

**Committee:** Planning Committee Working Group  
**Title:** Planning Committee Speaking Procedure  
**Report Author:** Ben Ferguson, Democratic Services Manager  
[bferguson@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:bferguson@uttlesford.gov.uk)

**Date:**  
29 November 2023

---

## Summary

1. This report asks members to consider the public speaking arrangements for Planning Committee meetings.

## Recommendations

2. To consider the public speaking protocol at Planning Committee meetings and to instruct officers whether any changes are to be made.

## Financial Implications

3. N/A.

## Background Papers

4. None.

## Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	To ask PCWG to consider the current public speaking protocol at Planning Committee.
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

6. **Situation**

7. At the previous PCWG meeting held on 13 September, members discussed the public speaking procedure at Planning Committee.

8. The relevant minute reads as follows:

“Discussion took place around reviewing the current allocation of up to 10 public speakers + Ward Councillor + Parish Council (PC) + Applicant/Agent. Need to encourage democracy and representations but members of the public could feed into the process through their PC’s. Idea put forward of maximum of 5 public speakers. Current time allowances were considered reasonable. Members to re-consider whether Applicants/Agents have a right to speak in cases recommended for approval where no other speakers have registered. Ben Ferguson to bring back a written report.”

9. The protocol for public speaking at Planning Committee is set out in Part 5 of the Constitution and the relevant extract can be seen in paragraph 10 below.

10. This was updated in February 2020 following recommendations arising from the previous iteration of the Planning Committee Working Group. The new protocol removed the distinction between objectors and supporters and allowed ten members of the public to speak on each application, in addition to a non-committee member, town or parish council representatives and applicant or agent. Furthermore, it increased the speaking time available from 3 to 4 minutes for the public and 3 to 5 minutes for local council representatives. Agents or applicants were permitted up to 15 minutes, although they would only get an opportunity to speak if their application was recommended for approval and there were other speakers on their application. The current Protocol has been included below:

- 2.1. Town/parish councils and applicants/agents, objectors and supporters may make representations on all applications. If an application is recommended for approval and there are no registered speakers against the application the applicant/agent will not have the right to make representations.
- 2.2. Two representatives of the town or parish council may also attend site visits. (see Procedure for Members’ Site Visits above).
- 2.3. A town or parish council representative and members of the public may attend the meeting and speak on any application. They must register with the Democratic Services Officer at Uttlesford District Council (telephone 01799 510410) or email: [committee@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:committee@uttlesford.gov.uk) by 2pm on the day before the meeting. The order of speaking for each application will be as follows: 1. Non-committee member 2. Supporters or Objectors 3. Town or parish council 4. Applicant or Agent
- 2.4. A town/parish council representative or member may speak for up to 5 minutes, members of the public may speak for up to 4 minutes. Applicants and their representatives may speak for up to 15 minutes. Ten speaking slots are available between supporters/ objectors.
- 2.5. At the meeting those making representations should sit in the public area until the relevant item is to be considered.

- 2.6. Those making representations should sit at the allotted desk alongside members to make their statement and having made their statement should then return to the public area (or leave the meeting)
11. At the previous meeting, members discussed reducing the number of public speakers to five; the amount of speaking time for each individual would not be changed.
  12. Furthermore, issues relating to the agent or applicant's right to speak need to be addressed, as it is feasible that an applicant or agent could be informed that they would not get an opportunity to speak, as the application had been recommended for approval and no speakers had been registered, only for the committee to refuse the application at the meeting itself.
  13. The PCWG are asked to consider the current protocol and provide instruction to officers on whether they wish to amend it and, if so, to provide comment in order for a formal proposal to be brought to the next PCWG meeting. Any proposed changes to the Constitution will ultimately be considered by Full Council.

#### 14. Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Public speaking at committee provides direct democratic engagement with the council's planning processes. However, Planning Committee's primary purpose is to determine business in accordance with the council's policies and the NPPF. There is some concern that public speaking occupies a significant amount of time at committee, which is not necessarily conducive to the decision making process.	2	2	Uttlesford District Council's public speaking protocol is extremely generous in comparison to other local authorities, and the public can engage with the planning process via the public consultation that takes place for each application. If, for instance, the number of speakers was reduced to 5 (plus non-committee member, parish or town representative and applicant), there still would be up to 20 minutes of speaking time for individual members of the public to address committee.

--	--	--	--

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.