

Examination of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan

Examination Guidance Note for Stage 3

Matthew Birkinshaw BA(Hons) Msc MRTPI

Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Date: 3 May 2024

Update and Introduction

- 1) The following Guidance Note has been prepared to assist participants attending the Stage 3 hearing sessions in June and July 2024. All participants should familiarise themselves with the contents of the note, in particular those who wish to submit hearing statements and/or take part in the hearing sessions.
- 2) Further information about the examination of the Local Plan can be found in previous guidance issued by the Inspector for Stages 1 and 2, which is available on the examination website. The Planning Inspectorate's Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations also provides additional detail on the examination process (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice/procedure-guide-for-local-plan-examinations>).
- 3) The Stage 3 hearing sessions will be used to discuss the Council's suggested changes to the Plan in response to the Inspector's Initial Findings, consider material changes in circumstances which have occurred since the previous hearings and assess any new information which is relevant to the soundness of the Plan. **It is not the purpose of the hearings to repeat or re-run any sessions from earlier stages, for example where site allocations have already been heard.** For the same reasons, it is not necessary for participants to re-submit representations or hearing statements on these matters, which the Inspector will take into account in considering the soundness of the Plan.
- 4) The Local Plan is being examined by **Matthew Birkinshaw** BA(Hons) Msc MRTPI. The Inspector has been appointed by the Secretary of State. His role is to examine whether or not the Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and associated Regulations, and, whether or not it meets the tests of 'soundness' set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework').
- 5) At all times the Inspector will aim to work with the Council and everyone else involved in the examination in a positive and pragmatic manner.

The Role of the Programme Officer

- 6) The appointed Programme Officer is Charlotte Glancy. The Programme Officer is an independent Officer who is responsible for receiving, recording and distributing the examination materials, maintaining the examination library and organising the hearing sessions. Communication between the Inspector and representors is also handled by the Programme Officer, who can be contacted at:

Charlotte Glancy
C/O Banks Solutions
80 Lavinia Way
East Preston
West Sussex
BN16 1DD
Telephone: 01903 776601 or 07519 628064
Email: bankssolutionsuk@gmail.com

The Programme Officer is also responsible for making sure that the information regarding the examination and all relevant documents are made available on the examination website: (<https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan/examination-of-the-local-plan>)

Hearing Session Format and Location

- 7) As with previous stages of the examination, the Stage 3 hearing sessions will be informal, but structured. They will take place in the form of a roundtable discussion led by the Inspector. Hearings are designed to allow the Inspector to explore the main issues. People may choose to be professionally represented on the day, but there will be no formal cross-examination of witnesses or any detailed presentation of evidence.
- 8) The hearing sessions will take place in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS. The timings and content of each session is set out in the Examination Hearing Programme for Stage 3. In summary, Week 1 will run from **Tuesday 18 June to Thursday 20 June 2024**. Week 2 will run from **Tuesday 16 July to Friday 19 July 2024**. A reserve session is also planned for Wednesday 24 July 2024 and will be used as required.

Attending a Hearing Session

- 9) In order to plan appropriately for each session, it is important that participants confirm in writing with the Programme Officer if they wish to attend a particular session. The deadline for confirming your attendance is **Friday 17 May 2024**.
- 10) The Matters, Issues and Questions for Stage 3 will form the basis of the discussions at the hearing sessions and has been published on the examination website. Each session will be arranged by topic, not necessarily by policy number. It is therefore important that representors check that they have been allocated to the correct session, contacting the Programme Officer if unsure. You should only request to attend a session if you have made a representation seeking a change to the Plan relating to that topic.
- 11) If there is a Matter that has been raised by the Inspector, and one where several individuals (such as a group of local residents) wish to speak and make the same point, representors should consider whether they wish to nominate a single person to speak on their behalf. If participants are unsure, please contact the Programme Officer who will be able to help.
- 12) A final version of the Hearing Programme will be published on the examination website before the start of the hearings and confirm which representors are scheduled to attend each session. It will be for participants to check the progress of the hearings and to ensure that they are present at the right time.

Hearing Statements

- 13) Ahead of the hearings, the Council should produce Hearing Statements which respond directly to each Matter raised in the Matters, Issues and Questions.
- 14) Any representors who have made comments in response to the Council's suggested changes to the Plan, or, made comments at the Regulation 19 stage consultation may attend the hearing sessions and provide statements as required. This, however, is optional and is not a requirement of the hearings.
- 15) Statements should be concise and focused, and appendices should only be included where directly relevant and necessary. There is no need to re-submit previous consultation responses as part of Hearing Statements. The deadlines for providing hearing statements are as follows:
 - **Friday 31 May 2024** – deadline for sessions in Week 1.
 - **Friday 28 June 2024** – deadline for sessions in Week2.

- 16) Representors not participating at the hearing sessions may also submit a Hearing Statement. However, this is optional. All Statements should relate to the representations made by participants and is not an opportunity to introduce further arguments.
- 17) No other written evidence can be submitted unless specifically requested by the Inspector.

Statements of Common Ground

- 18) Statements of Common Ground between participants are encouraged where they assist in identifying matters in agreement, and therefore allowing the hearing sessions to concentrate on the issues in dispute.
- 19) Where possible, Statements of Common Ground should be submitted alongside Hearing Statements. If representors are intending on submitting Statements of Common Ground, please make the Programme Officer aware.

Examination Programme

- 20) Based on the above, the examination timetable and relevant dates for the Stage 3 hearing sessions are as follows:
- **3 May 2024** – notification of the time, date and location of all hearing sessions for Stage 3.
 - **17 May 2024** – deadline for confirming with the Programme Officer if you wish to attend the Stage 3 hearings.
 - **31 May 2024** – Hearing Statement deadline for sessions in Week 1.
 - **18 – 20 June 2024** – Hearing sessions Week 1.
 - **28 June 2024** – Hearing Statement deadline for sessions in Week 2.
 - **16 – 19 July 2024** – Hearing sessions Week 2.
 - **24 July 2024** – Reserve session.
- 21) Should representors have any questions about the Stage 3 hearings, or deadlines for providing Statements, please contact the Programme Officer.

Matthew Birkinshaw
Inspector