

ST ALBANS STRATEGIC LOCAL PLAN

GUIDANCE NOTE FROM THE INSPECTOR

September 2016

Preamble

It is sometimes necessary for a Pre Hearing Meeting (PHM) to take place at which I would explain the purpose of the Examination; the procedures to be followed; the format of further Statements to be submitted; the timetable; and other administrative matters. However, in the interests of efficiency I have decided not to hold a PHM but to provide advice and information through this written note.

Introduction

The Initial Hearing Session in relation to the Examination into the St Albans Strategic Local Plan (SLP) will open on Wednesday 26th October at 14.00 in the Council Chamber, St Albans City and District Council, Civic Centre, St Peters Street, St Albans AL1 3JE. In this regard the 'Questions and Agenda' for Issue 1: The Duty to Co-operate, has been published and is attached.

It should be noted that currently only one Hearing Session has been programmed at which my initial concerns (relating to the Duty to Co-operate) will be discussed.

Should further Hearing Sessions be arranged then additional advice about the timetable and venue will be circulated by the Programme Officer as appropriate. **This Note is based on the assumption that further Hearing Sessions will be held but no decision on that will be made until I have considered all the evidence in relation to the Initial Hearing on the Duty to Co-operate.**

The Inspector's Role

1. My task is **to consider the soundness of the SLP** based on the soundness criteria set out in paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF) published in March 2012. The relevant soundness criteria are whether the SLP is:
 - 1) *positively prepared* (based on a strategy that seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development);
 - 2) *justified* (the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence);
 - 3) *effective* (deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities); and
 - 4) *consistent with national policy* (enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework).

2. I will also consider whether the legal requirements have been met, particularly with regard to the Duty to Co-operate. Appendix A contains a list of useful publications and web sites for advice.
3. I shall aim to work collaboratively with the Council and the Examination participants in a proactive, pragmatic and solution-orientated manner. I cannot recommend as 'main modifications' changes that are merely 'improvements' to the plan which do not affect the soundness of the SLP. The Council is free to make minor changes because they do not affect the soundness of the SLP (see also paragraph 34).
4. Following the close of the hearings (and any consultation on Main Modifications if required), I shall prepare a report for the Council with my conclusions and recommendations. **The report will deal with broad issues and not with each individual representation.** I can only make a recommendation that Main Modifications should be made for the SLP to become sound if the Council requests me to do so in accordance with s20(7C) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as amended.
5. If Main Modifications are to be recommended by me, I will need to be satisfied that they have been subject to both appropriate consultation and, if necessary, Sustainability Appraisal.

The Programme Officer

6. The Programme Officer (the PO) for the Examination is Claire Jones-Hughes. She is not a Council employee and works under my direction. She can be contacted on 07737 786425 or by e-mail at bankssolutionsuk@gmail.com.
7. The main tasks of the PO are to act as a channel of communication between myself and all parties; to liaise with all parties to ensure the smooth running of the Examination; to ensure that all documents received are recorded and distributed; and to keep the Examination Library. Copies of the Examination documents are mainly on the Council's web site (see below). Anyone interested in viewing any of the documents should contact Mrs Jones-Hughes beforehand to arrange an appointment.
8. During the Examination the PO will be able to tell you how closely the hearing sessions are following the circulated programme. Alternatively, you will be able to view a regularly-updated programme on the web site at:
<http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/planning/Planningpolicy/SLPexam.aspx>
9. Any participant who requires specific adjustments in order to participate in the Examination should contact the PO as soon as possible so that any necessary assistance can be provided. Any other procedural questions or other matters that you wish to raise with me prior to the hearings should be made through the PO.

The Council's Team

10. The Council's team is likely to include:

Mr Chris Briggs, Spatial Planning Manager
Mr Matthew Reed, Counsel Landmark Chambers

Further officers in attendance:

Mr John Hoad, Spatial Planning and Design Team Leader
Mrs Wendy Frost, Principal Spatial Planning Officer

Number of representations

11. 1,333 representations were received on the Publication Draft of the SLP. I have full copies of all representations made and they will be taken into account by me in the examination of the SLP but only insofar as they relate to my consideration of legality and soundness.

Progressing your Representations

12. The starting point for the Examination is that the Council has submitted what it considers to be a sound plan. Those seeking changes should demonstrate why the SLP is unsound by reference to one or more of the soundness criteria set out in paragraph 1 above.
13. Respondents may either wish their views to be dealt with in written form (in which case they need take no further action) or they may have requested to come and discuss them orally at a hearing session. **Both methods will carry the same weight and I shall have equal regard to views put at a hearing or in writing. Attendance at a hearing session will only be useful and helpful to me if you wish and need to participate in a discussion. There is normally no opportunity for participants to read out previously prepared statements.** Only those parties who have asked to attend and are seeking specific changes to the SLP are entitled to participate at the hearing sessions.
15. I stress the need for all sides to work together during the Examination process on changes that could be made to the SLP whilst avoiding producing so many alterations that they together might render the SLP unsound.

The Hearing Sessions

17. Depending on the conclusions drawn from the Initial Hearing Session, it is likely that a range of different topics will be discussed at subsequent hearings and, assuming that the Examination does continue, Issues and Questions for each session will be circulated beforehand. Each topic or Issue will be the subject of a separate session. The format will provide a relaxed and informal setting for a discussion led by me.
18. The hearings will concentrate on the Issues and Questions for discussion. If necessary, you may submit supplementary information (restricted in scope to the subject matter of your original related representation) in advance of the hearings – see paragraphs 29-31 below. However, I would normally expect your case to be covered in the representation that you have already made – indeed it is these and my own reading of the SLP that has led to the framing of the Issues and Questions in the first place. I have a copy of all the representations made. **There will be no need to repeat those representations at the hearings.**
19. I will draw those present into the discussion in such a way as to enable me to gain the information necessary to come to a firm conclusion on the matters before me. All statements should have been read beforehand by all participants and I will proceed on the assumption that they have been; there will therefore be no formal presentation of evidence. There will be an opportunity within the discussion to ask questions of the other participants.
20. The Programme Officer will provide name boards for each participant, which should be up-ended to indicate a wish to speak. In that way I can invite contributions without overlooking anyone with a point to make. The hearings will be inquisitorial rather than adversarial. I shall endeavour to progress them in an effective and efficient manner. As part of that process, it is my aim to minimise the amount of material necessary to come to informed conclusions on the issues of soundness. In that way I will conduct short focussed hearings and, in turn, produce a short, focussed report. **In order to run efficient sessions I will not permit repetition of points at hearings or accept new evidence unless it has been agreed in advance. No**

more evidence can be submitted once the hearing session has closed unless I expressly invite it. Any that is submitted will almost certainly be returned by the PO.

21. Participants may bring professional representatives with them but there is no need for participants to bring advocates/legal representatives but, if they do, they may take part as a member of the team, rather than as a traditional advocate, and there will be no formal presentation of evidence/cross-examination. Supporters of the SLP would not normally be expected to participate in the hearing sessions. Participants will be grouped together according to the issues being considered. **If several interested parties have the same viewpoint they should appoint one or two spokespersons** to represent them at a hearing session. Generally only one seat will be available at the table for each respondent, although if necessary participants may 'hot-seat' at an appropriate time. In order to assist the organisation of the hearings please advise the PO of the name(s) of those people participating. The Council will have two seats.

The Hearing Programme

22. An Agenda for the Initial Hearing Session accompanies this Note. If you have any queries, please raise them with the PO as soon as possible. The timetable and Agendas for any subsequent Hearing sessions will be made available as soon as possible, depending on the outcome of the Initial Hearing session.
23. Should changes be required to the Programme it will be updated on the Council's web site (see para 8 for details). The PO will also be able to provide information on any changes. However, it will be for individual participants to check on the progress of the hearings, either on the web site or with the PO, and to ensure that they are present at the right time.
24. Hearing sessions will start at 10.00am and 2.00pm each day. No new session will begin before its stated start time but a later start may be unavoidable if a previous session has overrun. A short break will be taken mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Lunch will be taken at around 1.00pm.
25. Assuming that the hearing sessions are completed (and if necessary any consultation on Main Modifications), I will then prepare a report to the Council with my conclusions on legal compliance and soundness.

The Evidence Base and Examination Library

26. The Council has prepared an evidence base list that will be available in the Examination Library. Most of the documents in the library will also be available on the Council's web site, which will be regularly updated. Accordingly, parties should not attach extracts of these documents to their Statements as they are already Examination documents. However, where reference is made to an Examination document the reference number should be given as should the section or paragraph where the point referred to can be found. This will allow other participants to see for themselves the context in which the point is made.

Statements of Common Ground

27. Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) are invited where these would be helpful in identifying points in dispute or not in dispute thereby assisting the hearings to concentrate on the key issues that truly need public discussion. They could for example include agreed wording of a suggested change to a policy criterion, agreed factual information or areas or points of disagreement.

28. **Work on such statements should commence now with the aim of completing them in time to feed into the relevant hearing Statement.** However, as a last resort, an agreed SoCG will still be accepted if submitted at least 2 weeks before the relevant hearing session.

Statements

29. All Statements relating to the Initial Hearing Session should be received by the PO by midday on **Friday 7th October 2016**. This deadline relates to the receipt of both paper copies and electronic copies. The Statements should only address my questions. The Council's Statements may also include responses to the matters in the original representations. Statements will be placed on the Examination web site.
30. From the Council I require answers to all the matters and issues that I have raised. The Council's response should take the form of a version of my Issues and Questions papers with answers following the related questions. **The word limit will not be strictly applied to the Council's Statements as it is important that full answers are given.**
31. Further advice regarding the timetable for Statements for the, as-yet, unscheduled Hearing sessions will be published once the way forward is clearer.

Form of Statements

32. Appendix B of this document sets out the requirements for the presentation of all Statements. Its provisions should be thoroughly read and implemented. Statements that do not comply with these requirements will be returned. Please note the 3,000 word limit.
33. **In the Statements from respondents it would be very helpful for me to have a brief concluding section stating:**
- What part of the SLP is not sound.
 - Which soundness criterion it fails.
 - Why it fails (point to the key parts of your original representations).
 - How the LP can be made sound.
 - The precise change and/or wording that you are seeking.

Suggested Minor Amendments

34. I expect that the Council will suggest further minor changes as a result of the discussions that we will have. The Schedule of Proposed Minor Amendments (CD 003) will be an evolving document and updated regularly. These changes can be taken forward by the Council on adoption and need not form part of the Examination.

Site visits

35. Where necessary, I shall visit relevant sites and areas referred to in the representations before, during or after the hearings.

Finally ...

36. I would like to emphasise:
- that I shall have equal regard to views put orally or in writing;

- the need for succinctness, respecting the 3,000 word limit on any further submissions (with short appendices if necessary) - as set out in Appendix B;
- that you must meet the target date for the submission of Statements; and
- that your Statement should focus on my Issues and Questions document and the NPPF soundness criteria.

If there are any questions arising from this note they should be passed to me by way of the Programme Officer.

David Hogger

Inspector

Appendix A - List of relevant legislation and guidance

A. Legislation

These documents can be searched for and found on: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- The Localism Act 2011

B. Government Policy and Guidance

These can be found by using the search facility on: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/>

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

C. Plan Making

The Planning Advisory Service web-site www.pas.gov.uk includes a number of documents relevant to plan making.

D. Guidance from the Planning Inspectorate

This can be found at: <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/plans>

E. Examination and Evidence Base Documents

Many of the above documents and most of the evidence base documents are available on-line on the Council's web site.

The Examination web site can be found at:

<http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/planning/Planningpolicy/SLPexam.aspx>

The Examination Library can also be viewed in hard copy at the Civic Centre, St Peters Street, St Albans AL1 3JE , during normal office hours.

Appendix B - Format for statements

- A. Please send, where possible, e-mailed electronic versions of all Statements and Appendices to the PO (in Word or PDF format) for the Examination web site as well as the paper copies as detailed below. Please include the name of the representor, the respondent reference number and the hearing matter number, in the filename.
- B. I emphasise the need for succinct submissions with the avoidance of unnecessary detail and repetition of the original representation.
- C. It is the quality of the reasoning that carries weight not the bulk of the documents. There is no need for verbatim quotations from the LP or other sources of policy guidance. It is vital that the fundamental elements are set out clearly and succinctly – the hearing session is not the place for surprise contributions!
- D. None of the statements should be longer than **3,000 words**. For the avoidance of doubt, this limit applies to the statement for the Issue as a whole, not for the individual Questions within an Issue. Any submissions longer than this will be returned by the PO for editing. Statements should be prepared on A4 paper, printed on both sides, and **not bound** but just stapled and hole punched. Any photographs should be submitted in A4 format and should be annotated (back or front).
- E. Supporting material in the form of appendices to statements should be limited to that which is essential and should not contain extracts from any publication that is already before the Examination, such as evidence base documents and nationally available Government guidance – a paragraph or page reference will suffice. Any appendices should have a contents page and be paginated throughout. Whilst the word limit does not include text in appendices, the aim of succinctness should be respected. Anyone submitting appendices should indicate in their statement which parts they are especially relying upon.
- F. Those submitting statements (or further written representations) should submit **three hard copies** to the PO (for the Inspector, Council, and PO).
- G. All statements should be clearly marked to indicate the name of the representor, the respondent reference, the hearing session to which the statement is directed and the question that is addressed.
- H. All participants should adhere to the timetable for submitting statements. Late submissions and additional material **are unlikely to be accepted** on the day of the relevant hearing session since this can cause disruption and result in unfairness and the adjournment of the hearing. If material is not received by the deadline, the PO will assume that you are relying on your original representation