

South Derbyshire District Council

Development Control Committee

Protocol for Calling and Conducting Site Visits

Reasons for calling a site visit

When moving that a site visit be held, Members will be expected to consider and propose one or more of the following reasons:

1. The issues of fact raised by the Planning Services Manager's report or offered in explanation at the Committee meeting require further clarification by a demonstration of conditions on site
2. Further issues of principle, other than those specified in the report of the Planning Services Manager, arise from a Member's personal knowledge of circumstances on the ground that lead to the need for clarification that may be achieved by a site visit
3. Implications that may be demonstrated on site arise for consistency of decision making in other similar cases

Arrangements for a site visit

- 1 Unless specifically arranged otherwise, Site Visits will be held on the same day as and prior to the next following Committee Meeting. The Members Services Officer will work out an itinerary and times for site visits.
- 2 The Members Services Officer will send
 - ☐ a letter to each Committee and Ward Member and any relevant Parish Council, providing a location map for purposes of reaching the site and
 - ☐ a memo to the Development Control Managerwith this information
- 3 The Development Control Manager will inform the applicant/agent
 - ☐ of the date and time of the site visit and
 - ☐ ask if he/she wishes to have any feature of importance pointed out to the Committee and
 - ☐ that no discussion of the merits of the case will be permitted during the visit.
- 4 The applicant/agent will also be informed that the Parish Council has been advised of the time and place of the site visit and that third parties also tend to become aware of it but that access to the site will be at the discretion of the land owner.

- 5 The standard notification letter to neighbours will be amended to
- draw attention to this protocol and that for the conduct of site visits and
 - invite neighbours to draw to the attention of officers/ site visit Members to any particular features of the site and/or proposal

Protocol for the conduct of a site visit

- 1 Site visits are only justified in order to see conditions on the ground. Therefore the only discussion that will be legitimate on site will relate to pointing out site features and the extent of the proposed development. The merits of proposals will only be debated in the Committee meeting in the Council offices.
- 2 The site visit will not formally commence before the Chair calls Members to order.
- 3 The Chair will invite the designated planning officer to point out site features such as the extent and boundaries of the site and to display the plans submitted with the application. Members may ask the officer to explain points of fact on the ground such as where the proposal would extend to on the site.
- 4 The Chair will permit questions relating to site features from Members. The planning officer will answer these to the best of his/her ability. If there are unanswered questions, the officer will undertake to provide an answer to be put before the Committee at the formal meeting.
- 5 The Chair will not permit discussion of the merits of the proposal by any party.
- 6 The Chair will formally close the site visit, following which Members will proceed immediately to the next designated site.

SITE VISITS – EXISTING PROCEDURE

- (1) Site Visits were undertaken immediately prior to the meeting of the Committee other than in exceptional circumstances, when a special meeting was called. The agenda for the meeting of the Committee contained an item listing the deferred matters to be determined. Normally, the site visits took place in the early afternoon prior to the meeting of the Committee, but when there was a long itinerary, morning meetings were called with a luncheon recess prior to the meeting. Written notification advising of times for meeting at each site was despatched with the agenda for the meeting, at least three days in advance of the meeting.
- (2) Site Visits were scheduled to allow for a standard 10 minutes per site unless the issues were complex or the site so large as to require more time, having regard to the anticipated travelling distance between sites.
- (3) Members of the Committee were invited to attend the offices and travel in officer's cars or to meet on site in their own car or to share with other Members. The local Ward Members not being Members of the Planning Committee were also invited to attend.
- (4) The business was conducted in the following manner:-
 - (a) The Chairman called the meeting to order and invited the Planning Officer to describe the proposal, display the plans and indicate relevant features of the site, including its boundaries and setting.
 - (b) The Chairman invited comments and questions from Members and in particular, any Ward Member in a representative capacity, to make their views known.
 - (c) The Chairman allowed discussion concerning issues which the site visit raised and allowed officers to advise on Members' comments and questions.
 - (d) No other persons were permitted to address the Committee. However, interested local residents, applicants, agents and Parish Council Members were permitted to attend to listen to the discussion.
 - (e) In the event that a question was asked that an Officer could not answer, the Officer may obtain information from bystanders and relay it to the Committee.
 - (f) At the conclusion of the business, the Chairman adjourned the meeting until the meeting of the Committee when the matter was formally determined in accordance with the agenda item.
 - (g) An opportunity was provided at the conclusion of the site visit for any person present to address any Member or informal gathering of Members on any point they wished to make prior to departure to the next site subject to the constraints of the itinerary.

