

South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Plan Examination

Examination Guidance Note

Issued on 10 October 2025

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This note has been prepared by Planning Inspector David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI who has been appointed by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to carry out an independent examination of the South Norfolk Village Clusters Housing Allocations Plan (the SNVCP or VCHAP). The note provides guidance to representors who wish to be involved in the examination process.

2.0 PROGRAMME OFFICER

2.1 The Programme Officer for the examination is Annette Feeney, who works independently of the Council under my direction. Annette is responsible for organising the administration of the examination and acting as a channel of communication between myself, the Council and interested parties to ensure its smooth running. Annette is also responsible for ensuring that documents are circulated to the parties as required and liaising with the Council to ensure the online document library and examination section on their website is up to date.

2.2 Any procedural or other matters that you wish to raise during the examination should be raised through Annette whose contact details are as follows:

Annette Feeney
Local Plan Programme Officer
South Norfolk District Council
The Horizon Centre
Peachman Way
Broadland Business Park
Norwich
NR7 0WF
Mobile: 07775 771026
Email: annette.feeney@southnorfolkandbroadland.gov.uk

3.0 THE SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE EXAMINATION

3.1 The purpose of the examination of the SNVCP is to determine whether it satisfies the legal requirements under the 2004 Act and associated regulations, whether the Council has complied with the duty to co-operate and whether the plan is sound. To be sound the SNVCP must meet the four tests of soundness. These are that the plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. The starting point is the assumption that the Council has submitted a plan it believes to be sound.

3.2 **It is important to note** that the SNVCP follows the adoption of the strategic Greater Norwich Local Plan (the GNLP) in March 2024. The role of the subsidiary SNVCP is to fulfil the task set by Policy 7.4 of the overarching GNLP, namely to allocate sites for a minimum of 1,200 homes in the village clusters of the District. Policy 1 of the GNLP makes clear that the village clusters exclude

the Norwich urban area, insofar as this extends into the district, the main towns of Wymondham, Diss (with part of Roydon), Harleston and Long Stratton, and the key service centres of Hethersett, Hingham, Loddon/Chedgrave and Poringland/Framlingham Earl. The village clusters within the scope of the SNVCP encompass the remainder of the district.

3.3 The examination of the SNVCP is not an opportunity to revisit the matters which have been determined by the GNLP nor to pre-empt any GNLP review. As a non-strategic, subsidiary plan, the role of the SNVCP is to implement the strategy set by the GNLP. It follows that the SNVLP must be consistent with the GNLP.

3.4 The plan submitted for examination dated July 2024 (Document A.1.1) comprises the January 2023 publication plan (C.2.1) as amended by the July 2024 pre-submission addendum (C.4.1). It thus effectively supersedes and replaces the other two documents. The representations made during the two Regulation 19 consultation periods are thus combined and treated as one for the purposes of the examination. All those who submitted 'duly made' representations during the two Regulation 19 consultation periods are entitled to participate in the examination.

3.5 The Council has published a list of additional modifications and potential main modifications arising from Statements of Common Ground and a Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment addendum (A.6.2). These are just suggested changes at this stage, they do not form part of the formal plan being examined, and the distinction between main and minor modifications has not yet been agreed by me. These potential changes will be considered during the examination and may be taken forward in due course.

3.6 All written representations made during the two Regulation 19 consultation periods will be taken into account, but my report will not deal with every point that has been made. The examination relates solely to legal requirements and the soundness of the plan and as such only these matters will be covered in my report. Parties who are seeking changes to the plan (i.e. those who have lodged objections) will have the opportunity to put forward suggested changes to the submitted plan during the examination hearings, and together with the Council's responses these will be taken into account. It is important to stress however that the written evidence already submitted carries as much weight as verbal evidence given at the hearing sessions.

3.7 Those who have made representations supporting the SNVCP do not have a right to attend the hearing sessions. The Council has submitted the plan for examination and can be expected to be able to explain and support its provisions. It is not therefore necessary for those who support the plan to attend the examination although I may agree to an exception if this would be helpful to the examination, for example those promoting allocated sites.

3.8 Those promoting 'omission sites' should note that these will not be considered directly in the hearing sessions, the first step is to determine whether the plan as submitted is sound (and in particular its proposed allocations and settlement boundaries).

3.9 The examination will end when my report is submitted to the Council. The potential outcomes for the examination are:

- (a) The Council has complied with the duty to co-operate, the plan satisfies the legal requirements and is sound. In this case I would recommend that the plan be adopted without modification.
- (b) These requirements have not been met and it would not be possible to further modify the plan to make it legally compliant and/or sound. In this case I would recommend that the plan be withdrawn. It would not be possible to correct a failure of the duty to co-operate.
- (c) The submitted plan does not satisfy the legal requirements or is unsound in some way, but with

further modifications these matters could be addressed. In these circumstances the Council has asked me to recommend modifications to make the plan legally compliant and/or sound so it can be adopted.

3.10 Any modifications I recommend would be limited to those required to address matters of legal compliance or soundness. These would be known as 'main modifications' and would be published for public consultation prior to being finalised.

3.11 The Council may make further minor 'additional modifications' prior to adoption provided these do not materially alter the policies of the plan. This would be a matter for the Council with such additional changes not being considered during the examination or forming a part of my report. These would include a number of factual changes and typographical errors that have already been identified in Document A.6.2.

4.0 THE HEARING SESSIONS

4.1 From my reading of the SNVCP, its supporting documentation and the representations received, a series of matters, issues and questions (MIQs) have been identified that require discussion during the examination hearings and these are set out in the accompanying document. The MIQs focus on the allocations and changes to the settlement limits that have been proposed.

4.2 The hearing sessions will take the form of a discussion, led by me, during which the Council and other participants will be invited to put forward their views and to elaborate upon their written submissions. Only participants who have been invited – those who have made representations on the matter under discussion and wish to be involved – will be allowed to speak. Hearing participants will be given a full opportunity to contribute their views on relevant matters but there will also be a need to use hearing time efficiently for the benefit of all concerned. The sessions can be attended in person by interested members of the public who wish to observe proceedings.

4.3 The hearing sessions will commence at 10.00 am on Tuesday 13 January 2025 in the Upper Yare Room at the Horizon Centre, Peachman Way, Broadland Business Park, Norwich NR7 0WF and then in accordance with the subsequent timetable. Access to the Upper Yare Room is through the 'Public Meetings/Conference Centre' entrance, not the Main Entrance. Sessions will commence at 10.00 am with a short break mid-morning and a longer break around lunchtime. If there is a full afternoon session there will be a further short break mid-afternoon. The hearings will take place on Tuesdays to Thursdays with Friday mornings held in reserve. The second week of hearings will commence on Tuesday 27 January 2026 and, if required, the third week on Tuesday 10 February 2026.

4.4 The first morning and perhaps afternoon of the hearings will cover the preparation of the plan and the methodology for selecting sites and settlement limits, with the remainder focussing on the allocations and settlement limits selected and their individual merits. This will be done cluster by cluster, and the programme for this will be published once the number of participants who wish to discuss each particular cluster or site is known. Whilst the Programme Officer will endeavour to keep people informed of the detailed timetable it is the responsibility of participants to keep in contact and ensure they attend the appropriate sessions. The participants for each session will be those who made relevant representations on the SNVCP and who have confirmed to the Programme Officer that they wish to speak.

4.5 All those who wish to speak at the hearing sessions should confirm this in writing to the Programme Officer by 5.00 pm on Friday 31 October 2025, stating clearly which matter, cluster or allocation/settlement limit change they wish to discuss. This includes confirmation from those who may have previously indicated in their initial representations that they wish to participate. In the case of Matter C please specify which individual cluster(s), allocation(s) or settlement limit change(s) you wish to discuss.

4.6 If you do not contact the Programme Officer by 5.00 pm on Friday 31 October 2025 it will be assumed you do not wish to speak at the hearings and will rely on your written submissions. A finalised timetable and list of participants will be circulated prior to the hearing sessions and only those on the list will be allowed to speak.

4.7 Where several individuals or groups have made similar representations on a topic they are encouraged to appoint a common representative to avoid unnecessary repetition as this will not be allowed at the hearings.

5.0 THE EXAMINATION LIBRARY AND AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS

5.1 All documents associated with the examination are available on the Council's website and this will be kept up to date. The Council has produced a range of background papers and supporting documentation and these are available together with the representations made during the two Regulation 19 consultation periods (Documents A.5.4 and A.5.6) summarising the responses received. Attention is particularly drawn to the Council's responses to the representations published in Appendix 6 of the two documents.

5.2 The latest hearing timetable and list of participants will be published on the website, together with any further documents prepared to assist the examination, the hearing statements submitted by participants and any correspondence between the Inspector and the Council. An initial letter from the Inspector dated 15 September 2025 (Document IN1) asking some preliminary questions, together with the Council's response on 23 September 2025 (Document CR1) are already on the examination website and participant's attention is drawn to these.

5.3 If you have difficulties accessing the website please contact the Programme Officer or the Council.

6.0 THE SUBMISSION OF HEARING STATEMENTS AND FURTHER MATERIAL

6.1 The Council is asked to provide a full written response to the MIQs, addressing all the relevant points raised by representations. These should include specific references to supporting evidence or existing documents as necessary.

6.2 Other participants may, if they wish, submit written statements addressing the MIQs to reinforce their existing representations (not new matters), and this is particularly helpful for the sessions being attended. However, there is no requirement to submit further statements and participants may rely on the submissions already made. Any statements should be succinct and there is no need to include extracts from the plan or examination documents as references will suffice. Any appendices should be kept to an absolute minimum and previous material should not be resubmitted. Those not participating in the hearings may also submit statements.

6.3 Statements should indicate exactly what changes are thought to be necessary to make the plan sound or legally compliant and make clear any wording changes sought.

6.4 Hearing statements should be submitted to the Programme Officer electronically. For both the Council and other participants, **the deadline for the receipt of further written statements is 5.00 pm on Friday 28 November 2025**. The person or body submitting the representation should make it clear which specific matter, issue and question is being addressed, **with a separate statement for each matter, cluster or allocation/settlement limit change**. Those commenting on several matters should not combine them into a single statement. In order for the hearing sessions to proceed as planned, late statements will not be accepted. Statements will be posted on the examination website as soon as possible and thus made available to other hearing participants and interested persons well before the hearings commence.

6.5 After this, no further opportunity will be provided for additional statements or further documentation unless this is specifically requested by me. In particular, there is no scope to produce rebuttal statements responding to the views of other participants and no opportunity for further statements or written information to be submitted at the hearing sessions.

7.0 SITE VISITS

7.1 I will familiarise myself with the area and visit key sites before, during and after the examination hearings. These will generally be on an unaccompanied basis, but if there is a need to visit private land or be accompanied by the Council and/or other interested parties the necessary arrangements will be made through the Programme Officer.

8.0 SUMMARY/KEY POINTS

- The issues, matters and questions paper sets out the key questions for consideration during the examination
- The hearing sessions will begin at 10.00 am on Tuesday 13 January 2026 in the Upper Yare Room at the Horizon Centre, Peachman Way, Broadland Business Park, Norwich NR7 0WF with subsequent weeks commencing on Tuesday 27 January 2026 and if required, on Tuesday 10 February 2026.
- All those who wish to speak at the hearing sessions must confirm this in writing to the Programme Officer by 5.00 pm on Friday 31 October 2025
- The programme for the hearing sessions and participants will be published in due course when the number of participants for each topic is known
- Participants who wish to submit further written statements to address the matters, issues and questions should do so by 5.00 pm on Friday 28 November 2025
- All documentation relevant to the examination is available on the Council's website
- Any queries should be directed to the Programme Officer – Annette Feeney

David Reed

INSPECTOR
10 October 2025