

Sedgeford Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examination Arrangements

Purpose of this Note

This Note sets out the basis on which the examination will be undertaken. Its ambitions are two-fold:

- to comply with the CLG/NPIERS procedural guidance (April 2018); and
- to provide guidance for the Parish Council on the key stages of the examination.

The examination route map

Different examinations raise their own issues. Nevertheless, the following are the key components that will be applied to this examination:

Stage 1: Background Reading

This involves reading the submitted Plan and its supporting documents. I will also read the various representations and take them into account during the examination.

The background reading is now largely finished. I will be looking at the representations received to the Plan shortly.

Stage 2: Visit to the neighbourhood area

The visit provides me with an opportunity to look at specific issues and sites in the neighbourhood area. Plainly not every component of the Plan needs to be viewed on the visit. Nevertheless, I will focus my time on looking at the issues that have arisen either from the background reading or which are fundamental to the Plan.

The visit will be unaccompanied. I will not meet with either the Parish Council or with any parties who have commented on the Plan. To do so would have the potential to affect the independence of the examination process.

Stage 3: Decision about the need for a hearing

The combination of the background reading and the unaccompanied visit will allow me to come to a view about the need or otherwise for a hearing. The legislation anticipates that the vast majority of examinations can proceed by way of written representations and without a hearing.

If a hearing is required, I will make separate arrangements with the Borough Council and the Parish Council. I will leave at least 10 working days between deciding on the need for a hearing and holding the hearing. A hearing will be held in the neighbourhood area wherever it is practicable to do so.

Stage 4: Clarification Note

Once the visit has taken place, I will usually issue a clarification note. It raises a series of questions. The answers to these questions will help me to understand the Plan better and, where appropriate, recommend modifications to the Plan.

The clarification note will suggest a timescale for responses based on the issues it addresses. However, this is a matter which I am happy should proceed at whatever pace is

determined locally. This recognises that neighbourhood plans are traditionally prepared by parish councils/parish meetings and individuals on a voluntary basis.

Stage 5: The Examination Report

My report will be prepared throughout the examination period. Its general parts can be written early in the process. The elements of the report that overlap with the clarification note will not be produced until the responses to the note are received.

I will prepare a fact check report before the final report. This gives an opportunity for the Borough Council and the Parish Council to comment on any factual inaccuracies and/or omissions. It does not present an opportunity for the examination to enter another phase.

Other related matters

The length of the examination

Plainly different plans cover different issues. Neighbourhood plan examinations are inevitably linear and are directly affected by the number of policies and the number and complexity of the representations received.

However, on average an examination of a small neighbourhood plan for a rural village (with approximately 15 policies) would take between 4-8 days. Larger plans may take between 6 - 12 days. These working days will be spread over several weeks. In the case of the Sedgeford Plan I am anticipating being able to send the fact check report towards the middle of May 2019.

Documents

The examination process should be open and transparent. In this context I will ask the Borough Council to display all examination-related documents on its website.

Contact arrangements

My principal contact for the examination will be Clare Robinson at the Borough Council. In most cases I will ask Clare to send documents to the Parish Council on my behalf.

Andrew Ashcroft

Independent Examiner

Sedgeford Neighbourhood Development Plan

16 April 2019