INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE

BRIDPORT AREA NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVIEW

EXAMINER: Andrew Mead BSc (Hons) MRTPI MIQ

Examination Ref: 01/AM/BNP

Phyllida Culpin
Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Nick Cardnell
Senior Planning Policy Officer
Dorset Council

Via email

11 August 2026

Dear Ms Culpin and Mr Cardnell

Following the submission for examination of the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan Review (the draft Plan Review/BANPR), I would like to clarify several initial procedural matters including my determination in respect of the appropriate examination process for the draft Plan Review. In addition, I have nine preliminary questions for Dorset Council (DC) and Bridport Town Council (BTC), to which I would like to receive a written response by **Tuesday 25 August 2026**, if possible.

1. Examination documentation

I can confirm that I am satisfied that I have received a complete submission of the draft Plan Review; the Basic Conditions and Consultation Statements; the Regulation 16 representations; and the statements from both the Bridport Town Council, as the Qualifying Body (QB), and Dorset Council in relation to whether the modifications contained in the draft Plan Review are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the Neighbourhood Development Plan which the draft Plan Review would replace, giving reasons why.

This has provided sufficient information to undertake my initial determination under paragraph 10(1) of Schedule A2 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).

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

2. Determination under Paragraph 10(1) of Schedule A2

I am required to determine whether the modifications contained in the draft Plan Review are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the Neighbourhood Development Plan which the draft Plan Review would replace. The purpose of this determination is to establish the appropriate examination process for the draft Plan Review which will, amongst other things, affect whether or not the draft Plan Review will need to be the subject of a referendum if it is to be made.

BTC state in the Modifications Statement that the changes do not modify the plan period. The changes respond to the Bridport Area Housing Needs Assessment (2025) and use new information to update, clarify and support the existing policies around affordable housing. AECOM's Site Options

Assessment 2025 has been added to the made Plan Evidence Base and used to update the supporting text for housing policies. In terms of housing, the change to the housing mix is relatively limited and should not impact on viability. A Workspace and Business Needs Assessment has been undertaken and used to support the economy and employment policies. Greater emphasis has been placed on transition to a net zero future with amendments to the supporting text in the climate change chapters and updating of climate policies. The Landscape chapter has been updated with supporting text and policy amendments to reflect the requirements of Biodiversity Net Gain legislation. A new, larger Local Green Space has been proposed (as a replacement for the Peter Foote Play Area) which has been identified as suitable for a small community led social rent housing development. Carbon reduction and standards for Design for Living were existing elements already contained within the made Plan and updating and adding more detail is helpful in clarifying how these issues should be considered.

BTC comments that a number of changes to the made Plan are simply reflecting factual updates and changes to the supporting evidence that those policies were based on. They do not alter the general thrust of policies of the made Plan. Accordingly, BTC considers that the proposed modifications are material but are not so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the plan.

DC have compared the policies in the made Plan with those of the submitted Plan Review and have considered the contents of each policy, along with the Modifications Statement prepared and submitted by the Joint Councils.

DC has also considered government guidance, in particular, the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on 'updating a neighbourhood plan'. PPG Reference ID: 41-106-20190509 summarises the three types of modification that can be made to a neighbourhood plan. These are: (i) Minor (non-material) modifications to a neighbourhood plan or order are those which would not materially affect the policies in the plan or permission granted by the order; (ii) material modifications which do not change the nature of the plan or order would require examination but not a referendum; and (iii) material modifications which do change the nature of the plan or order would require examination and a referendum. This might, for example, involve allocating significant new sites for development.

DC note that the plan period remains the same, and that the draft Plan Review does not identify any new development allocations. Since the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan was made in May 2020, the most significant changes influencing this review have been updates to national planning policy, local governance arrangements and the supporting evidence base. The original Neighbourhood Plan was prepared under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019, while this review has been prepared in the context of the December 2024 NPPF. The updated framework places a stronger emphasis on housing delivery, including housing targets and land supply requirements, and has required a few references within the supporting text to be updated accordingly.

National policy approaches remain largely the same except for the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). Supporting text to Policy L1 now references LNRS and Policy L2 has been updated to reference the latest BNG requirements. DC received a revised Neighbourhood Area application from Bridport Town Council in February 2025, following parish boundary and governance changes arising from the 2023 Community Governance Review. The revised Neighbourhood Area was approved in March 2025. As the changes were internal to the original neighbourhood plan area, they had no direct implications for the Neighbourhood Plan Review beyond minor updates to provide contextual accuracy.

The BANPR benefits from an updated evidence base, including a Housing Needs Assessment (March 2025); Housing Needs Assessment Supplement (January 2026); Site Options Assessment (August 2025); and a Workspace and Business Needs Assessment (March 2025). These studies have informed updates to Housing Policies H1, H3, H4 and H5 and Employment Policies EE1 and EE2. The remaining material changes to policy are largely drawn from experience gained using the Plan, community consultation and minor rephrasing to better bring text in line with National Planning Guidance. For

example, there is a greater emphasis on Climate Change, and several policy changes respond to earlier DC comments. In addition, Policy L3 has been updated to replace the Peter Foote Play Area Local Green Space designation with the larger Riverside Corridor designation, reflecting a broader area of green infrastructure and recreational land. Five additional community facilities have been added in support of Policy CF1. There have been a lot of changes made to the supporting text, including new definitions for Live/Work units and non-key employment uses, but these are considered minor in nature and largely provide factual updates and other improvements. Against this, there have been no changes to 28 policies and a further four changes to Policies H7, COB2, D10 and L1 with regards to the naming of National Landscapes (considered non-material changes). In conclusion, while there have been several material changes to policy text, Dorset Council's view is that none of the proposed modifications are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the Plan.

Having assessed all the written documents submitted, including the representations and relevant statements, I am content that the modifications proposed in the draft Plan Review are material but do not change the nature of the made Plan. Therefore, the examination can proceed under the terms of Schedule A2. As a consequence, should I recommend that the draft Plan be made (with or without examiner modifications), a referendum stage will not be a necessary part of the statutory process.

3. Site Visit

I intend to visit the Neighbourhood Plan Area during the week beginning 17 August 2026, which 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.

4. 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 I consider there are exceptional reasons for doing so.

5. Further Clarification

I have 9 questions seeking further clarification, which I have set out in an Annex to this letter. I would be grateful if you can seek to provide written responses by **Tuesday 25 August 2026**

I may have some additional questions, following my site visit (see 4. above), which I will set out in writing should I require any further clarification.

6. Examination Timetable

As you will be aware, the intention is to examine the draft Plan Review (including conduct of the site visit) with a view to providing a draft report (for 'fact checking') within 6-8 weeks of submission for examination.

However, in the event that I have further questions seeking clarification as a result of my site visit, I will need to provide you with additional time to reply. Should this arise, please be assured that I will seek to mitigate any delay as far as is practicable. The IPe office team will keep you updated on the examination and, in due course, the 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 a copy of this letter is placed on the BTC and DC websites, along with any subsequent responses.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Mead

Examiner

ANNEX

From my initial reading of the Bridport Neighbourhood Development Plan Review, the supporting evidence and the representations that have been made to the Plan Review, I have the following questions for Dorset Council and Bridport Town Council. I have requested the submission of responses by **Tuesday 25 August 2026.**

Where I am requesting additional clarification, suggested text and similar, this is with a view to informing the specific terms of any relevant examiner modification(s) that I may recommend. Accordingly, all of the points set out below flow from the requirement to satisfy the Basic Conditions.

On 25 March 2026, sections 98 and 99 of the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 were brought into force, including both new legal compliance (and Basic Conditions) requirements for neighbourhood plans, which include:

i) so far as the qualifying body considers appropriate, having regard to the subject matter of the neighbourhood development plan, it *[the Plan]* is designed to secure that the development and use of land in the neighbourhood area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change; and

ii) so far as the qualifying body considers appropriate, having regard to the subject matter of the neighbourhood development plan, it *[the Plan]* takes account of any local nature recovery strategy, under section 104 of the Environment Act 2021, that relates to all or part of the neighbourhood area.

Question 1 for DC. In the Basic Conditions statement, the QB states that the BANPR includes policies to support adaptation to climate change and positively supports the implementation of the local nature recovery strategy (LNRS). Do DC agree with the statement regarding climate change?

Question 2 for BTC and DC. In supporting the implementation of the LNRS, DC suggest strengthening references to the strategy in the Plan (See pages 8 – 10 of the DC Regulation 16 response). DC also suggest mapping the green spaces and linkages which have been identified as green corridors. Given that there no more statutory opportunities for public representations, I am reluctant to introduce newly mapped original information into the Plan Review. However, maps are available through the Dorset LNRS website. Page 69 of the Plan includes a sentence: *"As such, the green infrastructure network will be given significant protection from development."* In my opinion, that reads more as a policy statement. Therefore, I suggest including a new paragraph in Policy L1: *"4. The green infrastructure network identified in the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy will be given significant protection from development."* I would be grateful for comments from both Councils on my suggested addition to the policy and from BTC on further strengthening the references to the LNRS.

Question 3 for BTC and DC. Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). I refer to the Regulation 16 representation from Natural England (NE) dated 10 June 2026, and the letter from NE dated 6 June 2026, which state that the HRA screening identified a likely significant effect on the Chesil and the Fleet Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Appropriate Assessment concluded that a change to Policy L2 was required to highlight the need for a contribution towards the Interim Strategy for Mitigating the Effects of Recreational Pressure on the Chesil Beach and the Fleet SAC, Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar designation. Providing that this mitigation is provided, then it can be concluded that the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan does not result in an adverse effect upon the integrity of a European site.

Policy L2 does not appear to have been amended to satisfy that requirement. Please could BTC and DC agree an appropriate amendment to Policy L2 and submit it to me.

Question 4 for BTC. Policy AM6. DC suggest including *"wheeling"* in the policy in section a). Is that acceptable?

Question 5 for BTC. Policy EE1. DC suggest substituting "*Class E(g)"* for Class E in the first paragraph. Is that acceptable?

Question 6 for BTC and DC. **Policy EE2**. DC consider that the policy could benefit from clearer criteria linking the support for the identified development types to appropriate locations and a wider policy framework. It seems to me that many locational issues would be resolved in the environmental section of the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan, such as Policy ENV16. However, please could DC suggest any appropriate amendments to the policy and agree them with BTC before submitting them to me.

Question 7 for BTC. DC suggests that the definition of Affordable Housing on page 48 of the Plan is replaced with a direct reference to the NPPF Annex 2 definition. Do BTC agree?

Question 8 for BTC and DC. Policy H3. DC suggests amending the Plan to refer to: *"… affordable housing, preferably at social rent …"*. Does this mean amending the final phrase of section 2 of the policy which would then become: *"If the development is phased, then the approved proportion of open market to affordable housing, preferably at social rent, will apply for each phase."* Is that correct? Do BTC agree with the suggestion?

Question 9 to BTC and DC. Policy H4. In response to the comment from DC, would the following amendment to Policy H4.2 be acceptable: *"To help shape a balanced future community, development of 1 or 2 bedroomed homes suited to first time buyers will be strongly preferred."*