



## **‘Early reviews’ and Local Plans**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this note is to highlight the circumstances where plans have been found sound subject to an early review. It should help you understand whether these circumstances can be applied to your case, if you thought that seeking a soundness finding, with a commitment to an early review, might be the right thing to do.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) acknowledges the challenge of planning for 15 years when there are uncertainties about the end of that time period. It sets out that Local Plans may be found sound conditional upon a review in whole or part within five years of the date of adoption ([reference 12-008-20140306](#)). The PPG also explains how authorities can consider following approaches established in Local Plan examinations in other areas provided they are both relevant and appropriate.

In this note we’ve highlighted where a commitment to an early Local Plan review has been agreed by the Planning Inspectorate as a way of addressing some uncertainty towards the end of the plan-period or shortcomings in plans (which are not critical to the plan’s soundness or legal compliance as a whole). This latter point is particularly important; a commitment to review cannot be used to resolve matters critical to the plan’s strategy or legal compliance. It is not a panacea for addressing the difficult issues.

Since the introduction of the NPPF approximately one third of plans found sound have explicitly been on the basis that an early review should follow. Some of these decisions are summarised below; the full reasoning is set out in the relevant hyperlinked inspector’s report. Some of the circumstances are:

- Where an authority might need to plan for more housing depending on the outcome of wider SHMAs from nearby areas (Lichfield and North Warwickshire)
- Where further analysis of employment provision demonstrates the need for more analysis
- Where areas are considering a shared green belt review, to meet unmet need in one of an HMA group of authorities (when extent of shortfall is known) (Cherwell)

## Local Plan cases

*North Warwickshire Borough Council's Local Plan ([inspector's report](#))* 24 September 2014

The plan was found sound subject to an early review should a housing shortfall subsequently be identified in neighbouring authorities (particularly Tamworth and Birmingham). An early review was also found to be a suitable way to account for future changes to employment provision that would emerge from a review of employment provision underway during examination.

*Lichfield District Council's Local Plan ([inspector's report](#))* 16 January 2015.

Similar to North Warwickshire above, this finding was conditional on the Council undertaking an early review if further housing provision is found to be needed in the wider housing market area to address unmet needs of Birmingham or Tamworth councils.

*Cherwell District Council's Local Plan ([inspector's report](#))* 9 June 2014

The plan was found sound on subject to a commitment by the Council, together with other relevant councils, to undertake a joint review of the boundaries of the Oxford Green Belt, once the specific level of need that Oxford City Council cannot meet within its own administrative boundaries is identified.

*Dacorum Borough Council's Local Plan ([inspector's report](#))* 9 July 2013

The plan was found sound subject to the commitment to undertake a partial review to be adopted in 2017/2018, in part as the inspector considered there was a real value in having an up-to-date plan in place. Importantly, Dacorum had done work on understanding what the new level of objectively assessed need was. They could also demonstrate they were able to meet that new figure for 10 years. This review will seek to identify the full objectively assessed needs for housing for a 15 year horizon, assessing whether or not those needs can be met in respect of cross-boundary constraints including the Green Belt (in conjunction with neighbouring local planning authority areas).

*Winchester City Council's Local Plan ([inspector's report](#))* 11 February 2013

Winchester's Local Plan (prepared jointly with, and covering part of, the South Downs National Park Authority) was found sound with a commitment to an early review of requirements for retail and employment land, if and when local economic circumstances improve.