

INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION OF THE SHAFTESBURY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FIRST REVIEW

EXAMINER: Andrew Mead BSc (Hons) MRTPI MIQ

Examination Ref: 01/AM/SNP

Sybille Maddock
Interim Town Clerk to Shaftesbury Town Council

Philip Reese
Senior Planning Policy Officer
Dorset Council

18 February 2026

Via email

Dear Ms Maddock and Mr Reese

Following the submission for examination of the Shaftesbury Neighbourhood Plan First Review (the Plan), I would like to clarify several initial procedural matters.

1. Examination Documentation

I can confirm that I am satisfied that I have received a complete submission of the review of the Plan, including the draft Plan (as proposed to be reviewed); the Basic Conditions and Consultation Statements; the Regulation 16 representations; and the statements from both Shaftesbury Town Council (STC) and Dorset Council (DC) in relation to whether the modifications contained in the draft Plan are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the neighbourhood development plan which the draft Plan 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, 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 determine to whether the modifications contained in the draft Plan are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the neighbourhood development plan which the draft Plan would replace. The purpose of this determination is to establish the appropriate examination process for the draft Plan which will, amongst other things, affect whether or not the draft Plan will need to be the subject of a referendum if it is to be made.

The Shaftesbury Town Council state in their Modifications Statement that it has been modified by proposed site allocations which are all either brownfield sites that lie within the settlement boundary (where in principle such development is accepted; already benefit from existing planning permissions; or are allocated through the Local Plan.

It is also noted that:

- the settlement boundary is not extended;
- the additional changes to the areas of Local Green Space have been subject to consultation with the owners as part of the Regulation 14 consultation (and are not considered likely to be controversial given their existing status as either common land or public open space required through planning obligations);
- the inclusion of information on the geological stability of the slopes does not prevent development in these areas but, in line with national policy, is intended to ensure that the potential problems and costs of addressing land instability issues are fully understood and considered should proposals for development come forward in these areas;
- the changes reinforce the expectation of climate change measures to be incorporated in recognition of the importance of addressing this important issue, and do not fundamentally alter the Plan's stance on these matters;
- the other changes are relatively minor in nature; and
- the Plan period is not extended.

Dorset Council has compared the policies in the made Plan with those of the submitted review, commenting that many of the policies remain unchanged, or only changed in a minor or superficial way. Other policies have been materially amended but, overall, the alterations are not 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 are material but do not change the nature of the made Plan.

Therefore, the examination can proceed under the terms of Schedule A2 and, 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 15 February 2026, which will assist in my assessment of the draft Plan, including the issues identified in the representations.

I may have some questions whilst drafting the report, which I will set out in writing should I require any further clarification.

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. Examination Timetable

As you will be aware, the intention is to examine the draft 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, in the likely event that I have a number of questions seeking clarification as a result of my site visit, I must provide the opportunity for you to reply. This would mean that the examination timetable may be extended. However, 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 Town Council and Dorset Council websites.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Your sincerely

Andy Mead

Examiner