

## **Examination of the New Castle Point Local Plan**

**Inspector:** Philip Lewis BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

**Programme Officer:** Andrea Copsey

Examination Office, PO Box 12607, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 9GN

[copseyandrea@gmail.com](mailto:copseyandrea@gmail.com) 07842 643988

---

### **Guidance note for participants at the virtual local plan examination hearings**

#### **Introduction**

1. The hearings being held as part of my examination of the New Castle Point Local Plan will proceed 'virtually', by means of Microsoft Teams, thus overcoming the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. These guidance notes focus specifically on participation in the virtual hearings by means of Microsoft Teams and should be read alongside the Inspector Guidance Notes issued in February 2021 which provide more general advice on the operation of the hearings.
2. Some people will be more familiar with Microsoft Teams 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 the hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner. Please read this note carefully as it sets out the procedures and rules for how the virtual hearings will be conducted.
3. Andrea Copsey is the Programme Officer for the examination, working under my direction independently from the Council. She is responsible for organising the administration of the examination, maintaining the document library, ensuring that all documents received are distributed, and acting as the channel of communication between myself, the Council and those taking part in the examination. She is the first point of contact for those with queries about the process and participation in the virtual hearings. Her contact details are: Andrea Copsey, Examination Office, PO Box 12607, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 9GN [copseyandrea@gmail.com](mailto:copseyandrea@gmail.com) 07842 643988

#### **Joining the virtual hearings as a participant**

4. If you are intending to join the virtual hearings using a PC, Apple Mac, iPhone or Android, you should download and install the Microsoft Teams application. If this is not possible, you can join using a Chrome browser on your desk top computer (not on your mobile phone). Some people with older devices or who use corporate devices which prevent downloads being installed could experience problems. In this case, either use an

alternative or contact your corporate systems administrator. Please do familiarise yourself with Microsoft Teams before joining the hearings. You will be responsible for making sure your kit is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing via Microsoft Teams.

5. The Programme Officer will email participants with an invitation to join the hearing. Participants should join their session using the electronic link in their invitation. If you prefer to join by Telephone or are unable to use the video option, simply dial the telephone number provided and when asked, type your conference ID followed by the # key. The telephone number to ring will be provided within the invitation. There will be separate invitations sent out for the specific hearing sessions.

### **Watching the virtual hearing**

6. The sessions will be available for non-participants and the public to watch on the internet. Each hearing will be livestreamed on the Council's website. A link will be available on the examination website. This will enable people to watch the hearings as they would with a physical hearing and will also allow those in the same organisation or team as their participating colleagues to keep up with the proceedings.

### **Participating in the Virtual Hearings**

7. The aim is to make the virtual hearings as similar as possible to physical hearings in the way they run and the way you participate.
8. At the start of each hearing session I will take appearances in the usual way. 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 Microsoft Teams to indicate your desire to speak.
9. I will give each of you who have raised their hands an opportunity to have their say. Although all participants may be able to see each other only one participant may speak at a time. I ask that all participants have their video turned off and they are on mute until invited to speak. When you are invited to speak unmute your microphone, and state your name and, if any, your organisation if it is your first time speaking during the session.
10. Please make your response is brief and focused and adhere to the agenda. You won't need to repeat your full case, or give any formal presentation, as I will have read all your representations. I may ask questions about aspects of your verbal or written submissions. The format will be a structured discussion, there will not be any cross examination and responses should always be directed to me. I will invite participants to speak in turn, so please be patient, and say what you need to say.

- 11.If you have already spoken on a particular topic but believe that you can help further on the subject, raise your hand using the facility in Microsoft Teams. Please ensure that anything you say here is new, important and relevant. Simply repeating what you or others have already said, or to register that you agree or disagree with another participant, is not necessary. Try however to get your points across the first time you are invited to speak as that will make for a more efficient event.
- 12.I will ask the Council for their comments on the main points raised and I will terminate the discussion on any topic when I have enough information. At the end of each hearing, I will end the session and ask all participants to exit the meeting. The online meeting will be terminated by the Programme Officer.
- 13.If you experience electronic interference during a session, try moving your mobile phone away from your computer. If you experience other connectivity issues, try switching off some other devices which share your Wi-Fi, or move closer to the router. If you are in a room with other members of your team, please ensure that only the microphone of the person speaking is on at any one time to prevent feedback or other disturbance.
- 14.If you are unable to join, or lose connection during a hearing, try again to join using the link provided in your invitation. The hearing may continue in your absence. As a 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 that you may wish to use. If none of these resolve the issue contact the Programme Officer for assistance.
- 15.The Council's test event is to ensure that you are comfortable taking part in the virtual hearings using Microsoft Teams.

### **Conduct, documents, evidence and presentation**

- 16.Local Plan examinations are a formal event, with appropriate conduct. All participants, their views and evidence are treated with fairness and consideration, and participants do not interrupt each other. I expect all participants to treat others with dignity and respect, even where you may not share the same views.
- 17.To make the best use of the 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 along with a Privacy Policy. You must join the hearing on Microsoft Teams at least 20 minutes before the time indicated on the agenda. The Programme Officer is responsible for admitting participants into the hearing session, you must wait to be admitted. You will 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 will not be acceptable and you may not be admitted. Individual invitations will be sent to participants by the Programme Officer. Address any issues in respect of the invitations to the Programme Officer. Do not forward your invitation to another participant as that is likely to affect the running of the event.

18. 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.
19. 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.
20. You must make sure that you attend the hearing you are invited to from start to finish. Leaving midway through a session, coming and going are not respectful to the hearing, and you may miss the opportunity to speak, hear other people's contributions, and listen to Inspector announcements.
21. When adjournments are announced, please make a careful note of the resumption time and be back at your screen before that time. If you need to leave early for any reason, please inform the Programme Officer as soon as possible.
22. The chat facility in Microsoft Teams must not be used under any circumstances. It does not form part of the formal hearing procedure. Any attempt to post anything will not be considered. You should consider whether you are likely to need to confer with another person (Agent, Legal Representative etc) during the event. If so, agree how you intend to achieve this outside of the Microsoft Teams meeting e.g. SMS, Email, WhatsApp etc before the event.
23. The examination website contains all the relevant examination documents. These are available to myself, all other participants, stakeholders and the public. The hearing will not use the document sharing facility available on Microsoft Teams. Nor should you hold any document in front of your camera.
24. New documents should only be submitted during the hearings at my invitation. This is to ensure fairness to all participants. 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 so that she can pass it to me, and post it on the examination website.

## **Privacy**

25. The hearings will be conducted in line with the Council's data protection policies and processes available to view on the examination website. Please have regard to the privacy notices published on the examination website.
26. You can turn your camera off if you don't want your image to be viewed. Do not forget to turn off your camera and mute yourself once you have finished speaking. Please do not make your own recording of the hearing.
27. 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, Microsoft Teams allows you to blur your background, but please do not use any of the other backgrounds that are available on Microsoft Teams. You must also not share any personal information during the hearing, either yours, or anyone else's.

*Philip Lewis*

INSPECTOR

26 April 2021