

Tunbridge Wells Local Plan Examination

Virtual Hearings

Guidance for Participants

Introduction

This note is to be read in conjunction with the Examination Guidance Note ([Document ID-01](#)) which sets out the general parameters for the examination. This note provides specific advice on participating at the virtual hearings.

As set out in the Examination Guidance Note, the hearing sessions as part of the examination of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan will be conducted both in person and electronically using 'Zoom'. Some people will be more familiar with this conference-call technology than others. Please read this note carefully as it sets out further information on how the virtual hearings will be conducted.

Joining the hearing as a participant

Participants will be issued with an invitation to attend each session by the Programme Officer (Charlotte Glancy). This will be via the email address that you have already provided to the examination. Please note that if you are participating in more than one hearing session, then you will receive a separate invitation for each session. If you would prefer to join by telephone or are unable to use the video option, please contact the Programme Officer and specific details will be provided.


Participants should aim to join each session around 20 minutes before the event is due to open. Whether using video or telephone access, you will be held in a virtual 'lobby' until you are let into the hearing. Attempting to join the hearing after the time indicated on the agenda will not be acceptable and you may not be admitted.

Watching the hearing

As with those sessions held in the Town Hall, the virtual hearings will be live-streamed for observers to follow online. The hearings are being live streamed on the Council's [you-tube channel](#). The link is placed on the examination webpage.

The procedure for virtual hearings

The aim is to make the virtual hearings as similar as possible to physical hearings in the way that they run and the way that you participate. When you join the hearing session, please make sure that your microphone is muted. Also make sure that the environment you are in is comfortable and free from distractions, with mobile phones switched off or on their silent setting.

As with sessions held in the Town Hall, the Inspector will lead the hearings, introduce each topic and ask specific questions. If you wish to respond to a question, please use the 'raise hand' facility [] to indicate your desire to speak. Although all participants will be able to see and hear each other, only one participant may speak at a time. When you are invited to speak, you should turn your camera on, unmute your microphone and state your name and who you represent, if applicable.

Once you have spoken, please turn your microphone and camera off. The only people visible on the screen at any one time should be the Inspector, the participant who is giving their contribution and the relevant representative from the Council for that topic.

Participants will be invited to speak in turn, so please be patient. If you have already spoken on a particular topic but believe that you can help further on the subject, please use the 'raise hand' facility. However, raising your hand simply to repeat what you or others have already said is not necessary.

Breaks will be taken during the sessions. At mid-session breaks participants should not log out, but please ensure that cameras and microphones are turned off. At the end of each hearing session participants will be asked to log out.

Documents, evidence and presentation

The examination website contains all the relevant examination documents. These are available to all participants. Document sharing facilities will be disabled during the hearings and you should not hold any document in front of your camera. New documents should only be submitted during the hearings at our invitation. If we request a new document from any party, for example a statement of common ground, it should be emailed directly to the Programme Officer.

Conduct

Local Plan examinations are a formal event. All participants, their views and evidence are treated with fairness and consideration. Participants must not interrupt each other, and contributions should be made respectfully. The online Chat facility **must not** be used under any circumstances.

You should have made appropriate arrangements to ensure that your working environment is quiet, and that the hearing (and your ability to concentrate on it) is not disrupted by external noise and unnecessary distractions. 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.

You must make sure as far as possible that you attend the hearing you are invited to from start to finish. Leaving midway through may mean that you miss the opportunity to speak, hear other people's contributions and or the Inspector's announcements. If you need to leave early for any reason, please inform the Inspector and/or the Programme Officer.

Privacy

Please have regard to the privacy notices which will be available on the examination web page. If participants do not want their image to be viewed, please contact the Programme Officer.

The hearings will be recorded and made available on the examination website. Please do not make your own recording of the hearing. You must ensure that no-one else appears on your camera unless it has been otherwise agreed, and you should clear your background of personal information. If you prefer, you may blur your background, but please do not use any of the other backgrounds that are available.

Use of Zoom

Please do familiarise yourself with using Zoom if you have not used the software before.

You will be responsible for making sure that your kit is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing.

If you are unable to join, or lose connection during the hearing, try again to join using the link provided in your invitation. The hearing may continue in your absence. Transferring from wifi to mobile data, or making a wifi hotspot using a mobile phone are other contingencies that you may wish to use.

Should participants have any further queries, please contact the Programme Officer.

Matthew Birkinshaw

Inspector