Public speaking at Planning Committee Meetings

Currently, the planning process allows neighbours and other interested parties to make their views known on any planning application by making representations. To help us make the fairest possible decisions, we carefully consider the points raised, whether they are for, against the proposal or have a neutral position.

The planning officer dealing with the application summarises these comments and responds to them in their officer report to Planning Committee as necessary.

At Swindon Borough Council, we believe that this interaction with residents is vital to the planning process. To further improve this relationship, we operate a 'public speaking' scheme. This protocol explains how the scheme works.

What is the public speaking scheme?

Anyone who has made representations on an application that is to be heard at Planning Committee will be contacted about public speaking at the meeting. This includes members of the public, ward members and Parish Councils. The person applying for planning permission, the landowner/occupier or their representative, may also speak in support of the proposal.

If you have made representations to us about an application, you will be notified by email if the application is going to Planning Committee.

Can everyone who wants to speak do so?

Due to time constraints, up to a maximum of three persons may speak for and up to a maximum of three persons against each application. If more people wish to do so, together they must agree the speakers in advance. If we receive in excess of three requests each person will be contacted in order for a decision to be made between the parties as to who will speak. If representations are considered to be neutral, there will be no opportunity for that individual to speak at the planning committee.

Speakers must attend the committee meeting in person. There is no online participation.

A ward member can speak in favour or against a development as well as a member of the public and Parish Council, they must also, however, formally register to speak. If the ward member is a member of the Planning Committee and does not want to formally speak in favour or against a development in their ward, the Chair of the planning committee will approach them first for their comments following the formal public speaking part of the agenda item. If an application has been deferred from a previous meeting for further information, public speaking at the following committee will only be allowed to focus on the planning matter that resulted in deferral.

What happens at the meeting?

We ask that speakers arrive at our offices no later than 5.45pm and make themselves known to one of the committee officers present. When you arrive, an officer will explain the public speaking procedure and show you where to go.

The Chair of the committee will first announce the application, after which the planning officer will provide a brief summary of the proposal which includes a presentation.

The speaker(s) will then address the committee, followed by the applicant/land owner/occupier or their representative. Each speaker will have three minutes to state their views. The chair will ensure this time is not exceeded. This time cannot be split into portions for more than the allocated number of people to share. The public speaking will run in the following order:

- Ward member (unlimited time)
- Parish Council (3 minutes)
- Up to 3 speakers against (3 minutes)
- Up to 3 speakers in favor (3 minutes)
- Planning applicant/agent (3 minutes)
- Ward member summary (3 minutes)

Other non-Committee members may speak (for a maximum of 5 minutes) at the Chair's discretion if they meet the following criteria:

- The Leader of the Council or another Cabinet Member if the item is an important application of strategic importance and relevant to their portfolio;

- The Cabinet Member for Culture, Planning and Regeneration if the item is an important application of strategic importance.

Planning Committee is also available for members of the public to observe in person and via a live stream on Youtube. It is also recorded for viewing from the day after the Planning Committee meeting.

What can you say?

Essentially, this is an opportunity for you to explain or expand upon the key issues that form part of your application or within your written comments about the application. It is not a debate and you will not be interrupted. You will, however, be stopped promptly once your three minutes have concluded in the spirit of time management of the committee meeting. The planning committee members will not have the opportunity to ask you questions and neither will you have the opportunity to address or query members directly, this will be strictly managed by the committee Chair. You should use the time to draw the councilor's attention to planning matters that you feel should be given full consideration in the planning balance. The planning officer report is available for you to view online prior to the committee meeting.

You will not be able to hand out or discuss any additional material, such as photographs or plans to the committee members before or during the committee meeting. This applies to objectors, supporters, members and planning applicants/agents.

We recognise that planning applications can sometimes be surrounded by other issues and disagreements that can be frustrating and upsetting for all involved. However, if they are not material planning matters, they cannot affect the decision and the planning process is not designed to resolve them, so it will not help to mention them at the committee meeting.

How do you take part?

Any person, including ward members, wishing to speak must confirm their intention to speak in writing to Committee Services by no later than midday on the Friday before Planning Committee. Requests received after this date will not be considered.

Email: committeeservices@swindon.gov.uk

A formal request will be acknowledged, and you will get confirmation that you are registered to speak. If you do not register to speak in the manner outlined in this adopted protocol you will not be allowed to speak on the evening, you can however view proceedings in the public gallery or online. Any requests to change speaker after the above date/time will be at the discretion of the Chair, whose decision is final.