

INSPECTOR'S SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS TO THE COUNCIL (IN4)

and

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL RESPONSE

October 2023

Duty to cooperate

Inspector:

The Council's response to PQ3 describes potential soundness issues raised by various consultees about some of the strategic matters that had been addressed through the duty to cooperate. These are relevant to PQ4. However, PQ3 seeks to establish whether any relevant local planning authorities or prescribed bodies (ie those listed in regulation 4 of the 2012 Regulations) claim that the Council has failed to comply with the duty imposed by section 33A of the 2004 Act ie that it did not engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis on strategic matters during the preparation of the Plan up until the point it was submitted for examination.

SPQ3. Have any local planning authorities or other prescribed bodies made representations under regulation 20, or subsequently in discussions about the duty to cooperate statement of common ground, that claim that the Council did not engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis on strategic matters during the preparation of the Plan and have therefore failed to comply with the duty imposed by section 33A of the 2004 Act?

Council response:

The Council's response to PQ3 set out all of the comments received in relation to the Duty to Cooperate. The Council agrees with the Inspector that these representations relate to concerns raised regarding potential soundness issues.

The Council can therefore confirm that none of the relevant local authorities or prescribed bodies (those listed in regulation 4 of the 2012 Regulations) have claimed that the Council has failed to comply with the duty imposed by section 33A of the 2004 Act ie that it did not engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis on strategic matters during the preparation of the Plan.

Local Housing Need

Inspector:

National planning policy guidance expects local housing need to be calculated at the start of the plan-making process and then be kept under review and revised where appropriate as the figure may change due to the inputs being variable. However, local housing need calculated using the standard method may be relied upon for a period of 2 years from the time that a plan is submitted for examination [PPG ID:2a-008-20190220].

SPQ24. What was the local housing need figure for West Berkshire calculated using the standard method when the Plan was submitted for examination on 31 March 2023?

Council response:

Within the submitted Plan, the housing requirement is presented as a range. The lower end of the range is the 2022 local housing need figure (LHN) which is 513 dwellings. The upper end of the range is the LHN plus 5% (538 dwellings).

One of the inputs into the calculation of the LHN using the standard method are the affordability ratios which are published annually by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The most recent set of affordability ratios were published days before the submission of the Plan on 22 March 2023.

Using the affordability ratios published on 22 March 2023, the LHN is 515 dwellings. The calculation of this LHN is set out below.

Step 1 – Setting the Baseline

National household projections for the area provide the starting point. The 2014-based projections need to be used to calculate the average annual household growth over a 10 year period.

*The 2014 based household projections show a projected increase in households in the District from 67,187 in 2023 to 70,936 in 2033, an increase of 3,749 or **374.9 households per annum**.*

Step 2 – An adjustment to take account of market signals

This adjustment to take account of market signals uses median affordability ratios, published by the ONS. The affordability ratios compare the median house prices to median workplace earnings. Authorities should use the most recent year for which data is available. ONS published updated affordability ratios on 22 March 2023.

Each 1% increase in the ratio of house prices to earnings above 4 results in a quarter of a per cent increase. The formula is:

$$\text{Adjustment factor} = ((\text{Local affordability ratio} - 4) / 4) \times 0.25 + 1$$

For West Berkshire the most recent figure for the local affordability ratio is **9.97** (figure for 2022 published March 2023).

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Adjustment factor for West Berkshire} &= ((9.97 - 4) / 4) \times 0.25 + 1 \\ &= (5.97/4) \times 0.25 + 1 = 1.4925 \times 0.25 + 1 = 1.373125 \end{aligned}$$

The adjustment factor is therefore 1.373125 and is used as:

$$\text{Minimum annual local housing need figure} = (\text{adjustment factor}) \times \text{projected household growth}$$

$$\text{Minimum local housing need figure} = 1.373125 \times 374.9$$

The resulting figure is 514.785 or **515** rounded.

Step 3 – Capping the level of any increase

There is no need for a cap on the West Berkshire figure as the local need figure is less than 40% above the average annual housing requirement set out in the most recently adopted strategic policies (policy CS1 of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document).

Ongoing Work

Inspector:

The responses to a number of PQs refer to ongoing work being carried out by the Council in liaison with other parties. In order to inform my decisions about the examination programme, the Council is asked to clarify when each of the following will be available:

SPQ4. Clarification of primary health care provision at North East Thatcham Strategic Site proposed in policy SP17 following liaison with the Integrated Care Board, NHS and GP Surgeries as appropriate.

Council response:

The Council continues to have regular dialogue with the Berkshire Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) with regards to the provision of health care within West Berkshire and in particular the provision at North East Thatcham.

BOB ICB in its representation (1335060) has made it clear what changes it would like to see to policy SP17 which can be summarised as “a serviced, well accessed rectangular site of at least 0.8 acres be donated by the developer to BOB ICB and for this to be part of a £3 million developer contribution”.

In addition, the Burdwood Surgery has submitted representations (1332973) on its requirements.

On-going discussions between WBDC, BOB ICB and the “consortium” are on-going and will likely take between four and five months before being finalised. However, it is likely that the final requirements for health care will only be established as part of the examination process when policy SP17 is finalised.

SPQ46(b). Further work on the strategic road network (M4 and A34) and statement of common ground with National Highways.

Council response:

The next liaison meeting with National Highways is to be held on 23rd October. Parties are aiming to reach an agreed position through a statement of common ground by the end of January 2024.

SPQ46(c). Further work on the A339 in liaison with Hampshire County Council.

Council response:

A liaison meeting is planned with Hampshire County Council on 19th October. Parties will seek to reach an agreed position and provide clarity through a statement of common ground by the end of January 2024.

SPQ46(d). Further work on Thatcham level crossing and an agreed position with Network Rail.

Council response:

A liaison meeting was held in September and additional information has been provided to Network Rail following those discussions. The next liaison meeting with Network Rail is to be held on 19th October. Parties are aiming to reach an agreed position through a statement of common ground by the end of January 2024.

SPQ48. Potential modifications to policies SP1, SP5, SP6, SP7, SP11, DM5, DM6, DM7, DM20, DM24, DM25, DM28, DM29 and DM37 following liaison with the Environment Agency and Thames Water.

Council response:

A liaison meeting was held with Thames Water on 5th October. Parties are aiming to reach an agreed position through a statement of common ground by mid-December.

Due to a lack of resources the Environment Agency has made it clear that it will not be able to respond in a timely manner to the Council's request for a liaison meeting. Subject to resources being available at the Environment Agency the Council is hoping and is aiming to reach an agreed position through a statement of common ground by mid-March 2024.

SPQ49. A statement of common ground with Historic England.

Council response:

Following the meeting in August, parties are aiming to reach an agreed position through a statement of common ground by mid-December.