

The sole purpose of a site visit is for Councillors to familiarise themselves with the site's characteristics before making a decision on a planning application or other matter at the next scheduled meeting of the Planning Committee. The visit itself is not a legally constituted meeting under the Local Government and Access to Information Acts and, as such, it is not legally required to be publicised or to be open to the public. However, whilst Councillors have statutory powers to enter land this does not apply to third parties, such as residents. Applicants and landowners are therefore asked in the interest of openness and fairness to allow third parties to also enter the land and observe the proceedings.

Site visits are an opportunity for Councillors to view the site of an application officially and have a proposal explained to them by Officers of the Council. They will be able to see the site layout, boundaries, physical features, and constraints and note the general characteristics of the site, and how it fits in with the surrounding area, nearby land uses and observe any relevant highway matters affecting the site.

No decision is made on site. It is not a forum for debating the application, or for receiving representations about the merits of the application. However, where appropriate, Councillors may receive representation from the relevant Parish/Town Council and other interested parties that point out relevant facts and features relating to the physical characteristics of the site. Councillors will also be able to ask questions of the Officers present.

How a Site Visit is Organised

A site visit is initiated either:

- by a resolution of the Planning Committee; or
- by the Head of Planning Development Services, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice Chairman, in circumstances where to wait for the next available Committee meeting could unnecessarily delay a planning decision.

A scheduled list of site visit dates is published at the beginning of the municipal year. Requests for site visits should be used sparingly. Clearly, it is not possible or practical for Committee to call at many sites on each scheduled visit. Site visits should only be agreed where there is good reason for Committee to see the site in detail before a decision is made.

Requests for site visits should be made as early as possible to avoid deferment of an application to a future Committee.

Attendance at Site Visits

All Members of the Council may attend if they wish.

Relevant Officers of the Council will attend to explain the proposal to Councillors and answer any factual questions that may arise. The applicant/agent or owner of the site may attend to facilitate access to the land

and buildings, and may be asked to provide factual information for Councillors.

Applicants, their representatives and other interested persons will not however, be allowed to seek to influence or discuss the merits of the application with Councillors in any way whatsoever.

Procedure at the Site Visit

The precise conduct of the site visit will depend upon the nature of the site and the proposal, but in general, the following points of procedure apply:

- The site visit will not start until the Chairman arrives and convenes the visit. In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman will convene the visit. It will be recorded who was present at the site visit.
- Members, Officers and others present should generally remain assembled throughout the visit and should not break into smaller groups to view the site.
- No Councillor should attend a site visit where they have a prejudicial interest.
- Applicants and their agents will be expected to maintain a suitable distance between themselves and Councillors and Officers during the course of the site visit to ensure that no allegations of impropriety or undue influence can be made later.
- Officers will explain the proposal and point out any important features of the site.
- Councillors may question Officers about factual aspects of the proposal. If Officers are unable to provide any information requested by Councillors, they will seek to obtain it after the site visit and before the meeting of the Planning Committee.
- Councillors should not openly express their views on the merits of the application during the site visit. Councillors and Officers should not enter into discussion about the proposal, particularly with the applicant or any other interested party, and questions should be confined to points of clarification only.
- No decision will be made about the application site until the meeting of the Planning Committee.