



# The Planning Inspectorate

**APPEAL APP/X0360/W/25/3371069**

**LAND NORTH OF READING ROAD, ARBORFIELD**

**CASE MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE 16 JANUARY 2026**

## **INSPECTOR'S POST-CONFERENCE NOTE**

This note summarises the matters discussed at the Case Management Conference (CMC) held on Friday on 16 January 2026.

### **Advocates and Witnesses**

The Council was represented by Jack Parker of Counsel. At the present time the Council anticipates calling witnesses to address veteran trees, housing land supply, highway matters, landscape, ecology, Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), drainage/water quality and planning issues. The appellant was represented by Christopher Boyle KC of Counsel and proposes to call witnesses to address housing land supply, trees, drainage, BNG, highway and sustainability and planning issues. Overall, there may be up to 14 witnesses. However, both parties agreed that some issues may be resolved prior to the commencement of the Inquiry.

### **Venue/Sitting days**

The Inquiry is scheduled to open at 10.00am on Tuesday 10 March 2026 at the Council offices Wokingham. It was agreed that it would be programmed for 6 sitting days with two reserve days on 19 and 20 March.

### **Likely main issues**

It is an outline application with access to be determined at this stage. At the CMC the Council outlined the reasons for the additional matters added to their reasons for refusal at the time of their Statement of Case. He confirmed that matters in relation to access and visibility are resolved, but that the other matters should be main issues at the present time. Based on the discussion at the CMC 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 SANG. I shall require sufficient information to enable me to undertake an appropriate assessment.
- Whether the proposal would prejudice the delivery of Loddon Valley Garden Village for reasons of highway capacity.
- The effect of the proposal on irreplaceable habitats, in particular the adequacy of buffer zones around veteran trees.
- The effect of the proposal on protected species.
- The BNG assessment.
- The overall planning balance.

Both parties considered that some of these matters may be resolved, or the difference between the parties narrowed in advance of the Inquiry. I would request that the parties, as a minimum, seek to agree the baseline position in relation to these matters. The Council also confirmed that it would not be putting forward its own technical evidence on water quality, but would rely on the evidence provided by the Environment Agency.

It was agreed that the difference between the parties in respect of housing land supply was not substantial and would not alter the weight afforded to this matter in the planning balance. It therefore does not need to be the subject of a separate issue at the Inquiry, but would be addressed by the planning witnesses.

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.

#### *Flood Risk Assessment*

An updated Flood Risk Assessment has now been provided. The parties should ensure that the Environment Agency is consulted on the updated assessment. I have not had the opportunity to review the Flood Risk Assessment, but the parties should ensure that there is sufficient information to enable me to conclude that in addition to the on-site flood risk, whether there would be safe egress and access to the site in the event of a flood.

#### *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.

#### *NPPF Consultation*

The NPPF Consultation period is due to end on 10 March. It was agreed that the parties should prepare their evidence on the basis of the extant NPPF. Should the new NPPF be published prior to my decision being issued the parties will be provided with an opportunity to comment on any implications for their respective cases.

## *Documents*

At the CMC I requested a hard copy of the topographical survey and, notwithstanding the access details submitted, a plan, other than the illustrative/indicative plan showing clearly where the site access is proposed. I also requested a plan showing the location of the veteran trees on site. These should be submitted as soon as possible and no later than **30 January 2026**.

## **Statements of Common Ground**

It was agreed that the parties should prepare topic specific Statements of Common Ground, together with an overarching Statement of Common Ground. This 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. The Statement of Common Ground should also set out the latest position in relation to the emerging Local Plan.

The overarching Statement of Common Ground should be submitted no later than **23 January 2026**. Having considered the views of the parties I am content for all the topic specific Statements of Common Ground to be submitted by **30 January 2026**. Should there be matters still under discussion these should be recorded as matters still in dispute and an update provided should matters change.

## **How the evidence will be heard**

The evidence will be heard on a topic basis.

Following the discussion at the CMC I anticipate that the issues in relation to the suitability of the location (in policy terms), highway matters (including Lodden Valley Garden Village), impacts on the water course, the Thames Basin Special Protection Area/SANG, landscape matters 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 the sustainability of the location, 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.

I propose that the manner in which the evidence is heard is reviewed following the exchange of evidence.

## **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. This should have regard to the statutory tests in relation to planning obligations, and any parties other than the Council seeking contributions should be made fully aware of the need to robustly justify any financial contributions sought. The 106 agreement/unilateral undertaking should be completed before the close of the Inquiry. An executed version should be submitted within two weeks of the close of the Inquiry.

### **Timetable for the submission of documents**

The timetable for the submission of documents was discussed 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.

The overarching Statement of Common Ground should be submitted by **23 January 2026**. Topic specific Statements of Common Ground should be submitted by **30 January 2026**. Proofs of evidence will be required by **10 February 2026** with rebuttal statements, should they be necessary, submitted by **24 February 2026**. A hard copy of the proof of evidence should be sent to the Case Officer on **10 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.

The parties are requested to review how the evidence will be heard and the running order for the Inquiry following the exchange of proofs. Their views on this matter, together with time estimates for evidence in chief and cross examination, any constraints on witness availability should be submitted by **24 February 2026**.

### **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.

The appellant volunteered to set this up and it will be hosted by the Council. I shall need access to it not later than **10 February 2026** when proofs are exchanged.

### **Inquiry Timetable**

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>23 January 2026</b>   | Overarching Statement of Common Ground                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>30 January 2026</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Topic specific Statements of Common Ground</li><li>• Additional documents requested</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>10 February 2026</b>  | Proofs of Evidence and summaries. Hard copy to be sent to Case Officer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>24 February 2026</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rebuttal proofs if required</li><li>• S106 and conditions</li><li>• Site Visit Itinerary</li><li>• CIL Compliance Statement</li><li>• Parties' views as to how the evidence should be heard (if changed)</li><li>• Time estimates/draft timetable/running order</li><li>• Updated SoCG (if required)</li></ul> |
| <b>30 September 2025</b> | 10:00 Inquiry opens                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

*Lesley Coffey*

PLANNING INSPECTOR

19 January 2026