



Sandwell Local Plan 2024-2041 - Examination

Inspector

Mrs C Jack BSc(Hons) MA MA(TP) PGDip(CHE) MRTPI

Programme Officer

Ms Louise St John Howe

louise@poservices.co.uk

07789 486419

Examination website

[Examination Overview](#) | [Sandwell Local Plan Examination](#) | [Sandwell Council](#)

Inspector's Note for Participants in Virtual (Online) Hearings

Introduction

1. This note should be read in conjunction with the Inspector's Guidance Notes for the examination. This note provides specific advice on participating at the virtual hearings.
2. Virtual hearing sessions will take place online using Microsoft Teams. Some people will be more familiar with this conference-call technology than others, but everyone should be assured that the hearing will be conducted in a fair, open and impartial manner and the Inspector 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. The Programme Officer will run an information session on Microsoft Teams prior to the virtual hearings taking place. Details of these sessions will be sent out by the Programme Officer to all those taking part in the virtual hearing sessions.

Observing a Virtual Hearing Session

3. The virtual sessions will be live-streamed. A link to the livestream will be available on the examination website for use by anyone wanting to watch.

Taking Part in a Hearing Session as an Invited Participant

4. To participate, you will need to have a right to be heard in that session and have registered your interest in participating with the Programme Officer by the relevant deadline (see the Inspector's Guidance Note for more details).



Joining a Virtual Hearing as a Participant

5. To join the live Hearing (an online video conference) via Teams, you will need to click on the link in the invitation sent to the email address you have already provided to the examination.
6. 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 a desk top computer (not on your mobile phone). If for technical reasons you are unable to join via the link provided, please contact the Programme Officer.
7. If you are using an older device, or a corporate device which prevents downloads being installed, you might experience problems joining the live session. If this is the case, please contact your corporate systems administrator in advance.
8. You are responsible for making sure your equipment is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing via Microsoft Teams at the scheduled time. 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 Wi-Fi, moving closer to the router, or switching off your camera.
9. If you are initially unable to join, or lose connection during the hearing, please try to re-join using the link provided in your calendar invitation. Consider trying an alternative device if you have one available. The hearing is likely to 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 to try.

Microsoft Teams Controls

10. The principal controls you will need to use during an examination hearing session are:
 - Camera on/off
 - Microphone on/off
 - The raised hand button  to indicate that you wish to speak
 - The red telephone 'Leave' button to disconnect at the end of the hearing session or at the point you wish to leave the discussion.



Procedure for Virtual Hearings

11. The aim is to make virtual hearing sessions as similar as possible to physical (in-person) hearing sessions in the way they run and the way you participate. Please bear in mind that the purpose of the hearing is for the Inspector to gain the information they need to examine the plan's soundness and legal compliance.
12. The Inspector will take appearances in the usual way, and they will lead the hearing, introduce each topic, and ask specific questions about the topic based on their Matters, Issues and Questions previously circulated. There may also be a specific agenda provided for a session.
13. If you wish to respond to a question, please use the 'raise hand' facility in Microsoft Teams to request to speak. The Inspector will give everyone who has raised their hand an opportunity to speak. 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. Turn off your microphone once you have finished speaking to help avoid 'feedback' and for privacy reasons.
14. Hearing time is limited. Therefore, as with physical (in-person) hearings, please make your contributions concise, focused, and relevant to the question. You will not need to repeat your full case, or give any formal presentation, as the Inspector will have read your written representations. The Inspector may ask questions about aspects of your verbal or written submissions. The format will be a structured discussion, where there will not be any cross examination, and your responses should always be directed to the Inspector.
15. The Inspector will typically invite participants to speak in turn, so please be patient. If you have already spoken on a particular topic but believe that you can help further on the subject, please use the 'raise hand' facility in Microsoft Teams and the Inspector will invite you back into the discussion at an appropriate moment.
16. The Inspector will curtail the repetition of points already made. It is also not necessary to register that you either agree or disagree with what another participant has said. As it is their plan, the Inspector will ask the Council for their comments on points raised.
17. At mid-session breaks, the Inspector will remind participants not to log out of the session but ensure they turn their cameras and microphones off. At the end of each hearing session, they will ask all participants to log out by leaving the call using the red telephone 'leave' button in Microsoft Teams.



Documents, Evidence and Presentation

18. The examination website contains all the relevant examination documents, which are available to all participants, stakeholders, and the public. During the hearings you should not use the document or screen sharing facility available on Microsoft Teams. Nor should you hold any document in front of your camera. Instead, refer to examination documents by their reference number so all participants are clear about what you are referring to.
19. New documents should only be submitted during the hearing stage at the Inspector's invitation. If they request a new document from any party, it should be emailed direct to the Programme Officer who will pass it to the Inspector and arrange for it to be added to the examination website.

Conduct

20. All participants, their views, and evidence shall be treated with fairness and consideration. Please do not interrupt other participants and ensure you make all contributions in a respectful way.
21. To make the best use of available hearing time and avoid disruption the virtual hearing sessions will start at the time indicated on the hearing programme.
22. You will receive an invitation from the Programme Officer to the relevant session(s). Please join the hearing on Microsoft Teams 20-30 minutes before the time indicated on the agenda and you will be held in a virtual waiting lobby until you are admitted into the hearing by the Programme Officer. When you join the hearing session, please make sure your microphone is muted. 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.
23. Please make appropriate arrangements to ensure that your environment is quiet during the hearing, and that the hearing (and your ability to participate and concentrate on it) is not disrupted by external noise and unnecessary distractions. Please ensure mobile phones and other devices are set to silent for the duration.
24. Those who regularly use Microsoft Teams and similar platforms may have grown used to the idea that people can come and go during virtual meetings. However, that does not apply to examination hearing sessions. You should make sure as far as possible that you are available to attend the hearing session 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 any announcements from the Inspector. If you do need to leave early for any reason, please inform the Programme Officer as soon as possible. Comfort breaks will be built into the daily agenda.



25. When adjournments are announced, please make a careful note of the resumption time and be back at your screen shortly before that time.
26. The Microsoft Teams 'chat' and 'comment' facilities must not be used under any circumstances. The Inspector will not take account of them, and their use could be distracting for other participants. Prior to the event you should consider whether you are likely to need to confer with another person (agent, legal representative, etc.) and make the necessary arrangements e.g. SMS, email, WhatsApp instead.

Privacy and Data Protection

27. Please have regard to the privacy notice on the Council's website. You may turn your camera off if you do not want your image to be viewed or recorded. You must not share any personal information during a hearing session, whether your own or anyone else's.
28. Please do not make your own recording of the hearings. You must ensure that no-one else appears on your camera or audio unless it has been otherwise agreed, and you should clear your background of personal items and information. If you prefer, Microsoft Teams allows you to blur your background. Please do not use any of the other backgrounds that are available on Microsoft Teams.

If you have questions about participating in or observing a virtual hearing session, please contact the Programme Officer in the first instance.

Catherine Jack

INSPECTOR