

## **PLANNING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION**

### **DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND COMPLIANCE TEAM**

### **SITE INSPECTION PANEL PROTOCOL**

This protocol sets out the way in which site visits should take place.

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#### 1. Purpose of site inspection panels

- 1.1. To enable a panel of Members and a Town / Community Council representative to examine a planning application in the context of a site visit prior to consideration at Planning Committee, where information cannot, or would be unlikely to be gleaned from the Planning Officer's Committee report, and supporting information including Committee visual displays.
- 1.2. Site Inspection panels are fact gathering only, have no decision making powers and will not make any recommendation back to Planning Committee on a proposal.

#### 2. The appointment of site inspection panels

- 2.1. Any County Council Members and the Chair of the Committee are empowered to request a Site Inspection Panel visit a site which is subject to a report on the agenda for determination by Planning Committee.
- 2.2. Members will be required to give a clear indication in writing (email or letter) of the planning grounds for requesting a Site Inspection Panel, in each instance.
- 2.3. Site Inspection Panels will normally take place on the Thursday or Friday of the week immediately preceding the Wednesday on which the Planning Committee is due to meet and consider an application.

#### 3. The composition of site inspection panels

- 3.1. The membership will consist of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee together with the Local Member(s) for the electoral division in which the application site lies, a representative of each political group, and a representative of the local

Town/Community Council. In exceptional circumstances, and with the agreement of the Chair, invitations may be sent to all Members of the Planning Committee and Local Member(s).

- 3.2. A Site Inspection panel meeting will normally be attended by the Planning Section Case Officer, the Development Manager or Principal Planning Officer. Other Officers may be requested to attend where specialist advice may be required on an item.
  - 3.3. In circumstances where the Chair, Vice-Chair or Local Member(s) is/are unable to attend or where there is a conflict of interest, he/she may nominate another Member to attend with the agreement of the Chair.
4. Procedures to be followed in the appointment of pre-committee site inspection panels
- 4.1. Site Inspection Panels will normally be appointed in advance of the Planning Committee at which an application is to be considered.
  - 4.2. A request for a Site Inspection Panel should be made by email or letter by a Member to the Development Manager and Support Team Manager at least 5 working days before the date set for Site Inspection Panels i.e. by the end of the Friday of the week before the site inspections take place on the following Friday. A request should follow publication of the list of potential items for Planning Committee circulated 3 weeks before the Committee, or the actual index of item on Committee circulated on the Friday 10 working days before the Committee.
  - 4.3. Any request for a Site Inspection panel should include clear planning grounds for staging a meeting.
  - 4.4. The Development Manager will consult with the Chair of Planning Committee before the decision is made whether to proceed with a site visit.
  - 4.5. The Member requesting a Site Inspection Panel meeting will be advised of the decision at (4.4) and the reasons.
  - 4.6. Officers will make the arrangements for Site Inspection Panel meetings and will inform Members accordingly.
5. Procedures at site inspection panel meetings
- 5.1. The Site Inspection will commence at the appointed time.
  - 5.2. If the Committee Chair is absent, Members should agree on the acting Chair (this shall be the elected Vice Chair if present).

- 5.3. The Chair shall formally open the meeting.
- 5.4. The Planning Officer will be invited to outline the proposal and main issues and suggest if there are specific features Members should observe, taking into account the reasons for appointing the panel. The Officer will advise the Panel whether it may be appropriate to view the proposal from adjoining land / properties and of any requests from neighbouring occupants to view the site from their land / property.
- 5.5. The Site Inspection Panel will view the site, relevant buildings and surroundings as necessary.
- 5.6. Members will be offered the opportunity to raise questions or seek clarification of points of fact with the Planning Officer and/or local member(s) and/or Town/Community Council representative.
- 5.7. The Local Member(s) and representative of the Town/Community Council will be offered the opportunity to comment on the proposal.
- 5.8. Members of the Site Inspection Panel will be offered the opportunity to comment on the proposal and to debate issues.
- 5.9. The Chair will formally announce when the meeting has concluded.
- 5.10. The Planning Officer will be responsible for preparing a short factual note of the meeting for inclusion in the late representations sheets to be circulated at the Committee. These notes shall include the reasons for appointing the panel, a record of those present, and an outline of what was observed and considered. No opinions shall be expressed on the merits of the application in the notes.
- 5.11. **Other Members** - Members other than those appointed onto the Site Inspection Panel are permitted to attend a Site Inspection Panel as observers but will not be permitted to speak.
- 5.12. **The General Public/Applicants/Agents** - No members of the public, applicants or their agents, shall be permitted to attend, address or to observe the proceedings of any Site Inspection Panel meeting. In exceptional circumstances, where it is necessary for a Site Inspection Panel to inspect / enter into buildings or land in the presence of the owner/applicant/neighbouring occupier, that person shall be advised at the outset of the meeting that he/she is not able to take part in any of the proceedings of the meeting, other than to answer any factual questions put through the Chair. The

owner/applicant/neighbouring occupier shall be asked to leave the presence of the Site Inspection Panel prior to any comment or debate on a proposal.

- 5.13. **Hospitality** - Members of a Site Inspection Panel should not accept any form of hospitality which might be considered as having an influence on the decision making process.
- 5.14. **Health and Safety** - Members are expected to comply with prevailing site rules and regulations and all health and safety arrangements on all site visits. This may include the wearing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and arrangements will be made to ensure that PPE is provided where appropriate. It will be the decision of the Chair (or his nominated substitute) as to whether any Member of the Site Inspection Panel is putting themselves at risk due to their health or physical condition, taking into account Officer advice.
- 5.15. In relation to any procedural matters arising in relation to the organisation or conduct of Site Inspection Panel which are not covered by this protocol, the decision on the course of action to be taken shall rest with the Chair (or Vice Chair in the absence of the Chair) in consultation with the Development Manager or relevant Principal Planning Officer.

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