

Save Greater Manchester's Greenbelt Chair's Report 2023 Annual General Meeting

Dear members

I am pleased to present the SGMGB Chair's Report, summarising the activities and achievements of our group. This report covers the period of the latest stage in the Places for Everyone (PfE) plan-making process, when our activities have been particularly focused on preparation for the Examination in Public and active participation in the Examination Hearings.

This stage in the process began with the Regulation 19 Consultation, which ran from 9th August 2021 to 3rd October 2021. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) received around 4,000 responses. These were consolidated, with commentary, and, along with the PfE plan and its evidence base, were submitted to the Secretary of State for evaluation.

Following this, the government appointed three inspectors, William Fieldhouse BA(Hons) MA MRTPI, Louise Gibbons BA(Hons) MRTPI, and Steven Lee BA(Hons) MA MRTPI, to oversee the Examination in Public. This examination process will conclude on receipt of the Planning Inspectors Report. The PfE Plan will be adopted if that report is approved by the Executive Committees of the 9 participating districts.

The process has been demanding. The Planning Inspectors issued their Matters, Issues and Questions (known as MIQs) in July 2022, with responses due back in September and October 2022. Hearings began in November 2022 and the Planning Inspectors have issued further questions to the GMCA (and sometimes to other participants) throughout the examination. SGMGB provided responses to most of the Planning Inspector questions, action points and the GMCA proposals.

In December 2022 the government published a consultation on the changes it intends to make to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Our Vice Chair responded in detail. The consultation ended on the 3rd of March 2023. Publication of the response has been delayed but the Planning Inspectors confirmed that *"if a revised version of the NPPF is published during the examination they will consider what if any further steps they need to take"*.

At the close of Hearings William Fieldhouse said *"It is one of the biggest plans the Planning Inspectorate has examined, if not the biggest in terms of the scale of the area and the amount of development and the number of authorities that it covers, outside London anyway."* Mr Katkoffski, KC for the GMCA, responded *"it is the biggest plan as the London plan doesn't make allocations"*.

We are very pleased to say that SGMGB representatives attended all the Hearings on the thematic policies in the Plan and participated in nearly every Allocation Hearing. A huge commitment, both time-consuming and challenging, demonstrating the dedication of our members. This has been an incredibly complex process and producing arguments that carry weight in planning law, without any legal representation, was a monumental achievement (especially as the GMCA and many developers had their Barristers present).

Throughout this whole period, SGMGB met frequently to agree approaches, undertaking research and preparing appropriate responses. We also met regularly with the GMCA to ensure that we were appropriately informed about the process and with other campaign groups (such as Friends of the Earth, Steady State Manchester, CPRE and the Community Planning Alliance) to share knowledge and collaborate in a variety of activities. Crucially we were able to provide our members with information to help them structure their feedback and respond effectively when attending their Hearings at examination. A final additional Hearing session was held on 5th July 2023 to explicitly examine the issues surrounding deep peat deposits within several Allocation areas.

On behalf of the SGMGB Committee, I extend our sincere gratitude to all our members who have contributed to this mammoth task. Your commitment to producing written representations and attending Hearings has been commendable. Understanding, interpreting, and responding to the biggest and most complicated planning examination that has ever taken place in the history of UK plan-making demanded a shift away from the emotive and a sharp focus on policy and law. It has been a huge learning experience.

Our efforts were not in vain. Changes **HAVE** been made to the PfE Plan but our work is **NOT** yet done. Our fight for the protection of our greenbelt and greenspaces is far from over. The lessons we have learned and the experiences we have gained in this process will stand us in good stead for the next phase and I hope you will all continue to stay actively engaged as we move forward in our efforts to safeguard our precious environment, especially given the climate and biodiversity emergencies we are all facing.

The next stage is, of course, the consultation on the Main Modifications proposed or agreed by the Planning Inspectors. These will be subject to an updated Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulation Assessment.

We would like to demonstrate the continued strength of feeling about the release of Green Belt in the number of responses made to the Modifications Consultation (remember 27,000 residents responded in 2016 and it did make an impact).

We need **YOUR** help to do this! Please can you alert your local groups and residents and ask them to be ready to respond. We will provide some guidance once the final list of Main Modifications has been published and we will keep you informed about the dates for the Modifications Consultation.

Come along to our AGM to find out more about next steps and thank you once again for your unwavering commitment, let's look forward to continuing this journey together.

Sincerely,

Zoe Sherlock Chair, SGMGB