

EXAMINATION OF THE MERTON LOCAL PLAN

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SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE NOTE FROM THE INSPECTORS: STAGE 1 HEARINGS JUNE 2022

Purpose

1. This Note provides focussed information for those intending to participate in or observe the Stage 1 Hearing sessions, and supplements the material already published by the Inspectors in relation to the Examination.

Revised Timetable

2. A revised hearing timetable (INSP06) has been published following the Inspectors' review of the submitted hearing statements, and in the light of requests to participate at specific sessions. The revised timetable is intended to assist with the efficiency of the Examination and would see all substantive discussion in Weeks 1 and 2 of the programme, with scope for a contingency session, if needed, in Week 3. As is common with local plan examinations there may be further limited alterations to timetabling during the course of the hearings, and participants and those wishing to observe the hearings are advised to check the examination website for any updates.

Participants

3. Weeks 1 and 2 of the hearings will take place at Merton Civic Centre. As COVID-19 restrictions are no longer in place the intention is that those participating should do so in-person. However, should there be any specific reasons why participants would be unable to appear in-person these should be communicated to the Programme Officer as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made.
4. A contingency day is scheduled for Wednesday 29 June. If needed, this will be a virtual session hosted via the Council's Zoom video-conferencing platform. If any participants require further guidance on the use of Zoom please contact the Programme Officer in the first instance. General advice on the protocols for hearings using Zoom will be set out in the Inspectors' opening remarks to any relevant sessions.

Observers

5. Those wishing to observe the in-person elements of the hearing sessions are free to attend the Civic Centre, where ample public seating is available. However, to ensure that sufficient capacity is available, any people intending to observe sessions are advised to contact the Programme Officer to confirm which sessions they would like to attend.
6. Any hearing sessions, whether in-person or virtual, will be live-streamed via the Zoom video-conferencing platform available from a link on the Council's examination website. However, this is limited to 500 persons observing at any single time.
7. It is important to note that the sessions **will not be recorded by the Council**, so those wishing to observe will have to do so in real time, whether at the venue or via the Zoom live-stream. The Planning Inspectorate's 'Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations'¹ (the Procedure Guide) (at paragraphs 5.8 to 5.10) outlines further advice for observers or participants who may wish to record any hearing sessions.

Examination – General Principles

8. The starting point for the Inspectors' examination of the Local Plan is the Regulation 19 version which was submitted to the Secretary of State, and on which consultation has taken place. The Council has suggested changes both in response to issues arising in consultation responses, and as a result of questions posed by the Inspectors throughout the Examination. However, only the Inspectors can recommend changes to the submitted plan via 'Main Modifications'. Main Modifications are those which, taken individually or together, would have material effects on a plan's policies or their interpretation, and would be necessary to ensure soundness or legal compliance. Accordingly, the hearings will consider whether changes suggested thus far by the Council (and others) should be taken forward as Main Modifications to the Local Plan, and may identify other instances where such changes are necessary to ensure soundness and legal compliance. Further advice on the scope of the examination in general, and Main Modifications in particular, can be found in the Procedure Guide.

Closing

9. The Inspectors look forward to a productive and solution-orientated Stage 1 Hearings programme and thank all those who have submitted statements and indicated their wish to participate in sessions at this stage. Any questions on the contents of the above should be directed to the Programme Officer via the contact details given in the header of this note.

R J Aston
INSPECTOR
7 June 2022

G J Fort
INSPECTOR

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice/procedure-guide-for-local-plan-examinations>