



The Planning Inspectorate

APPEAL APP/X0360/W/25/3371069

LAND NORTH OF READING ROAD, ARBORFIELD

CASE MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE 16 JANUARY 2026

INSPECTOR'S PRE-CONFERENCE NOTE

The Case Management Conference (CMC) will be led by the Inquiry Inspector, Lesley Coffey, a chartered town planner and Planning Inspector. Attached as a separate document is the conference agenda.

There will be no discussion as part of the conference as to the merits of your respective cases and I will not hear any evidence. The purpose of the CMC is to set out a clear indication as to the ongoing management of this case and the presentation of evidence, so that the forthcoming Inquiry is conducted in an efficient and effective manner.

The Inquiry is scheduled to open at 10.00am on Tuesday 10 March 2026 and has been programmed to sit for 4 days , with two reserve days. The number of sitting days required will be discussed at the CMC, and the parties should give consideration to whether the allocated number of sitting days is adequate in advance of the CMC.

Advocates and Witnesses

The Council has advised that it intends to call four witnesses to address Planning, landscape and character of the area, highways and transport and Housing Land Supply. My understanding is that the appellant proposes to call witnesses to address the same topics, and possibly any Arboricultural issues that may arise. The parties should confirm this at the CMC. Both parties should also ensure that witnesses are available to address flooding and ecology issues.

The parties should also check whether there are any availability constraints in relation to their advocates or witnesses prior to the CMC. This will assist with agreeing the running order of the Inquiry, as well as ensuring that adequate time is available to complete the Inquiry.

Likely main issues

It is an outline application with access to be determined at this stage. Based on the reasons for refusal I anticipate that the main issues will be:

- Whether the proposed development is in a suitable location having regard to local and national policies in relation to the location of housing.
- The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- Whether the quantum and scale of development is acceptable.
- Whether the proposal would be sustainable development, having regard to its location and the opportunities for sustainable travel.

- The effect of the proposed development on the nearby watercourse with particular regard to flooding and water quality. In relation to this matter the parties should base their evidence on the Environment Agency's most recent advice and flood maps.
- Whether any potential adverse effects on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA would be adequately mitigated. It would seem that this matter relates to the availability of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace. I shall require sufficient information to enable me to undertake an appropriate assessment.
- The housing land supply position.
- The overall planning balance.

The Council's Statement of Case identifies a number of additional issues. These are:

- The potential for prejudice to the delivery of Loddon Valley Garden Village and highway mitigation. Both parties reference the Loddon Valley Garden Village in their Statements.
- The access and visibility splays.
- Irreplaceable habitats, in particular veteran trees.
- Protected species and BNG.

I would like to understand why these matters were not addressed by the reasons for refusal, as well as the views of the parties as to whether they should represent further main issues, are likely to require any additional witnesses, or would be resolved in advance of the Inquiry.

Matters in relation to the provision of affordable housing, sports and recreational facilities, and training and vocational initiatives are also relevant considerations, but it would seem that there is scope for these matters to be addressed by way of planning obligations prior to the Inquiry. The loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land is a further matter to be assessed but based on the available information I would expect it to be addressed by the planning witnesses.

Prior to the CMC the parties should consider whether there are any further issues that need to be addressed.

Flood Risk Assessment

The appellant should update me regarding the Flood Risk Assessment. Whilst the Environment Agency's flood maps were updated in March 2025, a further update was provided in November 2025 and any implications arising from the more recent update should also be addressed.

The appellant should advise me at the CMC of the likely timeframe for the preparation of an updated Flood Risk Assessment.

SANG

I note the views of the Council in relation to the use of the Council owned SANG. As the parties are aware due to the proximity of the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area I shall require sufficient information to allow me to conduct an appropriate assessment.

Statements of Common Ground

I have a draft Statement of Common Ground dated August 2025. This needs to be updated in the light of the matters to be discussed at the CMC. It will need to include details of the plans on which the Council based its decision and any updated plans and the date they were submitted. I have a list prepared by the appellant dated August 2025 setting out essential supporting information, including updates during the course of the application. Could the parties please confirm whether there have been any further updates. The Statement of Common Ground should also set out the latest position in relation to the emerging Local Plan.

An agreed Statement of Common Ground should be submitted as soon as possible. Should there be matters still under discussion these should be recorded as matters still in dispute and an update provided should matters change. The parties should also consider whether topic specific SoCG would be useful to the smooth running of the Inquiry. The date for submission will be discussed at the CMC.

How the evidence will be heard

The evidence will be heard on a topic basis.

Based on the information submitted to date I anticipate that the issues in relation to the suitability of the location, impacts on the water course, the Thames Basin Special Protection Area and planning matters, including the planning balance, are most appropriately addressed through the formal presentation of evidence and cross examination.

It would seem that the matters in relation to character and appearance, the sustainability of the location, housing land supply and outstanding matters in relation to ecology and BNG would be more suited to round table discussions. I anticipate that any other matters would be addressed by the planning witnesses.

There will also be a round table session in respect of the s106 agreement/Unilateral Undertaking and the suggested conditions.

The parties should give careful consideration to the most suitable means of hearing the evidence and the running order, prior to the CMC, as well as the number of sitting days required.

S106/Conditions

When considering the proposed conditions, I would ask that parties have regard to the advice in the Framework and PPG, namely that they should be kept to a minimum and only imposed where they are necessary, relevant to planning and to the development to be permitted, enforceable, precise and reasonable in all other respects.

The conditions should be prepared by the Local Planning Authority and shared with the appellant. Where possible the parties should seek to agree them before the commencement of the Inquiry. If there are any outstanding differences between the parties the draft condition schedule should include the comments from the appellant.

I shall require a CIL compliance statement from the Council in respect of any planning obligations it seeks.

Timetable for the submission of documents

The timetable for the submission of documents will be discussed at the CMC. My suggested submission dates are set out below. If for any reason, including witness availability, there is likely to be difficulty in meeting the suggested dates, please advise me at the CMC.

Based on what I have read to date there are a number of documents that will need to be updated prior to the Inquiry. It would assist with the smooth running of the Inquiry if any such updates are shared as early as possible in order that they can be addressed in proofs.

Statements of Common Ground should be submitted by **23 January 2026**. Proofs of evidence will be required by **13 February 2026** with rebuttal statements, should they be necessary, submitted by **24 February 2026**.

Draft planning conditions and a draft s106 planning obligations should be submitted two weeks before the Inquiry. A CIL compliance statement will be required from the Council to justify any contributions sought. This, together with a site visit itinerary should also be submitted two weeks before the commencement of the Inquiry. A signed s106 agreement should be submitted within two weeks of the close of the Inquiry.

Parties should send me time estimates for evidence in chief and cross examination, together with any constraints on witness availability no later than two weeks before the commencement of the Inquiry.

Programme

We will commence each morning at 9:30/10:00. I do not propose to sit beyond 17:00 in general. There will be a lunch break of about one hour and a short break in the morning and afternoon. We will try to adjourn by 14:30/15:00 on Fridays provided we have reached a suitable point in the evidence.

Inquiry Library

As you are no doubt aware this event will need an Inquiry library. A dedicated Inquiry website to facilitate access by all parties to Inquiry documents would be the best means of providing this. It would need to accommodate the original application together with supporting documents and plans, the Statements of Common Ground, the Core Documents, and the proofs of evidence. It would need to be easily navigable and searchable to allow for quick and easy location of documents and would need to be easily updated in the event that any documents are submitted during the Inquiry. I have no preference as to who provides this and keeps it up to date.

All the above points are included on the CMC agenda.

Lesley Coffey

PLANNING INSPECTOR

13 January 2026