

Charfield Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examination Arrangements

Purpose of this Note

This Note sets out the basis on which the examination of the neighbourhood plan will be undertaken. Its ambitions are two-fold:

- to comply with the CLG/NPIERS Guidance for service users and examiners (April 2018); and
- to provide guidance for the Parish Council on the key stages of the examination.

The examination route map

Different examinations raise their own issues. Nevertheless, the following are the key components that will be applied to this examination:

Stage 1: Background Reading

This involves reading the submitted Plan, its supporting documents and the various representations. I will take all this information into account when preparing my report.

Stage 2: Visit to the neighbourhood area

The visit will provide me with an opportunity to look at specific issues and sites in the neighbourhood area. Plainly not every component of the Plan needs to be viewed on the visit. Nevertheless, it will be focused on the issues that have arisen either from the background reading and/or which are fundamental to the Plan.

The visit will be unaccompanied. I will not meet with representatives of the Parish Council, South Gloucestershire Council or any of the parties who have commented on the Plan. To do so would have the potential to affect the independence of the examination process.

The timing of the visit will relate to the scale and nature of the representations that have been received to the Plan within the current consultation exercise. However, I will visit the neighbourhood area as quickly as possible once I have completed the background reading.

Stage 3: Clarification Note

Following the visit, I will prepare a clarification note. It will raise a series of questions on the submitted Plan. The answers to the questions will help me to understand the Plan better and, where necessary, to recommend modifications to ensure it meets the basic conditions. It will also provide an opportunity for the Parish Council to comment on representations received to the Plan.

The clarification note will suggest a timescale for responses based on the issues it addresses. The timescale is usually between two and three weeks. However, this is a matter which I am happy should proceed at whatever pace is determined locally. This acknowledges that work on neighbourhood plans is carried out by parish councils and individuals on a voluntary basis.

Stage 4: Decision about the need for a hearing

The combination of the background reading, the unaccompanied visit and the responses to the clarification note will allow me to come to a view about the need or otherwise for a hearing.

The legislation anticipates that the vast majority of examinations can proceed by way of written representations and without a hearing.

If a hearing is required, I will make separate arrangements with South Gloucestershire Council and the Parish Council. Plainly those arrangements would need to take account of Covid:19 and any restrictions in place at the time of a hearing.

In the event that a physical hearing can take place it will be held in the neighbourhood area insofar as it is practicable to do so.

Stage 5: The Examination Report

My report will be prepared throughout the examination period. Its general parts can be written early in the process. The elements of the report that overlap with the clarification note will not be prepared until the responses to the note are received.

I will prepare a fact check report before the final report. This will give an opportunity for South Gloucestershire Council and the Parish Council to comment on any factual inaccuracies and/or omissions within the report. It will not present an opportunity for the examination to enter another phase.

Other related matters

The timing of the examination

Plainly different plans cover different issues. Neighbourhood plan examinations are inevitably linear and are directly affected by the number of policies and the number and complexity of the representations received.

In the case of the Charfield Plan I anticipate being able to prepare the fact check report by the end of November 2020. Plainly this will depend on the timing of the responses to the clarification note.

Documents

I have asked South Gloucestershire Council to display all examination-related documents on its website.

Contact arrangements

My principal contact throughout the examination will be Danny Dixon at South Gloucestershire Council. In most cases I will ask South Gloucestershire Council to send documents to the Parish Council on my behalf.

Andrew Ashcroft

Independent Examiner

Charfield Neighbourhood Development Plan

23 October 2020