

COUNCIL PLANNING FORMAL SITE VISIT PROTOCOL

1. Arranging the visit

- 1.1 Should Members decide at a Planning and Rights of Way Panel meeting that they require a visit to an application site:
 - The Panel will need to resolve to defer the application until the site visit has taken place and it returns to a future meeting;
 - Members will be asked to agree a time and date at the end of the meeting. If this is not possible, a schedule for the visit will be agreed between the Chair and officers. The schedule will identify the timetable for the meeting, invited attendees and what matters will be viewed on site.
- 1.2 The planning officer will then notify the applicant or their agent of the time and date of the site visit and seek authority for Councillors and officers to visit the site or other land. Where the application site is on private land, the applicant or agent will only be requested to be in attendance to facilitate access if required.
- 1.3 Where Members of the Panel or officers believe that the Panel would benefit from viewing the site from other locations (e.g. neighbouring property) then this shall be permitted subject to agreement of the Chair and the requirements of this protocol.
- 1.4 Attendees will include:
 - Planning and Rights of Way Panel Members;
 - Planning Officer;
 - Service Lead – Infrastructure, Planning and Development;
 - Democratic Support Officer;
 - Solicitor (if necessary)
 - Other officers relevant to the application i.e. Highways or Trees
- 1.5 Councillors are reminded that they have no right of entry to private land except by permission of the owner and that they and officers should not enter a private site until all invitees are present and an officer has made contact with the landowner/operator/applicant.
- 1.6 In the unlikely event that the landowner will not give permission to enter a private site, the site will have to be viewed from public highway or alternative private land if the landowner has permitted entry.

2. Conduct of the visit

- 2.1 The purpose of the site visit is to enable Councillors on Planning and Rights of Way Panel to familiarise themselves with the site and its surroundings and in order to understand the issues more clearly when considering the application at Panel.
- 2.2 While it may be necessary for an applicant or his agent to be present on the site (e.g. to provide access or for safety reasons), discussions with the applicant or their agent or any third party will be avoided and they will be advised that lobbying of councillors is unacceptable. Presentations by applicants will not be permissible.

- 2.3 At the request of the Chair, the planning officer will describe the proposal to councillors and will display appropriate plans or drawings of the proposal. (It is expected that Councillors will already be familiar with the planning officer's report) The planning officer will indicate matters of fact in relation to the proposal and surrounding land which Councillors should take into account.
- 2.4 Questions by councillors should be addressed to the planning officer and be of a factual nature, for example, distances to adjoining or objectors' properties or the landscape features to be retained. If it is necessary to seek information from the applicant or agent on site this will be done by an officer.
- 2.5 At no time during the site visit should councillors debate or comment on the planning merits or otherwise of a proposal.
- 2.6 No other interested parties (such as objectors, supporters, ward councillors) shall be invited to or participate in the site visit.

3. General

- 3.1 Councillors will not make any decision at the site visit and individual members should keep an open mind about the merits or otherwise of the proposal to which the site visit relates.
- 3.2 Councillors should avoid being separated; it is essential that they should not allow themselves to be lobbied or enter into a debate about the application.
- 3.3 Councillors should ensure that they have seen all aspects of the site suggested by the accompanying officer or the Chair during the visit.
- 3.4 The application will usually be the first item on the agenda of the following Planning and Rights of Way Panel meeting where the decision will be made.

4. Record of the Visit

A record of the visit will be retained on the planning application file. The record will include the timetable for the meeting, attendees and what matters were viewed on site.

Notes:

- Officers will identify relevant health and safety issues for all site visits. All health and safety instructions, as issued by the site owner/operator must be strictly followed.
- Where appropriate, protective clothing e.g. visibility jackets, hard hats will be provided for councillors on arrival at the site. Councillors should, however, be aware of the need to wear appropriate footwear.
- Officers will **not arrange** transport to the site for the site visit. Councillors will be required to make their own way to the site.