

Report to Bracknell Forest Borough Council

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Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State

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Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)

Section 20

Report on the Examination of the Bracknell Forest Local Plan

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Contents

Abbreviations used in this report	4
Non-Technical Summary	5
Introduction	6
Context of the Plan.....	7
Public Sector Equality Duty	8
Assessment of Duty to Co-operate.....	8
Assessment of Other Aspects of Legal Compliance	9
Assessment of Soundness.....	10
Issue 1 – Whether the spatial strategy is justified, effective and consistent with national policy?	11
Issue 2 – Whether the Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the housing requirement?	13
Issue 3 – Whether the Plan has been positively prepared and is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to economic development?	14
Issue 4 – Whether the approach to the alteration of the Green Belt and development within it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy?..	19
Issue 5 – Whether the proposed residential/mixed use allocations and employment/ mixed use allocations are justified, effective and consistent with national policy? ...	25
Issue 6 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to meeting housing needs, including specialist housing, and Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople provision?.....	32
Issue 7 – Whether the Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the approach to housing land supply?	36
Issue 8 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Development in the Countryside and the Separation of Settlements?.....	38
Issue 9 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Design, Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability?	39

Issue 10 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to its approach towards the historic and natural environment and healthy and safe communities? 42

Issue 11 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Transport? 43

Issue 12 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Infrastructure Provision, Implementation, Monitoring and Viability?.....45

Overall Conclusion and Recommendation 47

Schedule of Main Modifications..... Appendix 1

Abbreviations used in this report.

BIDS	Business, Industry, Distribution and Storage
dpa	dwellings per annum
DTC	Duty to Co-operate
GTAA	Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment
HNA	Housing Needs Assessment
HRA	Habitat Regulations Assessment
IDP	Infrastructure Delivery Plan
LDS	Local Development Scheme
LHN	Local Housing Need
MM	Main Modification
NP	Neighbourhood Plan
PPG	Planning Practice Guidance
PPTS	Planning Policy for Traveller Sites
PSA	Primary Shopping Area
S & IP	Science and Innovation Park
SA	Sustainability Appraisal
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SALP	Site Allocations Local Plan
SAMM	Strategic Access Management and Monitoring
SANG	Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace
SHELAA	Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment
SHMA	Strategic Housing Market Assessment
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement
SoCG	Statement of Common Ground
SPA	Special Protection Area
WNP	Warfield Neighbourhood Plan

Non-Technical Summary

This report concludes that the Bracknell Forest Local Plan provides an appropriate basis for the planning of the Borough provided that a number of main modifications (MMs) are made to it. Bracknell Forest Council has specifically requested that we recommend any MMs necessary to enable the Plan to be adopted.

Following the hearings, the Council prepared schedules of the proposed modifications and, carried out sustainability appraisal (SA) and habitats regulations assessment (HRA) of them. The MMs were subject to public consultation over a six-week period. In some cases, we have amended their detailed wording and/or added consequential modifications where necessary. We have recommended their inclusion in the Plan after considering the SA and HRA and all the representations made in response to consultation on them.

The MMs can be summarised as follows:

- MMs to delete the proposed Garden Village allocation at Jealott's Hill (Policy LP7) and its supporting text.
- MMs to delete three non-strategic residential site allocations due to their potential adverse impacts on the setting of nearby designated heritage assets.
- A revised housing trajectory and updated housing supply position.
- MMs to move a number of the Part 2 (non-strategic policies) to Part 1 (Strategic Issues) in the Plan.
- MMs to add a revised Spatial Strategy and new Settlement Hierarchy Policy.
- MMs to delete the Strategic Gaps and Wedges (Policy LP19) and Separation of Settlements (Policy LP38).
- A number of other modifications to ensure that the Plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Introduction

1. This report contains our assessment of the Bracknell Forest Local Plan (the Plan) in terms of Section 20(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) (the 2004 Act). It considers first whether the Plan's preparation has complied with the duty to co-operate. It then considers whether the Plan is compliant with the legal requirements and whether it is sound. The National Planning Policy Framework September 2023 (paragraph 35) (the Framework) makes it clear that in order to be sound, a Local Plan should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
2. The revised National Planning Policy Framework was published in December 2023. It includes a transitional arrangement in paragraph 230 which indicates that plans submitted on or before 19 March 2024, such as this Plan, are to be examined against the provisions of the previous Framework published in September 2023. Therefore, unless stated otherwise, references in this report are to the September 2023 Framework.
3. The starting point for the examination is the assumption that the local planning authority has submitted what it considers to be a sound and legally compliant plan. The Pre-Submission Bracknell Forest Local Plan March 2021, submitted in December 2021 is the basis for our examination. It is the same document as was published for consultation in March 2021.

Main Modifications

4. In accordance with section 20(7C) of the 2004 Act, the Council requested that we should recommend any MMs necessary to rectify matters that make the Plan unsound and not legally compliant and thus incapable of being adopted. Our report explains why the recommended MMs are necessary. The MMs are referenced in bold in the report in the form **MM1**, **MM2** etc, and are set out in full in the Appendix.
5. Following the examination hearings, the Council prepared a schedule of proposed MMs and carried out SA and HRA of them. The MM schedule was subject to public consultation for six weeks. We have taken account of the consultation responses in coming to our conclusions in this report and in this light, we have made some amendments to the detailed wording of the MMs and added consequential modifications where these are necessary for consistency or clarity. None of the amendments significantly alters the content of the modifications as published for consultation or undermines the participatory processes and SA/ HRA that has been undertaken. Where necessary we have highlighted these amendments in the report.

Policies Map

6. The Council must maintain an adopted policies map which illustrates geographically the application of the policies in the adopted development plan. When submitting a local plan for examination, the Council is required to provide a submission policies map showing the changes to the adopted Policies Map that would result from the proposals in the submitted local plan. In this case, the submission policies map comprises the set of plans identified as Pre-Submission Policies Maps 1- 4 as set out in LP/CORE/002 - LP/CORE/005.
7. The Policies Map is not defined in statute as a development plan document and so we do not have the power to recommend MMs to it. However, a number of the published MMs to the Plan's policies require further corresponding changes to be made to the Policies Map. In addition, there are some instances where the geographic illustration of policies on the submission Policies Map is not justified and changes to the Policies Map are needed to ensure that the relevant policies are effective.
8. These further changes to the Policies Map were published for consultation alongside the MMs in a 'schedule of maps changes linked to the proposed main modifications' [EXAM 63].
9. When the Plan is adopted, in order to comply with the legislation and give effect to the Plan's policies, the Council will need to update the adopted Policies Map to include all the changes proposed in 'schedule of maps changes linked to the proposed main modifications' [EXAM 63] and the further changes published alongside the MMs.

Context of the Plan

10. The Plan will replace the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan (2002), Core Strategy (2008) and some policies in the Site Allocations Local Plan (2013) (SALP). Part 1 of the document contains strategic policies and site allocations, and Part 2 contains non-strategic policies. All site allocations in the SALP that are not developed yet will be retained. Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan (2009) which deals with the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) will be retained. The Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2023) provides the planning strategy for minerals and waste up to 2036. A number of Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) have been made, including the Binfield NP (2016), Crowthorne NP (2021) and the Bracknell Town NP (2021). During the Plan examination, the Warfield Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) was made in 2022 and the Winkfield Neighbourhood Plan was made in 2023.
11. Following discussion at the examination hearings, it was agreed with the Council that a number of the Part 2 (non-strategic policies) be moved to Part 1

(Strategic Issues) in the Plan to ensure they are recognised as strategic policies in accordance with paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Framework and to provide an effective planning framework. This is summarised in examination note [EXAM67].

12. The main town of Bracknell is in the centre of the Borough and the smaller settlements of Sandhurst and Crowthorne are to the south. Bracknell Forest is a unitary authority with a population of 113,205 people and lies within the County of Berkshire. The northern and eastern parts of the Borough lie within the Metropolitan Green Belt and over 20 per cent of the Borough is protected by designations, including the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Windsor Forest and Great Park Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Public Sector Equality Duty

13. We have had due regard to the aims expressed in S149(1) of the Equality Act 2010. This has included our consideration of several matters during the examination including the provision of specialist housing to meet the needs of older people and park home dwellers, and a policy framework to support the needs for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople. The Plan was accompanied by an Initial Equalities Screening Impact Report (2021) [LP/SP/004] which has considered the impact of the Plan on those with protected characteristics. The analysis identifies only positive or neutral impacts. Positive impacts include improving accessibility to services and facilities for all of those with protected characteristics and the provision of specialist housing for particular groups.

Assessment of Duty to Co-operate

14. Section 20(5)(c) of the 2004 Act requires that we consider whether the Council complied with any duty imposed on it by section 33A in respect of the Plan's preparation.
15. Bracknell Forest is adjacent to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Surrey Heath, Hart, and Wokingham. The Metropolitan Green Belt lies to its east and to the north. A Duty to Co-operate Statement (2021) [LP/CORE/006] accompanied the submission of the Plan.
16. Historically Bracknell Forest fell within the Western Berkshire housing market and lies within the Central Berkshire functional economic market area.
17. Bracknell Forest, like other constituent authorities within the Western Berkshire Housing Market Area, has agreed, where necessary, to take some of the 230

excess dwellings for which Reading Borough's plan, adopted in 2019 has not made provision [LP/Ev/2m].

18. Part of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) lies within part of the Borough. This requires cross-boundary working which takes place on a regional basis [LP/CG/007].
19. Prior to the commencement of work on the Plan, a Duty to Co-operate Framework was consulted upon, and Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) have been provided with the relevant bodies [CLP/Ev/10a].
20. As such, we are content that, prior to the submission of the Plan, the relevant bodies have where necessary, engaged, constructively, actively and in an ongoing basis, in relation to plan-making with reference to the provision of homes, jobs and commercial development, infrastructure provision, together with climate change matters, as well as the natural and historic environment, such that the legal duty to co-operate has been satisfied.
21. However, this does not require that all those involved have necessarily found agreement. Where matters of soundness have been raised in representations to the submitted Plan, we have considered them below.

Assessment of Other Aspects of Legal Compliance

22. The Plan, in terms of its form and scope, conforms to the subject matter and geographical area for the Plan set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS). Whilst there has been slippage in the timescale in consultation on the MMs and adoption of the Plan, it has been prepared broadly in accordance with the Council's latest LDS October 2021 [LP/CORE/016]. Consultation on the Plan and the MMs was carried out in compliance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (2014) (SCI) and the SCI Temporary Changes Addendum (2021) [LP/CORE/015].
23. The Council carried out an SA of the Plan and of the MMs. The SA has been methodically undertaken and consulted on at each stage of the Plan process. Issues of coverage and consistency have been addressed during the preparation and comprehensive updates to the SA report. In terms of the timing of the outputs, SA is an iterative process that has informed the contents of the Plan. Some representors have argued that not all reasonable alternatives have been subject to SA, particularly in relation to the alternative development options outside of the Green Belt. However, the Council can exercise its discretion in deciding what the reasonable alternatives may be. We are satisfied that the Council has exercised this discretion in a reasonable way. Overall, we find the SA is proportionate, objective, underpinned by relevant and up to date

evidence, and accords with the relevant legal requirements and national guidance.

24. The Habitats Regulations Assessment Pre-Submission Report (March 2021) [LP/Ev/8e] and Addendum [LP/CORE/009] considered the impacts of development on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA; The Windsor Forest and Great Park SAC; Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC; and the Chilterns Beechwoods SAC. This was supported by an Air Quality Assessment [LP/Ev/8f].
25. A full appropriate assessment was undertaken. This demonstrates that the Plan may have some negative impact which requires mitigation. This mitigation has been secured through the Plan such that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of habitat sites because of the policies of the Plan, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. A further addendum [EXAM 65] was published to accompany the proposed MMs which comes to the same conclusion.
26. The Development Plan, taken as a whole, includes policies to address the strategic priorities for the development and use of land in the local planning authority's area, subject to a number of the Part 2 (non-strategic policies) being moved to Part 1 (Strategic Issues) of the Plan as outlined above. Furthermore, the Plan includes policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority's area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change, including Policies LP1, LP15, LP49 and the new Strategic Policy on climate change.
27. The Plan complies with all other relevant legal requirements, including the 2004 Act (as amended) and the 2012 Regulations.

Assessment of Soundness

Main Issues

28. Taking account of all the representations, the written evidence and the discussions that took place at the examination hearings, we have identified 12 main issues upon which the soundness of this Plan depends. This report deals with these main issues. It does not respond to every point or issue raised by representors. Nor does it refer to every policy, policy criterion or allocation in the Plan.

Issue 1 – Whether the spatial strategy is justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

Plan Period

29. There has been a significant delay between the submission of the Plan in December 2021 and the publication of the MMs. Therefore, the earliest that the Plan could reasonably be adopted would be the spring of 2024. The Plan period runs until 2036/37. Consequently, the Plan which contains strategic policies would not meet the minimum 15-year timespan set out in the Framework.
30. However, we are confident given the healthy housing supply position set out below together with the modifications to the Strategic Policies and Spatial Strategy that the Plan robustly anticipates and responds to long-term requirements and opportunities beyond the Plan period. Therefore, taking into account that a plan should be reviewed every five years, and the impetus to have an adopted plan, we have taken a pragmatic approach and conclude that the Plan period is sound.

Vision, Strategic Objectives and Spatial Strategy

31. The Plan's vision and objectives set out the Council's high level strategic priorities that reflect the key issues for the Borough as evidenced through the comprehensive SA reports and core evidence base. The Plan's vision seeks to achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. This includes supporting new housing and economic growth and infrastructure, whilst seeking to safeguard the Borough's heritage and environmental assets and ensure that the Borough is adaptive and resilient to the challenges of climate change.
32. However, as submitted, the spatial vision requires amending in order to be consistent with national policy on main town centre uses, flood risk and heritage assets and to be effective when read with detailed policies of the Plan, including the removal of the reference to the Garden Village Allocation at Jealott's Hill which is considered below in Issue 4. Therefore, **MM1** is required to ensure the spatial vision is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
33. The Plan sets out clear and reasonable strategic objectives, including taking a positive and proactive approach to development proposals, high quality development, housing and economic growth, town centres, infrastructure, managing environmental assets and supporting the economic and social well-being of all communities across the Borough. As submitted, a number of the objectives require expanding and amending in order to be consistent with national policy and to be effective when read with detailed policies of the plan. **MM2** would deal with this, and we recommend it accordingly.

34. The spatial strategy seeks to deliver the sustainable growth envisaged in the vision and strategic objectives. Following discussion at the examination hearings, it was agreed with the Council that a revised and amended Spatial Strategy was required to provide an appropriate planning framework to make it clear where future growth and development was being directed and to provide further guidance on the approach to development in the main settlements and different areas in the Borough. **MM3** is required to ensure the Spatial Strategy is justified, effective and consistent with national policy, including removing reference to the Garden Village Allocation at Jealott's Hill, and we recommend it accordingly.
35. The revised Spatial Strategy appropriately identifies a pivotal role for Bracknell Town focused on previously developed land in and around Bracknell Town Centre as a location for retail, leisure and other main town centre uses, a key location for designated employment areas and for housing. Elsewhere the Plan seeks to bring forward further opportunities for housing on a variety of previously developed and greenfield sites, bolster existing employment and support sustainable growth in and around the main settlements of Sandhurst and Crowthorne and smaller scale growth within the defined settlement areas of certain villages to support their service role. The revised spatial strategy also provides an appropriate planning framework for other areas in the Borough, including land in the countryside, Green Belt and areas covered by neighbourhood plans in the Borough.
36. The principles set out in Strategic Policy LP1 seek to guide development proposals in line with principles of sustainable development. **MM5** is necessary for Policy LP1 to be effective and consistent with national policy, in order to ensure that the policy makes the efficient use of suitable previously developed land and conserves and enhances the significance of heritage assets.
37. As submitted, the Plan did not contain a clearly defined settlement hierarchy. Following discussion at the examination hearings, it was agreed with the Council that a new standalone Settlement Hierarchy Policy was required to identify the roles of the different settlements in the Borough and provide a clear and effective framework to guide decision making on new development proposals both within and outside the defined settlements in the Borough. **MM4** would deal with this and would supersede and replace the sustainable locational principles in Policy LP2. As such, **MM6** is also required to remove Policy LP2 to ensure that the Plan is effective.
38. The defined boundaries of each settlement are set out on the Policies Map. The boundaries are soundly based, logical and justified in defining the built limits of the settlements and the land to be included or excluded, with a few exceptions. This includes several changes to the submitted Policies Map to expand settlement boundaries to include permitted and completed new developments [EXAM19 and EXAM22], which we consider are justified. In addition, a change

is proposed to include the park homes development at Warfield Park and recently permitted and implemented development adjacent to Warfield Park that forms a natural extension to the adjoining residential area on the northern eastern edge of Bracknell. These changes were consulted upon alongside the MMs. To ensure the Plan is effective, these changes will need to be made to the Policies Map when the Plan is adopted. There will be an opportunity at the next Plan review to make further changes to the settlement boundaries to reflect permitted and implemented development, where necessary.

Conclusion

39. Subject to the MMs set out above, the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the spatial strategy.

Issue 2 – Whether the Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the housing requirement?

40. As written, Policy LP3 is ambiguous and not consistent with paragraph 61 of the Framework. To ensure that it is clear on what basis any annual housing requirement is predicated and that the plan is justified, effective, and consistent with national policy a MM is required to differentiate the Local Housing Need (LHN) of 614 dwellings per annum (dpa), based on the standard method set out in the Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), from a supply which includes an element of flexibility. This impacts on the subsequent calculation of the five-year housing supply (see below) and makes it clear that the housing requirement for the Plan period is 10,438 dwellings.
41. The Plan was submitted over two years ago. The PPG [ID:2-008-2019220] states that local authorities can rely on housing figures for up to two years from submission. The most recent affordability ratio has reduced. This has meant in the last three years, year on year, the LHN [EXAM 71] has reduced to a figure of 566 dpa predicated on the most up to date data. Consequently, given that the two- year anniversary of the submission of the Plan fell very recently, late in the examination, and as the most recent figure is lower than the original LHN of 614 dpa and it will provide a modest increase in flexibility within the housing supply, we conclude it is appropriate to continue to rely on this figure.
42. Bracknell Forest Council does not look to other authorities to take any of its housing need and plans to meet its own needs in full. However, whilst it does not share a boundary with Reading Borough, it has agreed, together with the three other Councils in the Western Berkshire Housing Market Area to help meet the 230-dwelling deficit which could arise from Reading Borough's unmet housing needs in the second half of its plan period (2013- 2036) [LP/Ev/2m].

43. Nonetheless, there is no certainty as to how many of the 230 dwellings, if any, would be required to be built within Bracknell Forest. Therefore, given the requirement to review local plans every five years, there is considerable opportunity to revise the housing figures if necessary. Notwithstanding this, a MM is necessary to the supporting text of Policy LP3 to make explicit that Reading Borough's unmet needs may need to be catered for within Bracknell Forest and that the supply has some flexibility within it, so it may be able to make some contribution to Reading Borough's needs.
44. Designated Neighbourhood Plan Areas covers the majority of the Borough of Bracknell Forest. However, as submitted Table 9 which sets out the housing to be delivered within the Designated Neighbourhood Areas just replicates the allocations which have been made within the submission Plan within Tables 7 and 8. Furthermore, during the examination of the Plan, WNP has been made (2022) which includes a site allocation. As submitted, Table 9 leads to ambiguity and potential double counting and is therefore not justified or effective.
45. Moreover, following submission of the Plan, due to the progress of time, including the making of the WNP, changes are required to the number of housing commitments as well as to the windfall calculations and to the residual housing requirement, including reference to the adoption of the WNP. Following the consultation on the MMs a further minor alteration to Table 9 in Policy LP4 has been made to make explicit that WNP has already allocated a site within the Designated Neighbourhood Area. Therefore, in order to ensure effectiveness, consistency with national policy and to ensure that the Plan is justified, modifications are required to Policies LP3, and LP4. These MMs are contained in **MM7** and **MM9**.

Conclusion

46. Subject to the MMs set out above, the Plan has been positively prepared and is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the housing requirement.

Issue 3 – Whether the Plan has been positively prepared and is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to economic development?

Additional industrial, warehouse and office floorspace

47. Proportionate and up-to-date evidence [LP/Ev/3E and LP/SP/003] indicates a need for a total of 19,125 sqm of additional office floorspace and 48,875 sqm of additional industrial and warehouse floorspace in Bracknell Forest.

48. Table 12 of the submitted Plan summarises the amount of additional economic development/mixed use floorspace that the Plan proposes on allocated sites. Table 4 of the Council's latest employment monitoring [LP/Ev/3o] summarises the amount of additional office, industrial and warehouse floorspace that will be provided on sites with planning permission and completed during the Plan period. To be justified and effective, **MM21** is required to ensure that the figures in Table 12 are modified to reflect the latest evidence about the availability and capacity of sites.
49. The updated Table 12 in Policy LP11 (**MM21**) shows the proposed employment/mixed use allocations in the Plan would provide 25,960 sqm of additional office floorspace between 2020/21 and 2037, that would be more than required in the Borough (19,125 sqm). However, the latest employment floorspace monitoring [LP/Ev/3o] shows that the levels of need have increased in recent years due to losses of office floorspace to alternative uses and as such the level of additional provision is currently less than required in the Borough.
50. In relation to industrial and warehouse development, a total of 12,325 sqm of additional industrial and warehouse floorspace will be expected to be provided on commitments (9,897 sqm) and completions (2,428 sqm) between 2020 and 2022, which is significantly less than required in the Borough (48,875 sqm). However, the evidence shows there are no other suitable sites available and therefore the Plan does not allocate any new sites for such uses.
51. The evidence clearly shows that, whilst there are opportunities for additional office floorspace in and close to Bracknell town centre, the amount of land in the Borough suitable and available for new industrial and warehouse development is extremely limited.
52. It is clear that there are number of challenges in the ability to meet these needs, especially arising from the uncertainty in future demand for business, industry, distribution and storage use floorspace following the Covid 19 Pandemic, lack of commercial motivation to promote new employment sites due to higher residential values, and the loss of office to residential uses through permitted development rights. We are also aware that the removal of the Jealott's Hill allocation in Policy LP7 results in the loss of the additional Science and Innovation Park floorspace, some of which the Council envisaged could be suitable to meet some of the unmet light industrial needs in the Borough [LP/SP/003].
53. There is, however, still a large overall total stock of office space (347,000 sqm) and industrial/warehouse space (339,000 sqm) available in the Borough [LP/Ev/3o] that provides a good range and choice of sites that would be available in the short to medium terms to serve the demand for office, industrial and warehouse floorspace.

54. Given the employment policies support the retention and intensification of the existing employment areas, new office provision in and around Bracknell Town Centre and recent evidence of demand for high quality office floorspace in the longer term, the approach is considered to be both reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances.
55. To ensure the Plan is justified and effective, **MM21** is required. This modification refers to the amount of floorspace proposed, acknowledges that this is insufficient to meet identified needs in the Borough, and states that the Council will continue to be supportive of suitable proposals for employment uses in appropriate locations in accordance with the Employment Policies to address the shortfall and to carefully monitor emerging trends which could be responded to, if necessary, through a Local Plan Review.

Employment Development Policies

56. The five main designated employment areas in the Borough are identified in Policy LP10 and shown on the Policies Map. Policy LP26 aims to prevent the net loss of business, industry, distribution and storage (BIDS) uses within the designated employment areas unless there is up to date evidence to demonstrate that the site is no longer required for BIDS use, or the property has been vacant for at least 12 months and there is clear marketing evidence that it cannot be reused or redeveloped for BIDS uses.
57. Policies LP27 and LP28 provide a positive and flexible approach to the development of employment uses within and outside the designated employment areas whilst setting out appropriate criteria for assessing the potential adverse effects of employment developments in those areas. The policies give a suitable level of protection for such sites whilst providing reasonable flexibility to allow for redevelopment for other uses and complementary ancillary services.
58. However, in order to provide an overall strategic policy framework for employment development in the Plan within and outside the designated employment areas, Policies LP26 and LP27 need to be recognised as strategic policies in accordance with paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Framework and merged with Policy LP10. Consequential amendments are necessary to the policies and supporting text to reflect these changes and factual updates. **MM20, MM38** and **MM39** address this, and are necessary for the Plan to be justified and consistent with national policy.
59. In addition, Policy LP28 (criteria 2 and 3) that allow for complementary ancillary services and facilities within and outside the designated employment areas under specific circumstances, should also be moved into the new strategic policy for employment development and **MM20** and **MM40** deal with this.

Subject to that, the strategic approach to employment development in the Plan is justified and consistent with national policy.

60. For smaller businesses, **MM40** is required to Policy LP28 (criteria 1 and 4) and the supporting text to ensure the policy is justified and effective in terms of assessing the future flexibility for development proposals in defined settlements and alternative economic uses as part of proposals resulting in the loss of smaller business units.

Additional commercial leisure and retail floorspace

61. Proportionate and up-to-date evidence [CLP/Ev/3c and LP/SP/003] indicate no additional need for commercial leisure uses is required. This is as a result of Bracknell Forest already being well served and enhanced by the ongoing regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre, which involves a number of significant commercial leisure elements, with the opening of the Lexicon Centre and plans for The Deck.
62. The Town Centre Retail Needs Technical Review 2020 [LP/Ev/3f] indicates a need for a total of up to 9,100 sqm of additional comparison goods floorspace and 1,900 sqm of convenience goods floorspace in Bracknell. The Review identifies that the actual retail floorspace needs could be lower than the findings. There is, however, some uncertainty about the future levels of quantitative retail needs in the Borough created by the Covid 19 Pandemic, changing shopping patterns and the changes in the Use Classes Order.
63. The review also identified 11,688 sqm of vacant retail floorspace in Bracknell Town Centre in 2020 and, as such, concludes no residual need for new retail floorspace is required due to the amount of vacant and pipeline floorspace available. In order to verify the findings and address actual need, the review advises that a new household survey should be undertaken once shopping patterns have returned to normal after the Covid 19 Pandemic.
64. The Plan seeks to meet the identified need in several ways. Firstly, through the identification of the retail hierarchy and the town, district and local centre boundaries in Policy LP12 that provide some certainty regarding the areas in which retail and main town centre development will be encouraged, but also provides flexibility by potentially allowing any site within the centre to come forward.
65. Secondly, Policy LP12, the Policies Map and the Inset Maps in Appendix 3, identify a Primary Shopping Area (PSA) within Bracknell Town Centre and the defined district and local centres, which has been significantly extended to include additional areas. We consider these additional areas to be well

connected and significantly increase opportunities for new retail and main town centre use floorspace.

66. Given that no deliverable and acceptable sites were put forward during the Plan's preparation, we consider that the Council's approach to meeting the identified need to be justified. However, the Council will need to monitor the delivery of additional floorspace carefully. We are mindful that the Plan will need to be reviewed within the next 5 years, where such matters could be revisited if necessary.

Retail Policies

67. Policy LP12 sets out the Plan's approach to maintaining and improving the vitality and viability of the town, district and local centres. This includes the identification of a hierarchy: with Bracknell as the only town centre; Crowthorne and Sandhurst being district centres; and a number of smaller centres designated as local centres.
68. Having regard to the evidence, we consider the hierarchy of centres to be justified. However, some of the requirements in Policy LP12 and the supporting text need to be modified and updated, including removing reference to the new planned Local Centre at Jealott's Hill. **MM22** is necessary to ensure that these detailed requirements are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
69. Policy LP29 sets out the Plan's approach to maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of Bracknell Town Centre. **MM41** is necessary to ensure that the policy and supporting text is effectively worded in terms of taking into account its role as the primary town centre in the hierarchy to reflect national policy and conserving heritage assets. Consequential amendments are necessary in the supporting text to the policy to provide further clarity on how the policy will be applied. **MM41** deals with this.
70. Policy LP30 sets out the Plan's approach to maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the defined centres and the PSAs, including a 20% threshold for non-Class E uses in the PSAs, which we consider is justified. **MM42** is necessary to ensure that the policy and supporting text is effective and consistent with national policy in terms of assessing the significant adverse effect of development in Part 1 of the Policy, clarifying that Part 2 of the Policy only applies to ground floor units in the PSAs and clearly setting out the additional factors that will be used in assessing non-Class E uses in the PSAs. Consequential amendments are necessary in the supporting text to the policy to provide further clarity on how the policy will be applied. **MM42** addresses this point in the interests of effectiveness.

71. Policy LP31 sets out the Council's approach to retail and other main town centre uses outside of the designated centres. Part 1 set out the sequential test that should apply to applications for main town centres. However, as worded, the approach is not consistent with national policy and **MM43** is required to Policy LP31 to accurately reflect the sequential test in national policy and how it will be applied in the Plan.
72. Policy LP31 includes a threshold that requires development for retail or leisure uses exceeding 1,000 sqm to be supported by an Impact Assessment. However, whilst this threshold is justified in relation to Bracknell Town Centre, a modification is necessary to set out a smaller threshold of 500 sqm for developments on the edge of and outside the district and local centres. Based on the evidence provided, we consider the thresholds are justified in relation to Bracknell Town Centre, district and local centres. In addition, modifications are required to clarify how new local centres will be treated and to reflect national policy, including that the thresholds for an impact assessment relate to the gross external floorspace of development. Consequential amendments are necessary in the supporting text to the policy to provide further clarity on how the policy will be applied. **MM43** addresses these points in the interests of effectiveness.
73. Finally, in order to provide an overall strategic policy framework for retail development in the Plan, Policies LP29 and LP31 need to be recognised as strategic policies in accordance with paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Framework and the detailed wording needs to be modified. **MM22**, **MM41** and **MM43** address this and are necessary for the Plan to be justified and consistent with national policy.

Conclusion

74. Subject to the MMs set out above, the Plan has been positively prepared and is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the approach to economic development.

Issue 4 – Whether the approach to the alteration of the Green Belt and development within it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

Jealott's Hill Garden Village

75. The proposed Garden Village at Jealott's Hill, Warfield sits within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Its allocation as an exemplar low carbon mixed-use development based on Garden Village principles, with associated housing of 2,000 dwellings, 8 permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitches, employment (132,800 sqm) and social and physical infrastructure, would require the release of some 115.7 hectares of land from the Green Belt. However, it is envisaged

that only 1,350 dwellings and 38,750 sqm of additional employment would be delivered over the Plan period.

76. The 2,000 dwellings which are proposed to be built as part of the Garden Village are to provide a cross-subsidy for an additional 72,200 sqm of speculative employment floorspace. We understand the Council's position set out in the submitted Plan to be that the housing and employment proposed within the Garden Village cannot be decoupled.
77. Paragraph 140 of the Framework is clear that once established Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced or justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period.
78. We have concluded elsewhere in our report that the Council can demonstrate that it can meet its housing requirement of 10,438 dwellings over the Plan period without the 1,350 dwellings to be delivered from the Garden Village Allocation. Therefore, in housing terms the identified need for development within the Borough can be met without altering the Green Belt boundary.
79. The net additional employment floorspace provided in the proposed Science and Innovation Park (S & IP) does not provide for an increase in employment floorspace for the needs of the prime research and development anchor on the site (Syngenta). However, it is envisaged that it will provide 14,300 sqm of replacement floorspace. Therefore, in purely numerical terms there is no identified need for additional employment space at Jealott's Hill to allow for the expansion of the existing operator.
80. We are aware that the Council envisaged that approximately 15,000 sqm of the additional 72,200 sqm S & IP floorspace could be suitable to count towards meeting some of the unmet light industrial needs in the Borough.
81. However, as the Plan does not specifically allocate the precise mix and type of employment floorspace to be built as part of the S & IP, there is no certainty that this generic, non-specialist, light industrial floorspace would have been delivered on the site. In any event, as set out above, the employment policies and other supporting mechanism in the Plan would provide alternative means to help address the unmet industrial needs in the Borough. Therefore, with reference to employment land there is no need to alter the Green Belt boundary.
82. Having considered the evidence and what we have heard at the hearings it is clear the overarching rationale, or need for the allocation is to enable the globally significant established research facility at Jealott's Hill, which is part of a

large international company, the opportunity to benefit from an open innovation environment within the AgriTech sector and related emerging industries. This is considered vital to support, and thereby ensure, its long-term retention and continued investment at this location and it is argued within the United Kingdom. It is contended without the proposed housing, that the proposed speculative development would not be viable given a £68 million funding deficit.

83. As such it was argued by the Site Promoters and Council that there is no reasonable option for meeting the need identified to provide the benefits set out above, other than at a proposed Garden Village centred on the Jealott's Hill site.
84. We are aware of the cutting-edge scientific research which takes place at the Syngenta facility at Jealott's Hill and recognise the importance of existing and future collaboration within the AgriTech sector and related emerging industries to this established research establishment. We note the buildings on site are of varying ages and condition, consistent with the long history of Syngenta on the site.
85. Nonetheless, Syngenta already works with several higher education institutes and other organisations across the country and globally which are not co-located on the site. There is no realistic suggestion, were the proposed S & IP not to be forthcoming, this collaboration would cease.
86. Evidence was presented by the Site Promoters regarding the potential demand from interested third party companies for floorspace within the S & IP and the scale of the floorspace required to make a successful S & IP, based on a comparison with other S & IPs' business models around the UK. However, the AgriTech industry and those involved in the related Professional, Scientific and Technical Services in the UK is relatively small. Based on the evidence provided we are not persuaded that there is a qualitative need to justify the scale of the speculative AgriTech floorspace (72,200 sqm) proposed in the S & IP in this location.
87. In addition, there may be further opportunities, for further intensification of the existing site consistent with its location within the Green Belt (see below). These could go some way towards realising the intangible benefits from collaborative working and encourage investment in the fabric of the site. Indeed, during the hearings [EXAM 6] we were made aware of a BioStar planning application for a £60 million scheme within the existing site.
88. We accept that there is a risk, as in any other commercial international business, that a strategic decision may be taken to relocate the research facility outside of the country and that there may be financial incentives so to do.

89. However, there is a highly educated and specialised work force linked to the site, embedded within the local community and the wider southeast and mature relations with universities and commercial organisations across the UK.
90. In addition, the existing specialist buildings on site include the largest complex of experimental glasshouses in the UK which, if they were to be replaced wholesale, are estimated to cost in the quantum of £200 million. This all suggests that such a move would not be lightly undertaken. However, we note that there is no longer any functional link between the research work at Syngenta and the surrounding agricultural landscape.
91. Great importance has been given to the unquantified, and indeed, unquantifiable added value to the future success of the business of being in physical proximity to other related, and complementary research and innovation sectors. Consequently, even if we were to accept the disputed assessment relating to the viability of the proposed S & IP, and that the only way of raising revenue for the commercial enterprise would be through cross-subsidy from a housing scheme that would require a substantial release of Green Belt land, we are not persuaded that any future investment decision would be solely driven by this funding gap, nor that this model is pivotal to Syngenta's future at the site. Therefore, taking the above into account we do not conclude that the Garden Village allocation is a fundamental requirement to facilitate the long-term retention of the Jealott's Hill research facility in Bracknell Forest.
92. Conversely, were the Garden Village allocation to be implemented, this could not guarantee the long-term future of the Syngenta site in Bracknell. This would be substantively different to scenarios where S & IPs have direct links to the intellectual capital of universities, such as at Oxford and Cambridge, or national research institutes.
93. We are aware that following the removal of the allocation which included eight gypsy and traveller pitches that the identified need for gypsies and traveller pitches would not be directly catered for over the plan period. However, as set out below we are confident that with the planning application, which is currently being determined, together with Policy LP25, as modified, that the needs for gypsies and travellers are appropriately addressed in a manner consistent with the Framework.
94. Given the above, which demonstrates that there is no need for further housing or employment, nor that the needs associated with the Jealott's Hill research and development site are sufficiently compelling to establish a need for changes to the Green Belt, we have concluded that exceptional circumstances have not been fully evidenced or justified to remove 115.7 hectares from the Metropolitan Green Belt.

95. Additionally, we agree with the Council's joint Green Belt review [CLP/Ev/5c] which concludes that the Garden Village would be located on land which makes a contribution to assisting the countryside from encroachment and a limited contribution to the other four purposes of the Green Belt as set out in paragraph 138 of the Framework.
96. Overall, this means that these parcels continue to actively contribute to the purpose of the Metropolitan Green Belt, notwithstanding the existing buildings at Jealott's Hill which clearly have an urbanising impact.
97. Similarly, the development of the Garden Village allocation would result in a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt through the development of around 2000 new homes, associated infrastructure and employment uses.
98. Moreover, the parcels of land which make up the site allocation sit within and form part of an attractive agrarian landscape, albeit the existing Jealott's Hill buildings have an urbanising influence as confirmed in the Addendum to the Landscape Sensitivity Appraisal [LP/Ev/5g].
99. Whilst new belts of planting would create a long-term defensible edge to the east and west of the site [LP/Ev/5i para 2.12], it would be inevitable that the landscape character of the site would alter.
100. As, for the most part, the proposed boundaries to the Green Belt would not follow physical features that are readily recognisable, and therefore are unlikely to be permanent, they would not be consistent with paragraph 143 of the Framework.
101. Therefore, from our consideration of the evidence and our site visits we are clear that the scale of the proposed physical development, including the extensive proposed highway works would result in significant landscape harm in a sensitive location. Moreover, the extensive Country Park and proposed belts of planting would alter the appearance of the existing attractive agrarian landscape with a subsequent change in character.
102. The proposed Garden Village would, of necessity, have a significant and unavoidable impact on openness and would result in a substantive encroachment into the Green Belt with an adverse impact on a sensitive agrarian landscape. It would also result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the setting of nearby designated heritage assets, as agreed in the SoCG between the Council and Site Promoters [LP/CG/012].
103. It is proposed to create a new sustainable community, and to improve the walking and cycling network and the frequency of the existing bus service,

including the introduction of a new Demand Responsive Transport service. However, we are not persuaded that the location of the Garden Village would be such that there would be a realistic choice of means of transport that would significantly reduce the need to travel by private car.

104. Consequently, taking all of the above into account, including our earlier conclusion that the exceptional circumstances required by paragraph 140 of the Framework have not been evidenced for the Plan to be justified, and consistent with national policy, **MM12**, **MM1** and **MM3** are required to delete the Garden Village allocation Policy LP7, from the Plan and modifications made to the Spatial Strategy, Vision and Policies Map.

Green Belt Policy

105. Policy LP 36 seeks to ensure that development is determined in line with national policy as set out in the Framework. However, as submitted the reference to appropriate and inappropriate development is ambiguous and is not consistent with national Green Belt Policy. Therefore, the sub sections under criterion 1 should be deleted.
106. Criterion 2 of Policy LP 36 refers to Green Belt villages where limited infilling will be permitted. However, Policy LP20 of the Plan provides a list of defined villages for the purposes of limited infilling in line with criterion e) of paragraph 149 of the Framework, the boundaries of which are identified on the Policies Map, but which remain washed over by the Metropolitan Green Belt.
107. The boundaries and villages have been identified following a coherent and consistent approach [LP/EV/5d] taking local circumstances into account. As such, we consider this element of the policy to be positive and justified and provides clarity at a local level when determining planning applications.
108. In line with our conclusions with regard to Jealott's Hill Garden Village above, and the associated MMs, it is necessary to recognise the importance of the Jealott's Hill International Research Centre through the inclusion of supporting text which makes clear the continued investment at the site in a manner consistent with its location within the Metropolitan Green Belt will be supported.
109. To ensure that the Green Belt policy of the Plan is effective the list of villages where limited infilling can take place should be included within Policy LP36 and Policy LP20 deleted. **MM31**, **MM48** and **MM71** are required to delete Policy LP20, incorporate it within a wider overarching Green Belt policy and to amend the wording of the policy, supporting text, and Appendix 4 of the Plan and to include reference to the importance of Jealott's Hill International Research Centre.

Conclusion

110. Therefore, subject to **MM1, MM3, MM12, MM48, MM31** and **MM71** the approach to the Green Belt and development within it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Issue 5 – Whether the proposed residential/mixed use allocations and employment/mixed use allocations are justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

Strategic sites

Policy LP5: Land at Beaufort Park, Nine Mile Ride, Bracknell

111. The site is situated to the north of Nine Mile Ride on the south-western fringe of Bracknell Forest. The former Met Office headquarters, which is now a housing site, is surrounded by the allocation. Buckler's Park development lies on the other side of Nine Mile Ride which will provide a school, community centre and retail units as part of the redevelopment of the former Transport Research Laboratory. To the east is the Great Hollands Recreation Park and established housing. To the north is the golf course and cemetery. To the west lies mostly undeveloped land between Bracknell and Wokingham. Pedestrian and cyclist links are to be provided along South Road. The site is a mix of woodland, both deciduous and managed coniferous, and heathland. A gas pipeline runs along the south of the site.

112. The allocation measures around 32.5 hectares and is identified for the provision of 226 housing units together with a mix of landscaping, the location of which will be heavily influenced by the existing ecology and landscape of the site.

113. In order for the Plan to be effective, given our conclusion relating to the soundness of the strategic gap policy, LP5 requires amending to ensure that the proposed development is designed to retain the setting and distinctive character of Crowthorne, Wokingham and Bracknell.

114. In addition, given the high ecological value of parts of the site and the proximity to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, detailed consideration of the ecological significance of the site is necessary to ensure that the significant ecological constraints of the site and wider area are not compromised. Therefore, modifications should be made to enable the policy to be effective.

115. The site is subject to a raft of other detailed policy requirements which, in the interests of effectiveness, require modification. These include, amongst others, the provision of older person's housing integrated within the wider scheme, to contribute to the specific needs of the Borough, the extent and nature of which

would be addressed at the planning application stage; Open Space of Value; and recognition of the importance of the existing trees and woodland.

116. Moreover, due to the proximity of the wastewater treatment plant it is important that any proposal is supported by an appropriate odour impact assessment.

117. Also, it is vital that the proposed development results in a well-designed development, which provides a high-quality environment and living conditions for both the new residents and the wider community with good transport links. This will be achieved by the development meeting the policy as proposed to be modified and the provision of a master plan as set out in Policy LP15 as modified by **MM26** (see below).

118. The site is in single ownership and there have been two unsuccessful planning applications, supported by detailed technical supporting information, including an appeal on the site¹. However, whilst none of the applications have been successful, these have failed on technical issues which do not lead us to doubt that with an appropriately designed scheme development could be successfully delivered and would result in a sustainable and viable development.

119. The site had been envisaged to be delivered within the first five years of the plan. However, due to the uncertainty as to when a planning permission would be forthcoming given the refusal of permission and subsequent appeal, we have taken a conservative approach and have moved the delivery of housing outside of the five-year housing supply set out in **MM69**. It is anticipated that the site could start to deliver in 2028/29.

120. Overall, subject to **MM10** the strategic allocation covered under Policy LP5 is well placed to contribute to a sustainable pattern of development and would make a significant contribution to the supply of housing and affordable homes and make a positive contribution to the wider ecology of the area and protect and enhance the distinctive character of Bracknell and Crowthorne.

Policy LP6: Land East of Wokingham Road and South of Dukes Ride (Derby Field), Crowthorne

121. The site provides playing fields for Wellington College. It is bound by the railway line which runs on a north south axis, Dukes Ride to the north and Wokingham Road to the west. Currently, it plays an important role in the setting of the settlement of Crowthorne.

122. The allocation measures around 8.8 hectares, with a small segment lying within the adjacent local authority of Wokingham Borough Council. It is identified

¹ APP/R0335/W/23/3314630

amongst other uses for the provision of 217 housing units, older persons' housing as part of the scheme, at a scale and form to contribute to the wider needs of the Borough. The policy as submitted would amongst other considerations, require the provision of parking spaces to serve Crowthorne Rail Station, green infrastructure, Open Space of Public Value, a Multi-use Games Area and a play area on site, as well as measures to avoid and mitigate harm to habitat sites.

123. We are aware that the site allocation would result in building on the existing playing fields. However, the criteria of the policy are sufficiently robust to ensure that the loss of the playing fields on site will be compensated effectively in a manner consistent with paragraph 99 of the Framework.
124. Nevertheless, as worded the policy is inflexible, such as specifying the type of active recreation which will be required to be provided on site. Moreover, it is not effective in relation to detailed development management considerations such as the requirement to provide a masterplan and the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). These require strengthening and clarifying, or, where solely referenced in the supporting text being brought into the upper-case policy where it does not lead to undue duplication with generic development policies elsewhere within the Plan.
125. In addition, for the Plan to be effective, given our conclusion relating to the soundness of the strategic gap policy, the supporting text requires amending to stress the role of the site in protecting and enhancing the setting of the settlement of Crowthorne.
126. The site-specific requirements relating to the provision of off-site compensatory sporting facilities and the habitat requirements of the site are being actively addressed by the landowner. Therefore, the Council considers that it would be realistic for the site to start delivering 20 dwellings in 2027/2028. This position is confirmed by the SoCG between the landowner and Council [LP/CG/010]. As such, we are content that as modified, Policy LP6 is a viable and deliverable site.
127. Overall, subject to **MM11** the strategic allocation covered under Policy LP6 is well placed to contribute to a sustainable pattern of development and would make a significant contribution to the supply of housing and affordable homes and make a positive contribution to the provision of active space for recreation both to serve Wellington College and the wider community.

Policy LP8: The Peel Centre and The Point, Skimped Hill Lane, Bracknell

128. The site is situated on the south-west edge of Bracknell Town Centre and comprises retail warehousing, a supermarket, leisure facilities and associated

surface level car parking. It measures around 6.5 hectares and is identified for a mixed-use development, including about 900 residential units, of which about 600 are to be delivered in the Plan period, and about 3,000 sqm of floorspace for a supermarket, to replace the existing one on the site.

129. The site is within the single ownership of a development company. A significant amount of technical work has been undertaken to identify and assess how any constraints on the site can be addressed. The site identified in Policy LP8 is subject to detailed policy requirements which address a range of matters such as contamination, air quality, flood risk, ecology, vehicular access and improvements to the wider highway network. Some of these requirements in the Policy and supporting text need to be modified and updated, including securing an air quality assessment and acoustic report to assess the impacts on the health of residents and adequate wastewater capacity. **MM13** is necessary to ensure that these detailed requirements are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
130. In terms of securing a sustainable pattern of development, the site would be well-related to day-to-day services and facilities in Bracknell Town Centre and is close to a range of employment opportunities. Opportunities exist to improve pedestrian, cycling and public transport links as part of the development. Affordable housing and an element of specialist accommodation for older people will be delivered to contribute to the specific housing needs of the Borough. To help support the continuing regeneration and viability of the Town Centre, the proposed allocation includes about 500 sqm of gross floorspace for offices and about 500 sqm of gross floorspace for other commercial development, in addition to the supermarket.
131. The deliverability of the proposed allocation has been questioned given the active retail/leisure uses on the site and the lease arrangements for some of the existing retail units. Based on the known infrastructural requirements and capacity, the landowner has confirmed that the development would be phased and is shown as being delivered later in the Plan period and beyond. It is anticipated that the development would commence in 2031/32 with an output of 100 residential units followed by 100-140 residential units per annum from 2033/34. **MM13** addresses the phasing of the site and is required in the interests of effectiveness. The strategic site is, therefore, considered to be viable and deliverable/developable during the Plan period.
132. Overall, the strategic mixed-use allocation covered under Policy LP8 is well placed to contribute to a sustainable pattern of development and would make a significant contribution to the supply of housing and affordable homes together with the provision of economic development uses to support the vitality and viability of Bracknell Town Centre.

Eastern Gateway Development Area (Town Square), Bracknell

133. The site is situated within Bracknell Town Centre and comprises the original New Town's civic quarter, including the former Council offices, existing library and Town Square. It is identified for a mixed-use development, including about 210 residential units and about 3,160 sqm of net office floorspace, about 8,600 sqm of floorspace for Class E uses and a Class C1 hotel use. During discussions at the hearing session the Council put forward some amendments to extend and enlarge the site (BRA7) to include additional land within their ownership. This was considered necessary to provide greater flexibility for delivering the development in this location. **MM14** addresses this point in the interests of effectiveness.
134. The site is within the single ownership of Bracknell Forest Borough Council and is being promoted by the Council who has undertaken some technical work, including masterplanning, to identify and assess how any constraints on the site can be addressed. The site identified in a new Policy is subject to detailed policy requirements which address a range of matters such as ecology, flood risk, access and the reprovision of the Council's library either on site or elsewhere in the Town Centre. Some of these requirements in the Policy and supporting text need to be modified and updated, including securing SANG and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures, public realm improvements and green infrastructure. **MM14** is necessary to ensure that these detailed requirements are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
135. In terms of securing a sustainable pattern of development, the site would be well-related to the services and facilities in the Town Centre and is close to a range of employment opportunities. Opportunities exist to improve pedestrian links, public open space and green infrastructure in order to provide a high-quality public realm as part of the development, including the Town Square. To help support the continuing regeneration and viability of the Town Centre, the proposed allocation includes a range of economic development uses together with the opportunity to retain and refurbish Easthampstead House (former Council offices) for continued employment use or residential or a hotel use.
136. Based on the known infrastructural requirements and capacity, the Council has confirmed that the development would be delivered later in the Plan period. It is anticipated that the development would commence in 2030/31 with an output of 30 residential units followed by 60 residential units per annum thereafter. The strategic site is, therefore, considered to be viable and deliverable/developable during the Plan period.
137. Overall, the strategic mixed-use allocation in the Eastern Gateway Development Area is well placed to contribute to a sustainable pattern of development and would make an important contribution to the supply of housing and affordable

homes together with the provision of new economic development to support the vitality and viability of Bracknell Town Centre.

Southern Gateway Development Area, Bracknell

138. The site is situated within Bracknell Town Centre and comprises the existing bus station, adjacent to Bracknell's main train station and, formal public open space including Jubilee Gardens and Station Green. It is identified for a mixed-use development, including about 600 residential units and about 22,300 sqm of office floorspace. During discussions at the hearing session the Council put forward some amendments to amalgamate a number of smaller sites (BRA14, BRA15 and BRA17) into a single strategic site and enlarge it to include additional land within their ownership. This was considered necessary to provide greater flexibility for delivering the development in this location. **MM15** addresses this point in the interests of effectiveness.
139. The site is within the single ownership of Bracknell Forest Borough Council and is being promoted by the Council who has undertaken some technical work, including masterplanning, to identify and assess how any constraints on the site can be addressed. The site identified in a new Policy is subject to detailed policy requirements which address a range of matters such as contamination, air quality, flood risk, ecology, built heritage and improvements to the wider highway network. Some of these requirements in the Policy and supporting text need to be modified and updated, including securing On-site Open Space of Public Value, public realm improvements and measures to deal with the level changes across the site. **MM15** is necessary to ensure that these detailed requirements are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
140. In terms of securing a sustainable pattern of development, the site would be well-related to the services and facilities in Bracknell Town Centre and is close to a range of employment opportunities. Opportunities exist to improve pedestrian, cycling and public transport links as part of the development, including the existing bus station as a multi-modal public transport hub. The public open space would be reconfigured and enhanced in order to provide new green infrastructure to achieve net environmental gains, including a new community square and a high-quality public realm as part of the development. To help support the continuing regeneration and viability of the Town Centre, the proposed allocation includes about 1,500 sqm of unrestricted floorspace for Class E uses, in addition to the new office floorspace.
141. Based on the known infrastructure requirements and capacity, the Council has confirmed that the development would be delivered later in the Plan period. It is anticipated that development would commence in 2030/31 with an output of 30 residential units followed by 60-120 residential units per annum thereafter. The strategic site is, therefore, considered to be viable and deliverable/developable during the Plan period.

142. Overall, the strategic mixed-use allocation in the Southern Gateway Development Area is well placed to contribute to a sustainable pattern of development and would make a significant contribution to the supply of housing and affordable homes together with the provision of new economic development to support the vitality and viability of the Bracknell Town Centre.

Non-Strategic Allocation Sites

143. A number of smaller, non-strategic residential/mixed use site allocations have been identified through the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. These are identified within Binfield (BIN5, BIN12, BIN20), Warfield (WAR9) and Winkfield (WINK15) and are contained within Policy LP4 and set out on the Policies Map.

144. We have carefully considered whether the individual allocations within the Plan, including where they are for a mixture of uses, are justified, effective, and consistent with national policy, including whether the individual sites have been underpinned by proportionate evidence. The SA has appraised these sites individually [LP/Ev/1e, EXAM64] and demonstrates that they would contribute to the most appropriate strategy.

145. In all cases, the sites identified in Policy LP4 are subject to detailed policy requirements set out in Appendix 2 in the Plan. These would ensure suitable landscaping and screening where appropriate and address a range of other matters such as flood risk, contamination, air quality, noise, access, built heritage, biodiversity and green infrastructure. Some of these requirements need to be modified and updated, including ensuring a well-designed landmark building is provided on one of the main approach roads into Bracknell on site allocation BIN20. **MM70** addresses this and is necessary to ensure that these detailed requirements are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

146. Based on the known infrastructure requirements and capacity, the relevant landowners/developers for each of the sites have confirmed they are available and can be delivered within the next five years. The non-strategic sites are all within a suitable location and based on the evidence provided, are considered to be viable and deliverable/developable during the Plan period. In our view, other than those referred to below, the site allocations are justified.

147. **MM9** and **MM70** would delete the non-strategic residential site allocations at land opposite Popes Manor, Murrell Hill Lane (BIN 10b), and two sites on Lower Church Road (SAND 9 and SAND 10), due to their potential adverse impacts on the setting of nearby designated heritage assets. This main modification is necessary to ensure that Policy LP4 and the site allocations are justified, effective and consistent with national policy with particular reference to conserving and enhancing the historic environment (see below).

148. Development has commenced at the Former Bus Depot, Bracknell (BRA12), Coopers Hill (BRA13), Turnpike Road (BIN16) and London Road (WINK34). Therefore, the sites are committed development and no longer available as allocations. Consequently, for the BFLP to be effective, these non-strategic site allocations should be removed through **MM9** and **MM70**.

Conclusion

149. Overall, subject to the MMs set out above, the proposed residential/mixed use allocations and employment/mixed use allocations are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Issue 6 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to meeting housing needs, including specialist housing, and Gypsy, Traveller, and Travelling Showpeople Provision?

Affordable housing

150. LP/SP/001 states that there is an annual requirement for 338 affordable homes per annum. However, Policy LP9 sets out the Council's approach to the provision of affordable housing which would not meet this annual figure. Nonetheless, overall, the affordable housing target of 35% of new gross development has been shown by the evidence to be viable [LP/Ev/4t].

151. However, we have noted that the viability of town centre sites is less strong. Nevertheless, we are aware that nearly all the town centre allocations are on land owned by the Council and that sites are being actively developed within the town centre.

152. Nonetheless, to enable the policy to be effective **MM16** is required so that the policy is clear in setting out how affordable housing will be considered in the context of applications for older person's housing where the viability of standalone schemes may vary; housing within the town centre on less viable sites where flexibility of tenure may be required to enable the realisation of the 35% affordable housing; and in referencing that the Council may be willing to realise lower land values on sites it owns, so as to meet the 35% affordable housing target. As such, the Council's strategy for affordable housing is effective and justified whilst being flexible enough so as not to prejudice the delivery of development.

153. **MM9, MM10, MM11, MM13, MM14, MM15** and **MM70** are required to enable the policies to be effective by making explicit that the target for housing sites will be 35% affordable housing of a proposed development, rather than relying on a specific figure on individual sites.

Housing Mix

154. Policy LP24 Housing Mix is overly prescriptive and inflexible as it requires individual developments to meet housing needs as set out by the latest housing need assessment. As such it is not effective. Therefore, **MM36** is required to ensure that the housing mix of developments are informed by the latest evidence of the needs of different groups.

Custom built housing

155. The Framework requires policies to reflect the needs of those who wish to commission or build their own homes. Section 7.10 of the Plan, together with detailed elements of Policies LP5, and LP6 require to be amended, through **MM10**, **MM11** and **MM18** to ensure that the policy is effective by making it clear on what basis developers are required to make available plots for custom or self- build. The Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) [LP/Ev/2g] states that there are at least 55 individuals who are on the self-build and custom housing register. If all the plots on allocations identified for self-build and custom housing were to be realised this target would be met.

Adaptable and accessible housing

156. The HNA is clear that around 5% of new build should be wheelchair user homes. However, as submitted Policy LP22 is not clear how the more specialist category of adaptable dwellings is to be allocated and how the policy is to be implemented. As such, **MM34** is required to ensure the policy is effective.

Older person's and specialist housing

157. The Framework and the PPG are clear that local authorities should plan for older people with the requirement being described as 'critical' [PPG: ID: 63-001-20190626]. As submitted the Plan does not sufficiently articulate the need to provide older person's housing within the Vision and Objectives. As such amendments are required to **MM1** and **MM2** to recognise the importance of older persons' housing to the Plan.

158. The Council's evidence demonstrates that the overall viability of developments would not be compromised with older persons' housing as part of a wider mix development [LP/Ev/4t]. Given the variety of older person's housing requirements, including residential nursing homes and the difficulties in forecasting demand, to make the plan justified and effective amendments are required to update and make explicit that the Local Housing Need figures for older people's housing set out in the Plan are indicative.

159. This is because the demand for older person's housing is peculiarly dependent on personal circumstances; the fast-evolving nature of the sector, and the

subsequent difficulties in forecasting demand which may increase in response to new models of housing coming onto the market. Therefore, in the context of an ageing population, the indicative figures should not be taken as a ceiling on older person's housing development.

160. Nonetheless the Council is not required by national policy to allocate specific sites solely for older person's housing [PPG: ID: 63-013-20190626]. However, within the Plan as submitted, specialist older person's housing is required to be integrated and delivered within the strategic site allocations and is suitable on windfall sites within the settlement boundaries. To ensure that the need for older person's housing is recognised and for the Plan to be effective, a new stand-alone policy is required setting out the Plan's strategy for the delivery of older person's housing. Similarly, to be effective, the specific provision of older person's housing is required at the three strategic site allocations at a quantum, and tenure to be agreed as part of the master planning process. Consequently, **MM17**, **MM10**, **MM11** and **MM13** are required for the plan to be effective, justified, and consistent with national policy.
161. As submitted the Plan is not sufficiently clear as to how the loss of specialist accommodation is to be determined. Therefore, **MM33** is required to Policy LP21, which relates to the protection of existing housing stock to ensure that the policy is effective in preventing the inappropriate loss of valuable specialist accommodation to other uses. Similarly, Policy LP23 Specialist Housing requires amending through **MM35** to take a positive approach to ensure that there is a clear criteria-based approach to determining planning applications for all forms of specialist housing.

Gypsies and Travelling Showpeople and other caravan dwellers

162. The housing requirement for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople for Bracknell Forest has been set out within the Housing Background Paper [LP/SP/001] predicated on the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) (2017). A more up to date survey was published in March 2022 [LP/Ev/20] following the submission of the Plan in 2021.
163. In addition, in December 2023 a revised version of the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) was published to bring it into line with the Smith v SSLUHC & Ors (2022) EWCA Civ 1391 judgment 8, which the Court of Appeal issued at the end of the Stage 2 hearings. At the time, we gave the Council the opportunity to consider if the judgment had any relevance to our examination of the Plan. The Council's response [EXAM47a] was clear that it did not. We concur that whilst the Council's evidence differentiated between those who met and did not meet the previous definition set out in the PPTS, the Plan had always planned to meet the needs of all those who culturally identified as belonging to the Gypsy and Traveller communities. Nonetheless, to ensure that

the Plan is both consistent with the current PPTS and reflects the most recent evidence, **MM19** is required to provide the most recent assessment of need, together with the most recent five-year housing requirement for Gypsies and Travellers and to recognise the revised national policy. Furthermore, **MM73** is required to the Glossary to ensure that the definitions are consistent with the up to date PPTS.

164. The conclusions of the GTAA set out a need for five Travelling Show person plots over the study period 2021/22 to 2036/37. There is demand for four additional authorised Gypsy and Traveller pitches in the first five years of the plan, and another four in the latter part of the plan, as well as a need to work proactively to provide transit sites.
165. The GTAA suggests that the demand for a further five additional Travelling Showpeople plots could be accommodated through intensification of existing sites and bringing vacant plots into use. We have no evidence before us to suggest otherwise.
166. We are aware that **MM12**, the removal of the Jealott's Hill allocation Policy LP7, results in the loss of the allocation of eight permanent pitches for Gypsies and Travellers which would have required the alteration of the Green Belt. Nonetheless, we note that the Council at the time of the examination was determining a retrospective planning application (19/00491/FUL) for a non-authorised site with four pitches, to which there is no, in- principle, objection. If approved, it would meet the immediate need for authorised pitches within the Borough. Yet, there would remain an outstanding need for a further four pitches from the period 2026/27 onwards and the need would not be met in full through allocations within the Plan.
167. Nonetheless, as the need early in the plan can be satisfied by the retrospective application set out above and given the relatively small outstanding need for four pitches in the later part of the Plan period, we have taken a pragmatic approach to rely on Policy LP25 which is a criteria-based policy. As such, any new sites which come forward are dependent for their delivery on Policy LP25. However, as worded, this is overly restrictive and does not adequately ensure that the living conditions of the travelling communities are appropriately protected, and that the need for transit sites is acknowledged, nor is it sufficiently clear that the policy is applicable to those who identify as part of the Gypsy and Traveller communities, consistent with the most up to date definition, as set out in Annex 1 of the PPTS. Therefore, **MM37** is required to make the policy effective and consistent with national policy.
168. We note the recommendation of the author of the GTAA [LP/Ev/20] that the GTAA be reviewed every five years. This is particularly important given the reliance on the approval of the retrospective planning application.

Conclusion

169. Subject to the MMs identified above, the Plan's approach to meeting housing needs, including specialist housing, and Gypsy, Traveller, and Travelling Showpeople provision, is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Issue 7 - Whether the Plan has been positively prepared and whether it is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to the approach to housing land supply?

170. As set out above, and as amended by **MM7**, the housing requirement is a figure of 10,438 dwellings to be completed over the Plan period.

171. Taking into account housing completions, a reasonable windfall assumption, the sites already allocated within the Site Allocations Local Plan (2013), together with homes approved subject to Section 106 agreements, the Council can demonstrate a realistic committed housing supply of 9,110 dwellings. Not all of these sites will meet the Framework definition of deliverable, but if not, we are confident that they are developable over the Plan period. This leaves a further requirement of some 1,328 dwellings to be allocated and to come forward over the Plan period to meet the minimum 10,438 figure.

172. Following the examination of the Plan, amendments have been made to the housing supply, including the removal of the major Jealott's Hill allocation together with the three smaller allocations at Popes Manor, Murrell Hill Lane (BIN 10b) and the two sites on Lower Church Road (SAND 9 and SAND 10).

173. The housing trajectory within the Plan as submitted is required to be updated to accurately reflect the changes to the number and contributions derived from the housing allocations set out above based on the position as of April 1 2023, and following our discussions at the hearings where we took a conservative approach to the bringing forward of sites such as the Beaufort Park, Nine Mile Ride, Bracknell (BRA4) .

174. **MM69** provides a revised housing trajectory. This demonstrates that the Plan can provide 11,190 dwellings over the Plan period which gives a significant cushion of over a year's housing supply of 752 dwellings. Beyond the Plan period a further 300 dwellings could be delivered as part of the redevelopment of the Peel Centre, The Point and Skimped Hill Lane, allocation in Bracknell (BRA18).

175. As such, even were Bracknell Forest to take on all of Reading Borough's unmet needs of 230 dwellings, it would still have headroom of 522 dwellings during the Plan period. Therefore, we are confident that the Plan provides sufficient

housing to meet Bracknell Forest's needs and would be consistent with the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes.

176. The Framework requires that at least 10% of the housing requirement should be delivered on sites of less than one hectare. This equates to 1,044 dwellings over the Plan period. As a result of the removal of small allocations from the plan and the consolidation of smaller sites into larger allocations, only one site is identified which meets this criterion. However, due to existing commitments and completions on small to medium sites the Council is still able to demonstrate at least 1,333 dwellings to be delivered on small to medium allocations over the Plan period. Therefore, at 13% of supply, the requirement of paragraph 69 of the Framework is comfortably reached.

Five- year supply

177. The Council has provided the most up to date housing completions as of 1 April 2023 [EXAM 66]. As such, the completion figure for the first three years of the Plan period comes to 2,189 dwellings, which when compared to the three-year requirement at 1,842 dwellings (614 x 3) results in a surplus of 347 dwellings at the beginning of the Plan period.

178. The housing requirement as amended is that Bracknell Forest must provide a minimum of 10,438 dwellings over the Plan period. There is nothing in the Framework or PPG to suggest that this surplus of 347 dwellings, against the annualised housing requirement (614 X 3 or 1, 842 dwellings) over the first three years of the plan cannot be offset against the five-year requirement. This would result in a net figure of 2,723 dwellings, With the addition of a 5% buffer the five-year requirement comes to 2, 859 dwellings or 572 dwellings per annum. However, for the avoidance of doubt, it should be noted that this five-year housing requirement for deliverable housing would not act as a ceiling on the potential numbers of homes delivered in line with the Plan's strategy, rather it demonstrates whether the Plan is delivering the quantum of housing set out within its housing requirement for the Plan period.

179. Therefore, as a result of the amendments to the housing trajectory following the examination (see above), the five-year supply of deliverable housing would be some 3,048 dwellings. As such, with a requirement of some 2,859 dwellings, Bracknell Forest can demonstrate 5.33 years of deliverable housing and therefore **MM8** and **MM69** are required for the plan to be justified and effective in this respect.

180. Were the Plan to be adopted in the monitoring year 2024- 2025, the updated trajectory forecasts a further 947 dwellings to have been completed in the period 2023- 2024. As such, we are confident that the Plan would again provide a comfortable five-year supply of deliverable housing.

Conclusion

181. Subject to the MMs identified above, the Plan's approach to housing supply matters is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Issue 8 - Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Development in the Countryside and the Separation of Settlements?

Areas of Separation

182. Policy LP19 relates to the designation of strategic gaps and a green wedge which are identified on the Policies Map, whilst Policy LP38 sets out the policy to be applied in ensuring that the physical and visual separation between identified settlements is not unacceptably reduced. The objective of which is the avoidance of coalescence between settlements and the maintenance of a gap between Binfield and the Blue Mountain allocation, which form part of the larger urban area of Bracknell.

183. However, there is no specific support for such an approach within the Framework for development outside of settlements, indeed the Council's own landscape consultants [LP/Ev/5b] consider that it would be sufficient to rely on a policy which relates to the updated Landscape Character Assessments as a means of protecting the separation between settlements. This approach would be flexible and would not only be applicable to areas which have been identified as strategic gaps on the Policies Map. As such, it would result in a more nuanced, flexible and effective means of protecting the setting and character of settlements consistent with the various landscape characters of the Borough. It would also avoid confusion given the number of policies controlling development outside of settlements.

184. Similarly, we have not found there to be any justification for the green wedge, particularly given that a Golf Entertainment Centre and a secondary school together with a SANG fall within it. We are confident, were further proposals for development to come forward in the area covered by the green wedge that the Plan as modified provides a robust array of development management policies by which any development would be determined which would avoid most of the harms envisaged by Policies LP19 and LP38 without unnecessarily restricting appropriate development.

185. Therefore, for the Plan to be effective and justified, Policies LP19 and LP38 should both be deleted through **MM30** and **MM50**.

186. Policy LP37 Landscape Character sets out how landscape character will be considered in determining applications outside of defined settlements. However, in the context of **MM30** and **MM50** this should be modified to ensure that the Plan is more effective by strengthening the importance of Landscape Character Areas in relation to the setting and distinctive characteristics of settlements in determining applications. This would require that the inset maps are included within a new appendix and that the landscape character areas are referenced within the policy text with other consequential amendments as **MM49**. Further modification **MM47** is required to the Plan to ensure consistency. To ensure the Plan is effective, these changes will need to be made to the Policies Map when the Plan is adopted.

Development in the Countryside

187. As submitted Policy LP35 Development in the Countryside is not effective as the wording is vague. We are aware that much of the countryside within Bracknell Forest Borough lies close to settlements with subsequent development pressures. Therefore, the approach taken by the Council to control development within the countryside is appropriate and is consistent with paragraph 9 of the Framework which provides for local policies to take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area. However, **MM47** is required to clarify how proposals for development in the countryside will be determined, as well as to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and to reference Policy LP37.

188. Policy LP39 Dwellings for rural workers does not allow for rural workers' dwellings where the business has been in operation for less than three years. **MM51** is required to ensure that the policy is more flexible and can be applied to temporary dwellings.

Conclusion

189. Subject to the above MMs the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Development in the Countryside and the Separation of settlements.

Issue 9 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Design, Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability?

Design

190. Policy LP15 outlines the Council's strategic approach to high quality design, whilst Policy LP42 set out the framework for dealing with the potential impacts of development on design and amenity. **MM26** is necessary for Part 2 of Policy LP15 and its supporting text to be justified and effective in terms of masterplans

and design codes required with larger development proposals in the Borough. **MM53** is necessary for Policy LP42 and its supporting text to be justified, effective and consistent with national policy in terms of supporting the important contribution of trees within the streetscene and to remove the paragraph on monitoring due to changes in the Plan's monitoring framework.

191. Policy LP43 deals with tall buildings whilst Appendix 5 sets out the tall building viewpoints in the Borough. **MM54** is necessary for Policy LP15 and its supporting text to be justified and effective in terms of important views and key areas identified, well designed tall landmark buildings, parking and ensuring all proposals for tall buildings are accompanied by a high-quality contextual analysis to ensure they are sympathetic to the local character.
192. Policy LP44 sets out the Council's approach to considering applications for shop fronts and advertisement. **MM55** is necessary to ensure that Part 1 of the policy is effectively worded in terms of taking into account the cumulative impacts of advertisements to reflect national policy.

Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

193. Policy LP49 outlines the Council's approach for sustainable construction required to meet the climate change objectives and meet a high standard of environmental sustainability whilst Policy LP50 sets out the framework for assessing the potential impacts of renewable energy and low carbon energy proposals.
194. Whilst there is some flexibility in relation to higher energy efficiency standards being permitted beyond the Building Regulations in certain circumstances through the plan making process, a requirement for net zero carbon for regulated emissions and a minimum 35% improvement in regulated emissions for all new major residential development, where it is viable, that are over and above those set out in National Building Regulations goes well beyond this requirement. There are no local circumstances in Bracknell Forest to warrant this. **MM60** is therefore necessary for Criterion 1i of Policy LP49 and paragraph 19.4 to be justified and consistent with national policy by making it clear that these standards will be encouraged rather than required in line with this policy. This approach would be consistent with the Government's Written Ministerial Statement on energy efficiency standards published on 13 December 2023.
195. Criterion 1ii of Policy LP49 should be deleted in light of the latest changes to Part L of the Building Regulations and criterion 1iii dealing with water efficiency standards should be amended to remove reference to any updated standard set by a review of Part G of the Building Regulations, which is not justified. Criterion 1iv of Policy LP49 and the supporting text should be amended to cover both non-C3 development as well as non-residential development for effectiveness. In addition, amendments are necessary to the supporting text of Policy LP49 to

provide further clarity on how the policy will be applied to all new dwellings and to clearly define what constitutes a major development proposal. **MM60** addresses these points in the interests of effectiveness and is consistent with national policy.

196. Consequential amendments are necessary to the supporting text of Policy LP50 to make it clear that, where renewable and low carbon schemes are encouraged in line with Policy LP49, as modified, they will be assessed against Policy LP50. **MM61** addresses this point in the interests of effectiveness.
197. Policy LP18 outlines the Council's strategic approach to flood risk whilst Policy LP51 sets out the framework to ensure the effective use of sustainable drainage systems as part of development proposals. **MM29** is necessary for Part 3i of Policy LP18 and its supporting text to be justified and consistent with national policy in terms of dealing with the cumulative impact of development in areas identified at risk of flooding. **MM62** is necessary for Policy LP51 to be justified, effective and consistent with national policy by, firstly, more clearly defining what constitutes a major development proposal and secondly, removing the references to supporting documents in the policy that have not been the subject of examination and adding additional supporting text to Policy LP51 recognising the role and objectives of the Bracknell Forest Local Flood Risk Management Strategy which proposals should have regard to, as a material consideration.
198. Policy LP52 seeks to minimise and reduce pollution and hazards from development. **MM63** is necessary for Policy LP52 and its supporting text to be justified, effective and consistent with national policy, in line with the SoCG with the Environment Agency [EXAM55], in terms of seeking improvements, including opportunities for nature-based solutions to reduce the adverse impacts of development, where possible. Consequential amendments are necessary in the supporting text to provide further clarity on how the policy will be applied. **MM63** addresses this point in the interests of effectiveness.
199. Finally, in order to provide an overall strategic framework, a new policy outlining the Council's strategic approach on climate change is required in accordance with paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Framework. **MM25** address this and is necessary for the Plan to be justified and consistent with national policy.

Conclusion

200. Subject to the MMs set out above, the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Design, Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability.

Issue 10 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to its approach towards the historic and natural environment and healthy and safe communities?

Historic Environment

201. The Framework requires plans to set a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment and paragraph 20 sets out that this is a strategic matter. Therefore, Policy LP45 requires to be identified as such. Moreover, for the policies of the Plan to be consistent with the Framework, the wording should be amended to align with the conservation of, rather than the protection of, the historic environment. Similarly, changes are required to the reasoned justification to be consistent with paragraphs 195, 199 and 200 of the Framework and to ensure that the Plan accurately represents the number of assets within the Borough. Therefore, **MM56** is necessary.
202. We have come to the judgement that three small housing sites (BIN10b: Land opposite Popes Manor, Murrell Hill Lane; SAND9 and SAND10: Land adjacent Lych Gate Close and Land adjacent to Swallow Cottage, Lower Church Road, Sandhurst) currently make a positive contribution to the significance of the nearby heritage assets which the Framework states are irreplaceable resources. These are the Grade II listed Pope's Manor with other associated Grade II buildings, and the Grade II* Church of St Michael respectively. We consider, notwithstanding the evidence provided both from the Council and site promoters (LP/EV/7b & d, and EXAM 9), the discussion at the hearings and further representations, that development in the setting of the nearby heritage assets would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the heritage assets. We consider that this harm should be avoided by not allocating the sites in the first instance. This would be consistent with the environmental objective of the Framework to protect the historic environment. As such, given that great weight should be given to the assets' conservation, and the important contribution that the respective land makes to their historic setting and their significance, we conclude that **MM9** is required to delete the site allocations from the Plan to be justified and consistent with national policy. Moreover, we note that the three sites individually and cumulatively would make a small contribution to the housing supply which we have concluded would adequately meet the housing requirement for Bracknell Forest without them.

Natural Environment

203. Green infrastructure should play a multi-functional role. As worded, Policy LP16 does not make this sufficiently clear. In addition, to ensure that green infrastructure functions appropriately, Policy LP16 should be amended through **MM27** to ensure that fragmentation is addressed and that culverting of watercourses is avoided to ensure that the policy is effective.

204. Given the habitat sensitivity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA it is important that Policy LP17 Thames Basin Heaths SPA is effective both in setting out the threshold of when air quality assessments are required as advised by Natural England, and how large sites, which are subdivided, secure appropriate SANG. As such **MM28** is required. Similarly, **MM58** is required to Policy LP47 Designated Nature Conservation and Geological Sites with reference to air quality.
205. Prior to the Environment Act 2021 becoming live in relation to biodiversity net gain, Policy LP46 Biodiversity requires modifying to ensure that the policy is precise and accurate and explicit that once the regulations come into force, that these will supersede the biodiversity net gain elements of Policy LP46. Moreover, it needs to be amended to ensure that species protection is not conflated with the biodiversity gain. As such, **MM57** is required.
206. Policy LP48 relates to the protection of trees and hedgerows. As submitted, the policy is overly detailed, inflexible and does not reference the importance of native hedgerows. As such, it is not effective and requires **MM59**.
207. Consequential amendments **MM5, MM11, MM15, MM25- MM26, MM39, MM45, MM46, MM47, MM48, MM49, MM50, MM52, MM53, MM56, MM57, MM58, MM59, MM60, MM61, MM62, MM63** and **MM64** are required to be made throughout the Plan to make explicit the requirement to conserve both natural and heritage assets as set out in the Framework.

Community Facilities

208. Policy LP32 sets out the criteria by which community facilities and services will be protected. However, as worded the policy requires amending to ensure that it is consistent with paragraph 93 of the Framework and is effective with reference to valued facilities. As such, **MM44** is required.

Conclusion

209. Subject to the above MMs the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to its approach towards the historic and natural environment and healthy and safe communities.

Issue 11 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Transport?

Transport impacts and Sustainable Transport

210. Policy LP14 outlines the Council's strategic approach to transport whilst Policies LP54, LP55 and LP56 set out the framework for promoting sustainable transport

options and dealing with the potential impacts of development on the transport networks. Transport assessment work has been prepared in order to assess the potential impact of the Plan's proposals on the local and strategic road network including the Bracknell Forest Strategic Transport Modelling work [LP/Ev/4p] that have been agreed with National Highways. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2020 [LP/Ev/4I] identifies strategic transport priorities and the specific infrastructure requirements for the larger strategic sites. Some site-specific infrastructure requirements will be identified through a transport assessment at the point of a planning application.

211. In order to provide an overall strategic transport policy framework in the Plan, Policy LP55 needs to be recognised as a strategic policy in accordance with paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Framework and the detailed wording needs to be modified. **MM24** and **MM66** address this and are necessary for the Plan to be justified and consistent with national policy in clearly defining the Council's strategic approach for transport and dealing with the potential impacts of development on the transport networks. **MM24** is required for criterion 1vii of Policy LP14 to be justified and effective in terms of assessing the unacceptable impacts of development proposals on highway safety.
212. **MM65** is necessary for paragraphs 20.2, 20.3 and 20.6 to be justified and consistent with national policy by making it clear when a transport assessment will be required with a major development scheme under Policy LP54 and the circumstances in which transport assessments should be supported by transport modelling.

Parking

213. Policy LP57 sets out the Council's approach to car parking, cycle parking and electric vehicle charging facilities for new development. **MM68** is necessary for Policy LP57 to be justified and effective by removing the reference to the Council's parking standards in the policy, which is not an examined development plan document and adding additional explanatory text to refer to this supporting document under Policy LP57 which proposals should have regard to, as a material consideration. Additional amendments are necessary in the supporting text to provide further clarity on what other factors the Council will have regard to when considering parking associated with new development proposals and how the policy will be applied to electric vehicle charging facilities in light of the new building regulations requirements for electric vehicle charging facilities to be provided with new development. **MM68** addresses this point in the interests of effectiveness.

Conclusion

214. Subject to the MMs set out above, the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to transport.

Issue 12 – Whether the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to Infrastructure Provision, Implementation, Monitoring and Viability?

Infrastructure

215. The Council has worked closely with a range of other organisations to identify key infrastructure requirements and a programme for delivery, and these are set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2020 (IDP) [LP/Ev/4I]. There is a clear commitment to keep this under review. The IDP sets out clearly the specific infrastructure requirements for the larger strategic and individual site allocations. The Council has also been active in pursuing funding opportunities to bring forward improvements to infrastructure such as for strategic highway and junction improvements and flood alleviation schemes.
216. **MM23** is necessary to Policy LP13 and its supporting text, in line with the SoCG with the Environment Agency [EXAM55], to ensure that development proposals are supported by the timely provision of an appropriate level of strategic and local infrastructure, where required, including water supply and treatment and flood defence, in consultation with the relevant infrastructure and utility providers. Additional amendments are necessary to the criteria and how the criteria in the policy will be applied and to remove the reference to the IDP, which is not an examined development plan document. **MM23** addresses these points in the interests of effectiveness.

Implementation

217. The Plan takes a pragmatic and realistic approach to developer contributions given the issues in terms of viability. Policy LP13 gives sufficient flexibility to allow for viability to be taken into account.
218. Policies LP16, LP32, LP33 and LP34 set out an appropriate approach to green infrastructure as well as social, sports, open space, recreation and community infrastructure and facilities.
219. **MM72** and **MM73** are required to ensure the Plan is effective and consistent with national policy, through updating the list of existing development plan policies to be replaced by the Plan (Appendix 6) and the Glossary (Appendix 7), respectively.

Monitoring

220. **MM74**, which would provide a single comprehensive Local Plan Monitoring Framework in an appendix to replace the section on 'Delivery and Monitoring' at the end of each policy, is necessary to ensure that there would be clear and

effective mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Plan. Consequential changes are required to the Plan as a result of the removal of the section on 'Delivery and Monitoring'. **MM4, MM5, MM7, MM9, MM10, MM11, MM13, MM14, MM15, MM16, MM17, MM20, MM21, MM22, MM23, MM24, MM26, MM27, MM28, MM29, MM32, MM33, MM34, MM35, MM36, MM37, MM38, MM39, MM40, MM41, MM42, MM43, MM44, MM45, MM46, MM47, MM48, MM49, MM51, MM52, MM53, MM54, MM55, MM56, MM57, MM58, MM59, MM60, MM61, MM62, MM63, MM64, MM65, MM66, MM67 and MM68** address these points in the interests of effectiveness.

Viability

221. At the time of submission of the Plan, the original 2020 version of the Viability Testing Report was accompanied by two further updates [LP/Ev/4n, LP/EV/4n-a and LP/Ev/4t]. These broadly demonstrate that the policies of the Plan would not put the delivery of the Plan at risk. We note that the viability assessment suggests that the delivery of affordable housing on the town centre sites would be challenging. However, two of these have planning permission and are therefore commitments. Moreover, the Council's 2020 evidence demonstrates that with flexibility in affordable housing tenure that most of the sites could be viable.
222. However, Policy LP9 on Affordable Housing requires a main modification to recognise the challenges and a pragmatic approach to delivery of affordable housing consistent with meeting local needs through flexibility in tenure, and the acceptance that there may exceptionally be sites where development may not be able to fully provide for policy compliant housing. Similarly, at the hearing the Council was clear that where it owned town centre sites that it may accept lower land receipts to enable policy compliant affordable housing to come forward and this is reflected in the revised wording in the reasoned justification to Policy LP9 (**MM16**).
223. The viability of stand-alone specialist older person's housing can be constrained due to increased costs. Therefore, amendments to Policy LP9 are also required to reflect this.
224. We are content with the appraisal inputs within the Council's viability studies [EXAM2B] and that many of the policy inputs required by the Plan are not exceptional and are therefore reflected in the BCIS costs. Moreover, an allowance for SANG and SAMM has been made on a site-by-site basis. In addition, following our **MM60** which reduced the requirements for new build residential development to be net zero carbon, there will be further headroom within developer costs. We are also aware that developer profits have been set at a generous level of 20% for market housing and 18% for C2 extra care housing which again provides a cushion. Similarly commercial rates have been set at 15% and affordable housing at 6%.

225. Generally, the inputs used in the viability assessments are reasonable, and the Plan subject to modification will be viable and consistent with paragraph 34 of the Framework and paragraphs 001-006 and 028 of the PPG.

Conclusion

226. Subject to the MMs set out above, the Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to infrastructure provision, implementation, monitoring and viability.

Overall Conclusion and Recommendation

227. The Plan has a number of deficiencies in respect of soundness for the reasons set out above, which mean that we recommend non-adoption of it as submitted, in accordance with Section 20(7A) of the 2004 Act. These deficiencies have been explained in the main issues set out above.

228. The Council has requested that we recommend MMs to make the Plan sound and legally compliant and capable of adoption. We conclude that the duty to cooperate has been met and that with the recommended main modifications set out in the Appendix to this report, the Bracknell Forest Local Plan satisfies the requirements referred to in Section 20(5)(a) of the 2004 Act and is sound.

Louise Nurser and David Troy

Inspectors

This report is accompanied by an Appendix containing the Main Modifications.