

PLANNING COMMITTEE SITE VISIT PROTOCOL

To: **Planning Committee**

Date: **1 September 2016**

From: **Head of Growth and Economy**

Electoral division(s): **ALL**

Purpose: **To consider the following report**

Recommendation: **The Planning Committee is requested to note the content of the site visit protocol and endorse the content, agreeing any amendments required, to allow the relevant section of the document to be published on the Council's website.**

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 It is good practice to review development management (DM) procedures, which includes the site visits undertaken by members of the Planning Committee in relation to planning applications. Historically, Cambridgeshire County Council's site visit protocol has been covered and agreed as part of the training given to members of the Planning Committee (previously Development Control Committee). Whilst it is proposed for officers and members of the Planning Committee to continue with this approach, it has been identified that it would be useful to have a formal document to be able to give to third parties such as applicants / agents, local members, parish councils and objectors etc. to explain our site visit process and when a site visit is considered appropriate.
- 1.2 From a review of neighbouring authorities, it is evident that many have an approved site visit protocol to share with the general public and to set out how officers and members of the appropriate committees will conduct any site visits. The proposed text is sometimes split between what is displayed for the public (as an overview) and the detailed text for the officers and members of the Planning Committee. It also provides an opportunity for the emphasis to be made on the visit as a 'fact finding' session rather than an opportunity for third parties to influence the decision making.
- 1.3 The following report has taken account of the site visit protocol historically used by Cambridgeshire County Council and has ensured that it is broadly consistent with neighbouring county planning authorities in terms of the way it is proposed to be displayed to the general public.

2. CONTENT OF THE SITE VISIT PROTOCOL

- 2.1 Appendix A contains the proposed 'Planning Committee Site Visit Protocol' text for consideration and endorsement by members of the Planning Committee, subject to agreeing any amendments required. The first section includes the proposed text for the website and therefore circulation to the public and third parties that wish to be involved in a site visit. The second section sets out the detailed arrangements which are laid out in sections covering an introduction; purpose of site visits; procedures; the role of members; the role of the Chairman; and the role of the council officers. Although it is acknowledged there is some cross over having this layout, it does set out the appropriate roles and responsibilities for everyone involved in the site visit.
- 2.2 As confirmed in paragraph 1.3 above, the proposed text has been produced taking account of our historical protocol and how this compares with our neighbouring county planning authorities. It has been checked by colleagues in legal and has been shared in draft with the Chairman and Vice Chair of Planning Committee to ensure that it is broadly consistent with the procedures already followed by members of the Planning Committee.

3. PROPOSED PROCESS FOR AGREEMENT

- 3.1 As this protocol relates specifically to the Planning Committee, officers have received confirmation from legal that this can be endorsed by members of the Planning Committee and that it does not need to be incorporated into the constitution or need further endorsement from the wider Council. Therefore subject to any amendments requested by members of the Planning Committee it is proposed to endorse the formal site visit protocol text so that this can be placed onto our website and is available for circulation for any third parties as soon as possible.
- 3.2 At present, Appendix A does not stipulate a preferred day for any site visits to take place. However, the Chairman has raised concerns about the level of attendance at some recent site visits and therefore he has asked whether consideration can be given to a set day ahead of Planning Committee that can be kept free and then cancelled if not required? Apparently a similar protocol is used by some of the District Councils. Officers are content for a set day to be confirmed within the protocol if this would be useful to Members and to allow them to control their diary commitments easier. Based on the current timetabling, officers would recommend that either the Friday or the Monday ahead of Planning Committee be kept for this purpose, which allows time for the papers to be published and some time for officers to respond to any queries if these can't be covered as part of the site visit.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 In conclusion, to assist members of the general public and third parties that may be required to attend a Planning Committee site visit, it is proposed to produce a formal 'Planning Committee Site Visit Protocol' document. This will formalise the historical practices and ensure that the process is open and transparent to all. It will also set out the protocol that needs to be followed by officers and members of the Planning Committee and what information will be recorded and provided to Democratic Services that will be available for inspection upon request.
- 4.2 It is therefore recommended that members of the Planning Committee endorse the text contained within Appendix A of this report and agree any amendments required, to allow the relevant section of the document to be published on the Council's website.