

Our ref: E.7.1/LRF

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14th February 2008

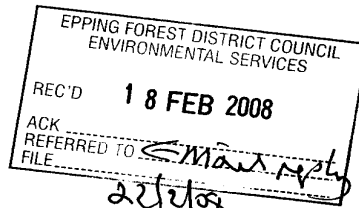
Dear Jim

Following our experience at the Licensing Sub-Committee last week, I hope you won't mind if I offer a couple of observations which might be helpful. I think sometimes we get so used to being at meetings etc that we forget what it is like to be on the other side of the fence, as it were. It was certainly a very salutary experience for me.

It would be very helpful for applicants and objectors who are going to attend the meeting to have an advance copy of the procedure which will be followed. In fact we had asked what would happen at the meeting but what we were told was different to what actually happened. An advance look at the procedure would have helped us prepare better. It would make it easier for the chairman to control the meeting if the people attending had the procedure in front of them, as they would be able to follow it and he/she would be able to point out clearly when they were straying from it. A set procedure is obviously essential for these hearings when objectors' feelings often run high and a method of structuring the meeting is required, but it is quite a complicated procedure so it is difficult to remember it when you have only had a verbal outline. In fact the procedure is very similar to that followed in disciplinary and grievance hearings, with which I am familiar from a previous life, so I understood it fairly easily, but it must be hard for someone to whom it is completely novel.

The difficulty which arose out of people being told different times to attend was unfortunate as it led to a situation which was really irresolvable in a way that everyone would be satisfied. Kim said to us afterwards that in future everyone would be told the start time of the meeting and would then have to just sit and wait their turn. Whilst this is less than ideal for applicants and objectors, I think it is the safest way to ensure the situation we faced does not arise again.

I wonder if it would be possible to consider an alternative venue for the meeting. I know that sometimes you have a lot of objectors and require a large space, but this must be the exception rather than the rule. The Council Chamber can be very daunting to someone who is not used to it. The physical sensation of being in the well of the chamber while the panel sat in judgement above us on the dais was quite intimidating. From our position, it was also impossible to see the names and faces of the people to the left of the chairman, which was not ideal, and I assume the objectors felt likewise about the people to the right of the chairman.



Kim P/F
J



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The physical set-up made it hard to hear the participants. I found myself trying to send my voice up to the panel, which meant that the objectors opposite could not hear properly. I also found it hard to hear the chairman and the people to his left.

Maybe a committee room would be a better venue and might help the business proceed more smoothly.

I hope you will not take my comments as criticism, they are just the thoughts of someone who found herself in an unusual situation and had some ideas which might help.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Louise Fuller". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Louise R Fuller
Town Clerk

