

# **Merton Local Plan – Stage 2 Hearings Closing Session and Inspectors’ Closing Remarks**

**21 October 2022**

*NB This is not a verbatim note, but reflects the points covered*

## **Preamble**

1. The purpose of this session is to give some indication of the next steps in the process and to deal with any procedural questions that the Council may have. None of this should be taken as pre-judging the contents of the Final Report which will take into account all relevant matters and representations.
2. To assist the next stage of the examination it will be necessary to produce a consolidated list of main modifications (MMs) - incorporating all of the changes suggested since the Regulation 19 Version of the Plan. The proposed modifications include changes that would have to be reflected on the Borough’s policies map to capture their spatial implications. Revisions to the policies map should be available for consultation alongside the MMs and related material.

## **Next Steps**

3. We already discussed in the relevant hearing session that once your additional work on Areas of Deficiency (AOD) has been produced, that we will allow an appropriate time for participants to make written comments on this.
4. In addition to the potential changes that have already been identified during the course of the examination, following the closure of the hearings we will be reflecting on whether other elements of the Plan are potentially unsound or not legally compliant and whether any revisions would be necessary to ensure soundness and/or legal compliance. If we were to consider that further changes or other work would be required, we would cover this in a post-hearings letter. Any such letter would be intended to be helpful and would give the Council an opportunity to consider what further modifications, if any, should be made, or whether any further work may be required. Our consideration of these matters will be our immediate post-hearings priority. However, any post-hearings correspondence of ours would necessarily follow the closure of consultation on the additional AOD evidence, which the Council is due to produce.
5. Any of our examination letters would be publicly available and published on the website in the normal way. The ball would then be in the Council’s court to finalise the schedule of proposed MMs - although we will need to see it before it is published to ensure that it reflects our understanding of hearing discussions and is in the interests of the soundness of the Plan.
6. Others may have a different opinion about proposed changes but that is a matter for us to resolve in due course through our report - and in any event the MMs would be subject to further consultation.

7. Additional modifications, that is those that taken individually or together do not have a material bearing on the Plan's policies or their interpretation, need not be the subject of consultation. However, if the Council wishes to include them for completeness then the distinction with MMs should be clearly spelled out and they should be contained in a separate schedule.
8. The period of MM consultation should be for a minimum of 6 weeks in line with the period that the Regulation 19 version of the Plan was consulted on. In carrying out further consultation you should make it clear that comments should solely be addressed to the proposed changes and the implications arising from them. You should also bear in mind the possible need for further sustainability appraisal and any necessary assessment under the Habitat Regulations. The Council should keep us informed of progress particularly the date of the close of the consultation period.
9. Once consultation on the MMs is concluded, we would welcome a statement from the Council which responds to the main issues raised, and will take this into account in framing our Report alongside the consultation responses.
10. At the moment, it is difficult to give definitive guidance about when our Final Report will be completed, but we expect this to be early Spring 2023, at the earliest. A firmer date will be given in due course.

### **Inspectors' Closing Remarks**

11. Finally, we would like to thank Carmel Edwards for the efficient and effective work she has done, and continues to do, as Programme Officer. We would also like to thank the Council for the timely responses to our various requests, for accommodating these sessions, and for the positive and proactive contributions during the hearings. We also thank all representors who participated for their solution-orientated approach to the sessions.
12. The hearings are now closed.

*R J Aston*  
INSPECTOR

*G J Fort*  
INSPECTOR