

Examination of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031

Guidance note for people participating in the virtual hearings

It is essential that this note is read carefully by everyone intending to participate in the further hearings.

Introduction

1. The further hearings will proceed virtually using Zoom. They will commence on Monday 28 September and will follow the draft timetable that has already been published.
2. The use of this technology is becoming the norm, largely as a result of Covid19 pandemic restrictions. However, we may still need to adapt, make allowances and learn from the experience. I would emphasise that, as usual, all the hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner to provide the requisite full and complete hearing of all points of view.
3. This note sets out the procedures and rules for the conduct of the hearings. If everyone fully understands the protocol and technical considerations, then we are more likely to have virtual hearings without mishaps. Everyone participating should be familiar with my guidance note regarding the general procedure for the further hearings [ED193].

Joining the virtual hearings as a participant

4. If you have been listed as a participant, then you will be sent a separate invitation to each of the hearing sessions you will be participating in. You should join each session using either the electronic link in your invitation or by entering the Meeting ID and Meeting Password directly into Zoom when prompted. If you do not have access to the internet you can dial-in to the virtual hearing by telephone. The telephone number will also be provided within your invitation. Further guidance is provided on the Zoom support page. Here is a link to it: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>
5. Whether using Zoom or telephone, you must join the hearing using your full name and at least **20 minutes** before the start time indicated on the timetable. You will be held in a waiting room until you are admitted into the hearing by the Programme Officer.
6. Once you have joined the hearing you should mute your microphone (if you are a telephone participant please enter *6 on your keypad to mute/unmute your microphone) until invited to speak. This will be monitored by the meeting administrator and they will do so on your behalf if needed.

Watching the virtual hearings

7. The hearing sessions will be live streamed on YouTube for non-participants and the public to watch live and can be accessed on the council website <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/> This will enable anyone with an interest to watch the hearings as they would a conventional hearing in as close to real time as is possible when using a streaming service. They will also be recorded by the Council and published on the Council's YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/c/North-hertsGovUk>.

Participating in the virtual hearings

8. The aim is to make the virtual hearings as similar as possible to conventional hearings in the way that they are run and the way that speakers participate. Please bear in mind that the purpose of the hearings is for me to gain the information that I need to examine the soundness of the Plan.
9. Before the start of each hearing, please make sure that your working environment is quiet and free from interruption. If you have a telephone or other device nearby during the sessions, please make sure that it is muted or switched off. This is essential to ensure that the hearing, and your ability to concentrate on it, is not disrupted by external noise and unnecessary distractions. If you are joining using Zoom, please ensure that your camera is positioned to provide a clear, front-on view of your face and avoid sitting where you are silhouetted in front of a window or light.
10. At the start of each hearing I will confirm who is appearing at that session. I will lead the discussion, introducing each topic and may ask specific questions. I will generally direct my questioning to the Council first, as it is the Council's evidence that is being tested. Once I have finished asking questions of the Council, I will turn to other participants.
11. If you wish to respond to a question, please use the "raise hand" facility in Zoom (if you are a telephone participant please enter ***9 on your keypad** to raise your hand) to indicate you wish to speak. I will give all participants who have raised their hands an opportunity to make their contribution. Only one participant will be permitted to speak at a time. When you are invited to speak, you should unmute your microphone, and state your name and the person(s) or organisation(s) that you represent, where applicable.
12. Please make responses brief and focused and adhere to the agenda. You do not need to repeat your full case in detail, or give any sort of formal presentation, as I will have read all of your representations. I may ask questions about aspects of your verbal or written submissions. When I have heard your comments and am about to move on to the next participant, please mute your microphone and lower your hand if you used the "raise hand" facility.
13. There will be no cross examination and no interruption, and all responses should be directed to me. Unless a wider 'cross table' discussion is appropriate, I will normally invite participants (other than the Council) to speak only once on each separate question that is on the agenda. I

therefore ask that you remain patient until it is your turn and say what you need to say when you have the opportunity.

14. If, exceptionally, you have already spoken on a particular question but believe that you could help further on the subject, you can raise your hand again. However, please use this facility sparingly and only when you have new, important and relevant evidence which will help me gain the information that I need to comprehensively consider the question of soundness. Raising your hand simply to repeat your view or disagree with others is not appropriate.
15. The chat and reaction facilities in Zoom are not to be used under any circumstances.
16. Please bear in mind that notwithstanding the virtual nature of these hearings, and that you may well be joining from your own home, they are still formal events and all participants should behave accordingly. Please respect the views of other participants and do not interrupt each other.
17. Some representors, and the Council, will wish to be represented by more than one person at the hearings, for example where planning agents or other technical experts are supporting their case. Where this is so, everyone who is likely to speak at a hearing session should join at its commencement, in line with the instructions above, and will be admitted into the hearing session when it starts. However, my questions will be directed at the primary person representing each party. Therefore, if you are the primary representor and a 'substitution' is necessary – for example if you want your technical expert to answer the question being put to you or to take up the point you are making – then you should say so and ask me to permit the 'substitute' to speak on your behalf. You should then turn off your microphone and the substitute should turn hers/his on and introduce themselves.
18. I will terminate the discussion on any particular topic when I consider that I have enough information. As we move towards the end of each topic or sub-topic, I will ask the Council for their comments on the points raised, if I have not already done so, before moving on.
19. As well as a break for lunch, I will be taking breaks during the hearings. When the hearing is adjourned for a break, please turn off your camera and mute your microphone (or your telephone if you have joined that way) but do not log out of the hearing session.
20. At the end of each hearing session, I will end the session and ask all participants to log out of the Zoom meeting.

Documents and evidence

21. The examination website contains all of the relevant examination documents. These are available to all participants, stakeholders and the public. The hearing will not therefore use the document sharing facility available on Zoom. Nor should you hold any document in front of your camera.

22. I will not be accepting new or otherwise late evidence during the hearing sessions. New documents should only be submitted during the hearings at my invitation. If I request a new document from any party, for example a statement of common ground, it should be emailed straight to the Programme Officer.

Privacy

23. It is important that people read the privacy notices. They will be posted on the examination webpage shortly, before the hearings commence.

24. If you are joining using Zoom but you do not want your face to appear on the screen, you can turn off your camera.

25. You must ensure that no-one else appears on your camera and you should clear your background of personal information. If you prefer, Zoom allows you to blur your background. You must not share any personal information during the hearing, either yours or anyone else's.

26. If you have any concerns about the security of your device, or out of preference you do not wish to install the Zoom app or client, you can join through your internet browser. In order to do this, after following the Zoom link, please select 'Join from your browser' on the page that is displayed.

27. If you are dialling into the meeting using a telephone, please **do not use the 141 service to keep your number private**. This is so that your identity can be confirmed before you are admitted to the hearing. Your phone number will be masked upon joining the meeting (e.g. 888****666) and will shortly after be replaced by your full name by the meeting administrator.

Use of Zoom

28. Please do familiarise yourself with Zoom before joining the hearings. You will be responsible for making sure that all of your equipment is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing via Zoom. It is strongly advised that before each session you ensure that your Zoom app, Zoom client or your internet browser (if joining by the 'join from your browser' route) are up to date.

29. If you experience electronic interference during the session, try switching off your mobile phone or other electronic devices nearby, if you have not already done so. If you experience internet connectivity issues, try switching off some other devices which share your Wi-Fi, or move closer to the router. If you are unable to join, or lose connection during the hearing, try to join again using the link provided in your invitation. As backup you can re-join by telephone using the number in the invitation. Transferring from Wi-Fi to mobile data or making a Wi-Fi hotspot using a mobile phone are other contingencies you could try.

30. If you do experience technical problems and all else fails, you should contact the Programme Officer, Mrs St John Howe immediately, as it is likely that the hearing session will continue in

your absence. Her details are set out below. Although Mrs St John Howe will not generally be appearing on the screen, she will be observing the hearing sessions and will be on hand to provide assistance whenever it is needed.

31. Technical events are being held for participants ahead of the hearing sessions. These are an opportunity to familiarise yourself with Zoom and the specific way it will be used during the hearings. You will receive an invitation with details of the dates from Mrs St John Howe. I strongly urge all participants to contact her to book a place – experience suggests that joining technical events has proved helpful even to seasoned Zoom users.
32. Finally, I should like to extend my thanks in advance to all those who are participating and also to Mrs St John Howe. As always, she will be pleased to help you with any administrative or procedural queries that you may have during the examination.

Simon Berkeley

Inspector

September 2020

Programme Officer: Louise St John Howe louise@poservices.co.uk 07789 486419