

Examination of the Remitted part of the Salt Cross Village Area Action Plan

Guidance note

Introduction

1. The purpose of this Guidance Note is to explain procedural and administrative matters relating to the examination of the remitted part of the Salt Cross Village Area Action Plan (AAP).

Examination Hearings

2. The hearing session will be held virtually on Monday 30 June 2025 with Friday 4 July 2025 held in reserve if needed. The hearing will take place based on an agenda which will be available in advance of the event.
3. Participants are advised to make use of the Examination website where further information including relevant documents can be found.

<https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/Salt-cross-AAP-Examination-2024>.

Inspectors Role and background to the Examination

4. As the Inspector appointed to consider the soundness of the remitted part of the AAP, my role is to consider whether the Council's proposed changes are necessary to achieve a sound plan and if the requirements of the relevant legislation and regulations have been met.
5. The AAP was formally submitted for Examination in February 2021. Examination hearings were held in June /July 2021 with Main Modifications consulted on between September and November 2022. The Inspectors Final Report was published on 1 March 2023. Shortly afterwards a legal challenge was submitted which challenged the legality of the Inspectors conclusions regarding Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon Development by judicial review. The Case was heard in the High Court in November 2023 with the written judgment handed down in February 2024.
6. The subsequent order of 4 March 2024 confirmed that the claim for judicial review was allowed and that the Inspectors report and proposed Main Modifications (MMs) relating to Policy 2 were quashed. In April 2024, the Council requested that the examination be reopened to reconsider Policy 2 in light of the legal challenge and the Government's Written Ministerial Statement dated 13 December 2023 which provides a Local Energy Efficiency Standards Update.
7. I will focus on the soundness criteria set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). This will focus on whether the proposed Main Modifications to the remitted part of the AAP have been positively prepared, are justified, effective, and consistent with national policy. Please note it is not my role to make improvements to the Plan that are not necessary to make it sound.

Programme Officer

8. The Programme Officer for the examination is Louise St John Howe who can be contacted as follows:

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Programme Officer
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9. She is independent of the Council and works under my direction. Her responsibilities include organising the programme for the examination, liaising with all parties to ensure the smooth running of the examination, maintaining the examination library, and ensuring that all documents are recorded and distributed. Documents connected with the examination process should be forwarded to her.
10. Any procedural questions, suggestions or difficulties should be raised with the Programme Officer and, if necessary, she will take them up with me. The normal method of communication will be by e-mail and all documentation will be available electronically, accessed via the examination website.

The Examination

11. The focus for the examination is solely on Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon Development.
12. The Council have submitted further evidence and proposed MMs. I will consider whether the Council's proposed changes to the remitted part of the AAP are necessary to achieve soundness.
13. The examination will focus on the Matters and Issues I have identified. I will have regard to individual representations insofar as they relate to matters of soundness. The Council should rely on the evidence it has collected in preparing their proposed MMs to the remitted part of the AAP to demonstrate the soundness of the Plan.
14. I intend to give the opportunity to be heard at the hearings to those who have made representations and indicated they wish to participate in the examination.

15. Those who have made representations should have already decided whether their views can be dealt with in written form or if they need to present them orally at a hearing session. Both methods carry equal weight.
16. Could all respondents who wish to participate in the hearing session(s), where relevant to their representation, please inform the Programme Officer they wish to attend by 5pm on **Friday 6 June 2025**.
17. A Draft Programme and list of participants will be prepared and updated as participants are confirmed.
18. It is open to the Council and any representor to submit a statement in advance of the hearings in support of their position focussing on the Matters, Issues and Questions that I have identified. Any such statements should be sent to the Programme Officer for receipt by 5pm on **Friday 13th June 2025**.
19. Statements should be limited to 3,000 words. Generally, there should be no need for appendices and no need to duplicate the content of documents already included as part of the Examination Library.
20. The need for succinct submissions is emphasised. Unnecessary detail and repetition should be avoided. It is the quality of the reasoning that carries weight, not the bulk of the documents. Nonetheless, it is vital that the fundamental elements of cases are set out clearly and succinctly.
21. Any representor who intends to use artificial intelligence in preparing their statement should follow the Planning Inspectorate's guidance available here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/use-of-artificial-intelligence-in-casework-evidence>
22. Further discussion between the Council and representors is strongly encouraged – ideally leading to Statements of Common Ground. Please keep the Programme Officer informed about progress with the preparation of such statements.
23. Representors who wish to proceed by written means do not need to take any further action; they can rely on what they have previously submitted in writing.
24. Before the start of the hearing sessions, I may raise questions directly with the Council on any points that are relevant to the examination. Any such exchanges of correspondence will be placed on the examination website as examination documents.

Hearing arrangements and Procedure

25. The hearing session will take place virtually on Monday 30 June 2025. Friday 4 July 2025 will be held as a reserve day if required. Please check the Programme regularly for updates on dates and approximate times of hearing sessions together with any changes.
26. The hearings will generally take the form of an informal discussion led by me based on an agenda informed by the Matters and Issues. There will be no formal presentation of evidence or cross examination.
27. I am required to run the examination hearings as efficiently as possible, minimising repetitious debate but allowing adequate time for discussions on key issues. The aim is for a focused hearing leading to the production of a short, focused report.

Joining the hearing as a participant

28. Participants will be issued with an invitation to attend each session by the Programme Officer. This will be via the email address that has already provided to the examination. If you would prefer to join by telephone or are unable to use the video option, please contact the Programme Officer and specific details will be provided.
29. Participants should aim to join each session around 20-30 minutes before the event is due to open. Whether using video or telephone access, you will be held in a virtual 'lobby' until you are let into the hearing. Attempting to join the hearing after the time indicated on the agenda will not be acceptable and you may not be admitted.

Procedure for virtual hearing

30. The aim is to make the virtual hearings as similar as possible to physical hearings in the way they run and the way that you participate. When you join the hearing session, please make sure that your microphone is muted. Also make sure that the environment you are in is comfortable and free from distractions, with mobile phones switched off or on their silent setting.
31. The Inspector will lead the hearing, introduce each topic and ask specific questions. If you wish to respond to a question, please use the 'raise hand' facility in Teams to indicate your desire 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, you should turn your camera on, unmute your microphone and state your name and who you represent, if applicable.
32. Once you have spoken, please turn your microphone and camera off (if you are a telephone participant you can mute by using *6). The only people visible on the screen at any one time should be the Inspector, the participant

who is giving their contribution and the relevant representative from the Council.

- 33. I will 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. Please use this facility sparingly and only when you have new, important and relevant points to make. Raising your hand simply to repeat what you or others have already said is not necessary.
- 34. Breaks will be taken during the sessions. At mid-session breaks participants should not log out, but please ensure that cameras and microphones are turned off. At the end of the hearing session, I will ask all participants to log out.
- 35. The examination website contains all the relevant examination documents. These are available to all participants, stakeholders and the public. The hearing will not use the document sharing facility available on Teams. Nor should you hold any document in front of your camera. New documents should only be submitted during the hearings at my invitation. If I request a new document from any party, for example a statement of common ground, it should be emailed directly to the Programme Officer.

Conduct

- 36. Local Plan examinations are a formal event. All participants, their views and evidence are treated with fairness and consideration. Participants must not interrupt each other, and contributions should be made respectfully.
- 37. You should have made appropriate arrangements to ensure that your working environment is quiet, and that the hearing (and your ability to concentrate on it) is not disrupted by external noise and unnecessary distractions. 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.
- 38. The Chat facility in Teams must not be used under any circumstances.

Privacy

- 39. Please have regard to the privacy notices which will be available on the examination web page. If participants do not want their image to be viewed, or for telephone participants want their phone number to remain private, please contact the Programme Officer.
- 40. Please do not make your own recording of the hearing. You must ensure that no-one else appears on your camera unless it has been otherwise agreed, and you should clear your background of personal information. If

you prefer, Microsoft Teams allows you to blur your background, but please do not use any of the other backgrounds that are available on Teams.

Use of Microsoft Teams

- 41. Please do familiarise yourself with Microsoft Teams before joining the hearings.
- 42. You will be responsible for making sure that your kit is functional and that you have everything in place and working to enable you to join the hearing via Teams.
- 43. If you are unable to join, or lose connection during the hearing, try again to join using the link provided in your invitation. The hearing may continue in your absence. As 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 that you may wish to use.

Close of the examination and the Inspectors Report

- 44. After completion of the hearings, I will submit a report to the Council with my conclusions and recommendations as quickly as possible. This will deal with the main issues concerning the soundness of the remitted part of the AAP considering representations received, although it will not deal with each representation individually. There are three possible outcomes in this instance, that the Council's proposed changes to the remitted part of the AAP are sound as a whole, that they are not sound as a whole, or a combination of these. Depending on my conclusions I will consider if any main modifications are needed to make the plan sound. These would be the subject of consultation.
- 45. The examination remains open until the report is submitted to the Council. However, once the hearing sessions are completed, I can receive no further information from any party, unless it is a matter on which I have requested further comments. Any unsolicited items will be returned to the sender.

Examination Library

- 46. Throughout the examination process, the Programme Officer will maintain an examination library of Core Documents. The List of Core Documents will be updated as required during the process and will be posted on the Examination website.

KEY DATES:

6 June 2025 - Representors wishing to be heard / attend hearings to inform Programme Officer.

13 June 2025 - Hearing Statements to be submitted to Programme Officer.

30 June 2025 - Hearing commences.

4 July 2025 - Reserve additional Hearing date if required.

Helen Hockenhull

INSPECTOR

8 May 2025