

Protocol for Virtual Planning Committee Meetings



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1. Background

By virtue of the provisions within The Local Government (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of District Council Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, the Council will, where a meeting cannot be deferred, deliver Planning Committee meetings virtually using the Zoom platform.

This Protocol for virtual Planning Committee meetings should be read in conjunction with the existing Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee which is available to view on the Council's website [here](#).

2. Public access to Virtual Planning Committee Meetings and Documents

Due to the challenges of hosting virtual Planning Committee meetings, we have made some changes to the timings of events as follows:

- Virtual Planning Committee meetings may no longer be held on the first Tuesday of every month at 7pm, rather the dates/times will be agreed with the Chair and Vice Chair and publicised accordingly;
- Where considered appropriate the Committee will meet more often than once a month in order to deal with planning matters as required;
- The Schedule of applications to be heard by the Planning Committee will be published ten working days prior to the meeting, with the Case Officer's Report being published on the NI Planning Portal on the same day;

- The deadline to register to speak is 5pm five working days prior to the meeting and it is required that you provide the Planning Department and Democratic Services with a copy of your representation before 10.30am two working days prior to the meeting, in the event that connection is lost during the meeting;
- The Planning Department will publish any addendum to the Case Officer's Report before 10.30am on the day of the meeting.

Audio recording of the meetings will be available as normal through the Council's website which can be found [here](#). There will also be a link published with the agenda which can be found [here](#).

As the Council offices are currently closed to the public, the Council is unable to facilitate public viewing of the associated planning applications. All documents are available on the NI Planning Portal under the Public Access system [here](#). If you need assistance to locate planning application documents, please contact the Planning Department between the hours of 9am and 3pm by telephoning **028 91 824006**.

3. Taking part in a Virtual Planning Committee Meeting

Members of the public are welcome to speak about specific applications at Planning Committee meetings but you are referred to the existing Guidance document on Speaking at Planning Committee meetings which can be found [here](#) or which is available from the Planning Office – please contact planning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk or telephone 028 91 824006.

Please provide a telephone number and email address when you submit your request to speak, as we will need this to contact you should we require. Late requests will not be facilitated.

Registered speakers will be required to make their representations to the Committee using the Council's selected virtual meeting platform – Zoom. Please be advised that comments can only be made verbally; however, at the Chairman's discretion you may be able to highlight something on the presentation by the planning officer if you wish to point out something of importance or clarify an issue. Only arguments relating to planning matters can be used, e.g., appearance of the proposed development, effect on the amenity of the areas, or your property, access, landscaping, materials etc. Matters relating to the applicant's personal motives or financial status, views over the site, boundary disputes etc. are not relevant.

You are advised that anything you say should not contain abusive or defamatory opinions. If you do so you may be asked to leave the meeting and be locked out from re-joining.

If you think you may not be able to participate in the meeting but would like to submit representations, you can do this – it will be covered in the troubleshooting section of this document.

a) Prior to joining a Virtual Planning Committee Meeting:

- i. Ensure you have the Zoom application installed on your device – you can access Zoom via your web browser, but we recommend you download the app if you are able, using the store/site relevant to your device;
- ii. Please ensure your Zoom Account Name is set up to reflect your full name, in order that the Host can identify you in the attendee list, and Members will be aware of who is speaking;
- iii. Disconnect any non-essential devices from the internet, disable any applications you are not using on your computer / iPad / mobile device and turn off any streaming services;
- iv. Ensure that your device is fully charged and that you have easy access to a charger to ensure you do not run out of battery;
- v. Choose a location in your home where you may take part in the meeting without being disturbed.

b) Joining a Virtual Planning Committee Meeting

You can join a virtual Planning Committee meeting from a range of devices; we would recommend a laptop, but you can use a tablet or smartphone.

You will need to click on the Meeting Link on the Planning Page of the Council website [here](#). You will be asked to enter your email address and name – please enter your full name so you are identifiable to the Host. If you are unable to use Zoom or need telephone access, please contact the Planning Department on **028 91 824006 between 9am and 3pm**.

Please refer to the guidance documents referenced above for more details.

It would be useful if you are ready 10-15 minutes prior to the meeting commencing. You will only be able to see proceedings once the meeting has started to be broadcast. Registered speakers must not activate their camera or microphone unless instructed by the Chair.

c) Running Order of the Virtual Planning Committee Meeting

The Chair will lead the meeting and will inform everyone present on the procedure for the meeting and the order of proceedings. Items will be dealt with in agenda order as follows:

1. Chairman's welcome and introductions
2. Apologies for absence

3. Declarations of interest
4. Minutes of last meeting – matters arising
5. Planning applications (in agenda order – on occasion the agenda may be reprioritised to hear those items with speakers first)
6. Other planning matters such as reports on appeals, enforcement and LDP as appropriate

Under Item 5 of the agenda the following running order will apply:

- i. The Planning Officer will be invited to present the application and recommendation;
- ii. Members will be invited to ask the Planning Officer questions if they need to clarify any points raised;
- iii. Registered speakers in opposition to the proposal will be invited to speak (5 minutes total);
- iv. Members will be invited to ask registered speakers (in opposition) questions if they need to clarify any points raised;
- v. Registered speakers in support of the proposal will be invited to speak (5 minutes total);
- vi. Members will be invited to ask registered speakers (in support) questions if they need to clarify any points raised;
- vii. The Planning Officer will be invited to respond to any points raised by the speakers (in opposition to and in support of);
- viii. Members will be invited to share their views (debate the application);
- ix. The Chair will clarify any additional matters before inviting a proposer and seconder for the Planning Officer's recommendation;
- x. A vote will take place – unless unanimous a recorded vote will be taken.

Troubleshooting and FAQs

What if I can't access, or don't want to use Zoom?

Please refer to the guidance referenced above in this document for assistance in accessing Zoom from your device. If you do not have access to an electronic device or internet, you can join the system by telephone – a number will be provided, either on the Council website, or if you telephone the Planning Department using the number reference earlier in this document.

Should you not wish to take part but wish to submit a representation, you can send a written submission to be summarised in the addendum prepared by the planning officer. You should ensure that it is submitted prior to 10.30am two days prior to the meeting to planning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk.

Will the membership of the Virtual Planning Committee be different?

The Planning Committee will continue to be made up of 16 members with 6 Members required to be present in order for the meeting to be quorate¹.

How will the Virtual Planning Committee vote?

Where a proposal is not unanimous, a recorded vote will be taken. In this circumstance, all those Members voting in support/opposition of the proposal will be requested to indicate their vote by use of the 'Raise hand' button within Zoom, which the Chair and Host will be able to see, and the Chair/Director will read out the names accordingly. Refer to the existing Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee for Committee decision-making options.

What happens if a Member loses connection?

If a Member of the Virtual Planning Committee loses connection the Host will attempt to bring them back into the meeting. If they are unsuccessful, and the meeting is quorate, the meeting will proceed without that Member.

If the Member is able to re-join the meeting at a later time, they will be able to participate in, and vote on, any items as they consider appropriate.

What happens if a registered speaker loses connection?

If a registered speaker loses connection the Host will attempt to bring the registered speaker back into the meeting. They will try the following:

- Invite the registered speaker back to the Zoom platform;
- Call the registered speaker (if a telephone number has been provided for us to do this);
- Read the representation out on behalf of the registered speaker (as a copy should have been provided to us in advance).

Note: If we cannot re-connect registered speakers the Virtual Planning Committee meeting will proceed in their absence. It is therefore required that a copy of the registered speaker's representation is supplied in advance of the meeting, so that it is able to be read out on behalf of the registered speaker. Speakers will still be able to listen to the audio recording of the proceedings by accessing the recording on the Council's website, once ratified by full Council.

How will I be invited to speak?

All members of the public will join the Zoom meeting as 'attendees'. When the Committee is ready to hear your representation, the Chair will advise you and the Host

¹ Quorum – the minimum number of members that must be present at any of its meetings to make the proceedings of that meeting valid

of the meeting will change your status from 'attendee' to 'participant'. You will then be advised that you will have a maximum of five minutes to speak, and the Host will advise when you have only one minute left. Members will then have opportunity to ask you questions or points of clarification in relation to your representation. You should mute your microphone when not speaking. Once Members are content, the Host will revert your status from 'participant' to 'attendee' and you will no longer be able to speak or be heard by the Committee.

I'm not registered to speak – how do I view the meeting?

You should click on the Meeting Link on the Planning Page of the Council website [here](#). You will be asked to enter your email address and name – please enter your full name so you are identifiable to the Host. If you are unable to use Zoom or need telephone access, please contact the Planning Department on **028 91 824006 between 9am and 3pm.**

Please refer to the guidance documents referenced above for more details.

Contacts

All Planning application queries should be directed to the case officer listed against the case file, or by emailing the General Planning email address at planning@ardsaandnorthdown.gov.uk or by telephoning the Planning Office between 9am and 3pm on 028 91 824006. Please also use this email address or telephone number if you have a query regarding information in this document.

Registered speakers should provide a copy of their speaking notes to the following: planning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk