

EXAMINATION OF THE WEST BERKSHIRE MINERALS AND WASTE LOCAL PLAN (MWLP)

VIRTUAL HEARINGS - NOTE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

This note should be read carefully by all intending participants.

The hearings will proceed virtually using ZOOM Cloud Meetings commencing on Tuesday 1 February 2022 according to the programme within INSP.4 attached.

The use of this technology is becoming the norm, largely as a result of Covid19 pandemic restrictions. However, we may still need to adapt, make allowances and learn from the experience. I would emphasise that, as usual, all the hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner to provide the requisite full and complete hearing of all points of view.

This note sets out the procedures and rules for the conduct of the hearings. If everyone fully understands the protocol and technical considerations, then we are more likely to have virtual hearings without mishaps. You should be familiar with Amended Guidance Note INSP.5 regarding the format and content of Examination Hearings in general and site allocations in particular.

Joining the hearing as a participant

Participants should join their session using either the electronic link in their invitation or by entering the Meeting ID and Meeting Password directly into Zoom when prompted. Please note that if you are participating in more than one Hearing session then you will receive a separate invitation for each session, although there will be a single invitation for the morning and afternoon sessions on Day 1, when it is expected to commence Matter 2 Aggregate Requirements before the midday adjournment.

Participants without access to the internet can dial-in to the virtual hearing by telephone. The telephone number will be provided within the invitation.

Once you have joined the Hearing you should turn off your camera and mute your microphone (if you are a telephone participant please enter *6 on your keypad to mute/unmute your microphone) until invited to speak. This will be monitored by the meeting administrator and they will do so on your behalf if needed.

Observing a Hearing

The Hearing 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 West Berkshire MWLP Examination webpage. This will enable anyone with an interest to watch the Hearings as they would a conventional hearing in as close to real time as is possible when using a streaming service. However, the live streaming will allow those in the same organisation or team, as their participating colleague, to keep up with the proceedings in real time.

Hearing Format

The aim is to make the virtual hearings as similar as possible to conventional hearings in the way that they are run and the way that speakers participate. Please bear in mind that the purpose of the Hearings is for me to gain the information that I need to examine the soundness of the Plan.

At the start of each hearing session I will confirm appearances. I will lead the discussion, introducing each topic and may ask specific questions. If you wish to respond to a question, please use the "raise hand" facility in Zoom (if you are a telephone participant please enter *9 on your keypad to raise your hand) to indicate you wish to speak. I will give all participants who have raised their hands an opportunity to make their contribution. Only one participant will be permitted to speak at a time.

When you are invited to speak, you should unmute your microphone, and state your name and the person(s) or organisation(s) that you represent, where applicable.

Please make responses brief and focused and adhere to the agenda. You do not 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. ***When I have heard your comments and am about to move on to the next participant, your camera should be switched off and your microphone should be muted.***

There will be no cross examination and no interruption and all responses should 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, so please be patient until it is your turn, and say what you need to say about the matter in question when you have the opportunity.

If, exceptionally, 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 to comprehensively consider the question of soundness. Raising your hand simply to repeat or disagree with a comment 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.

Documents, Evidence and Presentation

The examination website contains all of 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 Zoom. 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 via jdkemp@icloud.com. Both the chat and reaction facilities in Zoom are not to be used and will be disabled for the hearing.

Conduct

Please bear in mind that virtual Hearings are still formal events and act accordingly. Please respect the views of other participants, do not interrupt each other and dress in a manner that respects the important nature of the event. Please ensure that your working environment is quiet and free from interruption. It is suggested that you have drinking water to hand and avoid drinking out of a bottle or eating during the discussion. Short breaks will be built into the programme as usual.

It is necessary that you join the hearing on Zoom using your full name and at least 15 minutes before the start time indicated on the agenda. You will be held in a waiting room until you are admitted into the Hearing by the Programme Officer.

Privacy

Please note the privacy notice which will be sent to all 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 please do not use the 141 service to keep your number private. This is so that your identity can be confirmed before you are admitted to the hearing. Your phone number will be masked upon joining the meeting (e.g. 888****666) and will shortly after be replaced by your full name by the meeting administrator. If you are planning to record the hearings you should request approval via the Programme Officer in advance of the hearings.

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

If you have any concerns about the security of your device, or out of preference you do not wish to install the Zoom app or client, you can join through your internet browser. In order to do this, after following the zoom link, please select 'Join from your browser' on the page that is displayed.

Use of Zoom

Please do familiarise yourself with Zoom before joining the hearings. You will be responsible for making sure that all of your equipment is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing via Zoom. It is strongly advised that before each meeting you ensure that your Zoom app, Zoom Client or your internet browser, if joining by the 'join from your browser route', are up to date.

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. If you experience internet connectivity issues, try switching off your camera, turning off 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 will run test events for any participant who is unfamiliar with Zoom, or is concerned about joining a virtual hearing. You will receive an invitation with details of the dates from the Programme officer. If you are interested, please contact him to book a place.

Finally, I should like to extend my thanks in advance to all those who are participating, to the Authorities, and also to Ian Kemp, the Programme Officer. As you will know, all 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.

Brian Sims

Inspector

3 November 2021