Independent Examination of the Westcott Neighbourhood Development Plan (September 2026)

Policy WNDP7 (Community Assets)

Regarding the Riverbank Surgery, Westcott

Note from Examiner – Derek Stebbing BA (Hons.), Dip. EP, MRTPI

Introduction

1. I have been appointed by Mole Valley District Council (the Local Planning Authority) to conduct the independent single-issue examination of Policy WNDP7 (Community Assets) of the Submission Draft of the Westcott Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Plan), and specifically whether the Riverbank Surgery at Westcott should be identified within this Policy as a Community Asset and therefore safeguarded for its existing use.

2. This single-issue examination follows the previous examination of the Plan, and the publication of the Examiner's report on 14 May 2026, in which he recommended that the Riverbank Surgery be removed from the list of Community Assets identified in Policy WNDP7.

3. The Local Planning Authority considered that a letter received from the Dorking Medical Practice on 16 May 2026 constituted new and relevant information, and decided to undertake a non-statutory Post-Examination Focused Consultation on this issue between 9 June and 21 July 2026 in order to assist its decision-making regarding the Plan, and specifically concerning Policy WNDP7.

4. The focused consultation sought views on the following question:

   "Should the Westcott Neighbourhood Development Plan safeguard the Riverbank Surgery for its existing use under Policy WNDP7 (Community Assets)?"

5. This hearing and my subsequent report will deal only with the planning merits of the proposal to safeguard the Riverbank Surgery. My role is to assess whether the proposal satisfies the relevant land-use planning considerations to qualify for safeguarding as a community asset in Policy WDNP7, having taken into account the Basic Conditions and other legal compliance requirements, and the evidence submitted which includes the responses to the focused public consultation and the matters raised at this hearing.

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6. 76 responses were received to the consultation, including two late responses.

7. I have seen and studied all of the consultation responses.

8. The normal procedure for Neighbourhood Plan Examinations is that they are conducted by written representations with any site visits being unaccompanied. A public hearing should only be held when the Examiner considers that a key issue should be examined in more depth or to ensure that a person has a fair chance to put a case. It is up to the Examiner to decide who is invited to speak.

9. In this respect, following my review of the representations that were made during the Focused Consultation, I consider that a public hearing will be necessary to enable me to examine a number of matters in greater depth.

Purpose of this Note

10. The purpose of this Note is to now state my decision that a Hearing will be held for the purpose of receiving oral representations, and to set out the arrangements for the Hearing.

11. In the interests of transparency, this Note and any responses to it will be made publicly available so that all persons interested can follow the process.

Hearing

12. I have determined that a Hearing is necessary to ensure adequate examination of a number of matters relating to the responses that were made to the Focused Consultation. These are set out in the formal Agenda for the Hearing which is attached as Annex 1 to this Note.

13. The Hearing, which is a public hearing, will take place on:

    Wednesday, 23rd September 2026 between 2.00 pm and 5.00 pm
    at:
    The Council Chamber
    Mole Valley District Council Offices
    Pippbrook House
    Reigate Road
    Dorking
    Surrey RH4 1SJ.

14. Invitations will shortly be extended by the Local Planning Authority to the Representors whom I wish to hear from as listed in the Annex 2 to this Note. Members of the public can also attend and will, with my agreement, be able to speak.

15. Annex 3 to this note contains guidance for the conduct of the Hearing.

Derek Stebbing
Independent Examiner
8 September 2026