



CPRE Somerset Speaking Notes- Constitution and Governance Committee-Agenda item 8 (Planning Committee Procedure Rules) - Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton- 10.00am, 30 January 2023

I am Fletcher Robinson, Trustee and Planner for CPRE Somerset

Our Trustees have asked me to voice our strong objection to two proposals before this committee:

1. That objectors at planning committees of the Unitary Authority must share a single three minute speaking period [Planning Committee Procedure Rules, Para 7.19] ;
2. That a planning committee Chair may overturn a member's request to refer a planning application to committee, if the member's view is contrary to the officer's recommendation [Planning Committee Procedure Rules, Paras 8.4-8.8].

As regards the proposal in 7.19 for one single shared three minute speaking period for objectors, this is both undemocratic, and unworkable in practice. According to our research, there is not a single planning authority in the entire country that operates such a draconian system.

We are not suggesting that Somerset Council should emulate Exeter City Council, for example, where there is no stated limit on the number of people who may speak , but it would be a sad day for local democracy if the new Somerset Council is seen to be engaging in a race for the bottom on such an important matter as public participation.

We urge councillors to reject this proposal, and to adopt a transparent, fair and simple procedure, for example the most common procedure in the country being that each speaker will have a maximum of three minutes.

The stated number of speakers can vary from authority to authority, but a reasonable mid-point position is that objectors will have a maximum of 12 minutes in total, supporters will have the same, and in all cases that we have identified more speakers are allowed at the chair's discretion.

As regards the role of members in the Referral Process, the wording of paras 8.4-8.8 allows the chair to overturn a member's request to refer a planning application to committee, if the member's view is contrary to the officer's recommendation.

This proposal unjustifiably diminishes the traditional powers and prerogative of councillors, and It is undemocratic that the final decision on referral by a member should rest with the chair. We urge this committee to reject that wording as well.

FR/27.1.23

