

**BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN EXAMINATION**

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- 3.4 An important element of the new system is that the hearing sessions in the examination are intended to be an inquisitorial process, rather than the previous more adversarial approach between local planning authority and objector. With this in mind, the hearing sessions will be run as a series of round-table sessions which I will lead addressing particular topics or issues, rather than individual representations. I attach a first draft of the topics and issues I wish to discuss. The topics identified for discussion arise from the questions as to the soundness of the Plan raised by the representations made or which I have identified so far.
- 3.5 I will not encourage a debate on the merit of national policies as such but would rather seek to solicit views on the application and implications of these policies on the various policies and proposals within the Plan. Throughout the hearing sessions the focus will be on whether the Plan is sound. It is not the purpose of the examination process to recommend changes to a Plan where it is found to be sound that would further enhance its soundness. I am not seeking to improve the Plan.
- 3.6 At the end of the examination I will send my report to the Council with my conclusions and recommendations on the actions or changes needed as regards the soundness of the Plan

- 4.1 The Pre Hearing Meeting will take place on Tuesday 24 April 2012, at the General Offices, The Works Site, Steelworks Road, Ebbw Vale NP23 6DN at 2pm. The purpose of the meeting is to explain and discuss procedural and administrative matters relating to the management of the examination, including the programme for the hearings; the matters to be examined and related questions; the running order and participants; the methods of dealing with representations; the timetable for submitting any additional material that may be required; and any other relevant matters. The merits of the Plan and the representations will not be discussed at this meeting.
- 4.2 I will ask the Council at the PHM to confirm that the Plan has been prepared in accordance with the relevant statutory procedures and associated regulations, and is supported by a sustainability appraisal. I will also clarify the position in respect of the Statement of Community Involvement and the Delivery Agreement. To ensure that there are no fundamental procedural shortcomings at this stage, the Council has produced its own self-assessment of soundness of the Plan.
- 4.3 I attach an agenda for the PHM, together with a draft list of hearing sessions around which I would like to structure the examination. **I invite all participants to let me have their views on the draft list of hearing sessions.**
- 4.4 I will write to all individuals and organisations, whether or not you come to the PHM, with a note of any discussion that takes place along at this meeting and will finalise the programme for the examination thereafter.

5. Representations on the Plan

- 5.1 The Council prepared a consultation report as part of its core documentation. This reports that some 390 representations were received from 85 organisations, bodies and individuals within the specified six-week period following the publication of the Plan (Deposit Plan). Of the representations made, 98 expressed support for the Plan. 63 alternative sites were suggested in the deposit representations. These alternative sites were then subjected to a further round of consultation. 423 representations were received from 176 individuals and organisations in relation to this consultation. Of these, 321 were objections, that is, they supported the Council's position.
- 5.2 The Council has considered the submissions made over the preparation of the Plan and responded to some of them by making changes to the Plan (called "Focussed Changes"). It will be aware that it should avoid changes to the deposited Plan as far as possible. Such changes should not normally be necessary, if the

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scheduled are set out in the accompanying sessions programme and are likely to run over four weeks with the aim of finishing before the start of the school holidays.

- 7.2 The focus in the sessions will be on the soundness of the Plan, having regard to the tests of soundness concerning procedural requirements and the Plan's consistency, coherence and effectiveness. A separate session will be held for each of the main topics outlined in the programme. The sessions will take the form of an informal roundtable session which I will lead, where the Council and those who wish to be heard discuss the key points identified. Participants may bring professional representatives to speak on their behalf and may ask questions about the evidence, but there will be no formal presentation of evidence, cross-examination or formal submissions. Participants do not need legal representation. The Council has told me it will not be legally represented at the sessions.
- 7.3 At the start of each session I will set out a detailed agenda along the lines of the draft hearing schedule attached. The discussion will focus on these questions. I will begin by making a few brief comments on the matters to be covered, before inviting participants to make their contribution to the debate. The session will progress under my guidance, drawing participants into the discussion in such a way as to enable me to gain the information necessary to come to a firm conclusion on the relevant issues. At the end of each session, participants will have the opportunity to briefly sum up the main points of their arguments.
- 7.4 The hearings will be conducted on the basis that those taking part have read the relevant representations, statements and associated documentation, although participants will be able to refer to and elaborate on relevant points as necessary. I aim to progress the sessions in an effective and efficient manner, keeping a firm hand on the discussions and time taken. As part of that process, I have imposed a limit on the amount of material to be submitted to help me come to informed conclusions on the issues.

8. Examination Programme

- 8.1 The hearings part of the examination is likely to run over four weeks with a break in the middle to conduct site visits. The Programme Officer will draw up a final programme for the hearings, which will be published with the topics for discussion on each date, on the Council's website within a week of the PHM.
- 8.2 Every effort will be made to keep to the programme, but late changes may be unavoidable. Priority will be given to starting the debate on each matter at the appointed time, but on occasions it may be necessary to extend the debate. The draft timetable allows for a reserve session. Jeanette will contact participants and tell them of any late changes to the timetable, but it is the

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responsibility of the participants to keep themselves up to date with the arrangements and programme.

9. Preparation and submission of further material

Core documents

- 9.1 The Council has prepared a comprehensive list of Core Documents, which is available to view in the Examination Library located at the General Offices on Steelworks road. They can also be viewed on the Examination website at: <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/business/17460.asp> These documents include relevant national policy and guidance, background papers, existing development plan and other policy documents, and any other documents to which they are likely to refer. The list of Core Documents includes the Council's full evidence base for the Examination. Other participants should ensure that any additional documents they intend to refer to are included in the list of Core Documents, and they should arrange for such documents to be sent to the programme officer (four copies will be required). Any further written statements or other material requested will be added to the Core Documents list as it is submitted.
- 9.2 The representations already made at the Deposit, Alternative Sites and Focussed Changes stages should have included all the points, documents and evidence intended to substantiate representors' cases. Participants should therefore not submit any further material based on the original representations.

Submission of further material

- 9.3 Submissions should focus on the issues/matters I have identified on the tests of soundness and demonstrate why the plan is sound/unsound and how it could be made sound. All statements should clearly indicate the policy/ paragraph/ page of the Plan and the relevant soundness test(s). All submissions should be as concise as possible, avoiding unnecessary detail or repetition. There is no need for lengthy quotations from the Plan or other sources of

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11.1 I have already visited parts of the borough and will conduct a more detailed tour before the start of the hearing sessions. I intend to conduct a number of sites in the week from 11 to 13 July and intend to do most of them unaccompanied. Jeanette will contact relevant participants if I consider it necessary to visit specific sites accompanied by other participants in the examination.

12. Close of the examination

12.1 The examination will remain open until I submit my report to the Council. However, I cannot accept any further representations or evidence after the hearing sessions have finished unless I specifically ask for it. Any late or unsolicited material will be returned.

13. Timetable for submission of report to the Council

13.1 The timetable for the submission of my report will depend on what happens at the examination. I will confirm the likely date once the hearings sessions have been completed.

Vincent Maher
INSPECTOR