

# **Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee**

## **Protocol for public questions**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Formal legal responsibility for Cannock Chase AONB lies with the five local authorities that cover the area: Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase Council, Lichfield District Council, Stafford Borough Council and South Staffordshire Borough Council.

1.2 The local authorities (with advisors such as Natural England, Historic England and Forestry England) work together as a Joint Committee to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB<sup>1</sup> in the interests of local residents, landowners, businesses and visitors.

1.3 Meetings of the AONB Joint Committee are open to the public to attend, but are not public meetings. This means that meetings are held for the Joint Committee to conduct its business, in an atmosphere conducive to working, and that the public are allowed to watch and listen to proceedings.

1.4 The local authorities are committed to extend the level of public involvement in the operation of the business of the Joint Committee and agree to provide for questions from the public in accordance with this Protocol.

### **2. Who can speak?**

2.1 Any member of the public can request to speak at meetings.

### **3. When will speaking occur during the meeting?**

3.1 Provision shall be made for public questions in the agenda. The item shall appear next after the items dealing with apologies for absence, signing the minutes of the last meeting as a correct record, and the taking of matters arising from those minutes.

3.2 For the purposes of this Protocol a 'public question' shall mean the asking of any question in relation to the business of the Joint Committee and the statutory purpose of the AONB.

3.3 The time allowed for public questions will not exceed 15 minutes.

---

<sup>1</sup> The statutory purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. In pursuing this purpose, account is taken of the economic and social needs of local communities. Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as it is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other land uses.

#### **4. Notification of intention to speak**

4.1 Persons wishing to ask questions must inform the AONB Team in writing by electronic email no later than seven calendar days before the day of the meeting ([cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk)).

4.2 Only questions that have been received in advance in writing will be permitted at meetings.

4.3 Each question must give the name and address of the questioner.

4.4 A question may be rejected if it:

- is not about a matter for which the Joint Committee has a responsibility or which affects the Cannock Chase AONB
- is defamatory, frivolous or offensive
- is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Joint Committee in the past six months; or
- requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

4.5 At any one meeting, no person may submit more than one question, and no more than two questions may be asked on behalf of one organisation.

4.6 Questions will be asked in the order notice of them was received, except that the Chair may group together similar questions.

#### **5. How long does each speaker have?**

5.1 The Chair of the Committee will invite those who have given prior notice to pose their question at an appropriate time. The questioner may speak for up to 2 minutes.

5.2 If a questioner who has submitted a written question is unable to be present, they may ask the Chair to put the question on their behalf. The Chair may ask the question on the questioner's behalf and/or indicate that a written reply will be given.

#### **6. Responses to questions**

6.1 An answer may take the form of:

- a) a direct oral answer;
- b) where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer will be circulated later to the questioner.

6.2 Any question which cannot be dealt with during public question time, because of lack of time, will be dealt with by a written answer.

6.3 A record of questions and responses shall be recorded in the formal minutes of the meeting.

## **7. Conduct of speakers**

7.1 The Chair will have the discretion to interject if the speaker departs from the topic of their question.

7.2 Any remarks considered by the Chair to be defamatory, offensive or relate to an individual Member or officer will not be permitted and the speaker will be informed accordingly.

7.3 No facilities for presentations or visual aids may be used by a speaker.

7.4 During public questions, speakers must conduct themselves in an orderly manner or they will be asked to leave the meeting. Persistent disorderly conduct will result in the speaker being removed from the meeting.

7.5 The Chair has the last say on any matter and can refuse to allow a speaker to continue at any time they consider fit.

April 2021