

## **APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

### **INFORMATION PUBLICISING COMMITTEE PROCEDURES.**

#### **Total responses:**

**Parish / Town Council: 14**

**Agent / applicant: 2**

**Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillors: 5**

**MDDC elected members: 2**

**MDDC Scrutiny Committee**

(NB: Reference to initial working group recommended changes as identified formed the basis for the consultation exercise).

***Initial working group recommended change 1: That a clear guide to Planning Committee procedures is produced to inform the public and other participants.***

#### **Parish / Town Council responses:**

1. Strongly agreed.
2. An advocate service should be available to assist the layman in the presentation of their arguments.
3. This should set out the stages of an application, the responses requested, who decides and actions available if the decision is unacceptable to respondents.

#### **Agent / applicant responses:**

1. Support – will improve procedures.

#### **Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:**

1. Agree regarding information.
2. Support. Suggest copies are widely publicised, circulated and their existence made known to all Parish Councils.

### **LAYOUT OF VENUE.**

***Initial working group recommended change 2: That the layout of the venue is amended to a 'U' shape once display screens have been upgraded in the Council Chamber.***

#### **Parish / Town Council responses:**

1. Agreed.
2. Strongly support. Before the start of the meeting the Chairman should explain the proceedings and who is who.
3. The room layout has already been altered to make it more inclusive and presentational material more visible to all. Appears to be mostly implemented.
4. Introduce lapel badges in addition to name plates to enable the public to identify everyone involved.
5. If amended as proposed, suggest everything be turned through 90 degrees with a large screen behind the Chairman. This will ensure all can see and be more inclusive.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. Support – will improve procedures.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Speakers are only able to address the Chairman. It would be better to be able to address the Chairman and members rather than the side of their heads and see if they are listening.
2. Great if everything was turned through 90 degrees with a large screen behind the Chairman. The current end to end of room makes the public feel more remote and excluded.
3. Just go ahead with this.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

***Initial working group recommended change 3: That Legal advice is available in the preparation of the agenda, pre committee briefing and in person at the meeting itself.***

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. Agreed provided that this advice is available on both sides of the argument.
2. Concern over cost and time. Any legal pitfalls should have been researched before this stage.
3. Support – the cost of attendance would be saved in the long run by having answers on tap rather than a delay.
4. Legal attendance at meetings is imperative.
5. Do not object, but concern of performance of legal officers thinking on the hoof (he got it wrong). Support legal input into the preparation of the agenda and pre briefing. Do not see the need for an officer to be there every meeting, but only if there was an identified need. If a legal matter came up during discussion it is more appropriate for the decision to be deferred in order that a legal point can be given proper consideration and if necessary researched, rather than make a rushed and possibly flawed response.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. Support – will improve procedures.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Is this to look after the interests of the /Council and due to fear of being sued?
2. Is Legal Opinion to be made available to all parties? It could aid public transparency.
3. What is the cost and how is it justified?

## **ATTENDANCE**

**There is no change proposed.**

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. We see no need for other officers to be there unless there is an identified need as their time could be better used. We strongly argue that the Cabinet Member holding the Planning Portfolio be present at most, if not all meetings to monitor performance of committee and officers.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Agreed.

## **AGENDA FORMAT AND ORDER**

**The working group proposes no change in this respect.**

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Agreed.
2. We suggest that enforcement be dealt with after applications as less public are likely to be involved. We support the procedure set out in para 5.3 of the report (Review the list of applications before their individual consideration. Where there are none that wish to speak to an application or debate it, they are the subject of a single motion from the Chair in advance of the individual consideration of applications where there are speakers or a debate is requested by Members of committee).
3. There is no discussion of items where no member of the public is there to oppose. It is assumed each Councillor has fully read and understood all the documents. This is unlikely with so many for each meeting. They will therefore only be guided by the outcome expected from them. Full details should be presented for every case.

## **REPORT FORMAT AND CONTENTS**

***Initial working group recommended change 4: That the case officer name be included and in the case of refusals, the reasons for refusal be moved up to the front of the report to follow the recommendation.***

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. Agreed.
2. The length and content of reports is a matter for members of Planning Committee and what they feel is needed to help them reach a conclusion. Reports need to be correct in detail and contain reference to all relevant information - not be selective or summarised, thereby not giving the full information intended by the contributor. Some reports and their content currently leave a feeling of bias. We agree with the comments at 6.3 of the report (previous legal advice on the content of officer reports).
3. There are two issues from the legal advice on the content of officer reports that we feel are not regularly observed by officers: firstly, that it is fair to both the applicant and any objectors and secondly, if parts of the report are given orally the minutes need to reflect this and this would present a higher risk that the evidence would be discounted or given less weight by a Planning Inspector or the Court.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. Support – will improve procedures.
2. Reports are too long. The issues should be capable of being summarise rather than including all comments from consultees.
3. I accept that most local authority planning officers consider that their prime responsibility in terms of development control matters is to protect the integrity

of the policies within the Development Plan currently in force. I do detect in the approach of some officers in their reports to Committee a reluctance to fully set out all other material considerations and the weight which could be applied to those matters.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Agreed.
2. Officer recommendations let Councillors off the hook to listen or have a view. It relieves members from more than a cursory reading of the application before the meeting.
3. All the public need from the planning officers is consistent, fair and transparent planning decisions.
4. All planning policies, strategies, decision making criteria should be documented in an easily understood format and held in an online database for instant access by interested members of the public. This will free up the planning officers to focus on their priorities.
5. Where precedence or case studies are used to support a decision they should be should be easily available for public reference and scrutiny.
6. A report template will ensure contents are produced in a consistent manner and designed to reflect quantitative and qualitative needs of Planning Committee.
7. Vital officer name is on each report.
8. Major decisions should be in an executive summary at the front of the report template.
9. The more systemised the process becomes, the more efficient, consistent, fairer, transparent and faster planning decisions may be made with the potential to lower caseload for officers and Committee members.

## **OFFICER PRESENTATIONS**

***Initial working group recommended change 5: That officers review the length and content of presentations to make them more focussed and succinct.***

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. Agreed. Reduce reference to previous documents and jargon. Should be no longer than 15 mins but discretion applied to larger developments.
2. Be succinct.
3. Improve clarity and ease of comprehension.
4. Agree that presentation should not act as a substitute to or repeat the report thereby discouraging it from being read in advance. Agree presentations need to be focussed and not over long. Verbal presentations have been found to contain information or suggestions which have not been seen in the written report or documents on the website thereby preventing objectors presenting an alternative view. Changes have also been suggested on the hoof during the discussions of Planning Committee for which there is no presented evidential base.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. Support – will improve procedures.
2. MDDC Officers present cases clearly and concisely.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Just go ahead.
2. Supply officers with a standard presentation format / template that they and committee agree to.

***Initial working group recommended change 6: That the content of officer presentations be amended to increase the size/ colour of the cursor, the location of photographs be clearly indicated and the title slide be enlarged.***

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. Agreed.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. Support – will improve procedures.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Photos should have date and time taken to ensure they are a genuine representation. At the meeting I attended officer photographs were biased and not representative. I circulated photographs myself prior to the meeting other wise members would not have seen a realistic view of the area. Speakers should be able to present photographs too.

## **PUBLIC SPEAKING**

**Recommendation 7: That views be sought on arrangements for speaking at planning committee in terms of who, when, how many, how long for and the order of speakers. Should the questioning of speakers by Committee Members be included?**

**When may public speaking take place?**

**Who is able to speak and the number of speakers.**

**How long to allow for speaking.**

**When public speaking takes place and the order of speaking.**

**Questioning speakers.**

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. Committee should be allowed to question speakers to aid clarity, but that it not be a cross-examination.
2. Agree with questioning of speakers.
3. The Chairman should make a summary statement.
4. The applicant or their agent should be able to speak last.
5. Parishes should have chance to speak last or near the end as they represent all people of the area and usually carry their objections.
6. Objectors should be able to speak last. Statements by applicants / developers may not be accurate. Local knowledge is needed to correct these.

7. There should be more interaction between the Committee members and speakers.
8. Whilst a time limit for public speakers is set, it should be flexible to allow more contributors, if adding value, within the time constraint.
9. Clarification should be given of time allowed for speakers.
10. Time for 'comeback' should be allowed for applicants, supporters / objectors and Parish Councils to respond to possible inaccuracies. Particularly useful for the party that is first in the order of speaking.
11. Speakers should have 5 minutes each.
12. The time allowed to speak should be in proportion to the size of the application.
13. Allow the applicant and public speakers to speak during the individual planning application stage rather than up front in public question time.
14. Suggest: Major applications 2 speakers and 2 against with 3 minutes each. This will allow cases for and against to be made. Minor applications: 2 speakers and 2 against with 2 minutes each.
15. Very important Committee can clarify points with speakers.
16. Our Council involve the applicant in a question and answer session prior to the application being tabled. This is not through the Chairman, but as an open forum. It aids application understanding and the reasons for it.
17. Public speaking at the beginning of the meeting indicates frustration at not being able to speak when the application is considered.
18. It would be better to have speaking to agenda items when the item is dealt with rather than up front in public question time. It would then be relevant to the item being discussed. Currently the question could be asked over 2 hours before the matters is discussed and Committee could then forget the relevance. The recorded answers in the minutes are not in chronological order.
19. The number of people speaking for or against an application will always be contentious. Note a suggested difference between major and non major applications. Surely the reason why it is before Committee in the first place is because it is major. If non major it has probably been called to Committee by the Ward Member as it is controversial and so to those involved it becomes major.
20. Three minutes is very tight – anything less would not be considered viable. If public question time at the beginning of the meeting was restricted to no application questions and public questions taken with the relevant application, the questions could be better managed and restricted to 2 minutes per question. Five minutes could be permitted per speaker: 1 for, 1 against + Parish / Town representative + Ward members, 6 minutes for each.
21. Objectors should speak last as the applicant has had the opportunity to put forward papers in support of the application, has had meetings with officers to put their case and if recommended for approval, even more of the applicant's case is put forward. Objectors and Parish / Town Councils feel disadvantaged by this so need the balance of speaking last. When it gets before an Inspector, the applicant / appellant is on the other side and rightly should have the last word.
22. Support the practice now in place for registering speakers and the order of speaking.
23. Support increasing the number of people being able to have their say when an application is discussed.

24. Support a time restriction for Ward Members and that it be the same as for other speakers.
25. Give applicants the opportunity to speak at the end of this period, following statements by others.
26. Parish Councils should be given 5 minutes to speak as they represent large numbers of people.
27. Ward Members speaking should be restricted to 5 minutes each with a collective time of 15 minutes when more than 1 attends. Ward Members should be able to ask questions at the Chairman's discretion.
28. The length of Parish Council speaking is influenced by whether the Committee participants have read and understood the response of the Parish to the application and how much discussion there is between the case officer and members of Planning Committee in advance of the meeting.
29. If the original documentation and response have been understood there should not be a need for repetition and speeches can be kept short. The key is whether speakers believe Committee members have understood the issues. A summary (perhaps from the Ward Member) would clarify this understanding. Proceedings will shorten if speakers are able to comment on the summary. This is an issue when Committee members make observations during their discussion that do not match local awareness and there is no opportunity for comment or for correction, particularly over factual inaccuracies. If the Ward Member provides an initial summary, an adjustment to interpretation could be offered by them before a vote is taken.
30. Time allocations for speaking should be extended to five minutes for Town and larger Parish Councillors to speak, as they represent large numbers of people.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. Support – will improve procedures.
2. Allowing questions from Members is a good thing and will engage with the issues. A more reasoned debate may result from interaction between the Committee and speakers. The impression currently is that I am going through the motions and what is said will have no effect on member's views whatsoever.

MDDC Councillor responses:

1. There should be a right of reply when inaccurate statements are made by Planning Committee members during their debate. A spokesperson either for or against the application should be given the opportunity to correct this. Fairer decisions will result.
2. Restrictions on Ward Member speaking are too onerous and more speaking time should be given as they represent their constituents.
3. Ward Members that are also on Planning Committee have an unfair advantage as their input is not restricted. In some other authorities Committee members have the same restrictions as non Committee members.
4. I am aware of a Local Authority that prevents a Ward Member on Planning Committee from voting on an application in their ward.

MDDC Scrutiny Committee's response:

1. Members of Planning Committee would like the opportunity to ask questions of speakers to clarify issues. This takes place at some other councils.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. The order of speakers is not well thought out. There is no opportunity to correct wrong statements or to address committee members directly to respond to their comments or questions. Only officers and DCC can do so.
2. Issues were discussed out of context, misdirecting the discussion. Several facts were used to push the application through that were in contrast to MDDC own data i.e car use in Devon.
3. Two members of the public should be allowed to speak for and against – one is not enough.
4. Time allowed for each speaker is long enough.
5. Officers are allowed to speak for too long. The content is lost in a mass of slides and paperwork. Their time should be cut to allow further public representation and real discussion amongst all involved –not just members and officers.
6. Speakers should be allowed to ask questions and to answer them.
7. Public questions should be immediately in front of the relevant items otherwise they are lost in the Committee's minds by the time of the relevant item.
8. Need to remove the ruling that questions cannot directly mention policies but must relate to them by the nature of the question. Most questions are a waste of time as Committee members don't know what they relate to unless they are fully conversant with all policies.
9. Who decides what is a major application – this is arrogant. In many cases an application may have major implications for someone's life. It's not about application size. All applications should have a right to a hearing.
10. The number of speakers and timing is difficult – Majors: 4 minutes is not enough, 5 minutes is too long. 2 public speakers, each with 3 minutes would be more democratic and allow for different points of view and that not all objectors may want to get together. Additional opportunity for the Parish and Ward members should be given. Non-majors: 1 speaker each at 3 minutes.
11. Allowing the planning officer to respond to questions last with no recourse to address inaccuracies is wrong and undemocratic. Opportunity should be given for public response.
12. One supporter, one objector, the Town / Parish Council and the Ward Member should be allowed to speak, each having 3 minutes.
13. Questioning of speakers should be allowed.
14. For both major and non major applications 3 speakers for and 3 against should be the norm with 3 minute allowed for each.
15. Major applications – the applicant is normally a professional, articulate, presents arguments succinctly and convincing in a very short time. Objectors are unused to such situations, anxious, emotional and find it harder to present arguments concisely. The process favours or seems to favour the applicant.
16. Non majors – 3 speakers for each side are unlikely and could be limited to 2 speakers. Who decides what is a major application as non major issues may generate strong feelings for and against.
17. Propose questions be taken at the point of presentation of individual applications with an immediate response discussion. Follow with up to 3 speakers for and against limited to 3 minutes each. Any open session at the beginning should be limited to general issues, not individual plans.
18. If time is a huge constraint, drop public question time at the beginning. These are frustrating as answers are not given immediately. The questioner is not



allowed a discussion if they feel their question has not been properly answered.

19. Attempts to constrain time to speak, cross examination and questioning undermine the planning process and may be considered undemocratic. Is the reason to manage or constrain the amount of discussion or the time availability of committee members?
20. More productive to proactively improve public engagement and information availability and attempt to reduce the need to question in the first place than attempt to restrict public interaction.
21. Consider separating appeals from applications an minor from major applications. Allocate each application category an appropriate amount of time and resource rather than applying the same rules across all applications.
22. Improve communication, community engagement and transparency to keep the number of items referred to committee to a minimum (apart from major applications).
23. Committee should be able to question all speakers, but most information should be gathered by committee prior to the meeting.

## VOTING

***Initial working group recommended change 8: A clearer procedure be put in place regarding voting: that the item description, address and proposition be announced, Members clearly indicate their vote, that the vote is counted out loud and the outcome of the vote be announced.***

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. Agreed.
2. Voting needs to be more visible and accountable to the general public.
3. The vote should be counted aloud.
4. The results of the vote must be clearly announced.
5. The application should be summarised before the vote.
6. Funds permitting, use an electronic voting system as mistakes can be made on a hand count.
7. The vote should be made after clear description of item, address and proposal. The vote taking should continue as now by the raising of hands as it can be seen clearly which way each member votes.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. Support – will improve procedures.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Agreed.
2. Abstaining is a cop out unless there are legitimate (non-political) reasons. Each member should be obliged to vote. If they abstain, the reason must be given. If they wish to hide behind an abstention, they should not be on the committee.
3. Disagree with electronic voting on grounds of cost and members need the exercise to wake them up.
4. The public need to see who is voting which way and that they be under the pressure of public scrutiny to vote honestly and with a conscience.

5. No need to consult on this – go ahead. A record of an individual members vote history should be maintained in the interests of transparency and consistency.

## **SITE VISIT ARRANGEMENTS**

***Recommendation 9: That the arrangements for site visits be reviewed. Should the Planning Working Group continue or should site visits following a deferral be open to all members of Planning Committee to attend? Clear procedures on the operation of site visit are needed.***

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. Agreed – All members of Committee should be able to attend the site visit together with Ward Members and Parish representative.
2. Parish Council requests for a Committee site visit should be honoured to which Parish Clerks should be invited.
3. No strong feelings on the number of attendees.
4. The relevance of the second visit should be made clear.
5. At least two Parish or Town Councillors should be allowed.
6. There should be opportunity for Parish Council representatives to attend, to reduce the total number of visits.
7. At Committee meetings Officer reports are often read verbatim. This is unnecessary and waste time. Councillors should have read these already and accept officers have based their reports on policies and reasons.
8. It would be helpful for Parish Council to know if a site visit has taken place initially by the case officer and later by Committee members and the findings.
9. An opportunity for Parish Council attendance at a site visit would help understanding and should be an automatic option.
10. Site visits should take place prior to the meeting by all members where the application is major or considered complicated as they will then understand the location and site layout when listening to representations and carrying out their own discussions. These site visits would be with the Committee members and case officer. It is apparent from some meetings that councillors have little idea of the location let alone any other detail. Referrals for site visits would be reduced – our experience of these are not good and these types of visits should be the exception rather than the rule. The format could be as now.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. Support – will improve procedures.
2. I am often told that it is not possible to persuade Councillors to visit. Often a site visit is critically important to the understanding of project context, especially for Councillors who do not know the site. I was previously a Councillor for a different authority. There was a rota system requiring Councillors to attend site inspection panel visits. If they failed to attend, they were removed from the Committee.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. Date and time should be agreed with the Town Council and people making representations so the problem under scrutiny is seen.

2. In this case the visit was held mid-morning on a Wednesday. Research from the officer would have informed her that the doctor's surgery was closed and pre-school traffic finished. (Was this why this time and day was chosen?). one members visited outside this time and experienced chaos rather than the quiet lane portrayed by the officer trying to push the application through.
3. All members should attend a site visit if one is needed. A visit on 2 occasions would give a balanced perspective on traffic.
4. Planning Working Group visits – Non-committee speakers / attendees should not be asked to leave after speaking, but should stay in the wings in case other queries arise.
5. Video presentation is not a substitute for a site visit.
6. All committee members should be asked to attend site visits – all will vote so they should all see the site.
7. All site visits should include an invitation to the applicant and one objector. These people will be directly affected by the decision and have close, detailed knowledge of the area. The people who will be affected by the outcome are the only ones able to affectively point this out.
8. Site visits need to see the real situation – morning visits may present a different picture from an evening / night visit.
9. Concerned at reference to poor recent attendance. Committee members should address the need for site visits otherwise the fairness of the planning process is undermined. Members should regularly commit and guarantee their future available time on a regular basis.
10. Why is it left up to Members to decide which to visit? Known number of planning officers, committee members and site visits required to be processed within a particular time frame. Put a process in place where the appropriate quorum is mandated to attend site visits.
11. Planning officers are allocated cases geographically. Also allocate cases to individual committee members who are transparently responsible and accountable for assisting and supporting the planning officer to ensure that together they handle all aspects of their case load up to the final committee meeting.
12. Planning committee needs to allocate the correct level of resources in order to complete the workload to an agreed standard. Case load should be shared equitably between all council members. The methodology should be public and used to measure performance.

## **OTHER COMMENTS RECEIVED**

Parish / Town Council responses:

1. Disappointed and concerned that the consultation has been restricted to Planning Committee procedures when the PC has raised issues with the Chief Executive and Head of Planning and Regeneration over the performance, actions and procedures of the planning department and some of its officers. There was an understanding that we would be involved in any discussions from an early stage (reinforced by the District Councillor and Cabinet Portfolio for Planning). Much of this has not materialised to date. A few concerns have been addressed, but the main ones have not. It has taken so long for the consultation to take place gives concern to the veracity of assurance given to the Parish Council. Facts can be given to support the

- concerns –all have been made known to the above Councillor and officer over the past years.
2. The review is welcomed – the operation of the Committee has been source of public concern.
  3. If the application is for a large project the Planning Committee should meet in the town or village hall closest to that project if requested.
  4. A Parish Council representative should be invited to pre-meetings with applicants.
  5. Parish Council sometimes reach a decision (recommendation) subject to proviso or concerns expressed. Officer Reports should explain or detail this. If not, the Parish Council do not feel their voluntary time and effort has been valued. On major submissions with multiple points it would be time consuming to go into detail, but a 'noted' is too casual a reply. Planning guidelines may overrule local comments or wishes, but the principle could be established.
  6. Too much power is delegated to Planning Officer, potentially leaving them in a vulnerable position. More power should be with the elected members on the Planning Committee.
  7. Voting abstentions should not be allowed. Abstaining Councillors should make room for those who wish to vote. It is a waste of time being on a Committee if abstaining.
  8. There is a lack of dimensions on plans making it difficult to know the size.
  9. Fixed meeting dates of Parish Councils should be factored in when setting the timetable for an application through the planning process (especially for major applications).
  10. When Committee decide to refuse an application against officer recommendation it should not go back to the Officer for clarification of policy and reasoning. The original decision to reject should be accepted as binding. To do otherwise is undemocratic. Once the Committee has made their decision it is for Officers to implement it. Follow up reports should only be required when the officer recommendation is for approval and the Committee decides to refuse. Over-turn decisions from refusal to approval will not be appealed.
  11. Conditions on planning approvals are not followed up. A register is required to record conditions and ties to be policed by the Planning Enforcement Officers.
  12. The detail of an application is important and any conditions arising. Who has responsibility to make sure conditions are met? Is the Parish Council, being local, expected to oversee the conditions are applied or is there a formal review by the case officer?
  13. Lack of consultation with Parish Council when details of an original application are changed or amended before a final decision is made.
  14. Closing dates for public comment set from the date of registration and not when published in press or on site (it sometimes becomes flexible).
  15. Relevant application pages on website not containing all documents or documents referring to other applications.
  16. Planning officers making prior decisions which should rightly be made later by Committee Chair or elected councillors.
  17. Meetings take place between the applicant and officers which the Parish are prevented from attending where their input could prevent or reduce potential conflict of misunderstanding.
  18. Notes of such meetings are not passed to Parish Council or placed in the public domain leading to suspicions of questionable procedures.

19. After approvals are given or enforcement notices issued by committee conditions are amended or changed completely without reference to Parish Councils, local objectors or the Planning Committee.
20. Instances of misinformation given where certain actions are not challenged and no evidence produced to support or verify information or actions.
21. Information presented to Committee by officers during the hearing which has not been made openly available and no evidence placed in the public domain subsequently to support such information.
22. Concerned at proposal by Planning Department to do all paperwork by email. This would cause great difficulty to small Parish Meetings without access to large, coloured photocopy systems. I hope it is dropped for small parishes.

Agent / applicant responses:

1. At times it appears that Councillors are not fully briefed in their training to understand that a balanced decision has to be reached, taking account of both policies in the Development Plan and **all** other material considerations.
2. There is a troubling impression given by Committee members that they can get out of voting as a result of someone locally mentioning the application to them. Further clarity should be provided to Councillors in training as to what constitutes a conflict of interest. It appears that local objectors who have discussed the matter with their ward councillor suffer a disadvantage later in the process because the councillor is frightened to vote on it.

MDDC Councillor responses:

1. Concerned about the number of special meetings. I avoid being unavailable for scheduled meetings and plan ahead at the start of the year. You should either make provision to the start to meetings in the morning or identify dates that might be needed for extra meetings. Special meetings are more of a problem for members who are the only representative of their patch.

MDDC Scrutiny Committee's response:

1. When the Committee goes against officer recommendation, applications are often deferred. They come back to Committee at a later date giving the applicant a second chance to have their application heard.
2. Where Planning Committee is minded to determine an application against officer advice it is deferred for an officer implications report. On occasion the Committee had been unable to provide reasons for the proposed decision which related to planning policy. This has left the planning authority in a vulnerable position should an appeal take place subsequently.
3. There is a concern over the validity of information provided by applicants and what checks are undertaken.
4. Concern over the enforcement function of planning. Statistics of cases to be provided to Scrutiny Committee members.

Members of the public and individual Parish / Town Councillor responses:

1. I have attended one Planning Committee meeting as a Town Councillor. The impression was not good. The procedure was largely lip service and decisions had been made already.
2. Members (including the Chairman) need to listen to speakers. There was a lack of common decency in not doing this that was appealing behaviour and unacceptable in a formal meeting.

3. Committee members are given advice on how they should vote on an application based on officer's direction and pressure. This makes a mockery of the democratic process. The Committee should be free to make their own informed decision based on balanced, not biased facts.
4. Where a vote is taken and result not desired by the Chair, on no account should members be asked to reconsider without genuine need agreed.
5. Members are advised to be subservient to planning officer recommendations.
6. Minutes should be a proper record of what has occurred. Verbatim records should be available or recording.
7. Support recording and sharing of committee meetings in the interest of transparency and engagement.
8. A Councillor has been denied participation for nearly a year and faced court proceeding for something said in a committee. Councillors must be free to make honest and transparent input.
9. The consultation skates over the surface and avoids the minutia of the proceedings.
10. There is the impression of a very relaxed, cosy relationship between developers and planners.
11. The issues being experienced should be elaborated on and why is the review limited to the committee processes only? Many aspects of the planning process go on outside the committee. How was the subject list arrived at?
12. If community engagement is addressed thoroughly, the number of appeals, arbitrations and workload of the committee may be reduced.
13. Planning Committee's customer and stakeholder is the community. It should move its attention away from attempting to solve internal issues towards becoming an outward (community) facing service capable of delivering added value and efficiencies to all parties.
14. Planning Committee serves the public and has statutory obligations regarding their work – it cannot afford to be found short in any aspect of service provision.
15. In order to improve, there needs to be willingness to consider changing current working methods: where is the Planning Committee today in terms of performance and efficiency? Where does it want to be in the future? – a clear set of statements to define how a new and improved committee could perform.
16. It is difficult to make reliable informed decisions on detailed management aspects without first addressing issues arising from the bigger picture.
17. Proven processes and systems should be used to assist process improvement. (Agree strategic goals that link to objectives, that link to measurements that link to individual goals, budgets and targets. Without a clear Strategy, - how to agree objectives?, without quantifiable objectives, - how to measure performance?, if unable to measure performance, how is it possible to drive improvement?). These are informed by external community engagement (how we perform and look at our community), internal business processes (what should be focus on to improve satisfy our objectives), learning and growth (what does the planning committee need to do to improve performance and service?), investments (what investments are needed to achieve the objectives?)
18. Parish Councils feel marginalised in the planning process (especially with the presumption to approve). Their opinions and those of their parishioners are ignored or overlooked. There is good will and enthusiasm in the Parishes.

Rather than risk alienating them, explore ways how MDDC may utilise the pool or resource.

19. If MDDC are short of resources, consider co-opting Parish Councillors into the Planning Process.
20. Much time is spent scrutinising and querying applications that are either not accurate or up to a basic minimum standard. Simple changes to the process could ensure a competent qualified officer checks and approves the documents for accuracy prior to being released to the public.