

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE CHRISTELTON AND LITTLETON
NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

EXAMINER: Andrew Mead BSc (Hons) MRTPI MIQ

Examination Ref: 01/AM/CLNP

Councillor John Beckitt
Christelton Parish Council

Charlotte Aspinall
Senior Planning Officer - Planning Policy
Cheshire West and Chester Council

Via email

30 June 2026

Dear Cllr Beckitt and Ms Aspinall

Following the submission of the Christelton & Littleton Neighbourhood Development 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 Parish Council, set out in the Annex to this letter, to which I would like to receive a written response(s) by **Monday 20 July 2026**.

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 (SEA) Screening Determination 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 week commencing 6 July 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. Examiner Clarifications

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 Christelton Parish Council.

I have 23 questions seeking further clarification, which I have set out in an Annex to this letter. I would be grateful if you can seek to provide a written response(s) by **Monday 20 July 2026**.

4. 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.

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 is placed on the Christleton and Littleton Parish Councils and Cheshire West and Chester Council websites.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Andy Mead

Examiner

ANNEX

From my initial reading of the Christelton & Littleton 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 (CWaCC) and the Qualifying Body (QB/Christelton Parish Council). I have requested the submission of responses by **Monday 20 July 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.

Specific questions of clarification to the Qualifying Body (QB) and CWaCC are listed below, but I am happy to receive comments from either party on any of the questions which are not directed at them in the first instance.

Policy HN1

1. **Question to QB and CWaCC.** I note the comments of CwaCC in the Regulation 16 representation and agree that Policy HN1 reads as a statement rather than a land use policy. Would the following suggested policy be appropriate? *“Proposals for residential development which seek to accommodate the local housing needs identified in the Housing Needs Survey Report will be supported.”*

Policy HN2.

2. **Question to QB and CWaCC.** This policy appears to support developments of up to 16 dwellings on sites of less than 1 hectare on the edge of the village. Does this refer to both Christelton and Littleton? Given that the land is within the Green Belt, how does this policy have regard to government advice on development in the Green Belt?
3. **Question to QB.** What is the evidence to justify 16 dwellings per hectare when existing densities are quoted as being between 6 and 26 dwellings per hectare (ha)? Similarly, what is the evidence to justify setting a maximum site area of 1ha?

Policy HN3

4. **Question to QB.** I am unsure what this policy is trying to achieve. Does it mean that greenfield and brownfield sites should not be developed next to each other? And if so, what is the issue with such a juxtaposition?

Policy HN4.1

5. **Question to QB.** The policy ambiguously states “several houses ...”. How many houses and what is the justification for a particular number? Which “village” is meant in the policy?
6. **Question to QB and CWaCC.** It seems to me that Policies HN2, HN3 and HN4.1 could be combined into one policy which would read: *“Proposals for residential development to meet local needs will be supported where they reflect the prevailing character and density of the adjoining settlement.”* I would be pleased to have the comments from the Councils on this suggestion.

Policy HN4.2

7. **Question to QB and CWaCC.** The policy comments on “infill” and “backland housing”. In my experience, infill development is frequently defined as “filling a gap in an otherwise built up frontage”, with no reference to the number of dwellings. In addition, backland development

is not always unacceptable, it depends on the site circumstances and whether, for example, significant harm to privacy of neighbours or from noise and disturbance can be avoided. Therefore, I suggest the following policy could be appropriate: *“Proposals for residential development as infill and in backland will be supported provided there is no significant harm to the amenities of neighbours and the character of the immediate area and that an acceptable means of access can be achieved.”* I shall be pleased to have comments from both Councils.

Policy HN5

- 8. Question to QB.** I am uncertain how “priority for repurposing” can be implemented. What is the aim of the policy?

Policy HDC1; Policies HDC2 – HDC31

- 9. Question to QB and CwaCC.** This policy introduces the General Housing Design Code. The policy comprises six paragraphs, the last five of which are more in the nature of supporting evidence. Therefore, I am considering recommending modifying the policy to retain just the first paragraph, but in an amended form as set out in question 11 below, bearing in mind that the Design Guidance published in January 2026 by the government is, at this stage, a consultation draft (the response period ended in March 2026 and the responses are still being analysed).
- 10. Question to QB and CwaCC.** The Plan makes the distinction in policies between “must”, “should” and “could” (page 14). I believe this is an artificial device which introduces unrealistic expectation. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, although the use of “must” conveys the impression that there is a non-negotiable requirement, in reality, there may be material considerations which outweigh compliance with a specific planning policy, whether on design matters or not. Accordingly, I am considering recommending the use of “should” throughout the policies rather than “must” or “could”.
- 11. Question to QB and CwaCC.** In addition, Policies HDC2 – HDC31 are detailed design features which I consider would be better located in an Appendix, so making the Plan less unwieldy. Therefore, I would welcome comments from both Councils on the above suggestions and the following Policy HDC1.” *“Proposals for residential will be supported where it has regard to advice in the Christleton and Littleton Design Code (See Appendix X) and National Design Guidance.”*
- 12. Question to QB.** In the Regulation 16 representations, CwaCC make many detailed comments about Policies HDC2 – HDC31, as does the Canal and River Trust. Please could the QB consider the points made and, if possible, agree amended policies with CwaCC, taking into account the deletion of HDC15 Minimum Space Standards for the reasons advanced by CwaCC in the Regulation 16 response. If no agreement is possible, I would be pleased to receive details of the points of difference.

Policy SUC1.

- 13. Question to QB and CwaCC.** The Canal and River Trust comments that the policy is overly prescriptive, does not reflect site specific constraints and is not deliverable for reasons included in the Regulation 16 representation. With those comments in mind, I may recommend the following policy on which I would be grateful for the comments of both

Councils. *“Proposals for development which recognise the multifunctional nature of the Shropshire Union Canal will be supported where there will be no harm to the safety or stability of the Canal or its infrastructure. Where appropriate, development will be encouraged to provide access to the canal for local residents and tourists to the area for recreational opportunities and physical activity; etc...”*.

Policy SU4

- 14. Question to QB and CWaCC.** Following criticism of Policy SU4 in its Regulation 16 representation, the Canal and River Trust suggests a widespread modification to the policy. I would be pleased to have the comments of the Councils on this suggestion.

Policies GG1 – GG5

- 15. Question to QB and CWaCC.** My initial thoughts on the proposals to create Green Gaps are that they are not appropriate to the neighbourhood plan but comprise a strategic land use policy which is more the function of a Local Plan. Indeed, they even appear to replicate some of Green Belt policy by presuming against development except in very special circumstances. Moreover, the Plan states as part of the vision on page 9: *“Importantly, the Green Belt and strategic green gaps will be retained ...”*, reinforcing my view that it is a strategic policy. Indeed, the text of the general policy in the box on page 46 to prevent housing development is even more onerous than Green Belt policy which would allow housing in accordance with paragraphs 155 and 156 of NPPF, and especially the “Golden Rules”.

National guidance on Local Green Space is that the designation should not be proposed to as a “back door” way to try to achieve what would amount to a new area of Green Belt. The creation of the Green Gaps is a similar proposition and could well significantly hinder the extremely difficult task for which CWaCC has responsibility of identifying land to contribute to the future housing need for this area of Cheshire West and Chester. Therefore, I am considering recommending the deletion of Policies GG1 – GG5 and would be pleased to have the comments of both Councils.

Policy LGS1

- 16. Question to QB.** I have noted the Regulation 16 representations from Bridgemere UK Ltd objecting to the designation of LGS1 and also the response of the QB. Without prejudice to any conclusions I may come to about the designation of LGS1, I would be grateful to receive a copy of a plan at an appropriate scale showing the “former playing field” referred to in the submissions. I would also wish to see the submission of reasons why LGS1 is demonstrably special to the local community and how it holds a particular local significance. (See NPPF paragraph 107 b).

- 17. Please could CWaCC contact Bridgemere UK Ltd** to ascertain whether they wish to respond to the Regulation 16 comments made by the QB.

Policies IOS 1-3

- 18. Question to QB.** Please could a definition of ‘Incidental Open Space’ be submitted for inclusion in the Glossary.

Policy HE1

- 19. Question to CWaCC.** The Council comments that requirements of the policy should align with national and Local Plan policy for development within Conservation Areas. The neighbourhood plan no longer has to generally conform with strategic local policies, but I

would be grateful to have a suggested modified policy submitted by CWaCC to correct the perceived deficiencies in the policy and which has regard to national guidance.

Policy HE3

20. Question to QB and CWaCC. I would be pleased to receive a copy of a plan delineating the area to which this policy applies? Is this area a designated heritage asset? If not, should the policy applied here be consistent with national guidance for development affecting non-designated assets?

21. Question to QB. Does the QB have any comments on the points raised by Asteer Planning on behalf of Hilbre Overlea Eastes in the Regulation 16 response, page 16, about the Battle of Rowton Moor?

Policy CF2

22. Question to QB. How can the “needs of the community” be demonstrated?

Policy LV1

23. Question to QB. Please could the QB confirm that the views on the map on page 71 are intended to be the “significant local views and vistas” to which Policy LV1 would apply. If so, in order to make the map suitable for effective development management, please could a replacement be submitted. The map should be of larger scale so that the position of the arrows is clearly shown. The viewpoints should be from positions which are publicly accessible such as public roads or rights of way. I found it difficult to see from the map the locations of V18, V19, V12, V15, V16, and V17.

It may be prudent to liaise with CWACC, which will likely hold the necessary Ordnance Survey licence to assist in producing a suitable map at an appropriate scale.