

Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions for Examination

Matter 9: General (Non-site) Policies

Issue 9b: Broadband (Policy SA33)

Q90. Is the term 'high speed and reliable' broadband connection a specific enough basis on which to determine planning applications? What criteria would be used to determine whether broadband is 'high speed and reliable' for individual development proposals?

The HBF does not wish to comment on this question at this time.

Q91. How would the delivery of this policy be achieved? Is the delivery of a broadband connection within the control of developers?

The HBF generally consider that digital infrastructure is an important part of integrated development within an area. However, the inclusion of digital infrastructure such as high-speed broadband and fibre is not within the direct control of the development industry, and as such it is considered that this policy could create deliverability issues for development and developers. Service providers are the only ones who can confirm access to infrastructure.

The HBF consider that in seeking to provide broadband the Council should work proactively with telecommunications providers to extend provision and not rely on the development industry to provide for such infrastructure. The Council should also note that Part R of the Building Regulations clearly sets the appropriate standards for high speed electronic communication networks, that are within the control of the housebuilder.

Q92. Is the wording of the policy suitably flexible to allow for circumstances where this would be unviable or not possible?

There is some flexibility within the policy, which the HBF supports. However, it is considered that further flexibility could be beneficial to allow for consideration of the viability of the development and the potential constraints to delivery of broadband. Whilst, paragraph 112 of the NPPF (2019) establishes that local planning authorities should seek support the expansion of electronic communications networks it does not seek to prevent development that does not have access to such networks. The house building industry is fully aware of the benefits of having their homes connected to super-fast broadband and what their customers will demand.

Q93. Is the suggested Main Modification MM27 justified? Is this necessary in the interests of soundness?

The HBF do not consider that MM27 is justified or in the interest of soundness, it continues to place the onus on the development industry rather than the broadband service operators and instead creates more work.