



APPEAL REF: APP/H4315/V/20/3265899
Omega Zone 8, West of Omega South and South of the M62,
St Helens, Merseyside WA8 3TR

CASE MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE (HELD ON MS TEAMS)

14:00 MONDAY 8 MARCH 2021

INSPECTOR'S POST-CONFERENCE NOTE

1. The case management conference was led by Mike Worden BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI, the appointed Planning Inspector.

Introduction of those present

2. For the applicant, Mr Peter Goatley QC introduced the applicant's team
3. For the Council, Mr Giles Cannock QC introduced the Council's team

Purpose of the conference

4. The conference involved no discussion of the merits of the cases and the Inspector did not hear any evidence. The purpose was to give clear indications in relation to the ongoing management of the case, and the presentation of evidence, so that the Inquiry can be conducted in an efficient and effective manner.
5. The conference was also used as a test event and the Inspector went through the way in which the Inquiry would be conducted on the MS Teams platform and highlighted some of the functions which would be available to participants. It was clear that there was some feedback and echo on part of the conference call and the parties agreed to ensure that such technical issues were resolved by the time of the Inquiry. There were some notification sounds audible on the call, and these will need to be turned off during the Inquiry.

Likely main considerations

6. It was agreed based upon the Secretary of State's letter and the material currently submitted that the likely main considerations for the Inquiry are:
 - The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for protecting Green Belt land (NPPF Chapter 13)
 - The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with Government policies for building a strong, competitive economy (NPPF Chapter 6)
 - The extent to which the proposed development is consistent with the development plan for the area, including any emerging plan.

In addition, the following are considerations which the Inspector wishes to explore at the Inquiry:

- The effect of the proposal on:
 - the character and appearance of the area;
 - air quality;
 - ecology;
 - heritage and landscape assets;
 - climate change;
 - the living conditions of neighbouring residents with particular regard to noise; and,
 - the highway network and how the development can contribute to meeting sustainable transport objectives.
7. The consideration of the effect of the proposal on climate change has been added to the list of considerations in the light of discussion at the conference.
8. The Inquiry will also examine any benefits to be weighed in the planning balance and as the proposal is considered to be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, whether any factors in favour of the development amount to very special circumstances to outweigh policy and any other harm to justify allowing development in the Green Belt.

How the issues will be dealt with

9. The whole Inquiry will be held virtually on MS Teams.
10. All of the sessions will be topic based round table sessions except the session on planning matters and balance which will involve formal presentation of evidence by witnesses for the applicant and for the Council. This was suggested as an approach by the parties at the conference and the Inspector agrees that this would be helpful to the Inquiry.
11. After the Inspector's opening remarks, the applicant and the Council will be invited to make opening statements. The Inspector then intends to hear from any interested parties. Currently Bold Parish Council and the Bold and Clock Face Action Group have indicated that they wish to speak.
12. The Inspector agrees with the suggestion from both parties that a session on the background to the site and the nature of the proposal would be helpful, and that this would follow after openings including statements from interested persons. It was agreed that all of this would probably be completed on day one of the Inquiry.
13. The Inquiry will then move into topic based round table sessions starting with employment need and economy.
14. There will then be further round table sessions on the topics which the Inspector are considerations and which are set out above. These will be

discussions led by the Inspector. The Inspector will have questions and will require technical and professional participants to be present.

15. The session on planning matters and balance will take place after all of the other topic based sessions have concluded. The applicant and the Council will each provide time estimates for their witnesses for this session.
16. There will then be sessions on conditions and planning obligations before each party gives its closing submissions.
17. The Inspector will conduct an unaccompanied site visit due to covid 19 restrictions. This will take place most likely after the Inquiry has concluded or at some convenient point during it. It is very important that the parties point out views that they wish him to see or viewpoints to visit. He will also conduct a familiarisation visit prior to the Inquiry and the parties have helpfully offered to prepare an informal itinerary.

Inquiry duration and programme

18. The Inquiry will open at 10:00 on Tuesday 27 April. Subsequent days will commence at 9:30. Sessions will be programmed in one and half hour blocks to enable sufficient breaks in each day. It is not expected that any day will need to go beyond 17:00.
19. It may be that the Inquiry will not need all of the scheduled six sitting days. However at this stage the Inspector requires that those days are held as potential sitting days by the parties. The parties have confirmed that there are no issues of availability of advocates, witnesses or participants across those six days.
20. The Inspector is grateful for the assistance of the main parties in submitting draft agendas for the round table sessions, for his consideration. It was agreed that initial draft agendas could be submitted to the Inspector by the end of this month.

Conditions and obligation

21. The parties are close to agreeing a list of suggested conditions, and these are to be submitted without prejudice two weeks prior to the Inquiry.
22. The planning obligation is being worked on by the parties. It is likely that there will need to be a short period post the close of the Inquiry for the submission of an executed version of the obligation. The Inspector accepts this may be necessary for the reasons outlined by the applicant and a timetable will be agreed during the session. The Inspector would still require an unexecuted version before the start of the Inquiry.

Documentation

23. The parties have confirmed that it is not expected that there will be any amendments to any of the plans.
24. For those considerations identified above as 'other considerations', the parties will submit statements which shall include links to previously submitted statements of case, submission statements, statements of common ground and other documentation. For the principal planning considerations and balance, proofs of evidence will be submitted.
25. Statements of Common Ground are being worked on. These are expected to cover planning, employment need and highways. The position of Warrington Borough Council was discussed at the conference. The Inspector has copies of the Warrington Borough Council Committee Report and Minutes from the relevant meeting when the proposal was discussed as a neighbouring authority consultation. However it would be extremely helpful to the Inquiry if a Statement of Common Ground could be agreed with Warrington Borough Council.

Document Library

26. Discussion took place around the Inquiry library. This needs to be held on a publicly accessible portal. Both the applicant and the Council propose that it is added to the existing section of the St Helens Council website which hosts the core document library for the Parkside and Haydock Point Inquiries.
27. The Inspector has viewed the webpage. Although he understands the resourcing point put to him, he remains concerned about its ease of use for the Omega Inquiry given the amount of scrolling which has to be done on an existing very long webpage and having to access some core documents at the top of the page and then other documents right at the bottom of the page. He is also concerned that there could be confusion from the general public about the separate status of the Omega Inquiry.
28. He would therefore urge the applicant and the Council to collectively consider whether there is a feasible technical solution which could ease navigation and accessibility of documents and avoid the potential for confusion between the Omega Inquiry and the other ones being held in St Helens.

Submission of Documents

29. Following consideration of the points made at the conference, the Inspector has set the following timetable for the submission of documents:

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| Tuesday 30 March (5pm) | Proofs of evidence and Statements of Case |
| | Statements of Common Ground |
| | Initial draft agendas |
| | Core Documents list and Core Documents |
| | Familiarisation site visit itinerary |
| | |
| | |
| Tuesday 13 April (5pm) | CIL Compliance Statement |
| | Time estimates |
| | Agreed list of suggested planning conditions |
| | Notification letters and copy of site notice (if not sent before). |
| | Draft Section 106 |

30. The Inspector reminds the parties of the protocol for the content and format of proofs and appendices circulated with the pre-conference note.

31. The Inspector will produce a draft Inquiry timetable for consideration by the parties.

Mike Worden
INSPECTOR