

Planning Process – Definition of Roles

1. Public
2. Town and Parish Councils
3. Planning Officers
4. District Councillors
5. Planning Committee Members within a Sub-Committee
6. Planning Committee Members within a Full Planning meeting
7. Planning Member (Cabinet)

Public – its role is to participate in the planning process by supporting or objecting to applications to contribute to better planning decisions. This will enable decision makers to have more additional facts and information to bring to bear in making informed decisions.

Town and Parish Councils - an elected group who represent their parish and are statutory consultees in the process. Their role within a formal meeting is to assess and consider if a corporate view should be submitted to the planning authority looking to support, wherever possible, neighbours and amenity groups. They consider and comment on the character of area, density, overdevelopment, layout, position, design, external appearance of buildings and impact on landscape. They protect valuable resources such as good farm land, highway matters, effect on neighbours (such as overlooking, loss of light, visual intrusion), protect specially designated areas or buildings, nature conservation, tree cover and hedgerows, public rights of way and to promote certain community uses.

Planning Officers - are employed personnel whose role involves managing a variety of planning applications, appeals and pre-application enquiries, assessing the applications, producing planning documentation and reports and communicating with a range of stakeholders including public and councillors. The Officers should exercise planning judgement as to the merits of schemes, and subsequent reports should be balanced in content and delivery, so as not to mislead those who are responsible for making planning decisions.

District Councillors - their role is to represent their district on a range of matters including planning and planning applications. They must familiarise themselves with planning policy and will become involved in planning applications as a result of representation. They can comment on their own behalf or on behalf of the local resident and support Town and Parish Councils. District Councillors can contact the Planning Officers to discuss directly an individual case to find out about planning issues, responses, whether changes can or will be made prior to a decision. This process is the only direct person to person representation into the planning system. It is a very important interface to have direct dialogue between the District Representative and the Planning Officers. All persons who enter into these discussions should at all times be open minded and should not have predetermined the outcome of such discussions.

Planning Sub Committee Members - their role is to consider all planning issues and merits of each application delivered and put forward by the Officer in a report and then to make a decision to refuse or approve. They should have received these applications/documents five days prior to the meeting. The committee members can ask question of the Officers in attendance. The application can be recommended to go to a full committee meeting.

Planning Committee Members - their role in a full planning meeting (represented by some 15 councillors) is a similar format to the above but it is open to the public. People are given the opportunity to speak, for or against the application, which allows them to influence the decisions to be made by the Committee and in that process the public are able to see a clear and open democratic planning decision.

Planning Committee Member (District Councillor serving on Cabinet) - their role as an elected person is to represent their district on all matters except individual planning applications. Amongst other Council business they are responsible for development and planning policy and have a strong interface with Planning Officers. They play an important role in driving planning policy and proposals and therefore should exclude themselves from decision-making committees. This is to avoid the perception of a conflict of interest and predisposition.