

The key moment is when a local plan that does not have any substantial unresolved objections to it is submitted to the planning inspector for examination. At that point, the plan's weight can start to be substantial in decisions on particularly large applications. I know that my hon. Friend will be quick to work out whether that provision might apply to his local plan, and if so how. Nevertheless, that is what the guidance says: it is at the point of submission to the planning inspector for examination that a plan can start having significant weight, if there are no substantial unresolved objections to it.

It is probably worth mentioning that prematurity also applies to neighbourhood plans. I was very pleased to hear from my hon. Friend that there are a number of communities in his constituency that are undertaking neighbourhood planning. The provision on neighbourhood plans is similar to that on local plans. When a neighbourhood plan has been submitted to a local authority for it to conduct what is called the local authority publicity period, which is a period of formal consultation that it undertakes before an examination, that is the point at which a neighbourhood plan—even in draft—can start to have significant weight in decisions.

My hon. Friend's second question was about previous plans. Although I cannot comment on the particulars of Stroud's previous plans, until they are replaced by another plan, previous plans and their policies are generally a material consideration in any decision. It is common sense, however, that the older those plans become the more likely it is that the policies and provisions within them become out of date and therefore are likely to have less impact and weight in decisions. Plans do, in a sense, have a half-life, and it is important eventually to update them, review them or replace them with an entirely new plan if local policies and plans are to have a leading role in decisions on applications in local areas.

My hon. Friend's third question related to an important point about the status in the local plan, in particular the five-year land supply, of sites that already have planning permission, but which have not yet been implemented and where buildings have not yet been constructed. In order that the policy position is crystal clear, I will read what the national planning policy framework states:

“Sites with planning permission should be considered deliverable until permission expires, unless there is clear evidence that schemes will not be implemented within five years, for example they will not be viable, there is no longer a demand for the type of units or sites have long term phasing plans.”

I hope that that makes it clear that unless there is good reason to believe that a site is no longer viable, or there is no longer demand for the type of unit that it would provide, or its plan for construction stretches beyond the five-year