

10. SITE INSPECTIONS

Purpose of site inspections

- 10.1 Site inspections are fact-finding exercises to allow members to make a more informed decision than would be possible from reading the officer's report and considering the views expressed at the Planning Committee meeting.
- 10.2 The sole purpose of site inspections is to allow the chairperson and vice chairperson and other members to look at the site and its surroundings. In conducting the site visit, the members will not formally debate the application, express a prior opinion, lobby for any particular decision or come to any decision.

Requests for Committee site inspections

- 10.3 If members wish an application to be reported to Planning Committee, and be the subject of a site visit, they should advise the case officer, or in his/her absence, any other officer of the Development Management team, in writing (including email) within 21 days of receiving the weekly list of planning applications.
~~Requests by members for site inspections in respect of committee cases should wherever possible be made to the chairperson of the Planning Committee or the Chief Planning Officer, in writing at least 48 hours before the committee to which the application is being reported. Such a request should indicate why a site visit is necessary. Early notification allows the clerk of the committee to advise members of the public who may otherwise have attended the committee not to do so. The Chief Planning Officer will consult with the chairperson before deciding whether to agree to the member's request. Similarly, if the chairperson receives a request, he should consult with the Chief Planning Officer. Members may also request a site visit at the Planning Committee and should indicate why a site visit is necessary.~~
- 10.4 Site visits should ~~only~~ be allowed on the basis of a request from either the chairperson or vice-chairperson, or from any local member ~~or any member~~ excluding an adjoining ward councillor whether or not a member of the committee. It is expected that local members will already be familiar with the site. Members are encouraged to go to the sites themselves, discuss proposals with officers, and look at the presentations that officers now e-mail to Planning Committee members before committee.
- 10.5 Site visits may also be arranged, at the behest of the ~~Chief Planning Officer~~ Head of Planning and Regeneration or Development Control Manager when they consider that there are particular site issues that members should be aware of prior to the determination of the application.

Criteria for agreeing to hold site inspections

- 10.6 Any request for a formal site visit will have to comply with the following criteria:
- o Illustrative material is insufficient to convey the issues
 - o A judgment is required on visual impact
 - o The setting and surroundings are relevant to the determination of the application
 - o The site has not been visited recently by the Planning Committee in relation to another planning application

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10.75 Requests for formal site visits made at Planning Committee will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances, e.g. where a councillor was incapable of notifying officers of the need for a site visit when the application for planning permission was first publicised. Site visits requested after the application appears on the committee report delay determining the application. While the decision whether or not to undertake an inspection in such circumstances is a matter for the Planning Committee, members shall only make such visits where the Planning Committee cannot otherwise make an appropriately informed decision and the inspection would have substantial benefit. Examples where a site visit would not normally be appropriate include where:

- The member simply disagrees with the conclusion reached in the report.
- The member wishes to consider boundary or neighbour disputes.
- Loss of property values
- Any issues that are not material planning considerations.
- Where councillors have already visited the site within the last 12 months, except in exceptional circumstances.

Where there is any dispute about the need for a site visit the final decision will be taken by the Chair and/or Vice Chair of the Planning Committee in consultation with the Head of Planning and Regeneration and/or the Development Control Manager

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Notification of site visits

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10.8 All site visits will take place on the Monday before Planning Committee for applications being reported to that committee. All members (subject to declarations of interest) will be entitled to attend the site visits, and all Planning Committee members will be encouraged to attend.

Committee Services will arrange the site visits but will not attend to take minutes. A briefing note will be prepared by planning officers and will be presented to the Planning Committee confirming that a site visit has taken place, and providing a summary of any additional information received or matters arising from the site visit.

Attendance at site inspections

10.96 Site visits will normally be attended by the chairperson and vice-chairperson of Planning Committee, ward members and appropriate officers. ~~Where appropriate adjoining ward members will be invited and in exceptional circumstances the whole of the committee.~~ All members (subject to declarations of interest) will be entitled to attend the site visits, and all Planning Committee members will be encouraged to attend.

10.107 Members may through the chairperson ask questions of officers to clarify factual matters relevant to the site inspection.

10.118 If a request is received from a third party to inspect the site from a different location, the members, as a group, should take the view whether to do so. Unless there are good reasons not to do so, such a request should normally be acceded to but only if all participants at the site inspection are extended the same invitation.

Attendance at site inspections

- | 10.129 Members may only enter onto the site with the permission of the site owner who has the right of attendance at the site inspection.
- | 10.130 The public do not have a right of access to a site but may attend and view the site by way of public vantage points or on site with the consent of the owner.
- | 10.144 Applicants, their agents and members of the public will not be allowed to speak at the site visits, apart from providing matters of information or clarification; the informal meeting with the public that has become part of the custom and practice of this Council will end so that the site visits are undertaken in a more formal manner.
~~The public cannot address the meeting.~~
- | 10.152 If a member finds it necessary to visit a site alone, he or she shall view it from public vantage points only, seek to avoid discussion with interested parties and, if dialogue occurs, make it clear that a decision will be taken when the Planning Committee has discussed it after the site inspection.
- | 10.163 **Members are reminded that the rules of declarations of interest apply to site visits, and that if a member has an interest that would require the member to withdraw from a Planning Committee, the member is not entitled to attend the site meeting.**

Conduct at site inspections

- | 10.174 The inspection will be chaired by the chairperson or vice chair of the Planning Committee who will ensure that it is conducted as a single meeting and in an orderly fashion.
- | 10.185 The planning officer will give a brief summary of the application and the site inspection issues at the beginning of each site visit.
- | 10.196 Members of the Planning Committee attending the site inspection shall not make comments that would create an impression that they have already formed a view on the merits of the application.
- | 10.1720 Members of the Planning Committee shall not discuss the application, other than to clarify issues of fact, and shall not make a decision while on site.
- | 10.4821 Non-Committee members may address their colleagues on issues of fact pertaining to the site context.
- | ~~10.19 The applicant or members of the public will not be permitted to address members during the site inspection, but may be asked to clarify issues of fact by the chairperson.~~
- | ~~10.20 Once the formal site meeting is concluded at the chairperson's discretion, and depending on the time available, an informal discussion may be held with the applicant, any agent, and any members of the public. In such a situation members and officers should continue to abide by this code.~~