

Part 8.5b)

Planning Committees' Site Visit Protocol

Planning Committees' Site Visit Protocol

This document sets out the arrangements and procedural rules for the conduct of site visits that are agreed to take place prior to consideration of planning applications at meetings of the Council's Strategic and Area Planning Committees.

Introduction

1. Site visits may be used to assist Members of Planning Committees in understanding the issues concerning the site and/or the area around the site. Visits should only be conducted where it is felt the complexities of the site require clarification prior to committee members considering the officer's report, or where the committee, having considered the report, feel more clarification is required.
2. Any site visit should be conducted to garner facts and seek clarification. Debate on the merits of an application or on the views of relevant parties should not be conducted. Discussion and debate should be restricted to the formal meeting where the application is to be determined and conducted subject to the Council's normal rules in the interests of openness and transparency of decision making.
3. A site visit can be agreed to be conducted:
 - i) Prior to a Committee, by agreement of the Chair, Vice Chair, and senior planning officer; or
 - ii) By formal resolution of the Committee.
4. In considering whether a site visit is required **prior** to the Committee considering the application, the Chair, Vice Chair, and senior planning officer should consider the complexities of the site, the responses from statutory consultees and the material planning considerations involved.
5. A Committee on receiving the officer's report, the representations from the applicant, objectors, and other interested parties, may determine to conduct a site visit. A simple resolution of Committee duly **moved** and **seconded**, with the majority of those voting in favour would be sufficient. Site visits can cause delay and additional cost for both the developer and the Council and should only be used where the expected benefit is substantial.
6. If a site visit is conducted, all members of the Committee will be notified of the time and date and invited to attend.

7. Members of planning committee should make best endeavours to attend site visits, but attendance is not an absolute requirement in order to take part in the debate at planning committee.

Procedure On Site

8. The following procedural rules will be observed in the holding of all Planning Committee site visits:
 - (a) Officers will arrange the site visit in advance with relevant parties. There is no right to enter on private land without permission of the landowner. Where appropriate, officers will obtain permission from the landowner or his/her agent for those invited to attend the site visit to enter the land. If permission is not given for Members and Officers and other interested parties to enter, the site will have to be viewed from the public highway/areas.
 - (b) The Democratic Services officer will agree with the relevant senior development management representative a timetable and a plan for any site viewings that are required including the notification arrangements. The site viewings will usually be held on a working day shortly before the relevant planning committee. This information will be circulated to relevant parties.
 - (c) A senior development management representative and the case officer will be in attendance.
 - (d) Attendees at the site viewings will normally be required to make their own arrangements for attending the site visit.
 - (e) The Chair (or Vice Chair) will control proceedings throughout.
 - (f) The Chair will explain that the purpose of the site visit is to obtain information relevant to the determination of the application. They will summarise the proceedings and the constraints as set out below.
 - (g) The Chair will introduce the Planning Officer who will describe the proposals to Members with reference to features on the ground and the submitted plans and summarise the relevant issues and material considerations.
 - (h) Other officers may be present to provide other specialist/expert advice/information where relevant/required (e.g., Highways Engineers, Environmental Health/Protection Officers etc).
 - (i) The applicant and/or their agent or representative will be invited to attend the site viewing. Ward Member(s) may attend the site visit to observe and, only at the request of the Chair, may clarify factual matters. At no time will the Ward Member, applicant, agent, or any local resident be permitted to address or question Members of the Committee. Presentations from these attendees should on no account be made. Occasionally it may be appropriate for such attendees to be asked, through the Chair, to point out

important or relevant site features. At no point during the site visit will debate or comment on the planning merits or otherwise of the proposal be permitted, as the proper time for such debate/comment is at the relevant meeting of the Planning Committee.

- (j) During the site visit, no separate discussions regarding the application must take place with officers or Members and either applicants, objectors, or supporters.
- (k) No hospitality will be accepted by Officers and Members from the applicant or any other interested party present at the site visit.
- (l) The Planning Officer(s) present at the site visit will make a note of those attending. Planning Committee Members who did not attend the site visit should pay particular attention to the site visit feedback provided those members who did attend.
- (m) The Chair (or Vice Chair) will conclude the site visit. No indication of the views of Members or the likely outcome of the Planning Committee's deliberations on the application will be given. To do so might imply that a Member's mind is already made up.
- (n) If Members require further information or clarification of any aspect of the development, the officer(s) attending the site visit will be asked to ensure that such information is available by the time the application is considered by Members at the relevant meeting of the Planning Committee.

NB. A copy of this Protocol will be issued to all those invited to attend the site visit.

End of Planning Committees' Site Visit Protocol

January 2022