



Planning Inspectorate

Virtual Hearings

Note for Participants from the Inspectors

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 we want everyone to be assured that the hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner and we 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.

3. How a Hearing will Work for Invited Participants


Joining a Hearing as a Participant

- 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). If for technical reasons you are unable to join via the link provided, please contact the Programme Officer.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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 experience electronic interference during the session, try moving



your mobile phone away from your computer. If you experience other connectivity issues, try switching off some other devices which share your Wi-Fi, or move closer to the router.

- 3.5 If you are unable to join, or lose connection during the hearing, please re-join using the link provided in your calendar invitation. The hearing may continue in your absence. As a backup you can re-join by telephone, using the number in the invitation. Transferring from Wi-Fi to mobile data or making a Wi-Fi hotspot using a mobile phone are other contingencies that you may wish to use.

Microsoft Teams Controls

- 3.6 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.

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 us, as the Inspectors, to gain the information we need to examine the plan's soundness.
- 4.2 We will take appearances in the usual way. We will lead the hearings, introduce each topic and ask specific questions about the topic based on an agenda that has been previously circulated.
- 4.3 If you wish to respond to a question, please use the 'raise hand' facility [] in Teams to indicate your desire to speak. We 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. When you are invited to speak, please unmute your microphone.
- 4.4 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 we will have read all your representations. We 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 us. We 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' [] facility in Teams and we will bring you back into the discussion.

- 4.5 We 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. We will ask the Council for their comments on points raised.
- 4.6 At mid-session breaks, we will remind participants not to log out but ensure they turn their cameras and microphones off. At the end of each hearing session, we will ask all participants to log out.

5. Documents, Evidence and Presentation

- 5.1 The examination website contains all the relevant examination documents. They are available to all participants, stakeholders and the public. 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 our invitation. If we 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 us and put it on the examination website.

6. Conduct

- 6.1 All participants, their views and evidence 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. When you join the hearing session, please make sure your microphone is muted. Please ensure that your camera is positioned to provide a clear, front-on view of your face and avoid sitting where you are silhouetted in front of a window or light.
- 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 Those who use Teams and Zoom may have grown used to the idea that people can come and go during virtual meetings. However, that does not apply to examination hearings. You must make sure as far as possible that you attend the hearing you are invited to from start to finish. Leaving midway may mean you miss the opportunity to speak, hear other people's contributions, and listen to our announcements. If you need to leave early for any reason, please inform the

Programme Officer as soon as possible. Comfort breaks will be built into the programme.

- 6.6 When adjournments are announced, please make a careful 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 have regard to the privacy notice on the hearing sessions page of the Council's examination website. You can turn your camera off if you do not want your image to be viewed.
- 7.2 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. Please do not use any of the other backgrounds that are available on Teams.
- 7.3 You must not share any personal information during a hearing session, either yours, or anyone else's.

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INSPECTORS