

Protocol for Online Planning Applications Committee

Introduction

The Coronavirus Act 2020 has paved the way for temporary changes to Regulations governing public meetings held by local authorities, including those held by local planning authorities, to allow the meetings to be conducted using media systems to be attended remotely by officers, members and the public and press.

This Protocol outlines some changes proposed to facilitate successful online meetings of the Planning Applications Committee, by reducing the number of participants and the complexity of the meetings.

Membership

While a video-link meeting is itself relatively easy to organise, the current Planning Applications Committee meetings are attended by 14 members and 5-10 officers, with public objectors and supporters, applicants/agents and ward councillors also participating in the meetings and other interested members of the public and the press in attendance.

In order to make the online meetings more manageable it is proposed to reduce the number of participants, by keeping officer attendance to a minimum and reducing the number of Committee members attending while retaining representation from all political groups.

The online meetings will therefore be attended by 10 members supported by the committee clerk, legal advisor, and the relevant planning officers.

All members attending the online meetings will be drawn from the membership of the Planning Applications Committee as it was agreed at the Annual Council Meeting in 2019 (or any subsequent review of its full membership in 2020).

The nominated members of each Group to attend the online meetings are:

Labour (6)	Cllrs McKenna, Sokale, Page, Ennis, Lovelock & Rowland
Conservative (2)	Cllrs Robinson & Stanford-Beale
Green (1)	Cllr J Williams
Liberal Democrats (1)	Cllr Duveen

Quorum

No change is proposed to the current quorum of five.

Attendance

As the online meeting is a reduced version of the full meeting to deal with the Council's response to the Emergency, it is evident that the meeting should have the full complement of councillors available to attend:

- The Chairman and Vice-Chairman should attend all meetings wherever possible.

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- The Leader of each political group is responsible for ensuring that the most relevant members of Planning Applications Committee attend the meeting.
- Substitution is allowed so that where a nominated member cannot attend then another member of the full committee should attend.

Managing the meeting

The success of the online meetings will depend on the ability of the participants to interact with each other via the system and the ability of the Chair to manage the meeting despite the unfamiliar setting.

The Chair will decide a practical protocol for management of the debate and decision-making - e.g. calling of speakers, self-introduction before speaking, vote taken by asking members in turn rather than show of hands. Such a protocol can be amended from time to time and does not require Committee approval for any change.

Given the potential difficulty of tabling and circulating documents at an online meeting Standing Order 39 is amended to specify that, where councillors are pre-disposed to make any proposed amendments, these should be submitted to the Chair, all nominated members of the Committee and the Planning Manager by email at least 24 hours before the commencement of the meeting. This does not preclude any amendments to officer recommendations, which may still be tabled during the meeting as a result of the discussions during the debate.

Officers will circulate updates by email as they become available in the days leading up to the online Committee. This will avoid the need for a consolidated document to be tabled on the day of the hearing. Councillors should therefore review their emails regularly to ensure that they can track these additional documents in good time as intended.

Planning Applications to be considered

To make the online meetings focussed on the important business of the Pandemic Response and the Recovery, officers are also seeking a change to the list of applications that are delegated to officers to deal with so that fewer applications need to be considered and decided by the online Committee. This will mean that reports will still be presented for Major category applications but only where the officer recommendation is to approve, and for those other applications where officers, in consultation with the Chair, feel a committee decision is appropriate.

The Chair and the Planning Manager will agree a forward plan of applications based upon these categories:

A	Important for the Pandemic Response or the Recovery from the Pandemic
B	Matters which are otherwise important for the economic development of the town
C	Minor and Household applications which are not related to the Recovery

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Category A & B applications are the matters which should be referred to the Committee.

Public participation and attendance

The normal public speaking arrangements are suspended. All people who have commented on a planning application will be invited to make written representations (word limit of 500) and submit these to the Planning Admin team by 2pm on the day before the meeting. These statements will be circulated to members of the Committee. Public participants usually prepare written notes for the meeting and the objective of public participation is still fulfilled by receiving these representations.

In addition, any formal questions submitted to the Committee will be responded to in writing only.

The facility for Ward Councillors to speak on applications will continue.

Members of the public will be able to follow the meeting 'live' in order to meet the legal requirement for meetings to be held 'in public'. Information will be published with the agenda on how to do this.

Meeting Agendas

- Introduction - Chair to explain meeting format and who is attending
- Minutes of previous meeting
- Declarations of Interest
- Information items
- Planning applications to be considered

For practicality any exempt items will be considered at a separate closed online meeting to be held on the rising of the main Committee.

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