

Public Guidance Notes for Planning Committees

Can I speak at the Planning Committee?

The Applicant or Agent, Parish, Town or City Council, Division Members and objectors or supporters are able to address the Planning Committee. **All speakers need to register – please see details on the next page.**

The order of speaking will be:-

- Those speaking to object to the proposal - maximum of 5 speakers of 3 minutes each
- Those speaking in support of the proposal - maximum of 5 speakers of 3 minutes each
- Parish, Town or City Council(s) - 3 minutes each
- Councillors of Somerset Council (non-Committee Members) - 3 minutes each
- The applicant or their agent - 3 minutes

Public speaking will be timed and the Chair will be responsible for bringing the speech to a close. The speaker/s will be allowed to address the Committee during their registered slot only and will not be allowed to provide further clarification. If an item on the Agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative speaking to object or support the proposal should be nominated to present the views of a group.

The Chair can exercise their discretion in consultation with the Legal Adviser, for example, it maybe that comments are derogatory in which case the Chair will exercise discretion to prevent the speaker from continuing, or if balance was required in terms of speakers for and against or to make a specific point, to allow a further speaker.

Comments should be limited to relevant planning issues. There are limits to the range of issues that can be taken into account when considering planning applications. Although not an exhaustive list, these might include:

- Government planning policy and guidance
- Planning legislation
- The suitability of the site for development
- Conflict with any planning policies such as the relevant Development Plan – which are available for inspection on the Council's website
- Adopted Neighbourhood Plans
- Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) Page 7 Agenda Annex
- Previous planning applications and decisions
- Design, appearance, layout issues and relationship with the surrounding area.
- Living conditions such as privacy, noise and odour.
- Highway safety and traffic issues
- Biodiversity and ecology
- Impact on trees and the landscape
- Flood risk in identified areas at risk.
- Heritage assets such as listed buildings, conservation areas and archaeology
- The economy, including job creation/retention.

- Drainage and surface water run-off.

Issues that are not usually relevant will vary with each application, but the courts have established that the following matters cannot be taken into account when considering planning applications:

- The history or character of an applicant
- Perceived or actual impact of development on property values.
- Land ownership, restrictive covenants or other private property rights including boundary and access disputes or maintenance.
- An applicant's motivations or future intentions.
- Retrospective nature of applications;
- Impact on private views;
- The extent of public support or opposition for a proposal alone;
- Competition between businesses;
- Matters controlled by other (non-planning) legislation such as licensing and building regulations or other laws.

How do I register to speak at Planning Committee?

A request to speak must be made to the Council's Democratic Services team no later than 5pm on the Thursday (two clear working days) before the Committee meeting by email to democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk For those speaking to object or support the proposal, the speaking slots will be allocated on a first come first served basis. If there are numerous members of the public wishing to speak in one slot it is advisable to make arrangements for one person to make a statement on behalf of all. The meetings are hybrid and you can speak either in person at the meeting or virtually. If you wish to speak at the meeting virtually please inform Democratic Services so that they can advise you of the details. If you have registered to speak, the Chair will invite you to speak at the appropriate time during the meeting.

Can I present information to the Committee?

Please be advised that you can only present documents to the Committee Members at the meeting if they are submitted to Democratic Services (using the email address above) by 5pm on the Thursday before the Committee meeting – this includes photographs and presentations (including Powerpoint presentations).

How do I know what time an application will be heard?

If you have registered to speak in person, we recommend arriving at the meeting venue about 15 minutes before the start time. If joining virtually, please consider joining the meeting a few minutes early to ensure your technology is working correctly - you may have to wait in a lobby until being admitted to the meeting. It is not possible to estimate the time an application will be heard.

What if my Division Member does not sit on the Planning Committee?

If your local Councillor is not a member of the Planning Committee, he or she can still address the meeting to outline any concerns or points of support by registering to speak by 5pm on the Thursday before the Committee meeting. However, they will not be permitted to take part in the main debate, to make or second a proposal or to vote on any item.

Presentation of planning applications

The Planning Officer will present the case to the Committee explaining the factual matters and any salient points which need to be drawn out with the use of a visual presentation. It is important to note that the Planning Officer is not an advocate for either the applicant or any third parties but will make an impartial recommendation based on the merits of the proposal and any relevant material considerations.

The role of Officers during the debate of an application

When an application is considered at Planning Committee, it is the Officers' role to explain why they have concluded that permission should be approved or refused and answer any questions that Members may have. Whilst the Committee has to reach its own decision bearing in mind the Officer advice, report and recommendation, the Lead Planning Officer and Legal Advisor in particular have a professional obligation to ensure that a lawful and unambiguous decision is made in accordance with the Council's Development Plan, planning legislation, regulations and case law. This means, in the event that a contrary decision is sought, they will need to explain the implications of doing so. This can sometimes mean that Officers need to advise and guide Members as to planning policy, what are or are not material considerations, what legally can or cannot be considered or given weight and the likely outcome of any subsequent appeal or judicial review.

Officers' views, opinions and recommendations may, on occasion, be at odds with the views, opinions or decisions of the Members and there should always be scope for Members to express a different view from Officers. However, any decision by the Committee must be based on proper planning reasons as part of the overall aim to ensure that a lawful and unambiguous decision is made. Where this is contrary to that recommended within the Officer report, the Lead Planning Officer and Legal Advisor will advise Members in making that decision.

Recording of the Meeting

Please note that this meeting will be recorded, and the recording will be made available on the Council's website and/or on YouTube. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore, unless you are advised otherwise, by taking part in the Council meeting during public participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes.

The Council supports the principles of openness and transparency. It allows filming, recording, and taking photographs at its meetings that are open to the public – providing this is done in a non-disruptive manner. Members of the public may use Facebook and Twitter or other forms of social media to report on proceedings, No filming or recording may take place when the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting.