

Additional webinar questions

The Final Countdown: For local plans aiming for examination in 2026 (legacy system)

This document contains additional questions raised but not responded to in the webinar recording.

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.

Q: Can we expect a series of inspector's questions after appointment of the examination team outside of the hearing sessions?

The Inspector's role is to be proactive and hearings are just one occasion where the Inspector will ask questions. Throughout the examination process the Inspector will probe the plan's 'soundness' through written exchanges and these can be before, or after, the hearing sessions depending on the specifics of the plan. The authoritative source here is the Planning Inspectorate's [Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examination](#) which notes, for example - 3.5. The Inspector may (also) write to the LPA with a series of initial queries to assist in understanding the plan and the evidence base.

NB All formal questions from the Inspector will be funnelled through the Program Officer. The LPA should not communicate directly with the Inspector outside of this channel.

Q: What is the Inspectorate's current approach to locally-defined designations, such as Strategic Green Gaps, in the context of evolving national policy on the protection of Green Belt?

Locally-defined designations such as Strategic Green Gaps are not part of the national planning policy framework in the way that Green Belt is. The NPPF sets out specific policies and purposes for Green Belt, with a well-established national policy basis. Locally-defined gap designations relate to local plan policy, and inspectors will assess them on their own merits as part of the soundness examination.

In examining these designations, inspectors will consider whether the designation is justified by a robust and proportionate evidence base, whether the criteria for designation are clearly defined and consistently applied, and whether the policy is necessary to achieve its stated objectives - for example, preventing 'coalescence of settlements' - and is not duplicating protections already provided through other means such as Green Belt or other landscape designations.

Changes to national Green Belt policy, including revisions the NPPF, may be relevant context where an LPA is seeking to introduce or retain gap designations in areas that adjoin or relate to Green Belt land. However, inspectors will assess gap designations on the basis of local evidence and the plan's own policy rationale, rather than by reference to Green Belt policy directly. The two designations serve different purposes and operate independently.

LPAs proposing to include locally-defined gap designations in a plan being submitted under the existing regulations should ensure the supporting evidence is robust and up to date, that the approach is clearly explained and justified in the supporting text, and that the policy is proportionate to the identified need. Any concerns about how such a designation may be received at examination are well suited to discussion at an advisory visit.

Q: To what extent can the local plan rely on potential future funding, such as that which may become available (e.g. through devolution or the establishment of a Mayoral Authority) when setting out the infrastructure requirements and viability assumptions associated with these broad locations.

Plans should be supported by clear, transparent and proportionate evidence, including in relation to infrastructure delivery and funding assumptions.

Inspectors will consider whether the plan is realistic and deliverable, including whether there is sufficient evidence to support reliance on future funding mechanisms.

Where funding is uncertain, Inspectors may seek to understand the assumptions made and the extent to which the plan can still be considered sound.

Statements of Common Ground with the relevant infrastructure providers and/or funders may also help to evidence the plan's approach.