

29 November 2021

Ms. Sue Tiley,
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
Planning Policy and Implementation Manager

By email only

Dear Ms Tiley

Welwyn-Hatfield Local Plan Timetable

It is now nearly 6 months since I wrote to you, following the Stage 9 Hearings, and sending you a series of reports that together set out the steps which you need to follow to make the submitted plan sound. You wrote to me on 6 August 2021 confirming in a flow chart that the necessary democratic process and Main Modifications consultation could be completed by Christmas 2021.

Before the Council's decision to write to the Secretary of State, there had already been substantial delays to the progress of this Examination that had resulted from the Council's actions. Your recent communication with the Programme Officer suggests that yet more delay is being introduced into the programme. I am extremely concerned about this further development.

I should not need to remind you that this plan has already been in Examination for over 4 years and that it is now important that it is concluded without any further delays. Now that the Council has received a response from the Secretary of State to its questions, I can see no reason why the final stages that could lead to the adoption of this plan cannot begin immediately, with each taking a minimal period.

In that context your proposed timetable for moving forward is not acceptable. I expect the Main Modifications consultation to begin by mid-January and for the responses to be provided promptly at the end of the consultation and within no more than 2 weeks.

Given the extent of the delays so far and the latest timetable, I am increasingly concerned that a sound plan will be achieved within a reasonable timescale. On that basis, if a timetable akin to that set out above is not followed, I will issue a brief report explaining the main areas of unsoundness but pointing out that given the history of this Examination, I no longer have confidence that a sound plan can be achieved within a reasonable period of time and that consequently the examination should close.

I would be grateful if the Council would please provide a response to the above points by 6 December. If it wishes to proceed with the Examination then a timetable must also be provided in line with my comments in the fourth paragraph above.

Yours Sincerely

M Middleton

Melvyn Middleton
INSPECTOR