

SPEAKING ARRANGEMENTS AT MEETINGS OF THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To enable Members to consider the circumstances in which the Committee would consider it appropriate to change the usual arrangements for public speaking at formal meetings under the Special Speaking Arrangements at the Strategic Development Management Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members consider it would be appropriate to change the usual arrangements for public speaking at formal meetings of the Committee where applications have resulted in substantial local interest. That the revised arrangements for public speaking in respect of such applications follow the framework set out in Appendix 2 and be subject to review after 6 months in operation.

BACKGROUND

Full Council on 16 July 2014 requested a review of the current special speaking arrangements at the Strategic Development Management Committee. This followed a meeting of the committee where there had been 80 letters of representation submitted and there was one parish and two adjoining parishes who wished to speak. The normal arrangements for public speaking applied in this instance as the number of representations was less than the trigger for special speaking of 100 individual representations received.

The current arrangement was agreed by the Strategic Development Management Committee on 5 February 2010 with subsequent clarification on definitions of the terms "Member", "Local Member", "Local Council" and "Other Local Council" to avoid any confusion over those terms. It was agreed that this right to speak as "Member" applies only to Members of this Council and does not extend to County Councillors. The current speaking arrangements are set out in Appendix 1.

The normal arrangements for public speaking in terms of the time limit is in excess of those in the surrounding authorities. The majority operate a three minute period for each group of parish/town council, objectors, supporters/applicant/agent, and members, except Buckinghamshire County Council who operate a four minute time limit. Exceptionally two authorities may allow a further three minutes in total for objectors and the applicant.

The adopted special speaking arrangements are therefore already much more generous than adjoining authorities. It is considered that to extend the time limit for speaking under these special speaking arrangements would result in considerably longer meetings and resource implications.

In your Officers view the key issue in deciding whether revised speaking arrangements should apply is the level of public interest generated by an application and whether the appropriate threshold for applications to be determined by the Committee which is set at 100 or more individual letters of representation should be lowered.

Of the 22 applications reported to committee meetings held between 20 March 2013 and 6 July 2014 six were the subject of special speaking arrangements, and two had no public speaking as it related to an appeal. Of those which were subject to normal speaking arrangements there were :

- 9 with 0- 10 representations received,

- 1 with 17 representations received (residential at Furze Lane, Winslow)
- 1 with 24 representations received (residential at New Road, Weston Turville),
- 1 with 40 representations received (residential adj Rushenden Furlong, Pitstone),
- 1 with 60 representations received (residential at Moreton Road, Buckingham) and
- 1 with 80 representations received (crematorium, Cane End Lane Bierton)

All those who registered to speak did get the opportunity to speak at the meetings, although in the case of the application for the crematorium of the four objectors registered to speak two speakers had less than one minute to share and were requested to stop speaking. This is not a highly unusual situation in Development Management Committee meetings and the speakers are advised to co ordinate between them sharing the 5 minutes or appointing a spokesperson.

In respect of the parishes there has only been one of the reported applications where more than one parish wished to speak and normal speaking arrangements were applied. In that instance at the chairman's discretion the parish for the application in question was allowed to speak first with the other adjoining parishes sharing the remaining time. It is considered that this is appropriate and the parish for the application in question be called first to speak in that group.

On two occasions a County Councillor spoke in the objectors group, (one occasion the special speaking arrangements were in place). There had been a question raised at the committee meeting as to whether the county councillor should be allowed to speak in the "member" group. Members will recall that this was discussed when the definitions were reviewed on 8 June 2011. It is considered that the current arrangements for county councillors is consistent with the public speaking arrangement operated at other district councils and the county council in relation to district councillors and that this is not changed.

It is acknowledged that there are a number of opportunistic applications for development at villages in the district which have been submitted ahead of the proper local plan process for VALP, the majority of which have a wider strategic impact and be reported to Strategic Development Management Committee. These have generated a large number of representations from those villages which fall below the current 100 trigger.

Whilst the existing arrangements have worked successfully since they were introduced in 2010 Members may wish to consider whether to reduce this trigger to 80 to respond to the current policy framework and local community interest in these strategic applications. This could be reviewed after 6 months to consider whether the affect on the resourcing and cost of committees.

Appendix 1- Current Special Speaking Arrangements

Arrangements for public speaking where an application to be determined by the Strategic Development Control Committee has been the subject of 100 or more individual letters of representation.

Local Members 5 minutes each

Local Councils consulted on the application 5 minutes each

Other Local Councils 2½ minutes each

Each individual or representative of a local group or society speaking against the Application: 2½ minutes each (subject to a maximum of 25 minutes speaking time)

Each individual or representative of a local group or society speaking in support of the Application 2½ minutes each (subject to a maximum of 25 minutes speaking time)

Applicant/agent 10 minutes in total

There would be an opportunity for Members to ask for points of clarification for each speaker through the Chairman.”

The following definitions apply:-

“Member” – a member of this Council.

“Local Member” – the ward member for the application in question.

“Local Council” – the Town or Parish Council/Meeting for the application in question.

“Other Local Council” – an adjoining Town or Parish Council/Meeting for the application in question.

Appendix 2

Arrangements for public speaking where an application to be determined by the Strategic Development Control Committee has been the subject of 80 or more individual letters of representation.

Local Members 5 minutes each

Local Councils consulted on the application 5 minutes each

Other Local Councils 2½ minutes each

Each individual or representative of a local group or society speaking against the Application: 2½ minutes each (subject to a maximum of 25 minutes speaking time)

Each individual or representative of a local group or society speaking in support of the Application 2½ minutes each (subject to a maximum of 25 minutes speaking time)

Applicant/agent 10 minutes in total

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