

Webinar Questions and Responses

Getting it right first time: Preparing your local plan for successful examination

This document contains responses to questions raised during the webinar "Getting it right first time: Preparing your local plan for successful examination" held on 24 September 2025. We have included questions that are of general interest and relevance to the wider local planning community.

Some questions raised during the webinar were not included in this published response as they were either:

- specific to individual local authority circumstances
- commercially sensitive in nature
- related to live examinations

For queries of a case-specific, sensitive, or individual nature, please contact the Planning Inspectorate's local plans team directly at plans.admin@planninginspectorate.gov.uk.

We encourage local authorities to continue engaging with us on local plan preparation matters through our advisory visit service.

Question	Response
When in the 30-month period would you envisage an advisory visit fitting?	Advisory visits will be replaced by Gateway 2 in the new system. Where Gateway 2 will fall within the 30 month period will become clear as the new system takes shape. Also answered in the webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=oLZzcMXAx-yAJ8Yn&t=3934
Do you envisage the main modifications will come within the 6 month timeframe?	The Government's response to the consultation on planning reforms indicates that if main modifications were necessary this may extend the six month examination timeframe "to a maximum of three months". However, it is not anticipated that any of these timelines will be set out in regulations, but that they will be policy expectations. See paragraph 105 of this document: Government response to the proposed plan-making reforms: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/plan-making-reforms-consultation-on-implementation/outcome/government-response-to-the-proposed-plan-making-reforms-consultation-on-implementation
Can you give us any update on the upcoming revised NPPF or the National DM policies?	A draft of these is anticipated later this year as per previous ministerial announcements.
What will happen in the event of a plan currently in preparation now under the classic system missing the uncertain transition submission deadline – i.e. would it have to start completely from scratch?	The awaited secondary legislation and regulations will provide full clarity. However, our assumption is that plans currently in preparation under the classic system that miss transition deadlines likely wouldn't have to start completely from scratch. Evidence already prepared may still be highly relevant - it's primarily the process that would change. See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=9xyOwkSNBfD6qqLk&t=4125

Question	Response
How can Inspectors consider issues such as the publication of national development control policies during the examination process	<p>Plans submitted for examination are assessed against the relevant version of the NPPF according to the transitional arrangements in the NPPF extant at the time.</p> <p>See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=2vsa8XfDZSr6t4&t=4259</p>
I think sometimes we write too much in response to MIQs (Matters, Issues and Questions) because we can't quite work out what angle the Inspector's question is coming from (remembering that we thought the plan was sound as submitted), so if the Inspector's Q is not clear, we are working in the dark. Do MIQs always have to be phrased as a question, could they more sign-posting of the issue?	<p>Don't spend too much time deliberating what angle the inspector's question is coming from - just answer the questions as best you can and seek advice from your Programme Officer if required. Inspectors normally try to be reasonably specific in their MIQs, and they are putting the questions that they require answers to. Rather than trying to second-guess the inspector's intent, focus on providing clear, concise, evidence-based responses that directly address what's being asked. Avoid submitting excessive information that isn't relevant to the specific question, as this can obscure your key points rather than clarify them.</p> <p>See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=s5NzEX78lymMMNgb&t=3998</p>
For avoidance of doubt, what is considered as 'up to date' evidence by PINS?	<p>According to the Procedure Guide (1.19): "Evidence base documents, especially those relating to development needs and land availability, that date from two or more years before the submission date may be at risk of having been overtaken by events, particularly as they may rely on data that is even older. As a minimum, any such documents should be updated as necessary to incorporate the most recent available information. But this may not be necessary for evidence documents on topics that are less subject to change over time, such as landscape character assessments."</p>
Rather than a question, it's more of a statement. Whilst understanding the proportionate amount of evidence can vary by local plan, it would be extremely useful to have focused guidance. Evidence can go into the £100,000s and LPAs (Local Planning Authorities) need to be able to direct finite resources to evidence base that is essential rather than a nice to have	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>
If it is recommended that a Plan be withdrawn from examination for new evidence to be prepared, does that necessarily entail that plan preparation be reset to the start of the process (i.e. pre-reg 18 or Gateway 1 under the new system)?	<p>If a plan is recommended for withdrawal to prepare new evidence, it would likely need to reset to the start of the statutory process (pre-Reg 19 or Gateway 1 under new system). Authorities should seek legal advice, but all statutory requirements for plan preparation would need to be met.</p> <p>See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=mXXxnLP3JOqfYrwo&t=4326</p>
If during the examination an Inspector considers additional sites are required to ensure the OAN (Objectively Assessed Need) is met, would that be a 'fundamental problem' that can't be fixed	<p>Additional allocations have sometimes been made through main modifications at examination. But it is difficult and could well represent a "fundamental problem" that cannot be fixed without undue delay to examination.</p>
Do you know whether it would be the same Inspector for both gateway checks?	<p>This remains a live issue being worked through. There are benefits to having different inspectors for Gateway 2 and examination (maintaining impartiality), similar to current advisory visit arrangements. The relationship between gateways and examination timing is still being determined.</p> <p>See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=c6X2Lmt2q0iP0fiP&t=4383</p>
Do you expect to receive any suggested main modifications from the LPA at the point of Local Plan submission? Or for these to only come about once the examination is underway?	<p>See Procedure Guide 1.2 to 1.5. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice/procedure-guide-for-local-plan-examinations#section-1-before-submission</p>

Question	Response
<p>Owing to forthcoming resourcing pressures at the Planning Inspectorate and the risk of abortive work by LPAs, is the Planning Inspectorate advising LPA's whether their LDS's for preparing new Local Plans under the existing regime are realistic?</p>	<p>Advisory Visits are really useful to cover key topics/challenges which can help LPAs assess whether their Local Development Scheme (LDS) is realistic/achievable.</p> <p>See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=mfZEz11twbS7oEob&t=4871</p>
<p>What happens if the duty to co-operate highlights issues where a common solution doesn't seem forthcoming?</p>	<p>Duty is not to agree. But need to provide evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to find solution.</p>
<p>Does the Inspector take significant notice of sites that are in areas where sustainability (rail/bus services/distance to walk/cycle to amenities) are lacking. As a Highways Officer we are seeing sites being promoted that should not meet sustainable transport grounds, but the housing targets are such that the LPA need to look at these locations.</p>	<p>Plans should contribute to meeting sustainable patterns of development. However, they should meet identified needs for development (unless NPPF 11b applies). Development should only be prevented on transport grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.</p>
<p>Will it be PINS inspectors inspecting the new Supplementary Plans which it is understood will need to be examined. Or will we need to appoint another suitably qualified independent person to undertake the examination, as we currently do for neighbourhood plans?</p>	<p>The LURA legislation doesn't specify that inspectors must examine Supplementary Plans - it's more open-ended than standard local plan requirements. Whether PINS will provide this service operationally is still being determined, though legally it could be an inspector role.</p> <p>See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=e8CLc0iQXLzLuZW&t=4636</p>
<p>Are there details around the secondary legislation for PINS Gateways prior to submission or is that going to wait until after transitional arrangement crop of LPs? Gateway seems effective in Scotland.</p>	<p>Details around secondary legislation for PINS gateways are still awaited. Most requirements are expected to be set out in regulations, with some elements in policy and guidance. More information will follow as transitional arrangements develop.</p> <p>See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=ySU_e_Tl16DBdi7_&t=4726</p>
<p>Should a programme officer be appointed prior to the gateway assessments?</p>	<p>Yes, programme officers should be appointed prior to gateway assessments, particularly from Gateway 2 stage onwards. Gateway 2 represents a critical point in the process, and having a programme officer in place by then would be sensible given the substantial nature of the gateway process.</p> <p>See response provided in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLFW?si=Ai8P44WJ10be-slx&t=4797</p>
<p>With the new towns due to be announced at some point, with the new towns within LPA geographical boundaries, will that require extensive duty to cooperate and what will the placement of a new town do to the existing timeline of the development of local plans? I take it the Development Corporation will handle the new town project completely?</p>	<p>This is a matter for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.</p>
<p>When would evidence (such as a GTAA) be considered out-of-date?</p>	<p>Procedure Guide 1.19. Evidence base documents, especially those relating to development needs and land availability, that date from two or more years before the submission date may be at risk of having been overtaken by events, particularly as they may rely on data that is even older. As a minimum, any such documents should be updated as necessary to incorporate the most recent available information. But this may not be necessary for evidence documents on topics that are less subject to change over time, such as landscape character assessments.</p>

Question	Response
How long does the initial assessment generally take?	Initial assessment can vary, depending on the plan, evidence, number of representations etc. The inspector will usually try to "frontload" the process and sort out as much as possible in writing before hearings. See section 3 of Procedure Guide. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice/procedure-guide-for-local-plan-examinations#section-3-initial-assessment-and-organisation-of-the-hearing-sessions
Could a template 'role description' be developed for the programme officer role? This would help authorities to either request approval to recruit or to appoint third party providers that can meet PINS expectations. This will be particularly useful in the early stages of the new system as it is difficult to identify key tasks at different stages of the timetable and to set contract KPIs etc at the current time.	We don't currently have such a template but our guidance page outlines the key qualities and role of an effective Programme Officer. See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-programme-officers-local-plan-examinations
Given the expected deluge of plans coming into PINS for examination in the coming years, will there be capacity to pick up the Gateway Checks in a timely manner in addition to the examinations, or will the examinations be prioritised?	Yes. We are resourcing our service to deal with the anticipated workload (both Gateways and Examinations). LPAs can help us to manage the demand by keeping us informed of their plans' progress prior to submission. Email: plans.admin@planninginspectorate.gov.uk Also answered in webinar: https://youtu.be/coAEk9EHLfw?si=tGM4IzT6-Z9ZJ3cO&t=4955
Is the pre-examination checklist a statutory requirement for local authorities to submit their plan?	The checklist is a non-statutory process but does form part of the SLA. If an LPA chooses not to engage, it may increase the risk of a lengthy examination with a higher possibility that the plan cannot be found sound and may need to be withdrawn.
When would be the best time to appoint a programme officer? Before, during or after Reg 19?	A Programme Officer must be in post before submission. Sometimes LPAs appoint to help with sorting out reg 19 reps, preparing submission docs and examination website etc
Surely SA (Sustainability Appraisal) is always needed for main mods? In terms of the 6-month examination, are there regulations which set out the maximum length of pauses and do you envisage the main modifications will come within the 6 month timeframe.	SA is almost certainly needed of main modifications.
Will the advisory visits be replaced by the Gateway sessions?	Advisory visits will be replaced by Gateway 2 in the new system.
At what stage in the 'classic system' is it best to have an advisory PINS visit?	It varies, but often approaching reg 19 (but before that version of the plan has been finalised). And sometimes after reg 19 if there are procedural issues at that stage
Please can you post the link for the programme officer training.	https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-plans#programme-officers
I should know this but does the Statement of Community Involvement remain in the new system? Asking for the person that couldn't find Q&A tab	We don't expect the Statement of Community Involvement to remain in the new system.
Would inclusion of an additional allocation be considered a substantial modification that may require the plan to be withdrawn and not be considered as a main mod?	Additional allocations have sometimes been made through main mods at examination. But it is difficult and could well represent a "fundamental problem" that cannot be fixed without undue delay to examination.