

## January 2024 Houghton Regis Neighbourhood Plan Update

I write this update with some really good news: We have passed the next major milestone!

Following on from October's update, Houghton Regis Town Council's Draft Neighbourhood Plan has been the subject of an independent examination.

Near the end of the examination the Examiner provided us with a 'fact check' Report. The purpose of this pre issue stage 'fact check' Report was to identify any issues of fact that were incorrect, such as place names or figures that were referenced. Whilst there is no legal or policy provision for a 'fact check' report stage, it has nonetheless become commonplace for examiners to provide a pre-issue version of the report (mirroring the legal requirement regarding the final report), so that purely factual errors can be picked up.

Houghton Regis Town Council and Central Bedfordshire Council responded to the examiner, in regard to these errors raised, on the 23rd January 2024.

The Examiner, Mr Derek Stebbing, concluded his examination on the plan and provided his final report on the 24th January 2024. The conclusion from the Examiner is as follows:

I have made recommendations to modify certain policies and other matters to ensure that the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements. I recommend that the Plan, once modified, proceeds to referendum.

It is clear that the Houghton Regis Neighbourhood Plan 2022-2035 is the product of much hard work undertaken since 2016 by the Town Council and the many individuals and stakeholders who have contributed to the preparation and development of the Plan. In my assessment, the Plan reflects the land use aspirations and objectives of the Houghton Regis community for the future planning of their area up to 2035. The output is a Plan which should help guide the area's development over that period, making a positive contribution to informing decision-making on planning applications by Central Bedfordshire Council.

So what happens now?

Well, the move to referendum stage is the responsibility of the local planning authority (Central Bedfordshire Council). They have now received both the Examiner's Report and a new copy of the Neighbourhood Plan that includes the changes required by the examiner. They will now publish this version of the plan on their website along with details of when the referendum is likely to happen.

If more than 50% of those voting in the referendum vote 'yes', then the neighbourhood plan becomes part of the statutory development plan for the area.

We are nearly at the end of what has been a very long journey. Curve balls have been thrown, Covid being just one. The examiner was certainly correct in that it has been a long, hard process that has required continued efforts by some very dedicated people. Over the last seven-plus years many members of the Houghton Regis Town Council and a large number of local residents have freely given hours of their time to ensure that, at last, the people of Houghton Regis have a real say in what can and, more importantly, cannot, happen in our town. My thanks to all who have helped along the way: whether you feel that you made a big contribution or a small one, the fact is we would not be where we are without each one of you.

David Gibbons  
Chair, Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.  
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