

PLANNING COMMITTEE – FORMAL SITE VISITS PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOL

Circumstances

1. A formal site visit by councillors should only occur when:

An application is under consideration which is of a nature or with such Borough-wide implications that councillors feel unable to fully assess the scheme without a detailed site inspection accompanied by Planning Officers to point out and explain the application “on the ground”.

Arrangements

2. Members of the Planning Committee (and Ward councillors) should meet at a pre-arranged date, time and location in order to conduct a formal councillor site visit. Staff will write to councillors with details.
3. Officers will pre-arrange access to the relevant site(s) in order to allow councillors to observe the application site from all necessary vantage points.
4. The site visit will be guided by the Planning Officers who will point out matters of material relevance to the application and answer councillor’ questions.
5. The purpose of the inspection is to gather information about the site and visually assess the likely or actual impact of the proposal, not to debate the merits of the application or the officers’ recommendation.
6. During the formal site visit detailed discussions and/or negotiations should not be conducted with the applicant or third parties by either councillors or members of staff. It is appropriate for councillors to ask questions through the Chairman for clarification of any technical points raised. These questions may be directed to the developer if the Chairman considers appropriate in order to answer a technical query. Primary discussion and debate should be reserved for the Planning Committee itself when the application is presented for formal consideration. Any arguments applicants or third parties wish to put forward can be heard at that stage through the public speaking arrangements and the debate will be in public.
7. Where members of the public are present at site visits it will not normally be appropriate for any public speaking as this will be reserved for the Committee.