

Having Your Say – Public Speaking at Authority Meetings

May I Attend a Meeting? Yes. Members of the public are welcome to attend meetings of the Authority and its Committees. Details of our meetings are on our [website](#). If you are unable to attend, many meetings are audio recorded and recordings are available on our website on the same page as the meeting agenda.

May I speak at a Meeting? Yes. Meetings of the Authority and its Committees provide an opportunity for public speaking, so long as you have notified us in advance that you wish to do so (details of how to register to speak are below). The Chairperson will allow members of the public to speak about any general matter relevant to the business of the Authority, or on any item on the Agenda for that meeting. If you wish to speak at a meeting, please contact Judy Coles, Corporate Support Officer, by email, in writing or by telephone by 4pm on the working day before the meeting, indicating a brief summary of the matter you wish to raise. Email: JColes@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk or Tel: 01398 322250 or 01398 323665.

What will happen at the Meeting? Please sit in the public seating area when you arrive.

The Chairperson will open the meeting and each agenda item will be introduced by an Authority Officer and in the case of a planning application, a Planning Officer will usually make a presentation. The Chairperson will then invite anyone who has asked to speak to do so. A separate table, chair and a microphone are set aside for people who wish to speak, so that the meeting can clearly hear what you say. In relation to planning applications, speakers will be invited in the following order:

- members of the public and representatives of groups or organisations (whether they support or object to the application, or wish to make neutral observations) will be invited in the order in which the Authority received notification of a wish to speak;
- representatives from the County, District or Parish Council;
- the applicant and/or their agent.

If you change your mind on the day and decide not to speak, or if you feel everything you wanted to say has already been said by someone else, you can simply advise the Chairperson that this is the case.

How much time will I have to speak? You will have two minutes to speak and this will be timed by the Corporate Support Officer. The Chairperson has the discretion to increase this time, however in the interests of fairness to everyone who has registered to speak, the Chairperson will usually ask you to stop if you exceed the two minutes allowed. At the Chairperson's discretion, you may be asked to clarify something you have said; this will be as a matter of clarification only and not to allow extra time for you to speak.

If a number of people wish to speak about the same matter, the Chairperson may ask those concerned to nominate one person to speak, and the nominated person will be allowed to speak for up to 5 minutes.

The time allocated for individual public speakers may be extended only in relation to a matter in which there is considered to be an exceptional degree of public interest. In these circumstances, all speaking slots will be allowed equal periods of time and it will be for the Chairperson to determine the process for public speaking.

How many times may I speak? You may speak once per agenda item. If multiple agenda items relate to a single application, single site or Authority matter, public speakers may address the committee once only, regardless of how many agenda items the application or matter comprise.

Are there any restrictions on what I can say? You should concentrate on explaining the main points that are important to you and you should try to focus your comments on how your views relate to the relevant planning policy(ies) – remember that it's the planning policies that will guide Members of the Committee in their decision-making. Bear in mind that a short, clear and direct statement or question is often the most effective in communicating a message. You should not say anything frivolous or defamatory, or which concerns a confidential issue that would normally be dealt with in private. In relation to planning applications, you should not speak about the applicant's past behaviour or speculate about what you think their future plans might be.

What happens after I have spoken? Members of the Authority Committee will have listened to what you have said but will not enter into debate with you. If you have asked a question, this may be answered by an Authority Officer at the time or noted for consideration in the Committee's debate that follows. If an answer to a question cannot be provided on the day, a written reply will be offered.

After everyone who wishes to speak has done so, the Authority Committee will debate the planning application or other matter, usually in public¹, and will then make a decision. In the case of planning applications the decision may be to approve or refuse the application, to defer a decision to allow further information to be provided, or to arrange a planning site visit. There will be no further opportunity for anyone who is not an Authority Member or Officer to speak.

May I communicate with Members of the Authority or Committee during a public meeting? No. It is important that public meetings are conducted in a proper manner, without interruption, and so that everyone attending the meeting can see and hear all the information presented. Members of the public are therefore asked not to lobby Members immediately before the meeting and may not communicate with Members or pass them notes, documents or photographs during the meeting itself. Members of the public are asked to respect the Committee's deliberations and refrain from commenting during their debate.

However lobbying is an important part of the democratic process and it is open to members of the public to contact members of the Authority/Committee about a particular matter before it is considered in a public meeting. The contact details of Members of the Authority are on our [website](#). At the start of each public meeting, Members of the Authority are required to declare if they have been lobbied about a particular matter.

I am unable to attend - can I still submit a statement or a question? Yes.

The Authority welcomes questions or feedback and appreciates that not everyone is able to attend meetings at a particular time or venue. If you are unable to attend, you may ask someone else to attend and read a statement or ask a question on your behalf. If this is the case, please tell us who will be speaking on your behalf and advise them that two minutes will be allowed, ie the same time that would be allowed if you had attended yourself. Alternatively, you may submit a statement or question in writing or by telephone by 4pm on the working day preceding the meeting to Judy Coles, the Corporate Support Officer: Tel: 01398 323665 or JColes@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk. Your question or statement will be printed and brought to the attention of Members at the meeting. Please note that any written statements submitted to the Authority will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act which means the Authority may be obliged to provide the statement to a third party if requested to do so.

Will I be recorded if I speak at a meeting? Yes. Many meetings are audio recorded to provide greater access for the public to Authority decision-making. By entering the Authority's Committee Room or other meeting venue and speaking during Public Speaking Time you are consenting to being audio recorded. Notices will be displayed if a recording of the meeting will be made. All recordings are made available on our website.

¹ There are limited circumstances when the Authority Committee may exclude the public in order to consider a confidential matter.

The Authority takes no responsibility for views expressed by members of the public during recorded public meetings. Recordings or any part thereof may be removed from the Authority's website at any time by the Chief Executive or Monitoring Officer if they consider that all or part of the content is, or is likely to be, in breach of any statutory provision or common law doctrine. Examples include breaches of Data Protection, Equality and Human Rights legislation or provisions relating to confidential or exempt information.

May I film or record a public meeting or use social media to report on the meeting? Yes. Members of the public may use Facebook and Twitter or other forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting. Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairperson so that those present may be made aware. [You should seek permission from individual members of the public attending the meeting prior to filming or distributing their images].