

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

PROTOCOL FOR PUBLIC MEETINGS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS

January 2017

Introduction

1. Public meetings can be a useful means of ensuring that the views of the local community on major or very controversial development proposals are brought to the attention of planning officers and Members. They can also help local communities to better understand the planning process and the policies and issues which are relevant to a specific proposal.

Purpose

2. Public Meetings for planning applications will only be held where a proposal is for major development and where there is an exceptional level of public interest in a development proposal. The relevant Planning Committee will decide whether a Public Meeting is required or not in respect of a specific planning application. A recommendation to hold a public meeting will normally be made by the relevant Development Manager or Head of Service in advance of determination.
3. The purpose of a Public Meeting into a planning proposal is primarily to provide officers and Members with the opportunity to hear at first hand issues of local concern which may be relevant to the determination of the application. It is also to provide the local community with information about the planning application in question and about the planning process as it affects that application. All Members of the relevant Committee should endeavour to attend Public Meetings where possible but if all Members cannot attend this will not be a reason to delay determination.
4. Public meetings are most likely to be required for major mineral and waste applications, applications for major energy proposals, including new wind farm proposals, major infrastructure applications such as new roads and major new school developments and large-scale regeneration projects. They may also be appropriate on occasion in respect of other types of development which have given rise to an exceptional level of public interest. The majority of development proposals warranting public meetings at the planning application stage will also have been the subject of pre-application publicity by the developer in the form of public information exhibitions, leaflet drops and press releases.

Organisation of the Public Meeting

5. Public Meetings will be organised in accordance with the following principles and procedures:

- the relevant Planning Committee will authorise Public Meetings giving consideration to the level of public interest which has been demonstrated in the application concerned.
- Advance notice of the date of forthcoming Public Meetings will be given to the Committee at the relevant Committee meeting preceding the Public Meeting. Notwithstanding this a minimum of 2 weeks notice will be given to Members of the relevant Committee of the date of a Public Meeting.
- The responsibility for the organisation of the Public Meeting will fall to the relevant case officer in conjunction with the relevant committee administrator.
- The following will be invited to attend the Public Meeting:
 - all Members of the relevant Planning Committee
 - The Local Member(s)
 - Representatives of the Parish or Town Council
 - The applicant or agent
 - Relevant consultees, eg Environmental Health; County Highways; Environment Agency; as appropriate
- In addition the following publicity shall be undertaken in advance of a Public Meeting at least one week in advance of the Meeting:
 - Public notices shall be posted in and around the development site and in relevant local communities
 - A press release shall be issued by the County Council
- The meeting will be chaired by the Chair of the relevant Committee.
- Other Members of the Committee who attend the Public Meeting should not voice an opinion at the meeting unless they intend to declare an interest in the application and withdraw from the decision-making process.
- Local Members who are not part of the determining Committee may take part in the Public Meeting and speak on the proposal if they so wish.
- There will normally be a minimum of two planning officers in attendance at a Public Meeting, one of whom should be the case officer and one of whom should be the relevant Development Manager or Head of Service.

- Other officers from the relevant Development Management Team will attend the Public Meeting as considered appropriate to provide support in terms of setting up the venue and assisting in the organisation of the Meeting
- The case officer will provide a short briefing paper for Members containing details of the proposals and the relevant issues for consideration not less than 5 working days in advance of the Public Meeting. Copies of the briefing paper will be also made available for members of the public at the Public Meeting
- The relevant Democratic Services officer will attend the Public Meeting and will take a note of the proceedings.
- Where possible a venue for the meeting will be selected in the locality in which the development is proposed, subject to a suitable venue being available in the area.
- Public Meetings will take place on weekday evenings only, excluding Fridays.
- Plans and other relevant visual information will be displayed at the meeting for public information purposes.
- No material shall be distributed at the meeting by the applicant or third parties.

Format of Public Meetings

6. Public Meetings should be conducted in a formal manner in compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998. The Chair will open the meeting, introduce the officers, applicant / agent and any consultee representatives and advise those present of the purpose of the Public Meeting in line with this Protocol and of the procedure and format to be followed.
 - The planning officer(s) in attendance will make a short presentation describing the development, explaining the planning process and the likely timescale for determination and making reference to issues raised to date by consultees and others.
 - The Chair will open the floor to questions from members of the public present. All questions must be addressed through the Chair, who will direct the planning officers or applicant/agent or consultee to respond as appropriate.
 - All speakers from the floor should provide their name and address for the notes of the meeting.

- Speakers should endeavour to ensure that questions are not repetitive to enable a thorough airing of all relevant issues to take place.
- The Chair will endeavour to ensure that everyone who wishes to speak is given the opportunity to do so. Should time permit the Chair may allow speakers to speak for a second time if the point in question has not previously been made.
- No verbal or other abuse of officers, members, applicant / agent, consultees or other third parties will be permitted.
- Should the Meeting become unruly or unmanageable the Chair will close the meeting immediately.
- The local police shall be notified in advance of the time and date of all Public Meetings.
- The Chair may, at his/her discretion, follow the Council's rules of debate as applied to Committees and Standing Orders, to conduct the Public Meeting and his/her ruling shall be final and binding.

Consideration of a planning matter following a Public Meeting

7. All members of the relevant Planning Committee, including any who were not able to attend the Public Meeting, are entitled to participate in the making of the decision when it is reported back to Committee. Where a member has participated in a public meeting and expressed a view on the proposal they should seek advice from the Monitoring Officer before seeking to participate in the Committee meeting. The notes of the Public Meeting will be made available as an appendix to the officer report and will be published with the report at the meeting of the relevant Committee at which the application is to be determined.