



Appendix A: Committee Site Visits

Code of Practice For Planning Committee Site Visits

Introduction

This Practice Note gives advice on the Council's procedure for Planning Committees undertaking site inspections prior to determination of certain key planning and rights of way applications. Its purpose is to ensure that an open and consistent approach is followed in the interests of transparency and in respect of procedures and administrative arrangements. In this way the interests of all parties involved in the process are dealt with equitably.

Purpose of Site Visits

The main purpose of a site inspection is to enable Members:

- To view a site/right of way and its surroundings to better appreciate facts that are important in the consideration of an application.
- To assist in the appraisal of constraints and opportunities afforded by the proposed development/right of way application and its impact upon surrounding land.
- To have a better understanding of issues raised by interested parties.
- To have officers point out material considerations and answer questions from Members.

Site visits are not formally constituted meetings of the Committee. It is important, therefore, that no decisions are taken or seen to be taken on the application at the visit, nor any discussion be held on the merits of the proposal.

Requests for Site Visits

Normally site visits will be programmed to take place either on the day before or the morning before the scheduled Planning committee meeting. The Area Planning Manager and or Principal Planning Officer will, in consultation with rights of way officers and the chair of the relevant committee, consider if a site inspection would be beneficial having regard to the purposes for holding meetings set out above. Where possible requests for a site inspection arising at a Planning committee meeting itself should be avoided, and such requests should be considered having regard to the above purposes taking into account that deferring an application for a site inspection would add at least four weeks to the determination process. Such a delay could result in a planning application being determined outside the statutory 8 or 13 week period.

Arrangements for Site Visits

Site visits will be held on the day before or the morning of the committee. Starting times will vary dependant on the location and number of sites to be visited. In advance of the site inspection taking place officer will notify applicants/agent(s) giving them notice of the date and approximate time of the visit and seeking their agreement for Members to enter onto the site and or neighbouring properties if required and desirable. Notice of the order of site inspections together with a location plan of the sites will be circulated to Members with the agenda papers for committee.

Attendance on private land, by any persons, is subject to the consent of the owner/applicant

Attendance at Site Visits

The only persons entitled to be present at the site inspection are Members of the Planning Committee, appropriate officers, the applicant/agent and a representative from the appropriate town/parish council and the owner of adjacent land only in respect of their land. Other members of the public may turn up and can listen to the proceeding but have no right to enter onto private land without the agreement of land owners and they may at no time address members of the committee. Representatives of the town/parish councils may be asked to point out physical features, as points of fact, to the committee, however they will be asked not to present any views or opinions as these will already have been included within the relevant committee report and should if desired be presented to the meeting of the Planning Committee as part of the agreed public speaking arrangements. Up to two parish members may attend a site visit.

Procedure at Site Visit

On each and every site visit the following procedure will generally apply:

- On arrival the Chairman will call the Members present to order. The chair will explain the purpose of the inspection for any parties present.
- The Chairman will ask the appropriate officer to describe the proposal to Members and identify any relevant features.
- Members, including parish members, will then be invited through the chair to ask any questions and seek clarification of any facts from the officers present.
- Members should not direct questions to the applicant/agent or any other person(s) present.
- Discussions on the merits of the application will not be permitted and Members should refrain from making comments or expressing opinions on the application.
- Members should keep together to ensure that they are aware of all the information presented at the inspection.
- When the chair considers that the purpose of the visit has been fulfilled they will close the visit.
- Officers will keep a record of those Members present at the site visit.

When conducting the site inspections Members must have due regard to health and safety of themselves and others and follow any appropriate safety instructions on site. Appropriate clothing and footwear should be worn.

Members should be aware of the need to comply with the Code of Conduct during site visits.

The fact that a site visit had been held prior to the determination of an application will be recorded in the committee minutes.