

Planning Committee guidelines for site visits by Members of the Committee



The purpose of the guidelines is to help the Chair and Members of the Committee in the conduct of site visits. It is important that the impression of any partiality on the part of any Members is to retain public confidence in Members, the Planning System and the position of the Council as a Planning Authority.

1. Purpose of site visits

Site visits are to give Members of the Committee the opportunity of visiting and viewing the site and its locality.

They are informal and are not intended to involve discussion of the merits of any planning application as the appropriate place for any such discussion is meetings of the Planning Committee at the Town Hall.

Site visits should be the exception, not the rule. They should not be used as an excuse to delay the determination of a planning application.

2. Role of the Chair and Members on site visits

The Chair is responsible for the conduct of the site visit and his/her decision is final on all issues. In his/her absence the Vice Chair will assume responsibility.

Members must try to attend site visits organised by the Council where possible and ensure that any information, which is gained from the site visit, is reported back to the Committee, so that all Members have the same information. Members should treat the site visit as an opportunity to seek information and observe the site and should only ask questions or seek clarification from officers on matters, which are relevant to the planning application.

3. Information to be provided to Members

All Members of the Planning Committee will be sent an email with details of the date, time and location(s) of the site visit.

To assist Members the officers report containing details of the application and consultation responses and representations received to date will normally have been provided to Members prior to the visit, along with the location and site plans.

Members should familiarise themselves with details of the application by reading the appropriate report beforehand.

4. Officers

Planning officers will attend the visit to assist Members and provide details of the application and the key planning issues. They will draw Members attention to details on the site itself and at other places in the locality of the site as appropriate.

5. Applicant and Landowner

The Applicant and other relevant parties will be notified in advance when the site visit is to take place and if necessary asked to arrange access to the site. It is not possible to prevent either the applicant or a landowner, if separate from attending the visit. However the purpose of the visit will be made clear to them by the Chair and it will be explained that they have no right to address the Members although they may wish to be prepared to answers any questions.

6. Local Residents/Objectors

Opponents of a proposed development may be present at the site in order to lobby Members. Members should take care to maintain their impartiality and not be drawn into discussion in order not to mislead residents/objectors.

7. Practical Arrangements

Members are required to make their own way and meet on site. Those requiring transport need to contact the Planning Team before the day so that necessary arrangements can be put in place. Members are also requested to wear suitable footwear and to be aware that many sites are undeveloped and may have very rough ground or involve a significant walk or climb.

The email setting out details of the site visit will contain information about site access difficulties.

8. Gifts and hospitality

Members and officers should promptly decline any gifts or hospitality.