



Planning Inspectorate

Virtual Hearings

Note for Participants from the Inspector

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This note is to be read in conjunction with the Inspector's Guidance Notes which set out the general parameters for the examination. This note provides specific advice on participating at the virtual hearings.
- 1.2 Virtual hearing sessions will take place on Microsoft Teams. Some people will be more familiar with this conference-call technology than others, but I want everyone to be assured that the hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner and I will ensure that everyone who is participating can be heard. Please read this note carefully as it sets out the procedures and rules for how the virtual hearings will be conducted. The Programme Officer will run an information session on Microsoft Teams prior to the virtual hearings taking place. Details of these sessions will be sent out by the Programme Officer to all those taking part in the virtual hearing sessions.

2. Watching a Hearing

- 2.1 The sessions will be live-streamed. A link to the live stream will be available on the Council's Local Plan examination web page. Observers will not be able to participate in the Hearings.

3. How a Hearing will Work for Invited Participants

- 3.1 To join the live video conference via Teams, you will need to click on the link provided in the invitation sent to the email address you have already provided to the examination.
- 3.2 If you are intending to join using a PC, Apple Mac, iPhone or Android, you should download and install the Microsoft Teams application. If this is not possible, you can join using a Chrome browser on your desk top computer (not on your mobile phone). Some people with older devices or who use corporate devices which prevent downloads being installed could experience problems. In this case, please contact your corporate systems administrator.
- 3.3 You will be responsible for making sure your equipment is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing via Teams. If you think you may need support, either with joining or taking part in the hearings, please contact the Programme Officer as soon as possible to register for the support session.

- 3.4 If you experience technical difficulties on the day of a hearing that you cannot resolve you may try, as a last resort, contacting the Programme Officer. However, please note that the Programme Officer may not be immediately available on the day and then only be able to offer very limited support.
- 3.5 If you are unable to join, or lose connection during a hearing, please re-join using the link provided in your calendar invitation. The hearing will continue in your absence. As a backup you can re-join by telephone, using the number in the invitation.
- 3.6 The hearing sessions will not be paused to allow technical or connection difficulties experienced by individuals to be resolved, unless they are clearly attributable to the Council's technology or other participants are having the same issues. Persistent technical problems (including a drop in personal wi-fi signal) can disrupt the sessions and may lead to participants being asked to cease taking part until they are able to resolve the problem.

Microsoft Teams Controls

- 3.7 The principal controls you will need to use during a hearing session are:
- Camera on/off
 - Microphone on/off
 - The raised hand [] – to indicate that you wish to speak; and
 - The red telephone to disconnect at the end of the hearing session or at the point you wish to leave the discussion.
- 3.8 Only participants of the meeting are able to use these functions.

4. The Procedure for Virtual Hearings

- 4.1 The aim is to make the virtual hearings as similar as possible to physical hearings in the way they run and the way you participate. Please bear in mind that the purpose of the hearings is for me, as the Inspector, to gain the information I need to examine the plan's soundness.
- 4.2 I will lead the hearings, introduce each topic and ask specific questions about the topic based on an agenda that has been previously circulated. A typical agenda item will start with questions I have for the Council before asking other participants to make any points of relevance to the issue under discussion.
- 4.3 When not speaking, all participants other than myself and the Council will be asked to keep their cameras turned off. If during an agenda item you wish to comment, please use the raise hand function to indicate your wish to speak. I will bring you in at an appropriate point. When it is your turn to speak, please turn on your camera and microphone and begin to speak. When you have spoken please turn your camera and microphone off.

- 4.4 I will give everyone who has raised their hand an opportunity to have their say. Although all participants will be able to see and hear each other only one participant may speak at a time.
- 4.5 As with physical hearings, please make your contributions brief and focused and relevant to the point on the agenda. You will not need to repeat your full case, or give any formal presentation, as I will have read all your representations. I may ask questions about aspects of your verbal or written submissions. The format will be a structured discussion, there will not be any cross examination, and responses should always be directed to me. I will invite participants to speak in turn, so please be patient. If you have already spoken on a particular topic but believe that you can help further on the subject, please use the 'raise hand' function and I will bring you back into the discussion.
- 4.6 I will curtail the repetition of points already made. It is also not necessary to register that you either agree or disagree with what another participant has said. The Council will have a final right of reply on all comments made.
- 4.7 Where a session is scheduled to last the whole day, we will usually take at least 3 breaks (mid-morning, lunch and mid-afternoon). During breaks participants should not log out but should ensure cameras and microphones are turned off. At the end of each hearing session, all participants should log out.

5. Documents, Evidence and Presentation

- 5.1 The examination website contains all the relevant examination documents. The hearings will not use the document sharing facility available on Teams. Nor should you hold any document in front of your camera.
- 5.2 New documents should only be submitted during the hearings at my invitation. If I request a new document from any party, for example a statement of common ground, it should be emailed direct to the Programme Officer so that she can pass it to me and put it on the examination website.

6. Conduct

- 6.1 All participants and their views shall be treated with fairness and consideration. Participants must not interrupt each other, and contributions should be made respectfully.
- 6.2 To make the best use of the hearing time and to avoid disruption, the virtual hearings will start strictly at the time indicated on the agenda.
- 6.3 You will receive an invitation from the Programme Officer to the relevant session or sessions. Please join the hearing on Teams 20-30 minutes before the time indicated on the agenda and you will be held in a waiting lobby until you are admitted into the hearing by the Programme Officer.

- 6.4 Please make appropriate arrangements to ensure that your working environment is quiet, and that the hearing (and your ability to concentrate on it) is not disrupted by external noise and unnecessary distractions. Please ensure mobile phones are switched off or set to silent.
- 6.5 You must ensure that no one else appears in your camera unless it has otherwise been agreed and you should clear your background of any personal information.
- 6.6 When adjournments are announced, please make a note of the resumption time and be back at your screen before that time.
- 6.7 The Microsoft Teams 'chat' and 'comment' facilities must not be used under any circumstances. Prior to the event you should consider whether you are likely to need to confer with another person (agent, legal representative etc) and make the necessary arrangements e.g. SMS, Email, WhatsApp etc.

7. Privacy

- 7.1 Please do not make your own recording of the hearings. You must ensure that no-one else appears on your camera unless it has been otherwise agreed, and you should clear your background of personal information. If you prefer, Microsoft Teams allows you to blur your background.
- 7.2 You must not share any personal information during a hearing session, either yours, or anyone else's.

K Ford

INSPECTOR