

Goudhurst Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examination Arrangements

Purpose of this Note

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

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

The examination route map

Different examinations raise their own issues. Nevertheless, the following are the key components that will be applied to this examination:

Stage 1: Background Reading

This involves reading the submitted Plan and its supporting documents and the various representations.

This stage is now completed. I will take the representations into account throughout the examination.

Stage 2: Visit to the neighbourhood area

The visit will provide me with an opportunity to look at specific issues and sites in the neighbourhood area. Plainly not every component of the Plan needs to be viewed on the visit. Nevertheless, I will focus my time on looking at the issues that have arisen either from the background reading or which are fundamental to the Plan.

The visit will be unaccompanied. I will not meet with the Parish Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council or with any of the parties who have commented on the Plan. To do so would have the potential to affect the independence of the examination process.

I will visit the neighbourhood area later this week.

Stage 3: Clarification Note

Once the visit has taken place, I will issue a clarification note. It will raise a series of questions on the Plan in general and its policies in particular. The answers to these questions will help me to understand the Plan better and, where appropriate, to recommend modifications to ensure it meets the basic conditions.

The clarification note will suggest a timescale for responses based on the issues it addresses. It is usually between two and three weeks. However, this is a matter which I am happy should proceed at whatever pace is determined locally. This recognises that neighbourhood plans are traditionally prepared by local 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.

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 make separate arrangements with the Borough Council and the Parish Council. Plainly those arrangements would need to take account of Covid:19 and any restrictions which may remain in place at the time of a hearing.

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.

I will prepare a fact check report before the final report. This gives an opportunity for the two councils to comment on any factual inaccuracies and/or omissions. It will not present an opportunity for the examination to enter another phase.

Other related matters

The length of the examination

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

In the case of the Goudhurst Plan I anticipate being able to prepare the fact check report in July 2021. Plainly this will depend on the timeliness of the response from the Parish Council to the clarification note.

Documents

I have asked the Borough Council to display the examination-related documents on its website.

Contact arrangements

My principal contacts will be Deborah Dixon and Freya Jackson at the Borough Council. In most cases I will ask Deborah and Freya to send documents to the Parish Council on my behalf.

Andrew Ashcroft

Independent Examiner

Goudhurst Neighbourhood Development Plan

24 May 2021