

EDEN LOCAL PLAN (2014-2032) EXAMINATION

Inspector: Melvyn Middleton BA(Econ) DipTP Dip Mgmt MRTPI

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Robin Hooper
Chief Executive
Eden District Council (via email)

7 November 2016

Dear Mr Hooper

Eden Local Plan Examination Progress in the context of current staffing conundrum

I understand from the Programme Officer that by the end of November the number of officers in your Local Plans team, who are available to work towards the adoption of the Local Plan, will have reduced from four to zero over about a three month period. From my point of view I do not see this as a major logistical issue, the only ramification is that it is likely to prolong the examination and if we do not put realistic contingency plans into place as soon as possible, result in me being under-occupied. I am conscious that my time allocated to working on the Eden Local Plan is charged to your Council on a daily basis and that in these times of economic austerity it is not prudent for this time to be allocated if I am unable to fully occupy myself on examination tasks. We experienced timing ramifications as a result of staffing difficulties at the beginning of the year, soon after my appointment and again in August when Mr Megson first became unavailable. On both occasions, after consulting your officers, I arranged to do other PINS work for parts of the time that had initially be allocated to Eden Local Plan. To this end I agreed to undertake two linked appeals at Inquiry at the beginning of October and have arranged for another to be Chartered in January. My purpose in writing this letter is to seek your guidance as to the way forward in the circumstances that will pertain from the end of November.

There are a number of outstanding issues that need to be resolved before I can recommend that the suggested modifications should be the subject of public consultation. The Full Objectively Assessed Housing Need (FOAHN), the location of the key hubs and sound site allocations that are sufficient to demonstrate a five year housing land supply, are the most significant but there are others. I agreed a list of all outstanding matters with your officers on 15 September. The FOAHN is the most critical as it has ramifications for the five year supply and site allocations. I received a paper from your officers about this on 24 October.

The Programme Officer is currently consulting on this with Examination participants. Once I have their observations, I hope to be able to come to a judgement on your revised FOAHN without the need for any further Hearing sessions. Assuming I find your revised FOAHN to be sound, there should be no obstacle to completing the modifications apart from professional time.

However, in any event the methodology used to determine the finally selected key hubs is not dependent upon this and I can assess its robustness once I have a comprehensive paper that sets out your methodology and final results and addresses the concerns raised by third parties and myself at the Hearings. Whatever the FOAHN and Key Hub outcome there is a need for further work on site selection at the Key hubs and in the Market Towns.

Although the final selection will be dependent upon the above, there is much work that could be done to assess the suitability and soundness of potential sites beforehand.

It is not clear to me how far the current staff will have progressed the outstanding work by the end of November. Nevertheless, on the assumption that there will be outstanding work, I think that we need to consider the options and agree the best way forward. However you replace the lost staff and whoever is appointed to progress this work, they are going to require time to familiarise themselves with Eden and its planning and the issues surrounding this Local Plan Examination. It seems to me that there are a number of options to overcome this quandary.

Formally suspend the Examination for an agreed period.

I would notify PINS that I require additional work for the whole of this period.

Informally agree that the outstanding work will not be completed until an agreed date and inform the key participants of that fact and the reasons.

I have a number of areas of work in response to representations and where modifications (if any) are agreed that I can begin to write up in draft for my final report and I can ask PINS for additional work to fill in the gaps. That may not be as easy to organise, as under a full suspension but it has worked during the earlier part of this year.

Carry on with the Examination

This could only work if either all of the outstanding matters are satisfactorily concluded by the time all of the existing Local Plans staff leave or they are immediately replaced with personnel who are familiar with the area and the Local Plan Examination to date.

I would be grateful if you could give the above your urgent attention and let me know the position from your side and your preference as to how we should proceed.

Yours Sincerely

Mel Middleton

Melvyn Middleton
INSPECTOR