

## Inspector's Note on Recording of Hearing Sessions

In responses to the consultation on the Main Modifications and related material, some representors expressed concern that the examination hearings, held in December 2019, were not live-streamed and/or recorded.

Whilst the hearing sessions are an important component of an examination, a considerable proportion of an examination focuses on the submission and consideration of written evidence. In terms of the hearing sessions, live-streaming was mooted by the Council when the procedural arrangements were originally discussed. However, the Inspector was of the view that this was unnecessary due to the generous size of the Council Chamber and its ability to accommodate a considerable number of participants and observers. No material had been presented to him at that stage to suggest that the number of interested parties who would wish to participate in or observe the proceedings would exceed the capacity of the chosen venue. The Inspector was not aware of any requests for the hearings to be live streamed either prior to their opening or during the course of proceedings. Moreover, the hearings were held prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a period when very few local plan hearing sessions were live streamed.

There is no legislative duty or procedural requirement for local plan hearings to be live-streamed and/or recorded. Moreover, as the Inspectorate's Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations (the Procedure Guide) makes clear, provided that it does not disrupt proceedings, anyone present would be allowed to report on and make audio and visual recordings of hearings, including on digital and social media as long as this is done responsibly and in line with data protection legislation. This was a matter that was covered in the Inspector's opening remarks at each hearing session. He is not aware that anyone took advantage of this opportunity – and, when asked, no-one indicated that they wished to record the event.

The Planning Inspectorate's Procedure Guide has recently been amended to reflect the current practice of holding examination hearings by virtual means and now specifically refers to the possibility of live-streaming or recording of these. However, this guidance was not reflected in the edition of the Procedure Guide available at the time of Woking's Examination hearings, which were conducted in-person rather than virtually.

For information, the Procedure Guide (5<sup>th</sup> Edition), which was current at the time of the examination hearings is available here:

<https://www.woking2027.info/allocations/sadpdexam/examguide>

The latest edition (which was published in March 2021) is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice>