

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE ALDINGTON & BONNINGTON**

**NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022-2030**

EXAMINER: DEREK STEBBING BA (Hons) DipEP MRTPI

Linda Harman  
Chair, Aldington Parish Council Neighbourhood Planning Committee

Claire Marchant  
Team Leader  
Plan Making and Infrastructure  
Planning and Development Service  
Ashford Borough Council

Examination Ref: 01/DAS/ABNP

26 February 2024

Dear Ms Harman and Ms Marchant

**ALDINGTON & BONNINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN EXAMINATION**

Following the submission of the Aldington & Bonnington Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan) for examination, I would like to clarify several initial procedural matters. I also have a number of questions for Aldington & Bonnington Parish Council (the Qualifying Body/the Parish Council), to which I would like to receive a written response(s) by **Friday 22 March 2024** if possible.

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) and the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report and Determination and the Regulation 16 representations, to enable me to undertake the examination.

Subject to my detailed assessment of the Plan, I have not at this initial stage identified any very significant and obvious flaws in it that might lead me to advise that the examination should not proceed.

2. Site Visit

I will aim to carry out a site visit to the neighbourhood plan area during the week beginning 18 March 2024. 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. 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.

### 4. Further Clarification

From my initial assessment of the Plan and supporting documents, I have identified a number of matters where I require some additional information from the Parish Council.

I have five questions seeking further clarification, which I have set out in the Annex to this letter. I would be grateful if you can seek to provide a written response(s) by **Friday 22 March 2024**.

### 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 6-8 weeks of submission of the draft Plan. However, as I have raised five 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 Parish Council and Ashford Borough Council websites.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

*Derek Stebbing*

Examiner

## ANNEX

From my initial reading of the Aldington & Bonnington Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2030 (Submission Version dated December 2023), the supporting evidence and the representations that have been made to the Plan, I have the following questions for the Qualifying Body and Ashford Borough Council (the Borough Council). I have requested the submission of responses **by Friday 22 March 2024**, although an earlier response would be much appreciated. All of the points set out below flow from the requirement to satisfy the Basic Conditions.

### **Question 1: Re: Policy AB1 (Green and Blue Infrastructure and Delivering Biodiversity Net Gain) (Page 21)**

I have noted the Borough Council's representations concerning this draft Policy, and in particular the aim (in criteria A and B) of delivering a measurable Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 20%, where possible. In my assessment, the requirement to demonstrate a measurable Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 20% significantly exceeds the national policy requirement.

In my assessment, the Policy will require modifications to have due regard to the relevant national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG<sup>1</sup>) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain>) as published on 14 February 2024.

Furthermore, I consider that, as drafted, there are inconsistencies between criteria A and B in the Policy which could lead to difficulties in interpreting the precise requirements of the Policy for users of the Plan.

I consider that criteria A and B can be satisfactorily consolidated into a single criterion, which reflects national PPG, and I therefore invite the **Qualifying Body** to consider this matter, taking into account the Borough Council's representations, and to provide me with a Note on possible revised text for this Policy, that I may consider as a proposed modification.

### **Question 2: Re. Policy AB3 (Local Green Space) (Page 34)**

I have noted the representations submitted by DHA Planning Ltd. on behalf of TG Designer Homes concerning the proposed designation of the site known as 'Calleywell Field' (Site No. 5) as a Local Green Space.

I note from the Consultation Statement (at Page 30) that representations were submitted at the Regulation 14 consultation stage by Hobbs Parker Property Consultants LLP on behalf of the owners of this site and that (at Page 35) "*Calleywell Field and Wood is retained, but reduced to a 10m strip, which appear more appropriate in terms of its recreational use.*", as the Steering Team's response to representations.

I therefore request that the **Qualifying Body** provide me with a copy of the representations concerning the 'Calleywell Field' site that were submitted at the Regulation 14 consultation stage, in order that I may consider the justification for the proposed Local Green Space, as now defined in the draft Plan, in greater detail.

I confirm that I will visit each of the proposed Local Green Space sites during the course of my site visit.

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<sup>1</sup> PPG Reference ID: 74-006-20240214.

**Question 3: Re: Policy AB6 (Residential Windfall Development)**

I have noted the Borough Council's representations concerning the criteria that are set out in clause B of this draft Policy, which I also note repeat some of the concerns that were expressed by the Borough Council at the Regulation 14 consultation stage.

Before I consider this matter in greater detail, can the **Qualifying Body** please confirm that Figure 13 correctly shows the location of all bus stops within the village of Aldington and on the principal roads leading out of the village?

Furthermore, can the **Qualifying Body** also please confirm whether the term "*small to medium-scale development*" should be interpreted as being for sites no larger than 1.0 hectare, as assumed by the Borough Council in its representations?

**Question 4: Policy AB12 (Sustainable Travel) (Page 79)**

Can the **Qualifying Body** please confirm that the reference to Figure 20 in clause B of this draft Policy should be to Figure 19?

**Question 5: Re. Paragraph 2.7 (Page 15)**

I have noted Kent County Council's representations on the draft Plan, which include the suggestion that paragraph 2.7 of Section 2 (About Aldington and Bonnington) contains some inaccuracies and is confusing.

I therefore request that the **Qualifying Body** review the County Council's representations, and specifically Appendix A to those representations, and provide me with a Note setting out any necessary revisions to paragraph 2.7, and if appropriate to other parts of Section 2, that I may consider as a modification to the Plan.