**EXAMINATION OF THE STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN REVIEW**

**INSPECTORS’ GUIDANCE NOTE**

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**Purpose of this note**

1. This note provides guidance to participants on the procedural and administrative arrangements for the hearing sessions as part of the examination of the Stroud District Local Plan Review. References in square brackets [ ] refer to examination documents which can be found in the examination document library on the Council’s examination webpages. The link is as follows: <https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/planning-and-building-control/planning-strategy/stroud-district-local-plan-review/local-plan-examination>

**Dates of the hearing sessions**

1. The examination hearing sessions will commence at **10:00** on **Tuesday 7 March 2023**. They will be held virtually using Zoom hosted by the Council. The **Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs),** published as a separate document, will form the basis for the discussions.
2. **A draft programme** for the examination hearing sessions has also been published which sets out the matters to be discussed on each day. Please note that details may change.

**Programme Officer**

1. Charlotte Glancy is the Programme Officer and is responsible for the administration of the examination. She is working under our direction, is impartial and is independent of the Council. The role of the Programme Officer includes acting as the main point of contact for the examination, providing an effective channel of communication between us and all parties. All programming queries, practical and procedural points should therefore be addressed to the Programme Officer on the contact details as above.
2. Copies of all examination documents are available to view on the [examination website](https://www.stroud.gov.uk/environment/planning-and-building-control/planning-strategy/stroud-district-local-plan-review/local-plan-examination). Any participant who does not have access to the internet should contact the Programme Officer so that alternative arrangements can be made for viewing documents.

**Scope of the examination and the Inspectors’ role**

Inspectors’ role

1. Our role is to assess whether the Stroud District Local Plan Review (the Plan) as submitted, has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements and determine whether it is sound. The purpose of the hearing sessions is to enable us to obtain the information we need to make these assessments.
2. The National Planning Policy Framework, July 2021, (the Framework) states that in order to be sound, a Local Plan should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
3. There are three possible outcomes to the examination:
	* the submitted Plan is sound;
	* the submitted Plan is not sound but could be made sound by making changes (main modifications), if necessary following additional work; or,
	* the submitted Plan is not sound and could not be made sound by any changes.
4. Following the close of the Hearing we will prepare a report to the Council with our conclusions.

Changes to the Plan

1. There are two ways by which changes can be made to the Plan:

(a) **Main modifications** which are recommended by the Inspectors. These are changes which alone or in combination with others, would materially alter the Plan or policies and must be subject to consultation. We can only recommend **main modifications** if they are necessary to resolve problems that would otherwise make the submitted Plan unsound or not legally compliant.

 (b)**Additional modifications**which can be made by the Council on adoption. These are changes which do not materially affect the policies in the Plan. The Council is accountable for these changes and they do not fall within the scope of the examination.

Omission sites

1. Our starting point for the examination is that the Council has submitted a Plan which they consider is sound and legally compliant. We will therefore be considering whether the policies and site allocations within the Plan comply with these requirements.
2. We will not be considering the merits of any alternative or omission sites. If during the examination there appears to be a need for additional development sites to be allocated, it will be a matter for us to raise this with the Council to decide what it would propose in order to meet such a need.
3. Those seeking changes to the Plan need to demonstrate why the submitted Plan is not sound, rather than highlight an alternative or omission site.

**The hearing sessions**

1. The hearing sessions for the examination will be held virtually using Zoom and are being hosted by the Council. A separate note about the virtual hearing sessions explaining how representors will participate and how others can observe the events will be issued shortly. The aim is to make the virtual hearing sessions as similar as possible to physical hearing sessions in the way they are run.
2. Except for the opening day which will start at 10:00, the hearing sessions will normally run between 09:30 and 13:00 in the mornings and between 14:00 and 16:00 in the afternoons, unless stated otherwise.
3. The hearings will be in the form of structured round table discussions which we shall lead. There will be no formal presentation of evidence or cross-examination. Barristers and solicitors, if present, will be treated as part of the respective organisation or team.
4. The discussion will focus on the issues in the programme together with any additional points or supplementary questions we wish to ask arising from any further written statements.
5. The programme is currently in draft form and may be subject to change. An updated version will be issued before the Hearing starts and this will include a list of participants invited to attend each session.

**Progressing representations on the Plan**

Participation at the hearing sessions

1. Only those who have made representations within the prescribed time periods and seek changes to the Plan, have a right to be invited to and participate in relevant hearing sessions. However anyone, including those supporting the Plan, may observe the live streaming of the virtual hearing sessions. Details on how you can do this will be published in due course.
2. If you wish to participate at a hearing session, and your representations are relevant to that session, please contact the Programme Officer as soon as possible and by **17:00 on Tuesday 24 January 2023** at the latest, to confirm this.
3. Please clarify which matters and issues are relevant to your representations and on which issues and questions you wish to speak. Anybody who does not confirm their wish to appear by that date may not be included in the programme, so please respond promptly.
4. Where several people or organisations wish to speak on the same issue or wish to make the same point, you should consider appointing a single spokesperson or persons, as we will not be allowing points to be repeated during the hearing sessions. This will ensure that effective use is made of available time in the sessions. The Programme Officer will assist you with these arrangements.
5. The updated version of the Hearing Programme will be published on the examination website around two weeks before the start of the Hearing. It will be for individual participants to check this and to ensure that they attend the right sessions and at the right time.
6. If anyone is unsure as to which session their representations relate to please contact the Programme Officer for advice.
7. Please note that we will give equal regard to views put at the hearing sessions and those set out in writing. Participating in a hearing session will only be useful and helpful to us if you can engage in a debate and focus on our specific questions.

 Further written statements

1. Our matters, issues and questions (MIQs) will form the basis for discussion at the hearing sessions. As participants should have already set out their full cases within their existing representations there should ordinarily be no need to produce further written statements. Representors may therefore choose to rely on their original response.
2. However if participants do wish to produce further written hearing statements, these must relate to their original representation and respond to the issues and questions set out in our MIQs. Statements must not repeat what is in previous representations as these will be taken into account.
3. As the examination documents are available on the internet, participants should not attach extracts to any statements. Instead, please reference relevant examination document numbers and page numbers.
4. To assist the conduct of the hearings, any additional statements produced by participants must accord with the following:
* Only respond to the specific questions in the MIQs which are of relevance to the original representation;
* Respond to each matter (set out in the MIQs) in separate statements;
* Clearly indicate what changes are necessary to make the Plan sound or legally compliant and set out the precise wording;
* Be succinct, to the point and no longer than 3000 words for each matter;
* Should normally not include appendices as all pertinent points should be set out within the main statement; and
* Along with the electronic version, two paper copies should be provided, stapled (not bound) and with any A3 pages folded to A4.
1. Please note that any statements that are of excessive length and/or contain irrelevant or repetitious material may not be accepted.
2. Unlike other participants, the Council is required to respond to each of our questions and therefore the 3,000 word limit per matter does not apply to them. However any statements should still be succinct.
3. Electronic versions of statements and the two paper copies, including those from the Council, should be sent to the Programme Officer to arrive **no later than 17:00 on Tuesday 14 February 2023.** Late statements may not be accepted.
4. Any new or revised statements of common ground with the Council should be submitted to the Programme Officer as soon as possible but to arrive **no later than 17:00 on Tuesday 21 February 2023.**

**Site visits**

1. Insofar as we consider it necessary for our consideration of the soundness of the Plan we shall visit relevant sites and areas before, during or after the hearing sessions. We will do these unaccompanied unless access to private land is necessary.

**Close of the examination**

1. Following the hearing sessions the examination will remain open until our report is submitted to the Council. However we will not accept any further representations or evidence from any party during this time unless we have specifically requested it.

**Further information**

1. Further information about the preparation and examination of local plans can be found using the following links:
* The Planning Inspectorate’s YouTube channel includes a series of 5 short videos on local plans and the examination process at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQqDetL1R5aRgbNm8PDViNw>
* The *National Planning Policy Framework* –*July 2021 is* available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>
* The national *Planning Practice Guidance* available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>*, and*
* The Planning Inspectorate’s *Examining Local Plans Documents: Procedural Practice – Revised February 2022 (7th edition)* available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice>

**Inspectors Victoria Lucas and Yvonne Wright**

**20 December 2022**