Planning applications committees

Our planning committees are public meetings where elected councillors meet to decide whether planning applications are approved or refused. Most planning applications can be assessed against the Council’s planning policies and decided by the Executive Director, Planning and Borough Development, but about 10% are decided by a planning committee.

Anyone can attend planning committee meetings and listen to the discussions. Public seating is available and visitors can enter and leave the meeting for the applications in which they are interested. There are also opportunities to speak at the meeting for those who have registered in advance. Agendas are available five working days before each meeting at [www.rbkc.gov.uk/committees](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/committees).

If you prefer a paper copy please call Planningline on 0207 361 3012. Paper copies are also available at the committee meetings.

What applications are decided by our planning committees?
The planning committees decide applications where:

- three or more people have submitted objections to the application and the Executive Director is recommending it be approved;
- a councillor has requested the application is decided by a committee and not the Executive Director;
- approval is linked to a legal agreement between the Council and a developer about providing affordable housing or works outside the site; or
- the Executive Director considers it appropriate for the committee to decide an application or other matter rather than deciding it himself.

What happens at planning committees?
The agenda for the meeting contains a report for each application being presented to the committee. At the beginning of each report the Executive Director makes a recommendation to refuse or approve the application. Councillors on the committee will have read each report before the meeting takes place and will also have looked at the plans and supporting papers.

For some applications a planning officer will present plans and photographs to the committee. This happens where there are people registered to speak to the committee or where the chairman has asked for a presentation.

Applicants and those people who have made written comments on applications can register to speak at committee meetings. When we write to tell people that a planning committee will decide an application we explain how they can register to speak, should they wish to.

The committee may decide some applications quickly and take longer for others. It will not normally debate every issue resulting from an application and will normally focus on the matters which will affect whether the application is approved or refused.

The order of proceedings is:

1. The committee will normally consider the applications for which there is public speaking first
2. When the chairman calls out the application address, a planning officer will give a short introduction
3. The committee may ask questions of the planning officer to make sure they understand the application and issues
4. The chairman will call each of the public speakers in turn, with those speaking against the application first
and those speaking in favour of the application second

5. Occasionally the committee may ask public speakers questions if officers are unable to provide the information requested. Answer these questions briefly without speaking beyond the question and representing the case.

6. Once any questions have finished the chairman will ask public speakers to return to the audience

7. When all speakers have been heard the committee will discuss the application and make a decision with advice from officers. The public cannot take part in the discussion

Can information be presented or handed out at the meeting?

Written comments, photographs and other supporting information should normally be submitted during the consultation period. Photographs, letters and other supporting information cannot be presented at the committee meeting as other people will not have had the opportunity to see it and officers will not have been able to check it is accurate. If the committee relies on information presented in this way it can mean the committee’s decision could be challenged in the Courts.

What happens if the committee does not reach a decision?

The committee might sometimes decide to put off making a decision. This is known as ‘deferring the application’. They may do this if they need more information to make a decision. If a committee defers an application and there has already been public speaking at a meeting, there will be no further public speaking when it is discussed again.

Speaking at a planning committee

When we write to tell people that a planning committee will decide an application we explain how they can register to speak, should they wish to. Even if they do not wish to speak, comments received about an application before we have written our report are summarised in the Executive Director’s report to the committee.

If we receive comments after the report has been prepared, we summarise the comments in an update report published on the day of the meeting. If we receive comments after that update report, they are summarised verbally at the meeting. To make sure we receive comments always use the online comments form on the specific application record [2]; Writing to committee members directly may mean they do not see them on time.

Only the applicant and those who have made written comments on the application, or someone speaking on their behalf, may register to speak. Be organised, as the chairman will not normally allow substitute speakers at meetings.

How long is provided for speakers?

Those speaking in support of an application and those speaking against it will normally have three minutes each.

If more than one person wishes to speak in support or against an application, it will be for them to decide whether to appoint a spokesperson or to split the time between them. With agreement we will share contact details with other registered speakers so this can be arranged.

A councillor may sometimes request to speak at meetings even though they are not part of the committee. When this happens they have up to two minutes. Where they are speaking against the application, speakers in favour are allowed an additional two minutes. Where the councillor speaks in support of the application, speakers against the application are allowed an additional two minutes.

The chairman will say when the speaking time is almost finished to allow time to conclude. Speakers cannot question councillors, officers or other speakers.

What issues can be spoken about?
The committee’s decision can only be based on planning issues, which can include:

- road safety and traffic issues;
- the effect of the completed development on the local area and local properties;
- loss of light, overlooking or the sense of enclosure from a building;
- nuisance caused by noise, disturbance and smell from the completed development; and
- protecting important buildings and trees.

The committee cannot consider issues that are not planning issues, including:

- any disagreements between you and your neighbours about boundary lines or access;
- detailed construction issues which should be addressed through the Party Wall Act or similar laws;
- the applicant’s morals or motives
- how the development may affect the value of property

**Making the most of speaking time**

Three minutes may not seem very long, but remember that any written comments are already available to the committee. These tips may be helpful:

- use the time to focus on two or three key issues which might persuade the committee
- focus on issues which the committee can take into account, described above
- write down what to say and practice how long it takes. At the committee it will normally take slightly longer, so take this into account
- do not waste time thanking the committee or on introducing speakers and their backgrounds – it will reduce speaking time
- if speaking in support of an application, the committee will find it helpful to address the concerns of objectors
- all time does not have to be used - sometimes the most effective speakers say least

Speakers should arrive no later than ten minutes before the start of the meeting and introduce themselves to the committee administrator. If speakers arrive late or do not attend the meeting, the committee will still decide the application and may hear other registered speakers.