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# **North Hertfordshire District Council**

## **Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031**

### **Guidance note for people participating in the examination**

Inspector: Simon Berkeley BA MA MRTPI

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## Introduction

1. I am Simon Berkeley, the Planning Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to independently examine the soundness of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 ('the Plan'). I have prepared this guidance note. Its purpose is to explain the procedural and administrative matters relating to the examination.
2. The Programme Officer for the examination is **Louise St John Howe**. Her contact details are given on the cover of this note. She is acting as an independent officer for the examination, under my direction. Mrs St John Howe will be responsible for organising the programme of hearings, maintaining the examination library, recording and circulating all material received, and assisting with procedural and administrative matters. She will also advise on any programming and procedural queries. Any matters which the Council or participants wish to raise with us should be addressed to Mrs St John Howe.

## Purpose and scope of the examination

3. My role is to consider whether the Plan meets the legal and procedural requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and associated Regulations and whether it is sound in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

To be sound the Plan must be:

**Positively prepared:** based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development;

**Justified:** the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives and based on proportionate evidence;

**Effective:** deliverable over the plan period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities; and

**Consistent with national policy.**

4. People seeking changes to the Plan have to demonstrate why it is not sound and how their suggested changes would make it sound. Representations will be considered insofar as they relate to soundness and legal requirements. However, my report will not refer to representations individually.
5. At this advanced stage of the process, any further changes to the Plan should be limited. The Council cannot itself now make any 'main modifications'. Any changes needed to remedy soundness problems can only come about through a recommendation in my report.

## The Matters and Issues for the examination

6. I have set out the matters which will form the focus for the examination and the hearings going forward. They are shown on the Schedule of Matters and Issues accompanying this guidance note.
7. The Schedule of Matters and Issues has been circulated to representors with this note and is also available on the examination webpage. I have also issued a draft timetable for the hearings alongside that Schedule. Any comments from representors on either the draft hearings timetable or the scope of the matters I have set out should be sent to the Programme Officer by **5.00pm on Friday 6 October**.

## Representations and written statements

8. The views of representors can be considered in three ways:
  - a) you can rely on the written representation you have already made
  - b) you can if you wish also submit a written statement responding to the Matters and Issues I have issued alongside this note

- c) you can, if you wish and are entitled to do so, participate in the hearing sessions – I explain this further below
9. Everyone who has made a representation about the Plan during the pre-submission consultation that took place between October and November 2016 can either rely on what they have already submitted in writing or may, if they so wish, now submit a further written statement. There is no need to prepare a further statement if all the points are already covered in the original representation.
10. For those who do choose to provide statements, they should directly address the matters I have identified in the Schedule of Matters and Issues.
11. All statements from representors should:
- a) relate solely to the matters raised in their earlier representation
  - b) explain which particular part of the Plan is unsound
  - c) explain why it is unsound, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework
  - d) explain how the Plan can be made sound
  - e) explain the precise change/wording that is being sought
12. From the Council, a written statement in response to all of the matters is required. These should include full and precise references to the evidence base to justify the policy and to demonstrate that the Plan is sound. They should also include references to any main modifications the Council considers necessary to make the Plan sound and set out the Council's position on changes sought by other parties, where relevant.
13. All written statements should be succinct, avoiding unnecessary detail and repetition. There is no need for verbatim quotations from the Plan, national planning policy or other core documents (references will suffice). Nonetheless, it is vital that the fundamental elements of cases are set out clearly and concisely, since the hearings are not the place for new points or evidence to be presented for the first time.
14. Please note that it is not my role to 'improve' the Plan. I can only recommend main modifications to rectify issues of soundness.
15. Representors should attempt to reach agreement on factual matters and evidence before the hearings start and I strongly encourage everyone to maintain a dialogue with the Council and other participants in advance of the hearings. **Statements of Common Ground can be particularly helpful and are especially welcomed.**
16. **Three paper copies** (not bound) of each written statement should be sent to the Programme Officer, as well as the electronic copy. Statements should be no longer than 3,000 words for each matter. Statements which are excessively long or contain irrelevant or repetitious material may be returned. Any technical evidence should be limited to appendices, and should be clearly related to the case being made. Statements should be on A4 paper and stapled. Plans or diagrams should fold down to A4 size.
17. **Electronic and paper copies of all statements relating to issues being discussed in weeks one and two (see the Hearings Timetable for details) must be received by the Programme Officer by 5.00pm on Friday 27 October 2017 at the latest. Electronic and paper copies of all statements relating to issues being discussed in weeks three and four (see the Hearings Timetable for details) must be received by the Programme Officer by 5.00pm on Friday 3 November 2017 at the latest.** If material is not received by this deadline, the Programme Officer will assume that written statements are not being provided.
18. Participants should adhere to the timetable for submitting written statements. **Late submissions and additional papers are unlikely to be accepted on the day of the relevant session**, since this can cause disruption and result in unfairness, and may lead to the hearing being adjourned.
19. I will not accept any further representations or evidence after the hearing sessions have finished unless I specifically request it. Any late or unsolicited material is likely to be returned.
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## Participation at hearing sessions

20. **Only those who have made representations seeking to change the Plan have a right to appear before, and be heard by, the Inspector.**<sup>1</sup> However, it is important to stress that written representations carry the same weight as those made orally at a hearing session. Consequently, participation at a hearing session is only necessary if, in the light of the Matters and Issues, you have specific points you wish to contribute.
21. People who are able to participate in the forthcoming hearing sessions are those who made representations seeking to change the Plan under Regulation 20 (ie when the Council invited representations before submitting the Plan for examination) where their representation relates to a point that is among the matters for the examination.
22. If you have a right to be heard, and you wish to exercise that right, you should contact the Programme Officer **by 5.00pm on Friday 20 October** indicating the appropriate Matter and the session you wish to attend (see the draft Programme). You need to do this regardless of what you may have indicated previously. **Please note that if you do not contact the Programme Officer by that date it will be assumed that you do not wish to appear and be heard and you will not be listed as a participant.** You should only request to be heard at a hearing session if you have made a relevant representation seeking a change to the Plan. However, the hearing sessions are open for anyone to observe.

## The hearing sessions

23. The hearing sessions will start on **Monday 13 November 2017 at 9.30am**. They will be held in the **Icknield Centre, Icknield Way, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 1EF** (see [icknieldcentre.com](http://icknieldcentre.com) for venue details).
24. Every effort will be made to keep to the draft timetable, but late changes may be unavoidable. Priority will be given to starting the debate on each matter at the appointed time, and it may be necessary to extend the discussion in the afternoon session. The Programme Officer will endeavour to inform the participants of any late changes to the timetable, **but it is the responsibility of the participants to keep themselves up to date with the arrangements and programme. Participants need to be ready to attend on the Reserve time indicated on the programme – this will be used if necessary to complete any unfinished sessions.**
25. The hearings will take the form of a round table discussion which I shall lead. It will not involve the formal presentation of cases by participants or cross-examination. There will be a lot to cover and all contributions should be focussed.
26. Sessions will normally start at **9.00am (except the first day which will start at 9.30am) and 2.00pm each day, with a break for lunch at about 1.00pm, and a finish at about 5.00pm**. A short break will be taken mid-morning and mid-afternoon.
27. Please let the Programme Officer know as soon as possible if you have any specific needs in relation to attendance and participation at the hearing sessions.

## My report

28. After the final hearing session I will write a report setting out my conclusions about the soundness of the Plan, including recommendations on any actions or modifications I consider necessary to make it sound.
29. The examination will remain open until my report has been submitted to the Council. However, as mentioned above, I will not accept any further representations or evidence after the hearing sessions have ended unless I specifically request it. Late or unsolicited material may be returned.

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<sup>1</sup> S20(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

I trust that you find this Guidance Note helpful. If you have any further questions please contact Mrs St John Howe – she will be happy to assist if at all possible.

*Simon Berkeley*

Inspector

**Reminder of key dates:**

- Deadline for comments on my matters schedule/hearings timetable: **6 October, 5.00pm**
- Deadline to confirm with the Programme Officer whether you wish to exercise the right to be heard if you made a relevant representation seeking a change to the Plan indicating the appropriate Matter and the hearing session: **20 October, 5.00pm**
- Deadlines for submission of statements (including from the Council):
  - Statements relating to issues being discussed in weeks one and two: **27 October, 5.00pm**
  - Statements relating to issues being discussed in weeks three and four: **3 November, 5.00pm**
- Hearing sessions open: **Monday 13 November 2017, 9.30am**