

Ashwell Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examination Arrangements

Purpose of this Note

This Note sets out the basis on which the examination of the neighbourhood plan will be undertaken. Its ambitions are two-fold:

- to comply with the MHCLG/NPIERS Guidance for service users and examiners (April 2018); and
- to provide guidance for the Parish Council on the key stages of the examination.

The examination route map

Different examinations raise their own issues. Nevertheless, the examination of the Ashwell Plan will have the following the key stages:

Stage 1: Background Reading

This stage of the examination is now completed.

I have read the submitted Plan, its supporting documents and the various representations. I will take all this information into account in preparing my report.

Stage 2: Visit to the neighbourhood area

I have also visited the neighbourhood area.

The visit provided me with an opportunity to look at specific issues and locations in the neighbourhood area. Plainly not every component of the Plan needed to be viewed during the visit. Nevertheless, it was focused on the issues that have arisen either from the background reading and/or which are fundamental to the Plan.

The visit was unaccompanied. I did not meet with representatives of the Parish Council, the District Council or any of the parties who have commented on the Plan. To have done so, would have had the potential to affect the independence of the examination process.

Stage 3: Clarification Note

The next stage will be the preparation of a clarification note. It will raise a series of questions for the Parish Council on the submitted Plan. The answers to the questions will help me to understand the Plan better and, where necessary, to recommend modifications to ensure that it meets the basic conditions.

The clarification note will suggest a timescale for responses based on the issues it addresses. However, this is a matter which I am happy should proceed at whatever pace is determined locally. This acknowledges that work on neighbourhood plans is carried out by parish councils and individuals on a voluntary basis.

Stage 4: Decision about the need for a hearing

The combination of the background reading, the unaccompanied visit and the responses to the clarification note will allow me to come to a view about the need or otherwise for a hearing as part of the examination process. The legislation anticipates that the vast majority of examinations can proceed by way of written representations and without a hearing.

If a hearing is required, I will ask the District Council to make the necessary arrangements.

Stage 5: The Examination Report

My report will be prepared throughout the examination period. Its general parts can be written early in the process. The elements of the report that overlap with the clarification note will not be prepared until the responses to the note are received. These arrangements would also apply if a hearing was required.

I will prepare a fact-check report before the final report. This will give an opportunity for the Parish Council and the District Council to comment on any factual inaccuracies and/or omissions within the report. It will not present an opportunity for the examination to enter another phase.

Other related matters

The timing of the examination

Plainly individual plans raise different issues. Neighbourhood plan examinations are inevitably linear and are directly affected by the number of policies and the complexity of the representations received.

In the case of the Ashwell Plan I anticipate being able to send the fact-check report in October 2021. Plainly this will depend on the timing of the responses to the clarification note and/or the need for a hearing.

Documents

I have asked North Hertfordshire District Council to display all examination-related documents on its website.

Contact arrangements

My principal contact throughout the examination will be Clare Skeels at North Hertfordshire District Council. In most cases I will ask the District Council to send documents to the Parish Council on my behalf.

Andrew Ashcroft

Independent Examiner

Ashwell Neighbourhood Development Plan

8 September 2021