



**Dorset  
Council**

## **A Guide to Public Speaking at Planning Committee**

All members of the public are welcome to attend formal meetings of the Planning Committee to listen to the debate and the decisions being taken.

If you have written to the council during the consultation period about an application that is to be considered by the committee, any relevant planning or rights of way issues raised in your letter will be appraised by the case officer and summarised within the committee report. You will also receive a letter informing you of the committee date and inviting you to attend the meeting.

The agenda for the meeting is normally published 5 working days before the committee date and is available to view on the council's website at <https://modern.gov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1> or via the Modern.gov app which is free to download .

You can also track progress of a planning application by visiting the council's website at <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning/planning-application-search-and-comment.aspx>.

Alternatively you can contact a member of the Democratic Services Team on 01305 251010 or email [david.northover@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:david.northover@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) for Eastern Area Planning Committee, [George.dare@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:George.dare@dorsetcc.gov.uk) for Northern Area Planning Committee and [denise.hunt@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:denise.hunt@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) for Western and Southern Area Planning Committee. They will be able to advise you on whether an application will be considered by a committee meeting.

Formal meetings are open to the press and the public and during the meeting you may come and go as you wish. Members of the press and public will normally only be asked to leave the meeting if confidential/exempt items are to be considered by the committee.

Members of the committee and the public have access to individual representation letters received in respect of planning applications and rights of way matters in advance of the meeting. It is important to note that any comments received from the public cannot be treated as confidential.

### **How do I register to speak?**

If you wish to address the committee at the planning meeting it is essential that you contact the Democratic Services Team on 01305 251010 or email addresses set out above at least 2 clear working days before the meeting. If you do not

register to speak, you will not normally be invited to address the committee. When contacting the Democratic Services Team you should advise which application you wish to speak on, whether you are objecting or supporting the application and provide your name and contact details.

### **The Member who chairs Planning Committee**

Ultimately the Chairman of the Planning Committee retains the power to determine how best to conduct a meeting. The processes identified below are therefore always subject to the discretion of the Chairman.

### **What will happen at the meeting and how long can I speak for?**

The Chairman will invite those people who have registered to speak to address the committee. Each speaker is usually able to have up to **3** minutes each to address the committee.

When addressing the committee members of the public should:

- keep observations brief and relevant;
- speak slowly and clearly;
- for rights of way matters, limit views to those relevant to the legal tests under consideration;
- for planning matters limit views to relevant planning issues such as:
  - the impact of the development on the character of the area;
  - external design, appearance and layout;
  - impact of the development on neighbouring properties;
  - highway safety;
  - planning policy and government guidance.
- avoid referring to issues such as safety, maintenance and suitability for rights of way definitive map modification matters, as they cannot be taken into account;
- avoid referring to matters, which are not relevant to planning considerations, such as:
  - trade objections from potential competitors;
  - personal comments about the applicant;
  - the developer's motives;
  - moral arguments;
  - matters covered by other areas of law;

- boundary disputes or other private property rights (including restrictive covenants).
- remember you are making a statement in public: please be sure that what you say is not slanderous, defamatory or abusive in any way.

### **Can I provide handouts or use visual aids?**

No. Letters and photographs must not be distributed at the meeting. These must be provided with your written representations during the consultation period in order to allow time to assess the validity, or otherwise, of the points being raised. To ensure fairness to all parties, everyone needs to have the opportunity to consider any such information in advance to ensure that any decision is reasonably taken and to avoid potential challenge.

### **What happens at the Committee?**

After formal business such as declarations of interest and signing of minutes the meeting moves on to planning applications.

- The planning / rights of way officer will present the application including any updates.
- The Chairman will invite those people who have registered to speak to address the committee. A period of 15 minutes will normally be set aside to hear the views of those who have registered to speak, and each speaker is allocated a maximum of 3 minutes. It is entirely at the discretion of the Chairman to extend this period if they consider it appropriate to do so.
- The applicant or their representative also has the opportunity to address the committee. Where only one objector is speaking, the applicant and their representative will normally only be allowed up to 3 minutes speaking time in total between them both. If more than one objector is speaking this will normally be increased to up to 6 minutes in total.
- The order of speaking will normally be individuals that have commented, amenity groups, parish/town council representative, and then the applicant or their representative. Any such group, council or any other body / organisation will normally be given one 3 minute slot each for any representations to be made on its behalf. If a councillor who is not on the Planning Committee wishes to address the committee, they will be allowed 3 minutes to do so and will be invited to speak before the applicant or their representative.
- Neither the objectors or supporters will normally be questioned. However, the Chairman may ask questions to clarify a point of fact in very exceptional circumstances.

- Public participation then ends and the committee will enter into the decision making phase. During this part of the meeting only members of the committee and officers may take part.
- The Chairman of the Committee has discretion over how this protocol will be applied and has absolute discretion over who can speak at the meeting.

You should not lobby members of the committee or officers immediately prior to or during the committee meeting. Members of the public should also be aware that members of the committee are not able to come to a view about a proposal in advance of the meeting because if they do so it may invalidate their ability to vote on a proposal. Equally any communication with members of the committee during the meeting is to be avoided as this affects their ability to concentrate on the matters being presented at that time.

You should note that the council has various rules and protocols relating to the live recording of meetings.

### **What happens after the Committee?**

The minutes, which are the formal record of the meeting, will be published after the meeting and available to view in electronic and paper format, as a matter of public record, for a minimum of 6 years following the date of the meeting. Please note that if you attend a committee meeting and make oral representations to the committee your name, together with a summary of your comments will be included in the minutes of the meeting