

Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan

Introductory Notes

Prepared by

JOHN SLATER BA(Hons), DMS, MRTPI, FRGS

John Slater Planning Ltd

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1. I am delighted to have been appointed as the examiner to the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan and I look forward to working with Rother District Council's officers and Hurst Green Parish Council and its neighbourhood plan team on this examination.
2. My first task, after reading the documentation, is to make a visit to the parish, which will in the main will be unaccompanied. I have been asked to conduct an accompanied site visit of the allocation site, land adjacent to Iridge Place, and I have agreed to that request so long as I am joined by representatives of both the District Council and the Parish Council. I plan to make my visit on Monday 20th January 2025, and I will familiarise myself with the village and the surrounding countryside. I propose that the accompanied visit to the allocation site should take place starting at 2.30pm and it has been suggested that we meet at the site entrance next to Iridge Place off the A21. I have asked Julia Edwards to confirm arrangements with the Parish Council.
3. I have previously examined a number of neighbourhood plans in Rother District as well as the neighbouring Tunbridge Wells district so I am familiar with this part of the High Weald.
4. Upon my return from the site visits, I will prepare what is known as the Initial Comments document. In most cases, I will be able to confirm at that stage, whether I will need to call a public hearing. In relatively few cases, I do have to delay that decision until I have received the responses to my questions raised in this Initial Comments document. Most examinations proceed based on the written material only. I normally allow each party three weeks to respond to my questions.
5. My default position is always to ask that any documents issued, whether prepared by myself as examiner or as a response, should be placed on the relevant neighbourhood plan website. This will allow interested parties and the public to be able to follow the progress of the examination. There may be some e-mail exchanges, which I initiate, where I am merely seeking to clarify matters or make logistical arrangements, which are not necessary to be placed in the public domain.
6. It is important that any examination proceeds in an open, transparent and even-handed way. My normal practise is to copy in both the District Council and the parish council into any correspondence. Similarly, I will ask, that in responding to me, each party copies in the other, so that everyone knows what has been submitted. The only areas where I will not be copying the parish council, relates to the contractual matters regarding my appointment which will be directly between myself and the District Council.
7. The District Council has sent me electronic copies of the Regulation 16 consultation responses. Please be assured that I intend to offer the parish council the opportunity to comment on these Regulation 16 submissions, when I issue my Initial Comments document.

8. Just before Christmas, the Government issued a new version of the National Planning Policy Framework. Paragraph 239 deals with Implementation and confirms that only neighbourhood plans which are submitted after 12th March 2025, will the policies in the new version of the NPPF apply and I can confirm that I will be examining this neighbourhood plan in the context of the previous version of the Framework.
9. In the unlikely event, that I do need to call for a public hearing, I will contact Julia Edwards at the District Council by telephone and ask her to liaise with the parish clerk, to find a suitable date and venue, hopefully in the parish. If a hearing is required, I will set out the arrangements and the matters to be discussed in a Notice of Public Hearing document.
10. Once I will receive responses to the Initial Comments, I will proceed to prepare my report, but if I find that I need to seek further clarification or an elaboration on specific responses, I will set that out in an Additional Comments note.
11. Upon completion of my draft report, I will send it to both the parish council and the district council for fact checking. A fact check is not an opportunity for either party to challenge my recommendations or conclusions but to point out any factual errors. It also helps to identify “typos”. I normally allow a week for fact checking and I will then issue my final report which is sent to both parties although it is formally submitted to Rother District Council as local planning authority.

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Independent Examiner to the Hurst Green Neighbourhood Plan