

Norton St Philip Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2029

Introductory Notes

Prepared by

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1. I am delighted to have been appointed as the examiner to the latest version of the Norton St Philip Neighbourhood Plan and I look forward to working with Somerset Council's officers and Norton St Philip Parish Council and its neighbourhood plan team on this examination.
2. My first task, after reading the documentation, is to make a visit to the parish, which will be unaccompanied. I propose to make that visit at the end of the week commencing 10th February 2025.
3. Upon my return from the site visits, I will prepare what is known as the Initial Comments document. In most cases, I will be able to confirm at that stage, whether I will need to call a public hearing. In relatively few cases, I do have to delay that decision until I have received the responses to my questions raised in this Initial Comments document. Most examinations proceed based on the written material only. I normally allow each party three weeks to respond to my questions.
4. My default position is always to ask that any documents issued, whether prepared by myself as examiner or as a response, should be placed on the relevant neighbourhood plan website. This will allow interested parties and the public to be able to follow the progress of the examination. There may be some e-mail exchanges, which I initiate, where I am merely seeking to clarify matters or make logistical arrangements, which are not necessary to be placed in the public domain.
5. It is important that any examination proceeds in an open, transparent and even-handed way. My normal practise is to copy in both the local planning authority and the parish council into any correspondence. Similarly, I will ask, that in responding to me, each party copies in the other, so that everyone knows what has been submitted. The only areas where I will not be copying the parish council, relates to the contractual matters regarding my appointment which will be directly between myself and the District Council.
6. The District Council has sent me electronic copies of the Regulation 16 consultation responses. Please be assured that I intend to offer the parish council the opportunity to comment on these Regulation 16 submissions, when I issue my Initial Comments document
7. Just before Christmas, the Government released an updated version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraph 239 addresses implementation, confirming that only neighbourhood plans submitted after 12th March 2025 will be subject to the policies outlined in the new NPPF. I can confirm that I will be evaluating this neighbourhood plan based on the previous version of the Framework.
8. In the unlikely event, that I do need to call for a public hearing, I will contact Jo Milling at Somerset Council by telephone and ask her to liaise with the parish clerk, to find a suitable date and venue, hopefully in the parish. If a hearing is required, I will set out the arrangements and the matters to be discussed in a Notice of Public Hearing document.

9. Once I will receive responses to the Initial Comments, I will proceed to prepare my report, but if I find that I need to seek further clarification or an elaboration on specific responses, I will set that out in an Additional Comments note.
10. Upon completion of my draft report, I will send it to both the parish council and the district council for fact checking. A fact check is not an opportunity for either party to challenge my recommendations or conclusions but to point out any factual errors. It also helps to identify “typos”. I normally allow a week for fact checking and I will then issue my final report which is sent to both parties although it is formally submitted to Somerset Council as local planning authority.

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Independent Examiner to the Norton St Philip Neighbourhood Plan