

## ***West Suffolk branded header***

### **Planning matters**

**August 2013**

### **Site visit protocol**

Development Control Committee members are sometimes required to inspect a site to get more understanding of a site's location, physical characteristics and relationship to neighbouring properties or land use. This helps them when making a formal decision on a development control (planning) application. This protocol sets out the normal practice for the arrangement and conduct of formal site visits by the Development Control Committee.

#### **Requests for site visits**

A site inspection will result from any one of the following:

- A request by a councillor in writing during the time that an application is processed (ideally within the initial 21 day call-in period). Councillors will provide reasons for their request.
- The Head of Planning and Regulatory Services or Development Manager requires one in the interests of proper decision making.
- Development Control Committee calls for a site visit following a deferral of a decision (although this should rarely be necessary given the provisions of 1 and 2).

#### **Conduct of site visits**

- Site visits are solely for the purpose of viewing the site, understanding its location and immediate environs, and discussing the facts of the application.
- Site visits will commence promptly at the time stated in the agenda papers.
- Site visits will be led by a council officer, usually the Development Manager and/or the case officer.
- On occasion, officers of other authorities or statutory bodies may be invited (by the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services / Development Manager) to attend a site visit to clarify factual matters (for example Suffolk County Council as the local highway authority).
- Third parties (such as applicant, agent, media or the public) are not invited or expected to attend site visits. Members of the committee will not directly engage any third party person present at the site visit and will address any questions to the lead officer.
- Officers will give a brief presentation on the site, the setting of the proposed development and the specific reasons why the committee requested a site inspection. They will also advise whether the applicant or objectors have requested that the committee view the site from other locations and how that is to be dealt with.
- Councillors will ask their questions through the Chairman including any requests for specific information from the applicant. All committee members need to ensure that they can hear the officers' presentation and the questions and answers.

### **APPENDIX 3**

- The Chairman will seek confirmation that members are satisfied they have seen everything they need to make a decision and will draw the site inspection to a close.
- Members of the committee should politely avoid engaging in private conversations with applicants, agents or objectors as this can give the wrong impression to others present or anyone observing the site visit.
- For the purposes of factual record, attendance at a site visit will be recorded by the lead officer.
- As the purpose of the visit is not debate but simply to establish facts about the site and its surroundings, no formal notes of a site visit will be recorded, other than attendance.
- There is no requirement for a committee member to indicate likely attendance at a site visit, although it could be helpful.