

Dover Local Plan Examination
Virtual Hearings - Week 4
Inspector's note for participants

Introduction

This note is to be read in conjunction with the Inspector's Guidance Notes (ED13) which set out the general parameters for the examination. This note provides specific advice on participating at the virtual hearings.

The last week of the hearing sessions for the Dover Local Plan Examination will proceed 'virtually', by means of Microsoft Teams. Some people will be more familiar with this conference-call technology than others, but the Inspector would like everyone to be assured that the hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner and that they will ensure that everyone who is participating can be heard. Please read this note carefully as it sets out the procedures and rules for how the virtual hearings will be conducted.

Joining the hearing as a participant

Participants should join their session by using the electronic link in their invitation sent in an email by Louise St John Howe, the Programme Officer. This will be via the email address you have already provided to the examination. If for technical reasons you are unable to join via the link provided, please contact Louise.

Please join between 30 and 15 minutes before the event is due to open (i.e. between 09.30 and 09.45 for a 10am start) to allow time to register your details. Whether using video or telephone access, you will be held in a virtual 'lobby' until you are let into the hearing.

Watching the hearing

The sessions will be live-streamed but they will also be recorded for non-participants and the public to watch on the internet. A link will be available on the Council's Local Plan examination web page.

The recording of the proceedings will be published as soon as possible after each hearing.

How the hearing will work for invited participants

Microsoft Teams Controls

The principal controls you will need to use are:


- camera on/off
- microphone on/off (to mute or unmute yourself)
- the raised hand – to indicate you wish to speak; and
- the red telephone to disconnect at the end of the hearing session or at the point you wish to leave the discussion.


The procedure for virtual hearings

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. Please bear in mind that the purpose of the hearings is for the Inspectors to gain the information they need to examine the plan's soundness.

When you join the hearing session, please make sure 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.

At the start of each hearing session the Inspectors will remind participants that the event is being recorded and that this is not discretionary. If you do not wish to be recorded your option will be to leave the event. The Inspectors will take appearances in the usual way. They will lead the hearing, introduce each topic and ask specific questions about the topic based on their Matters, Issues and Questions (ED14).

If you wish to respond to a question, please use the 'raise hand' facility [] in Teams to indicate your desire to speak. The Inspectors will give each of you who have raised their hands an opportunity to have their say. 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 please unmute your microphone.

As with physical hearings, please make your contributions brief and focused and relevant to the point on the agenda. You won't need to repeat your full case, or give any formal presentation, as the Inspectors will have read all your representations. They 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 the Inspectors. They will invite participants to speak in turn, so please be patient, and say what you need to say. If you have already spoken on a particular topic but believe that you can help further on the subject, please use the 'raise your hand' [] using the facility in Teams.

The Inspectors are likely to curtail the repetition of points already made. 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 helpful. The Inspectors will ask the Council for their comments on points raised.

At mid-session breaks, please do not log out but ensure that your camera and microphone is turned off. At the end of each hearing session the Inspectors will 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 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 the Inspectors request a new document from any party, for example a statement of common ground, it should be emailed direct to the Programme Officer so that she can pass it to the Inspectors and put it on the examination website.

Conduct

All participants, their views and evidence should be treated with fairness and consideration. Participants must not interrupt each other, and contributions should be made respectfully.

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. You must join the hearing on Teams between 30 minutes and no later than 15 minutes before the time indicated on the agenda and you will be held in a waiting lobby until you are admitted into the hearing by the Programme Officer.

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.

It is a good idea to have a jug and a glass of water or a soft drink with you during the hearing session. Comfort breaks will be built into the programme.

Those who use Teams and Zoom may 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 as far as possible that you attend the hearing you are invited to from start to finish. Leaving midway may mean you miss the opportunity to speak, hear other people's contributions, and listen to the Inspectors' announcements. If you need to leave early for any reason, please inform the Programme Officer as soon as possible.

When adjournments are announced, please make a careful note of the resumption time and be back at your screen before that time.

The Chat and Comment facilities **must not** be used under any circumstances.

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 e.g. SMS, Email, WhatsApp etc before the event.

Privacy

Please have regard to the privacy notice on the hearing sessions page of the examination pages on the Dover District Council website.

<https://www.doverdistrictlocalplan.co.uk/examination-home/hearing-sessions/hearing-sessions>

You can turn your camera off if you don't want your image to be viewed.

As set out above the hearings will be recorded for reference. 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, Microsoft 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

To join the live video conference via Teams, you will need to click on the link provided in the invitation. If you are intending to join 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.

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 Teams. If you experience electronic interference during the 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 wifi, or move closer to the router.

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