Virtual Public Meetings of Epping Forest District Council

Zoom and Webcasting Guide

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Virtual Public Meetings of Epping Forest District Council Webcasting and Zoom

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1.   Introduction

From 4 April 2020 new regulations came into force allowing councils to hold virtual meetings at which members attend remotely via video conferencing.

The regulations, in response to the Coronavirus crisis and the need for social distancing and isolation, ended the previous requirement for voting members to attend meetings in person.

Epping Forest District Council already makes meetings available to view by the general public via webcasting technology provided by Public-i. In partnership with Epping Forest District Council and other organisations, Public-i has adapted its mobile webcasting solution to enable the integration of remote video conferencing applications into live webcasts.

We are able to stream a variety of video conferencing applications through the webcaster. Members have selected Zoom for virtual meetings of Cabinet and other meetings.

Many people have become familiar with the free version of Zoom for personal use. The Council has bought corporate licences enabling us to open up more powerful features. These allow us to hold meetings of unlimited duration for up to 300 participants.

2.   Key Points

> **Key Points**
>
> - Video Conferencing is a visual medium – like TV
> - Good sound and audio depends on your home broadband – quality counts!
> - Practice with friends or colleagues before the big meetings
> - Don't rush before meetings - give yourself preparation time
> - Learn basic functions – Mute, Camera On, Screenshare, Chat, Participants
> - Mute your microphone when not speaking
> - Sit close to the microphone and check its settings are right
> - Set your camera up – steady surface close to eye-level
> - Compose your picture – head and upper body – like a TV interview
> - Dress and sit appropriately
> - Check your lighting and surroundings (anticipate evening light changes)
> - Join early
> - Know the agenda
> - Follow the Chairman's lead
> - Know how to vote
> - Practice

Licenses for the setting up of Member Meetings in Zoom are held by Democratic Services. Other licences are held in Service Directorates.

Anyone, including staff, councillors, contractors and members of the public with an email address and mobile device or computer can join a Zoom meeting.

Although Members and Officers are familiar with the conduct of our meetings, the use of remote technology does require some adjustments.

3.   Zoom Overview

The integration of Zoom video conferencing into the webcast is carried out in the background. Participants only need to familiarise themselves with Zoom. It is strongly advised that all members practice a few times in Zoom before participating in a webcast public meeting.
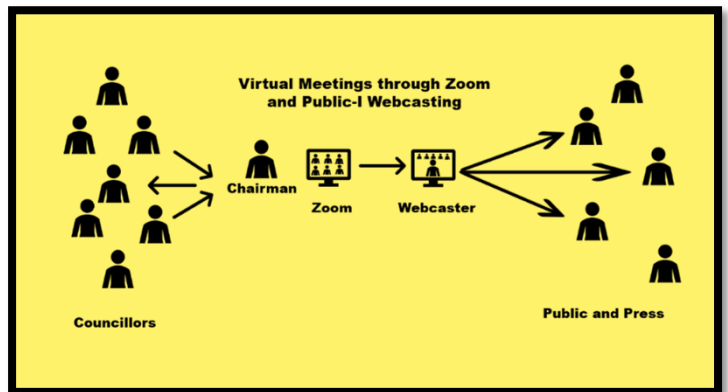

4.   Invitation

Members, officers and other participants are invited to join a meeting in Zoom by the licence holder or 'Host'– usually an officer of Democratic Services. This will be received via email and/or an appointment in your Outlook calendar.

The invitation will allow you to join Zoom half an hour before the start of the actual meeting.

Give yourself plenty of time. Allowing time for technical issues to be resolved, all participants should join the video conference at least 15 minutes before the official start of the meeting and webcast. Early joining also allows the Chairman and Democratic Services Officer to take note of attendees and avoids the distraction to viewers of participants joining after the webcast has started.

Each participant can choose between a gallery view and a speaker view. The gallery allows you to see all other participants on your screen at the same time.
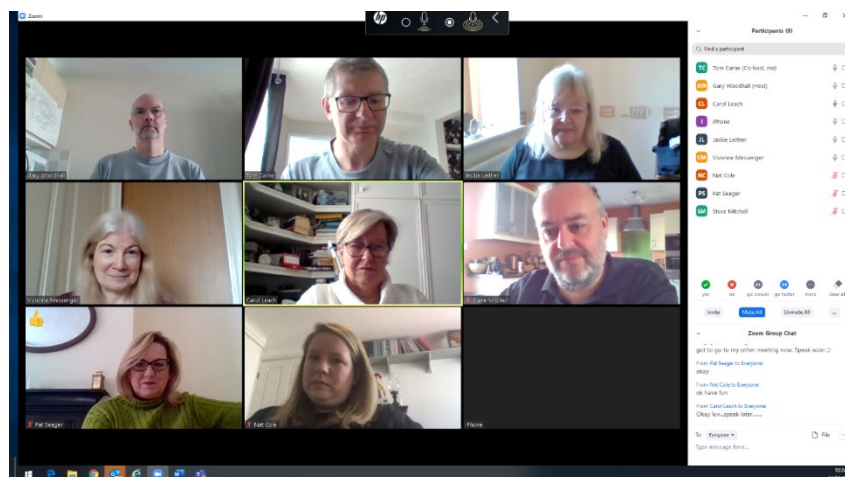
Zoom open in gallery view with Participants and Chat open beside the main view

Speaker view concentrates on the main speaker. This is the view seen by members of the public watching via the Webcast.
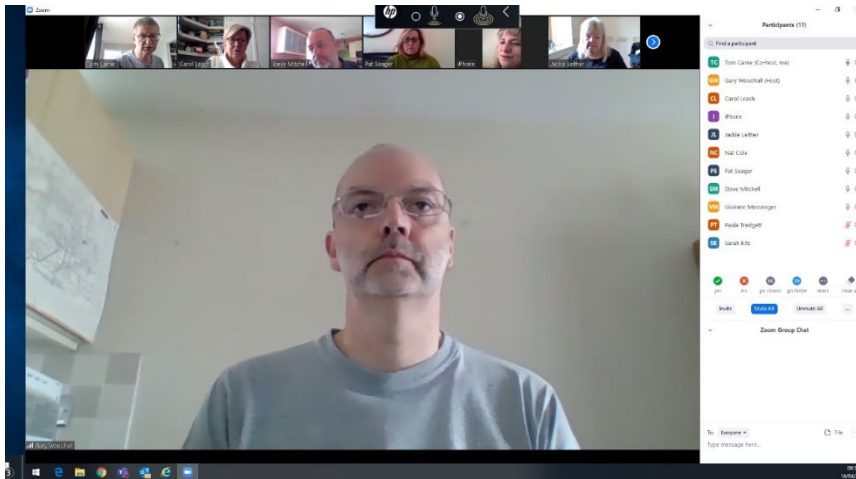
Zoom in speaker view

In the main view you will see the person currently speaking. Other participants are shown here as thumbnails with Participants and Chat open to the right of the main view
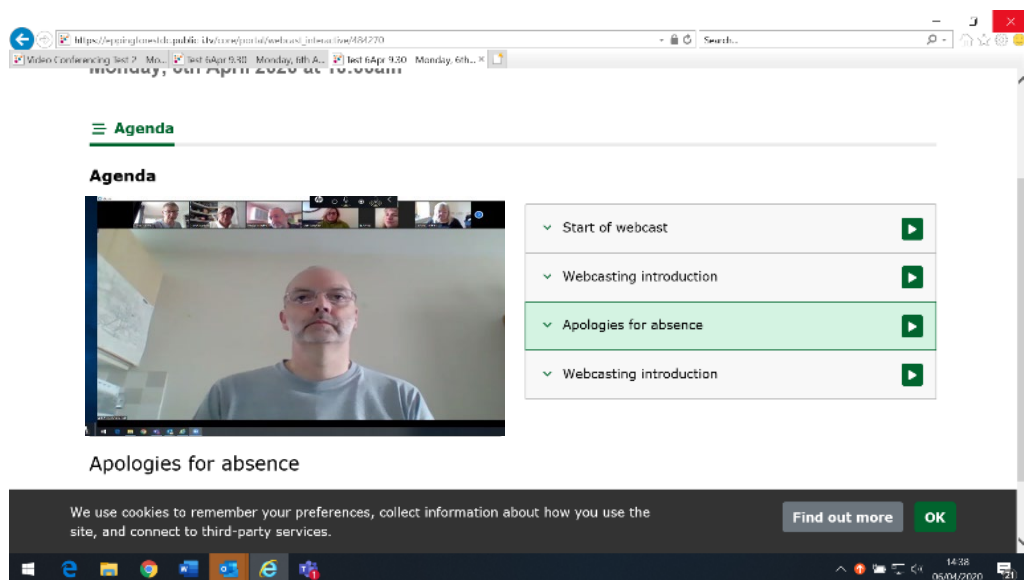

Zoom as it appears in the Public-I Webcast

When viewed by members of the public and media through the Public-I webcast, the additional functionality such as agenda points and speaker names are available. Once recorded, the webcast also allows viewers to select a particular item or person directly, rather than sitting through the whole meeting.

5. Organising yourself

Using a laptop or PC with an additional screen is best for the chairman and anyone screen sharing presentations. Other Members can also use their council-issued ipad.

Participants should consider their homeworking environment carefully before attending a virtual meeting.

> **Stay Connected - The quality of your broadband connection can make a huge difference to your ability to hear and be heard.**
>
> **Use the OFCOM link tips here to improve your home broadband connectivity.**

Body language and presentation come across strongly in the video format. Sound quality is important too.

Meetings can last a long time. Therefore:

- Dress and sit appropriately. Video conferencing is a very visual medium. Your choice of clothing and seating arrangement reflects the official business nature of the meeting. Small details can make a big impression on how your words are perceived.
- Place your device on a hard surface such as a desk or tabletop to keep the camera steady, the microphone unimpeded, and your head and shoulders in the frame at all times. Never hold it in your hand or lap. Involuntary movement of the camera is very distracting to your audience and will detract from what you are saying.
- Raise the camera of your laptop or ipad close to eye-level. If you don't have a stand, a pile of books or boxes can work just as well. Talk to Democratic Services if you plan to use a personal email or device to join the meeting.
- Plain uncluttered backgrounds are best. Ensure nothing inappropriate can be seen in the background.
- Ensure you are well lit and not in silhouette against a bright background.
- Choose a quiet room. Minimise noise or disturbance in other parts of your house or outside such as pets, music, and washing machines. Even a fish-tank filter picked up by your microphone can cause distraction in a video conference.
- Ensure all other occupants of your house know you are in a meeting to avoid unintended interruptions.
- Mute your microphone at all times. Only unmute when given leave to speak by the chairman of the meeting.
- Headphones can help to block out distractions and focus your attention on the conference without disturbing other members of your household.
- Do not use 'Chat'. This should be disabled by the host to avoid private messages appearing on the webcast.
- If you need to communicate privately with other members or officers, use an alternative such as Slido, email or text messaging
- Download the public Mod.gov app on your own separate device for convenient access to public agenda during a meeting.
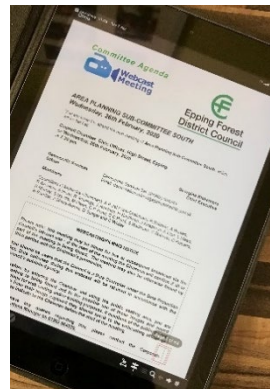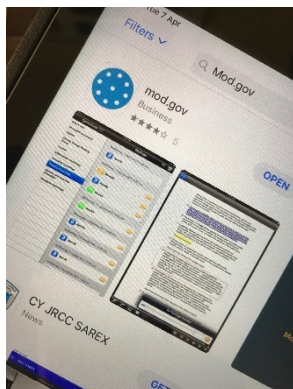
Public version of the agenda on an alternative device can add to convenience

6. Running the Meeting – Etiquette, administration and the Chairman's role

Successful video conferencing depends on everyone following strict etiquette and observance of the Chairman's direction.

The Chairman's role can be compared to that of a radio presenter, organising the flow of debate much like a radio phone-in. Participants are called to speak. Points are made quickly and then the Chairman moves on to the next 'caller'.

Like any radio show presenter, the Chairman has an unseen team of 'editors' and 'producers'. The Vice-Chairman and support officers are watching to see who wishes to speak. Support officers also manage the virtual attendance of public speakers.

The Chairman chooses how to be notified of speakers – for example

- Raise you virtual 'Blue Hand' in Zoom
- Visually raise your hand until you have been acknowledged
- Prompt from the Vice-Chairman or support officer
- Slido or other text based applications

Keep your contributions short and succinct. Video conferencing is a televisual medium where similar rules to TV apply. Long monologues lose the attention of the audience and break the flow of the meeting.

The Chairman of the meeting must maintain strict control. Where a degree of cross-chamber conversation may be tolerated in a conventional meeting, such behaviour in a video conference will render the meeting inaudible to all.

Each member should familiarise themselves with the order of the agenda before the meeting. Having run through the preliminaries (webcasting announcement, apologies etc), the chairman will invite a named member or officer to present each item in turn.

Unmute your microphone only when you speak and mute it again when you finish.

Powerpoints and other documents can be shared on screen during presentations.

Where provided to Democratic Services before the meeting, presentation slides can also be viewed independently in the webcast application.
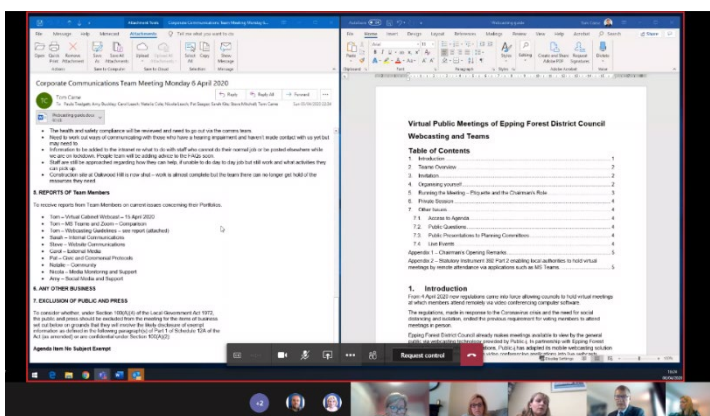
A screen shared in MS Teams – similar functionality is available in Zoom

Voting Option 1 – Silence as assent

At the conclusion of debate, the chairman will ask if any voting members object to the recommendations of the report. Indicate your disapproval to the chairman audibly. If there are no objections, the recommendation will be taken by the chairman as approved.

Voting Option 2 – Roll Call

Votes by a roll call. Each voting member is called by the Democratic Services Officer in turn to unmute their microphone and indicate their vote. This is not a 'recorded vote' to be recorded in the minutes unless individual members require this in accordance with statutory provision.

Repeat your name before indicating that you are either

- For
- Against
- Abstain

By prefacing your vote with you name, you give the automatic view selection in Zoom time to switch to your image.

Using the three agreed words 'For', 'Against' and 'Abstain' also avoids confusion and helps the Democratic Services Officer accurately record the vote.

7.   Declarations of Interest

Any councillor with a pecuniary or other interest which prevents them from participating or voting on a particular matter, they must 'leave' the virtual meeting. You will be placed in a virtual 'waiting room' by the Host. Once the item has been concluded, the Host will be admit you back into the meeting.

8.   Private Session

Active participation for members will be arranged by invitation. External viewing by members of the public will be via the webcast. Therefore, in the event of confidential business, the chairman will seek the assent of members to go into private session in the normal way.

The chairman will then obtain confirmation by the webcasting officer that the webcast has been paused or completed. Only on receipt of confirmation will the chairman proceed to the private and confidential business.

The Host should also remove any unauthorised participants from Part II business in Zoom.

The webcast will have ended for members of the public, but the video conference will continue for authorised members and officers.

9.   Portfolio Holders and Supporting Officers

The normal practice for supporting officers to sit behind their portfolio holders to provide support and advice during a meeting can be replicated virtually in a number of ways including.

- Text Message
- Messenger
- What's App
- Email

Using a separate application and device avoids unintended sharing of private messages and audio in Zoom.

10.   Other Issues

10.1   Access to Agenda
The integration of Modern.gov (the content management system used by Democratic Services to publish minutes and agenda) with the Public-i webcaster means that members of the public will continue to enjoy access to all documents and webcasts exactly as they did before the introduction of virtual meetings.

While using council-issued i-pads to access Zoom, members may find it convenient to refer to the meeting agenda through a separate personal device. All but Part II restricted items are available to view on any device via the Mod.gov app – see above.

Alternatively, members may wish to print off parts of an agenda before a virtual meeting if they are unable to access it from a second device.

10.2   Public Questions
Zoom is accessible to anyone with a smartphone, tablet, laptop, PC or Mac. Where a member of the public might usually wish to present a question in person, this may be done by

- Invitation to present via Zoom.
- The chairman reading from a written statement on their behalf.
- Phone-in – placing the person on speakerphone next to the Chairman's microphone (potentially a suitable low-tech option for residents unfamiliar with video conference technology).

10.3   Public Presentations to Planning Committees
Where an applicant and/or objector would normally make representations in person to a planning committee other alternative options could include

- Applicant and objector recording video messages (in an appropriate format) in advance to be replayed to members in the meeting via Zoom, or
- Submission of written statements to be read out by the Chairman or Officer during the meeting.

Appendix 1 – Example Training
View video conference webcasting organisation and management examples produced by Corporate Communications at the following links (produced in MS Teams but same principles apply)

- [Test 2](#)
- [Test 3](#)

Appendix 2 – Chairman's Opening Remarks

Good evening Members and welcome members of the public to this meeting of …….

This meeting is being held 'virtually' in accordance with Part 2 of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Regulations in response to the Coronavirus epidemic remove the requirement for councillors to be physically present in the room. They allow us to debate, participate and vote through remote video conferencing while observing the social distancing measures needed to restrict the spread of the virus.

Webcasting introduction - This meeting is also being webcast to the public. Everyone participating in this virtual meeting is reminded that it will be broadcast live to the internet (or recorded) and your image will be capable of repeated viewing (and use by such third parties).

Can I remind all members and officers of the meeting to observe the following code:

- Please mute your microphone at all times unless I have called upon you to speak
- Remember to mute your microphone again when you have finished.
- Indicate through virtual 'Blue Raised Hand' or visually if you wish to speak.
- I will call members to speak at my discretion and according to the demands of the agenda.
- Keep your contributions short and to the point.
- When voting, in response to the Democratic Services Officer's roll call, each member should give their name then indicate 'For', 'Against' or 'Abstain'. In other circumstances I may take silence as a sign of assent.

Appendix 3 – Statutory Instrument 392 Part 2 enabling local authorities to hold virtual meetings by remote attendance via applications such as MS Teams.

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/part/2/made

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

PART 2

Remote attendance

Meetings of local authorities

4.—(1) In respect of a reference in any enactment to a meeting of a local authority, that authority may, as they may determine—

(a) hold such meetings and at such hour and on such days; and

(b) alter the frequency, move or cancel such meetings,

without requirement for further notice.

(2) Where an appointment would otherwise be made or require to be made at an annual meeting of a local authority, such appointment continues until the next annual meeting of the authority or until such time as that authority may determine.

5.—(1) A reference in any enactment to a meeting of a local authority is not limited to a meeting of persons all of whom, or any of whom, are present in the same place and any reference to a "place" where a meeting is held, or to be held, includes reference to more than one place including electronic, digital or virtual locations such as internet locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.

(2) For the purposes of any such enactment, a member of a local authority (a "member in remote attendance") attends the meeting at any time if all of the conditions in subsection (3) are satisfied.

(3) Those conditions are that the member in remote attendance is able at that time——

(a)to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, the other members in attendance,

(b)to hear, and where practicable see, and be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by, any members of the public entitled to attend the meeting in order to exercise a right to speak at the meeting, and

(c)to be so heard and, where practicable, be seen by any other members of the public attending the meeting.

(4) In this regulation any reference to a member, or a member of the public, attending a meeting includes that person attending by remote access.

(5) The provision made in this regulation applies notwithstanding any prohibition or other restriction contained in the standing orders or any other rules of the authority governing the meeting and any such prohibition or restriction has no effect.

(6) A local authority may make other standing orders and any other rules of the authority governing the meeting about remote attendance at meetings of that authority, which may include provision for—

(a)voting;

(b)member and public access to documents; and

(c)remote access of public and press to a local authority meeting to enable them to attend or participate in that meeting by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcasts, and live interactive streaming.

Appendix 4 – Zoom Help and Advice

ICT has published the following to the Council Intranet.

ZOOM have created lots of helpful videos on YouTube to guide you through using the software, below is a video about how to join a meeting and more listed below.

- [Zoom meetings](#)
- [How to join a meeting](#)
- [How to schedule a meeting](#)
- [Joining a meeting and configuring your audio and video](#)

- [Meeting controls](#)
- [Manage participants](#)
- [Share your screen](#)
- [Polling (in meeting)](#)
- [How to use waiting rooms to manage office hours and drop-in visitor times](#)

Reported issues

People are also reporting some issues with loss of audio when using this software. If you are experiencing this issue, there are a few things to try...

- If you already have Zoom Client installed, please sign into it and go to the settings and choose 'Audio' for testing
- If you do not have the ZOOM client installed and don't want to install it at the moment, next time you attend a meeting - a 'test connection' screen will appear. Click on it and follow the instructions
- You can also test and adjust the settings when you are in the meeting by clicking on the drop down menu, next to the microphone
- You need to open ZOOM in Chrome because the audio is not supported in Internet Explorer. If you have already downloaded the client version it does this automatically. If you don't have the client installed and your default browser is internet Explorer, please copy the link and open it in Chrome

Appendix 5 – Planning Meeting Guidance

<u>START OF THE MEETING</u>

<u>Chairman – say 'start' and look at the camera for 20 seconds</u> (this is the signal for the Webcaster to start recording). After the 20 seconds is up, start the meeting.

Agenda Points

- **<u>Webcast introduction:</u>** At the start of the meeting the Chairman will read out the webcasting introduction.

- **<u>Welcome:</u>** The Chairman will then introduce themselves and say whether they are to be a **voting** or **non-voting** Chairman. They will then welcome the Councillors and members of the public and introduce the Principal Planning Officers and the Democratic Services Officers present.

- **<u>Message from the Chairman to Members:</u>** "Members I would like to advise you that during each application if you lose your signal, turn off your screens or be seen to leave the meeting for a brief period then your will not be included in the vote on such application that is being presented."

- **Advice to Public Speakers** This can be found in the agenda on Pages (5-8) and remind speakers that they have 3 minutes to speak.

- **Minutes:** The minutes of the last meeting are attached to the agenda. Ask the members if they are happy to agree them. Normally there will be a general assent to agree.

- **Apologies:** Ask the Democratic Services Officer if there were any apologies. They will then read out any apologies that they have received. After this happens it may be useful to ask the Councillors to see if any of them wish to give any late apologies.

- **Declarations of Interest:** The next item on the agenda will be Declarations of Interest. Ask the members present if they have any declarations of interest to make.

- **Any other Business:** Next ask the Democratic Services Officer if there is any other business. Invariably there will be none.

- **Epping Forest District Local Plan Submission – Planning Policy Briefing Note:** You do not need to read this out – ask Members of the Sub-Committee to note.

- **Site Visits:** Ask Members to identify any requests for a site visit to any of the applications on the agenda before any application is considered.

  Members will have to identify which application they would like to have a site visit for with reasons. This will then have to be seconded and agreed by the rest of the sub-committee for this to take place.

  If agreed, this item has now been dealt with and will be deferred to another meeting after the site visit has taken place. Any members of the public viewing the meeting on the webcast for that item can then leave.

- **Planning Applications:** Read out the EPF number and address of the first application and hand over to the Planning Officer to give their presentation.

- **Speakers:** After the presentation you will ask the DS officer whether there are any speakers on that item and if there are, the second DS officer will contact them by telephone. The order speakers are heard will be:

  - 1. Objector
  - 2. Parish/Town Council; and
  - 3. Applicant or Applicant's Agent

- *(For virtual meetings Public speakers will be contacted by telephone, the 2nd DS Officer will do this).*

- **Questions:** After the last speaker has finished turn to the Members and open it up to discussion. During this discussion extra conditions might be proposed.

- **Extra Conditions:**

  - 1. ask the member to indicate exactly what conditions they wish to add;
  - 2. ask for a seconder;
  - 3. ask the planning officer for his views on the appropriateness of the conditions proposed*;
  - ask for the Committee to debate/ agree the new conditions.

- *In the instance where these have been made during the debate it is always OK to ask the Planning Officer if he could just reiterate the additional conditions that have been added AS THEY UNDERSTANDS THEM and their views on their appropriateness. You can then seek the approval of those additions with the Committee formally when you take the vote. This does mean that if you have missed anything it can be picked up properly and members know with certainty what they are voting for.

- **Voting:** Close the discussion and indicate that you will now take this to a formal vote including any extra conditions that have been added.

- ***For _Virtual meetings_ the Democratic Officer will ask each member in turn to give their vote and they should say either for, against or abstain.***

- The Democratic Services Officer will ask individual members for their vote.

  Either:
  - in favour of the Officers recommendation; (for)
  - against; and
  - any abstentions.

  Once the result is known please say to the meeting in general something like: *"so that application has been agreed (or refused) (or been deferred to another meeting or referred to the parent committee, DDMC)"* - just so that the public know what has happened to the application.

Note:

- *If a vote for an application recommended to be granted is lost then that application has **not been refused** but stands in Limbo. A member must then make a proposal to refuse the application citing valid planning grounds. This must then be seconded and then voted upon.*

- *Once an application is refused then the sub-committee should indicate a 'way forward' for that application if possible.*

- *In the event of a tie the Chairman may exercise a 'casting vote'.*

Minority References:

For clarity the mechanisms available in the constitution are:

(1) Referral after a matter has been recommended for approval that represents a substantial departure from planning policy; (this is automatic and subject to advice from the planning officer at the meeting concerned);

(2) Referral during debate at the meeting where a member moves, and has seconded, a motion to refer the matter to DDMC for any reason (this requires the assent of the majority by vote);

(3) A minority reference, which can only be made **after** the Subcommittee have resolved to grant or refuse the application at hand.

On item (3) my reading of the constitution is that this is done by **four or more** members standing to refer that application **(At Virtual meetings they will hold up a 'Refer' notice)**. This is particular to EFDC planning subcommittees as this figure is normally a quarter of the members present.

Any matters that are not clear to you can be clarified by the Planning or the Democratic Services. Officer – just ask.

Vice- Chairman

During the debate the V-C should be noting all the Members that have virtual raised hands (in Zoom 'Participants') or are indicating visually that they wish speak.

The chairman may either

- invite the Vice-Chairman at appropriate moments in the presentations and debate to announce who has indicated to speak; or
- call on people directly to speak

Meeting End – the Chairman advise Members that the meeting has now closed at (TIME) then look directly at the camera for 20 seconds until the webcaster finishes the meeting.