FRTPI

Examination Ref: 01/AF/BNP

Laura Smith
Blacon Neighbourhood Forum Secretary

Marc Hallows
Blacon Neighbourhood Alliance Vice-Chair

Catherine Morgetroyd
Principal Planning Officer – Planning Policy
Cheshire West and Chester Council

Via email

19 February 2026

Dear Ms Smith, Mr Hallows, and Ms Morgetroyd

Following the submission of Blacon Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan) for examination, I would like to clarify several initial procedural matters. I also have a number of questions for Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Blacon Neighbourhood Forum (Blacon Neighbourhood Alliance) to which I would like to receive a written response(s) by **Thursday 5 March 2026**.

1. Examination Documentation

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

Subject to my detailed assessment of the draft Plan, I have not at this initial stage identified any very significant and obvious flaws in the Plan that might lead me to advise that the examination should not proceed.

2. Site Visit

I will aim to carry out a site visit to the neighbourhood plan area during week commencing 16 March 2026. 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 Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Blacon Neighbourhood Alliance.

I have 22 questions 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 **Thursday 5 March 2026**.

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 – 8 weeks of submission of the draft Plan. However, as I have raised the annexed 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 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 and any subsequent response is placed on the Blacon Neighbourhood Alliance and Cheshire West and Chester Council websites.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Freeman

Examiner

ANNEX

From my initial reading of the Blacon Neighbourhood Development Plan, the supporting evidence and the representations that have been made to the Plan, I have the following questions for Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Blacon Neighbourhood Alliance. I have requested the submission of responses by **Thursday 5 March 2026**.

Where I am requesting additional clarification, suggested text and similar, this is with a view to informing the specific terms of any relevant examiner modification(s) that I may recommend. Accordingly, all of the points set out below flow from the requirement to satisfy the Basic Conditions.

Questions for Cheshire West and Chester Council

1. Policy BLACON1 – sufficient parking (vehicular and cycle): Does the Council have any standards that would be appropriate to the proposal described in the Plan?
2. Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment and Marine Plan Screening Determination for Blacon Neighbourhood Plan: The screening determination, in its conclusions, is inconclusive as to the effects of the neighbourhood plan, whether it is necessary to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment and whether Habitats Regulations Assessment is triggered. It states, *“The Local Planning Authority will inform the neighbourhood plan group of the outcome of the screening assessment and identify additional work required”*. Please provide conclusions on the above matters and the evidence upon such conclusions are based.
3. Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment and Marine Plan Screening Determination for Blacon Neighbourhood Plan: Has this work been referred to Natural England? Please provide a copy of any reply that has been received (other than the email dated 29 January 2026 in response to the Regulation 16 consultation).

Questions for Blacon Neighbourhood Alliance

4. Is the Alliance satisfied that the Plan does not breach Human Rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998)?
5. Local Plan Policy SOC 6 and net loss of playing fields: In the draft Plan (and Order)¹, the Green Spaces report and the representations of the Council, there are conflicting descriptions of the existing playing field provision on the site. Please provide an accurate description of the present on-site provision. Please accurately describe the playing field provision that it is envisaged will be in place following the development. What pitch provision is it envisaged will be provided within the building and would this be of the appropriate standard? Will the availability of the internal provision be permanent or temporary?
6. Policy BLACON1 refers to *“any necessary repositioning”* of *“The two existing full size football pitches”*. Is this an accurate description of the pitches and will not repositioning be inevitable?
7. Policy BLACON1 - use for both indoor sports and community use: Is it envisaged that both uses will take place in (approximately) equal proportions or is the Alliance seeking a policy that would, potentially, allow 100% occupation by one or other use?

¹ The Blacon Community Neighbourhood Development Order, also produced by Blacon Neighbourhood Alliance, is the subject of a separate examination (to which I have been appointed).

8. Policy BLACON1 – changing rooms of the “*required standard*”: What is the required standard? Please provide a link to the standards envisaged.
9. Policy BLACON1 – sufficient parking: Has the Alliance looked into the amount of vehicular and cycle parking that would be appropriate and is it satisfied that sufficient provision can be provided on site? Please give details.
10. Policy BLACON1 – foul water drainage: Bearing in mind the representations of Welsh Water, is the Alliance satisfied that foul water can be satisfactorily drained from the development? Please describe the circumstances.
11. Policy BLACON1: Is the Alliance satisfied that there is sufficient space within the site to provide a satisfactory sustainable drainage system? Please describe the circumstances.
12. Policy BLACON2: For the benefit of both applicants and decision takers (and for my site visit), the extent of the sites to which the policy would apply needs to be clear; also, the identification/numbering of the sites on the Policies Map. Please supply a plan or plans showing the community facilities at a scale that enables clear identification of their boundaries.
13. Policy BLACON2: Please specify the policies in the development plan that relate to culture and community facilities.
14. Policy BLACON2: Cultural facilities are included within Local Plan Policy DM39 but not in Policy BLACON2. Should the reference to culture be removed from the final paragraph of the policy?
15. Policy BLACON2: Should JH Godwin Primary School and Stepping Stones Pre School be identified as separate facilities?
16. Policy BLACON3: For the benefit of both applicants and decision takers (and for my site visit), the extent of the Western Avenue Local Retail Centre needs to be clear. Please supply a plan showing the boundary of the centre at a scale that enables clear identification.
17. Policy BLACON3: Please specify the policies in the development plan that relate to local retail centres.
18. Policy BLACON4: For the benefit of both applicants and decision takers (and for my site visit), the extent of the sites to which the policy would apply needs to be clear. Please supply a plan or plans showing the Local Green Spaces at a scale that enables clear identification of their boundaries.
19. Policy BLACON4: Are any of the sites located within the Green Belt? If so, what additional local benefit would be gained by designation as Local Green Space?
20. Policy BLACON4: Were the owners of the proposed Local Green Spaces specifically notified about proposed designation?² Please provide details including details of any representations that were received.
21. Policy BLACON4: Please comment on the justification for the proposed allocation of Local Green Space 12, Kipling Road, given that the site is not publicly accessible at the current time.

² See Planning Practice Guidance Reference ID: 37-019-20140306.

22. In Appendix A, the description of Site 6, Cranleigh Crescent Green Space, seems to be a description applying to Graham Road Playing Field; and yet this is different from the description of Graham Road Playing Field as applied to Site 7. Please advise on what should be the correct description in regard to both these sites.