

ID16

Shropshire Council Local Plan Examination

Virtual hearings

Inspectors' note for participants

Introduction

For the reasons set out on the examination website, week 2 of the stage 1 hearings sessions for Shropshire Council Local Plan examination will take place “virtually” by means of Microsoft Teams.

Some people will be more familiar with this technology than others, but we will make allowances for those who are less familiar it. However, we want to emphasise that all our hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner.

Please read this note very carefully, as it sets out the procedures and rules for how the hearings will be conducted.

Joining the hearing as a participant

Participants should join their session using the electronic link in their invitation e-mail from the Programme Officer. Since these hearings are being set up virtually at short notice, the Programme Officer (PO) is going to be extremely busy organising the virtual events so please be patient and only contact her in relation to urgent matters.

When you click on the electronic link, you will be held in a “virtual” lobby as you will need to be admitted to the meeting by the PO. The PO asks for your patience during this time. When logging in to the Teams meeting, participants should check that their name display matches the list of participants on the draft programme. Only those registered to attend will be admitted. If you are having difficulty changing your display name to how it is displayed in the hearing programme, please let the PO know what display name you will be using to ensure entry to the meeting. Your display name will be shown at the meeting, on the live stream and on the recording. On joining the hearing, all cameras and microphones are to be muted.

Watching the hearing

The sessions will be available for non-participants and the public to watch live on the internet. A link will be available on the Shropshire Council

Local Plan examination website. This will enable people to watch the hearings as they would with a physical hearing. It will also allow those in the same organisation or team as their participating colleagues to keep up with proceedings in real time. The hearings will also be recorded and placed on the examination website.

The hearing format

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 to gain the information we need to examine the Plan's soundness.

One of us will lead each hearing, introduce each topic and ask specific questions about the topic. 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 each of those who have raised their hands an opportunity to have their say. Only one participant may speak at a time. When you are invited to speak, you should turn your camera on, unmute your microphone, and state your name and, if any, your organisation. You will not need to repeat your full case in detail, or give any sort of formal presentation, as we will have read all your representations. We may ask questions about aspects of your verbal or written submissions.

When we have heard from you and are about to move on to the next participant, your video camera should be turned off and your microphone should be muted. The only people visible on the screen at any one time should be us, the participant who is giving their contribution, and the relevant representative from the Council for that topic. There will not be any cross examination, participant interruption or open discussion, and responses should always be directed to us.

We will normally invite participants to speak only once on each question, so please be patient until it is your turn, and say what you need to say when you have the opportunity. We may invite further contributions on a topic if we need to gain a better understanding of the evidence, but we will curtail the repetition of points already made.

If you have already spoken on a particular topic, but believe that you can help further on the subject, you can raise your hand again. Please use this facility sparingly and only when you have new, important and relevant evidence which will help us gain the information we need. Raising your hand simply to repeat what you or others have already said, or to register that you do not agree with another participant, is not acceptable.

We will terminate the discussion on any particular topic when we have enough information.

As we move towards the end of each topic or sub-topic, we will ask the Council for their comments on the points raised.

At the end of each hearing, we will end the session and ask all participants to log out.

Documents, evidence and presentation

The examination website contains all the relevant examination documents. These are available to all participants, stakeholders and the public. The hearing will not therefore use the document sharing facility available on Teams. Nor should you hold any document in front of your camera. 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 straight to the Programme Officer so that she can pass it to us and put it on the website.

Conduct

Local Plan examination hearings are a formal event, with appropriate conduct. All participants, their views and their evidence are treated with fairness and consideration, and participants do not interrupt each other. You should respect the important nature of the hearings and make your contribution respectfully.

To make the best use of hearing time and to avoid disruption, the virtual hearings will start strictly at the time indicated on the agenda. You will receive an invitation from the Programme Officer to the relevant session or sessions. You must join the hearing on Teams at least 40 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. Attempting to join the hearing after the time indicated on the agenda will not be acceptable and you may not be admitted.

You should have made 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.

Coffee and comfort breaks will be built into the programme. Please do not leave the meeting during comfort breaks and lunch instead turn off your camera and mute your microphone.

Those who use Teams and Zoom will 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 that you attend the hearing to which you are invited from start to finish. Leaving the screen midway through a session and coming and going are not respectful to the hearing, and you may miss the opportunity to speak, hear other people's contributions, and listen to the Inspector's announcements. When adjournments are announced, please make a careful note of the resumption time and be back at your screen before that time.

Privacy

The hearings will be recorded, as set out above. Please do not make your own recording of the hearings.

You must ensure that no-one else appears on your camera and you should clear your background of personal information. If you prefer, Microsoft Teams allows you to blur your background, but please do not use any of the other backgrounds that are available on Teams. You must not share any personal information during the hearing, either yours, or anyone else's.

Use of Microsoft Teams

Please do familiarise yourself with Microsoft Teams before joining the hearings.

You will be responsible for making sure that all of your kit is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing via Microsoft Teams.

If you experience electronic interference during the session, try moving your mobile phone away from your computer.

If you experience internet connectivity issues, try switching off some other devices which share your wifi, or move closer to the router.

If you are unable to join, or lose connection during the hearing, try again to join using the link provided in your calendar invitation. The hearing may continue in your absence. Transferring from wifi to mobile data, or making a wifi hotspot using a mobile phone are other contingencies you may wish to use.

Louise Crosby and Carole Dillon

INSPECTORS

9 July 2022

