

Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031

Inspector: Mr Simon Berkeley BA MA MRTPI
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Mr. Nigel Smith,
Strategic Planning Manager
North Hertfordshire District Council

14 November 2021

By email only

Dear Mr. Smith,

Further to your email of 10 November I can confirm that:

1. I am still in the process of writing my report;
2. once completed, it will be subject to the Planning Inspectorate's Quality Assurance process, as are all local plan reports, in line with the Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations – although it will be 'fast tracked' as a priority; and
3. it will be sent to DLUHC for information before it is issued to the Council for fact checking, again in line with the Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations

This examination has been a very long, protracted, complex and contentious one. I have particularly large volumes of evidence to consider both from the Council and others, with some evidence documents superseding previous documents, in whole or in part. I have hundreds of proposed main modifications to take into account, and further main modifications which in numerous instances supersede either all or part of previous main modifications put forward by the Council. Moreover, my report writing is requiring that I re-read large volumes of evidence that has been submitted over several years, and that I refresh myself of verbal evidence given at hearings as far back as November 2017.

I understand the extreme importance of the Council putting in place a sound local plan as soon as possible, and the Council's consequent wish to have my report now. It is a wish I share, as no doubt do others involved in the examination. I hear the Council's frustration that my report is taking longer than I had estimated.

However, if there is some suggestion that I should somehow speed up my report writing, then I cannot oblige. This is a very technical, complicated and difficult piece to produce, demanding accuracy and robust reasoning to ensure it would stand up to scrutiny elsewhere if need be, as well may be the case. I will continue to write it with the level of robustness and sophistication that this examination and all participants to it deserve. That is my job, and to compromise on robustness in favour of speed of delivery would not be in anyone's best interests – if my report were to be found wanting, that could have significant implications for the Council having a sound local plan in place at all.

Given the complexity of this examination and the controversy the timing of my report has generated to date, I am not at this point going to be drawn into any further forecasting about when my report may be completed. However, the Council and all other participants can be assured that my aim is to release a robust report as soon as possible.

I ask that a copy of your email dated 10 November, and this reply, be added to the examination webpage.

Your sincerely,

Simon Berkeley

Inspector.