

Public Participation at Committees

There are two main opportunities for members of the public to comment at meetings of the Council's Committees.

Public Question Time

At the beginning of each scheduled meeting of the Committee an opportunity will be given to members of the public and representatives of parish/town councils to participate in the meeting by asking questions, making comments and raising matters of concern. Parish/town council representatives may also wish to use this opportunity to ask for the Council's support on any matter of particular concern to their parish/town. No decisions can be taken as a result of matters raised in the Question Time although an agenda item can be requested for a future meeting.

The period allowed for participation in this session shall not exceed 15 minutes except with the consent of the committee. Each individual speaker shall be restricted to a total of three minutes.

Agenda Items

Members of the public can also comment on items listed on the agenda at the time the committee considers them. If they are unable to be present when the item is discussed, they can make their comments during the Public Question Time session.

Planning Applications

Comments about planning applications will be dealt with at the time those applications are considered, rather than during the Public Question Time session.

After the officer has presented the report the parish/town council representative and others making representations will be invited to speak, followed by a response from the applicant or his/her agent.

Comments should be confined to additional information or issues, which have not been fully covered in the officer's report. Members of the public are asked to submit any additional documents to the planning officer at least 72 hours in advance and not to present them to the Committee on the day of the meeting. This will give the planning officer the opportunity to respond appropriately. Information from the public should not be tabled at the meeting. It should also be noted that, in the interests of fairness, the use of presentational aids (e.g. PowerPoint) by the applicant/agent or those making representations will not be permitted. However, the applicant/agent or those making representations are able to ask the Planning Officer to include photographs/images within the officer's presentation subject to them being received by the officer at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. No more than 5 photographs/images either supporting or against the application to be submitted. The Planning Officer will also need to be satisfied that the photographs are appropriate in terms of planning grounds.

At the committee chairman's discretion, members of the public are permitted to speak for up to 3 minutes each and where there are a number of persons wishing to speak they should be encouraged to choose one spokesperson to speak either for the applicant or on behalf of any supporters or objectors to the application. The total period allowed for such participation on each application shall not normally exceed 15 minutes.

The order of speaking on planning items will be:

- Town or Parish Council spokesperson
- Objectors
- Supporters
- Applicant/Agent
- District Council Ward Member

At the Regulation Committee, ward members, if not members of the Committee, will speak after the town/parish representative.

The chairman will ensure that the opportunity is given to both sides to speak but an application will not be deferred merely because one side is unable or does not wish to be present.

Members of the public must direct their comments through the chairman and are not allowed to take part in the debate.

If a member of the public wishes to speak they must inform the committee administrator before the meeting begins of their name and whether they have supporting comments or objections and who they are representing. This must be done by completing one of the public participation slips available at the meeting.

In exceptional circumstances, the Chairman of the Committee shall have discretion to vary the procedure set out to ensure fairness to all sides.

The same rules in terms of public participation will apply in respect of other agenda items where people wish to speak on that particular item.

Council members, who are not on a Committee, will be able to speak on all items at the discretion of the Chairman, and it shall be for the Chairman to decide how long they may speak.

Exceptionally, members may be permitted to use presentational aids when speaking at the meetings on items other than planning and subject to the agreement of the Chairman.

Members with Prejudicial Interests

If an ordinary member of the public would be allowed to speak under the above conditions, Council members should be provided with the same opportunity. Therefore, Council members are able to make representations, answer questions or give evidence, even if they have a prejudicial interest in the item. Members of the Council will be subject to the same time limits as members of the public. They may not, however, take part in the discussion or observe the vote. If a member's interest amounts to a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest then they must not participate at all i.e. they are not allowed to make representation and must leave the room. A failure to comply with these requirements may amount to a criminal offence.