

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

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Manager

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### **PUBLIC SPEAKING PROTOCOL – REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS AT PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

#### **Purpose**

1. To conduct a review of the public speaking protocol in the context of experience gained during the past 12 months.

#### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that the Planning Committee endorses the draft protocol attached at Appendix A, and adopts it for use with immediate effect, subject to officers being given delegated power to make any minor typographical changes.

#### **Reasons for Recommendations**

3. The protocol needs to be amended in order to remain effective, relevant and understandable.

#### **Background**

4. At its meeting on 24 May 2007, Council resolved that public speaking at Planning Committee be introduced, and that the Planning Committee be authorised to review and amend the scheme at its discretion, Part 4 of the Constitution being amended accordingly.
5. Planning Committee last reviewed the protocol in April 2011. Parts of the Protocol have been rewritten in the interests of Plain English.

#### **Considerations**

6. Public speaking at Planning Committee meetings, which includes contributions from local Members not on the Committee and members of parish councils, has been well received generally, and has allowed applicants, their agents, and objectors to take a greater part in the planning application process.
7. During the past few years, public speaking has operated well, but unforeseen circumstances have arisen from time to time, which have been dealt with under the Committee Chairman's general discretionary powers. The current review proposes the incorporation of those circumstances into the written protocol. This will provide clarity and certainty for Committee members and other interested parties.
8. The attached revision (with additions underlined and deletions struck through) does not make significant changes from the Protocol agreed 12 months ago. However, Members should note the following

- (a) Clarification that Objectors, Supporters and Parish Councils (but not local Councillors) must previously have submitted written comments to the District Council
- (b) Clarification that Appeal decisions are relevant (“material”) planning considerations
- (c) Inclusion of the National Planning Policy Framework as a relevant planning consideration
- (d) Confirmation that the retrospective nature of a planning application is not a relevant factor
- (e) Increased use of Plain English

### **Options**

9. The Committee has the option to approve the proposed protocol, either in whole or in part or as amended, or continue with the existing protocol.

### **Implications**

#### **Equality and Diversity**

10. The protocol is available electronically and in hard copy. Provision has been made for the document to be provided in alternative formats. Democratic Services Officers can advise verbally about the protocol’s main requirements.

### **Consultations**

11. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee, Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Youth Council, and key Council officers have been consulted about the proposed revised Protocol. The following comments have been received:

#### ***Sarah Stevens, immediate past Head of Planning & Economic Development***

“...I think the speaking protocol works well and if there is ever any pressure to increase the time from 3 to 5 minutes, I would resist as it would add considerable time to the Committee without adding anything extra in terms of input.”

#### ***Councillor Robert Turner, Planning Committee Chairman***

“...I agree keeping public speaking to 3 minutes.”

12. Other comments are reflected in the proposed additions (underlined) to the Protocol and deletions from it (struck through).

### **Effect on Strategic Aims**

13. The introduction of, and subsequent agreement of improvements to, the public speaking scheme, enables effective engagement by residents and parish councils with the decision-making process.

### **Conclusions / Summary**

14. To be effective, any system of public speaking must be clearly understood. It must be seen to be fair to everyone, and members of the Planning Committee should adhere to its general principles. A system of customer feedback is in place. For clarification, Appendix B shows the document should all suggested changes be accepted.

**Background Papers:** the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- None

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