

## **Nottinghamshire Minerals Local Plan Examination**

### **Virtual Hearings – Inspector’s Note for Participants**

#### **Introduction**

Due to the current restrictions with COVID 19, it has not been possible to hold physical hearings. However, the Council has the technology to allow the hearings to proceed virtually and I have therefore decided to proceed on this basis, using MS Teams.

Some people will be more familiar with this technology than others, and we will have to adapt, make allowances and learn from the experience as we go along. However, I want to emphasise that all hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner.

If you are to participate in any of the virtual hearings then please read this note very carefully, as it sets out the procedures and rules for how these hearings will be conducted. If everyone fully understands the protocol and technical considerations, then we are more likely to have a smooth-running event.

#### **Joining the hearing as a participant**

Participants should join their session using the electronic link in their invitation, which will be provided by the Programme Officer in due course. Please note that if you are participating in more than one hearing session then you will receive a separate invitation for each session. Participants without access to the internet can dial-in to the virtual hearing by telephone. The telephone number will be provided within the invitation.

#### **Watching a hearing**

The sessions will be available for non-participants and the public to watch ‘live’ on the internet. A link will be available on the front page of the examination webpage:

<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/minerals-local-plan/examination>

This enables people to watch the hearings as they would with a physical hearing in real time. The live streaming will also allow those in the same organisation or team, as their participating colleagues, to keep up with the proceedings in real time.

#### **The format of the hearings**

My aim is to make the virtual hearings as similar as possible to physical hearings in the way that they are run and the way that you participate. Please bear in mind that the purpose of the hearings is for me to gain the information that I need to examine the plan’s soundness.

At the start of each hearing session I will check appearances. I will lead the hearing, introduce each topic and ask specific questions about the topic. If you

wish to respond to a question, please use the "raise hand" facility in Teams to indicate your desire to speak. I will give each of the participants who have raised their hands an opportunity to have their say. Only one participant may speak at a time. When you are invited to speak, you should unmute your microphone, and state your name and, if any, the person(s) or organisation(s) that you represent. Please make your response brief and focused and do adhere to the agenda. You won't 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. Once you have spoken your microphone should be muted. (If you are a telephone participant you can mute by using \*6.)

Please ensure that your telephones are switched off or silenced if your microphone is likely to be switched on during a part of the hearing. There will not be any cross examination or participant interruption, and responses should always be directed to me. Unless a discussion is appropriate, I will normally invite participants (other than the Council) to speak only once on each separate matter that is on the agenda. I may invite further contributions, on a particular matter, if it is likely to enable me to gain a better understanding of the evidence, but I will curtail the repetition of points already made.

If you have already spoken on a particular matter 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. Raising your hand simply to repeat what you or others have already said, or to register that you don't agree with another participant is not appropriate.

I will terminate the discussion on any particular topic when 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. At the end of each hearing, I will end the session and ask all participants to log out.

### **Documents, evidence and presentation**

The examination website contains all 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 Teams. Nor should you hold any document in front of your camera. 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, Mr Kemp, so that he can pass it to me and put it onto the website. The chat facility in Teams must not be used under any circumstances.

### **Conduct**

Local plan examination hearings are a formal event, that require appropriate conduct from participants. The views and evidence of all participants are treated with fairness and consideration, and participants do not interrupt each other. You should dress in a manner that respects the important nature of the event

and make your contribution respectfully. You should use the formal Mr, Mrs and so on, not first names.

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. It is a good idea to have a jug and glass of water or a soft drink with you during the hearing session, but eating and snacking is not appropriate whilst giving evidence. Coffee and comfort breaks will be built into the programme.

Those who use Teams and Zoom will have grown used to the idea that people can come and go during virtual meetings. However, that does not apply to examination hearings. You must make sure that you attend the hearing to which you are invited from start to finish. Leaving the screen midway through a session, coming and going, and leaving early, are not respectful to the hearing, and you may miss the opportunity to speak or to come back on a particular point that is of concern to you.

To make the best use of hearing time and to avoid disruption, the virtual hearings will start strictly at the time indicated on the agenda. You will receive an invitation from the Programme Officer to the relevant session or sessions. You must join the hearing on Teams at least 15 minutes before the time indicated on the agenda. You will then be held in a waiting lobby until you are admitted into the hearing by the Programme Officer. Attempting to join the hearing after the time indicated on the agenda is not appropriate and you may not be admitted. When adjournments are announced, please make a careful note of the resumption time and be back at your screen before that time. You should not log out but please turn off your camera and mute your microphone.

## **Privacy**

Please have regard to the privacy notice. A copy will be sent to participants and posted on the Examination webpage once it has been concluded. Each hearing will be livestreamed on the internet. 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 can turn off your camera if you don't want your image to be viewed. Please inform the Programme Officer before the hearing if you wish to do this. If you are dialling into the meeting using a telephone, you can keep your number private by dialling 141 before the conference number.

The hearings will be recorded for reference. Please do not make your own recording of a hearing.

You must ensure that no-one else appears on your camera and you should clear your background of personal information. If you prefer, MS Teams allows you to blur your background, but please do not use any of the other backgrounds that are available on Teams. You must not share any personal information during the hearing, either yours, or anyone else's.

## **Use of Microsoft Teams**

Please familiarise yourself with Microsoft Teams before joining the hearings. You will be responsible for making sure that all your equipment is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing via Microsoft Teams.

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. Ensure your speaker volume is not turned up too high, as this can result in echoes and disturbance. If there is more than one participant in the same room this can also result in echoes and disturbance.

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. The hearing may continue in your absence. 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.

We are running test events for anyone who is unfamiliar with Teams or is concerned about joining a virtual hearing. Participants will receive an invitation with details of the date/time from the Programme Officer in advance of the hearings.

Finally, I should like to extend my thanks in advance to all those who are participating, to the Council, and Ian Kemp, the Programme Officer. The examination documents are on the website, but if you need assistance, the Programme Officer is there to help. As always, he will also be pleased to help you with any administrative or procedural queries that you may have during the examination.

Nick Palmer

INSPECTOR

29 September 2020