

Wiltshire Council

Council

11 July 2017

Notice of Motion No. 1 – Planning meetings to accommodate everyone

Councillors Chris Hurst and Ian Thorn

To consider the following notice of motion submitted in accordance with the constitution:

“The Council recognises the important role of planning within the authority and asserts the importance of democratic debate in the planning process. Public engagement is crucial to ensure that planning decisions are made in the best interests of Wiltshire residents. The Council's planning meetings are central in this process; giving the public an opportunity to contribute, speak and witness that all decisions are open, transparent and made free from prejudice. To this end, the Council resolves to start all Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Planning Committee meetings at 6pm to ensure that all residents have the greatest opportunity to attend.”

Background

The Cabinet Member for Planning consulted all of the Area Planning, and Strategic Planning Committee Chairmen on 19th October 2016 over the decision to align the start times of the Area Planning Committees to take place during the daytime.

All committee Chairmen accepted this approach as a reasonable way forward, recognising that achieving consistency, with how the committees are approached across Wiltshire, was important to address. (Currently 3 out of 5 Committees meet during the day).

Northern and Western Area Planning Committees were changed to day time meetings in 2014 and representation has remained consistent, and Strategic Planning Committee which has always met during the day.

Although this does not substitute for attendance figures per se, the average number of speakers who attended meetings in 2016 for the four planning committees is as follows:

- Northern (3pm): 3.2 speakers per application
- Western (3pm): 3.1 speakers per application
- Eastern (6pm): 3.1 speakers per application
- Southern (6pm): 2.2 speakers per application

These figures include any member of the public, consultee, or parish/town councillor who spoke to a planning application, and demonstrates that holding meetings during the day has not significantly impacted on Wiltshire residents in engaging in the planning process and having the opportunity to contribute, speak and witness all the decisions that are made at the Area Planning Committees.

Serious consideration has already been given to this matter. As part of the Councils work to bring the Planning Service to a cost neutral position, the Area Planning committees were looked at and how they were set up. Holding both the Eastern Committee and the Southern Committee in the evening increases the running costs significantly with the meetings being supported by, on average, six senior officers from Development Management, Legal and Democratic Services. Holding meetings during the day also provides flexibility in allowing access to additional resources when required.