

# **Examination of the St Albans City and District Local Plan**

**Matthew Birkinshaw BA(Hons) Msc MRTPI**

**Thomas Bristow BA Msc MRTPI**

Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State

Date 29 August 2025

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## **Examination Guidance Note for Stage 2**

Published v1

## Introduction

1. This Guidance Note provides further information on the procedural and administrative arrangements for Stage 2 of the examination of the St Albans City and District Local Plan.
2. Stage 1 was held between 29 April and 2 May 2025. On 26 June 2025, the Inspectors wrote to the Council advising that the examination should continue to the next stage.
3. All participants should familiarise themselves with the contents of this Guidance Note, in particular those who wish to submit hearing statements and/or take part in the hearing sessions.

## The Role of the Planning Inspectors

4. The Local Plan is being examined by **Matthew Birkinshaw** BA (Hons) Msc MRTPI and **Thomas Bristow** BA Msc MRTPI.
5. The Inspectors have been appointed by the Secretary of State. Their role is to examine whether the Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and associated Regulations, and, whether or not it meets the tests of 'soundness' set out in the 2023 National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework').
6. At all times the Inspectors will aim to work with the Council and everyone else involved in the examination in a positive and pragmatic manner.

## The Role of the Programme Officer

7. The appointed Programme Officer is Louise St John Howe. Communication between the Inspectors and representors is handled by the Programme Officer, who is contacted at:

Ms Louise St John Howe, PO Box 10965, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 3BF

Telephone: 07789 486419

Email: [louise@poservices.co.uk](mailto:louise@poservices.co.uk)

8. The Programme Officer is also responsible for making sure that the information regarding the examination and all relevant documents are made available on the examination website:

<https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/st-albans-city-district-local-plan-examination>

9. Should any representors not have access to the internet, please contact the Programme Officer so that alternative arrangements can be made.

## Hearing Sessions for Stage 2

10. As with the first stage of the examination, the Inspectors will hold hearing sessions to discuss the main issues and any main modifications as necessary. Again, **only those people seeking to change the Plan, and have duly made representations, have a right to participate in the hearing sessions.**
11. It is also important to stress that written representations carry the same weight as those made orally at a hearing session. Thus, participation at the hearings is only necessary if, in light of the matters raised, you have specific points that you wish to contribute orally at the hearing. The sessions will be streamed online for people to observe. Relevant links to each session will be made available from the examination website prior to the hearings starting.

## Hearing Session Format and Location

12. The hearing sessions will be informal, but structured. They will take place in the form of a roundtable discussion led by the Inspectors. People may choose to be professionally represented on the day, but there will be no formal cross-examination of witnesses or any detailed presentation of evidence.
13. The Stage 2 hearing sessions will be held at the **Council Offices, Civic Centre, St Peter's Street, St Albans, AL1 3JE** and will take place as follows:
- **Tuesday 14 October – Friday 17 October 2025**
  - **Tuesday 21 October – Friday 24 October 2025**
  - **Tuesday 4 November – Friday 7 November 2025**
  - **Tuesday 11 November – Friday 14 November 2025 (online)**
14. The time, venue and format of each session is specified in the **Examination Hearing Programme**. However, there are two important differences that participants must note between the Stage 1 and Stage 2 hearing sessions.
15. Firstly, a joint hearing session will be held with Dacorum Borough Council on **Tuesday 21 October 2025**, to be held at the St Albans City and District Council offices. This will consider strategic matters relating to the Hemel Garden Communities. Thereafter, matters relating to individual site allocations will be discussed with each local authority separately for the remainder of the examination.

16. Secondly, the final week of the examination will be held virtually online. Participants should register to attend these sessions with the Programme Officer in the same way, and further information will be released nearer the time including instructions for how to join the sessions.

## **Attending a Hearing Session**

17. **If you wish to be heard at the Stage 2 hearings, you must confirm this in writing with the Programme Officer no later than 5pm on Friday 12 September 2025, even if you indicated in your original Regulation 19 representation that you wished to participate.** If the Programme Officer does not receive written confirmation, it will be assumed that you do not wish to participate and that you will be relying on written submissions. You should only request to attend a session if you have made a representation seeking a change to the Plan relating to that topic.
18. The **Matters, Issues and Questions for Stage 2** will form the basis of the discussions at the hearings and has been published alongside this Guidance Note. Each session will be arranged by topic, not necessarily by policy number. It is therefore important that representors check that they have been allocated to the correct session, contacting the Programme Officer if unsure.
19. If there is a Matter that has been raised by the Inspectors, and one where several individuals (such as a group of local residents) wish to speak and make the same point, representors should consider whether they wish to nominate a single person to speak on their behalf. If participants are unsure, please contact the Programme Officer who will be able to help.
20. A final version of the Examination Hearing Programme will be published on the examination website before the start of each week of hearing sessions and confirm which representors are scheduled to attend each session. It will be for participants to check the progress of the hearings and to ensure that they are present at the right time. Participants should also be aware of any scheduled reserve days, which will be used as required.

## **Hearing Statements**

21. Ahead of the hearings, the Council should produce Hearing Statements which respond directly to all the points raised in the MIQs for Stage 2.
22. Any representors who have made comments seeking a change to the Plan and who are invited to the hearing sessions may also submit Hearing Statements. This, however, is optional and is not a requirement of the hearings.

23. Statements should be concise and focused, and appendices should only be included where directly relevant and necessary. There is no need to re-submit previous consultation responses as part of Hearing Statements. These will be returned by the Programme Officer.
24. Statements should only answer the specific Questions which are directly relevant to the original representation and should clearly identify the relevant topic to which they relate. Statements should be concise and provided for each Matter separately. There is no need to repeat or reproduce previous comments.
25. There are two deadlines for submitting hearing statements as follows.
  - **5pm on Friday 26 September 2025 for Hearing Weeks 2 and 3**
  - **5pm on Friday 17 October 2025 for Hearing Weeks 4 and 5**
26. Representors not participating at the hearing sessions may also submit an additional Written Statement as required. However, this is not an opportunity to introduce further arguments, and the format and length of Written Statements is the same as for Hearing Statements. No other written evidence can be submitted unless specifically requested by the Inspectors.

## **Statements of Common Ground**

27. Statements of Common Ground between participants are encouraged where they assist in identifying matters in agreement, and therefore allowing the hearing sessions to concentrate on the issues in dispute.
28. Where possible, Statements of Common Ground should be submitted alongside Hearing Statements. If representors are intending on submitting Statements of Common Ground, please make the Programme Officer aware.

## **Closing the Examination and the Inspectors' Report**

29. Following the hearing sessions, the relevant findings will be set out in the Inspectors' Report, or in some cases, through Interim Findings. The Report will be sent to the Council at the end of the examination and will set out the conclusions, and where necessary, any Main Modifications to make the Plan sound and/or legally compliant.
30. The examination will remain open until the Report has been submitted to the Council. During this time no further written submissions or evidence will be taken into account unless specifically requested.

## Summary and Examination Programme

31. Based on the above, the examination timetable and relevant dates are as follows:

- **Friday 29 August 2025** – formal notification of the time, date and location of the Stage 2 hearing sessions.
- **Friday 12 September 2025** - deadline for confirming with the Programme Officer if you wish to attend the hearings.
- **Friday 26 September 2025** – Hearing Statement deadline for hearing weeks 2 and 3.
- **Tuesday 14 October 2025** – Hearing Week 2
- **Friday 17 October 2025** – Hearing Statement deadline for hearing weeks 4 and 5.
- **Tuesday 21 October 2025** – Hearing Week 3 (including joint session with Dacorum Borough Council on 21 October 2025)
- **Tuesday 4 November 2025** – Hearing Week 4.
- **Tuesday 11 November 2025** – Hearing Week 5.
- **Tuesday 18 November 2025** – Reserve days as required.