

Statement made by the Chairman to the Meeting of the Planning Committee on 18 May 2016, after calling the Outline Planning Application for Stour Park (Land on the North Side of Highfield Lane, Sevington, ref. 14/00906/AS)

As Chairman of this Planning Committee, I carefully considered the scale and sensitivity of this planning application, and the potential impact of the proposed development on the town of Ashford and the surrounding area.

I have reached the view that, for these reasons, the Council's usual procedures should be modified for this one item of business only.

Therefore, yesterday I gave notice to the public and the applicant that the numbers of Objectors and Supporters permitted to speak at this Meeting on this item will be 3 each, instead of 1 each. This will allow greater public participation in this important decision, which I am sure the Committee would agree is desirable in this case.

In fact, the Portfolio-Holder for Planning, Development & Enforcement and I believe the time is right, in the next Municipal Year, to review this Committee's procedures for public speaking. We should seek to formulate a policy as to when greater speaking rights are appropriate, and I will ask Officers to bring forward a proposal to amend the Scheme of Public Participation accordingly.

The order of speakers for this item will be as usual: 1. Objectors; 2. Supporters, 3. The Parish Council's representative. As usual, all speakers will be limited to 3 minutes each.

I would just say to those who are speaking on this application, that there has been some media speculation about the identity of companies that might possibly occupy this proposed development. However, no details of occupiers are set out in the application, apart from Kent Wool Growers, for whom one of the buildings is intended. Other than that, the identity of possible occupiers is not a planning matter which this Planning Committee can give any weight to, so I would ask you all to concentrate your 3-minute speeches on planning matters alone. Thank you very much.