

OPDC Main Modifications - Virtual Hearings

Inspector's Note for Participants

Introduction

The OPDC Main Modification hearings are being held virtually due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The Corporation has the technology to host the hearings virtually and has therefore decided to proceed on this basis, using Microsoft Teams.

Some people will be more familiar with this technology than others, and we will have to adapt, make allowances and learn from the experience as we go along. However, as previously, all hearings will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner. If you are to participate in any of the virtual Hearings then please read this note carefully, as it sets out the procedures and rules for how the hearings will be conducted.

Set up

Please do familiarise yourself with Microsoft Teams 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. 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 some 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.

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. If you have a telephone or other device nearby, please make sure that it is muted or switched off. If more than one computer in a room is being used to take part in or watch a hearing session, the volume on all the computers' loudspeakers must be reduced to nil and headsets should be used. This is to avoid feedback that may disrupt the hearing session.

Joining the hearing as a participant

To make the best use of hearing time and to avoid disruption, the virtual hearings will start strictly at the time indicated on the programme. You will receive an invitation from the Programme Officer to the relevant session or sessions. Participants should join their session using the electronic link in their

invitation. Please note that if you are participating in more than one hearing session across different days then you will receive a separate invitation for each session.

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

Participants without access to the internet can dial-in to the virtual hearing by telephone. The telephone number will be provided within the invitation. 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 hearing and shortly afterwards the Programme Officer will replace it by your full name.

All participants must join the hearing at least 15 minutes before the time indicated on the programme. You will then be held in a waiting lobby until you are admitted into the hearing by the Programme Officer. If you experience any problem joining the event on the day that is not solved by the set-up advice given earlier, please call or text the Programme Officer.

Once you have joined the hearing you should mute your microphone (if you are a telephone participant, please enter *6 on your keypad to mute/unmute your microphone) and turn off your camera until invited to speak.

When adjournments are announced, please turn off your camera and mute your microphone but do not log out of Teams. Make a careful note of the resumption time and be back at your screen before that time. At the end of each hearing session, the Programme Officer will end the Teams session and ask all participants to log out of the Teams meeting.

Conduct

Local plan Main Modification examination hearings are an official event. Although run as informally as possible they require appropriate conduct from participants. The views and evidence of all participants are treated with fairness and consideration, and participants do not interrupt each other. You should use the formal Mr, Mrs and so on, not first names. The chat facility in Microsoft Teams should not be used and may, indeed be disabled. If you are likely to need to confer with another person during the hearing session, you should arrange how to do so in advance.

Those who have previously used Microsoft Teams or other similar software will have grown used to the idea that people can come and go during virtual meetings, as can attendees at face to face hearings. However, participants in examination hearings should make sure that you attend the hearing to which you are invited from start to finish. In order to participate effectively, you need to know what is said by other participants. Leaving the screen midway through a session, coming and going, and leaving early, may mean that you miss the opportunity to speak or to come back on a particular point that is of concern to you.

It is a good idea to have a glass of water or a soft drink with you during the hearing session, however, eating and snacking is not appropriate whilst giving evidence. Comfort breaks will be built into the programme.

Watching a hearing

The hearing sessions will be available for non-participants and the public to watch live. This enables people to watch the hearings as they would with a physical hearing. If you wish to observe the hearings, they will be live streamed on OPDC's [YouTube channel](#). You can go to OPDC's [Examination Webpage](#) where the link will be displayed. The hearings are also being recorded and will be uploaded on the Examination Webpage after each session.

The hearing format

My aim is to make the virtual hearings as similar as possible to physical hearings in the way that they are run and the way that you participate. Please bear in mind that the purpose of the hearings is for me to gain the information that I need to examine the plan's soundness.

At the start of each hearing session I will ask people to confirm that they can see and hear me by asking them to use the hand raise tool. I will then go on to introduce each topic and ask specific questions about the topic. Discussion will follow the Inspector's *Agendas* that have already been provided and are on the examination documents page as [ID-39v2](#), [ID-40v2](#), [ID-41v2](#) and [ID-42v2](#).

If you wish to respond to a question, please use the "raise hand" tool to indicate your desire to speak. (Telephone participants should enter *9 on your keypad to indicate a desire to speak and *6 to mute/unmute your microphone when asked to speak.) I will give each of the participants who have raised their hands an opportunity to speak. Only one participant may speak at a time. When you are invited to speak, you should turn on your camera and unmute your microphone, and state your name and, if any, the person(s) or organisation(s) that you represent.

Please make your response brief and focused. You won't 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 from you and I am about to move on to the next participant, your hand tool should be lowered and your microphone should be muted, you may turn your camera off too if you wish.

There will not be any cross examination or participant interruption, and responses should always be directed to me. Unless a discussion is appropriate I will normally invite participants (other than the Corporation) 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 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 efficiently and only when you have new, important and relevant

evidence which will help me gain the information that I need to consider the proposal's soundness. Raising your hand to repeat what you or others have already said, or to register that you don't agree with another participant, is not appropriate. I will close the discussion on any particular topic when I have enough information. As I move towards the end of each topic or sub-topic, I will ask the Corporation for their comments on the points raised, if I have not already done so. At the end of each hearing, I will end the session and ask all participants to log out.

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 unless the Inspector asks the Corporation and/or Programme Officer to display a relevant document already in the public domain. Nor should you hold any document in front of your camera. New documents should only be submitted during the hearings at my request. If I do request a new document from any party, for example a statement of common ground, it should be emailed straight to the Programme Officer, Charlotte Glancy, so that she can pass it to me and ensure it is put on the examination webpage. The chat facility should not be used under any circumstances nor should the reaction facility because their use is not recorded and there needs to be a record of proceedings in case of subsequent legal challenge.

Privacy

Please have regard to the privacy notices of the [Corporation](#) and the [Planning Inspectorate](#). Copies are posted on the Examination webpage under the [Examination Process](#) section. 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. Please do not make your own recording of a hearing. You must ensure that no-one else appears on your camera and you should clear your background of personal information. You must not share any personal information during the hearing, either yours or anyone else's.

Thanks

Finally, I should like to extend my thanks in advance to all those who are participating, to the Corporation, and also to Charlotte Glancy, 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.

P. W. Clark

Inspector

23 December 2021