

Planning Committee Organised Site Visit Protocol

Introduction

Some planning applications are decided by the Planning Committee and information about this can be found in the Council's Constitution here:

<https://www.nelincs.gov.uk/councillors-and-democracy/decision-making/the-constitution/>

In most cases Planning Committee reaches a decision based on information provided in a senior officer's report about the planning application. This report takes into account the views of neighbours and all 'material' planning considerations. More information about what constitutes a 'material' planning consideration can be found here: <https://www.nelincs.gov.uk/planning-and-development/planning-applications/commenting-on-a-planning-application/>

Occasionally the Planning Committee wish to visit a site, where development is planned, before making a decision. This note advises on the procedure that will be followed in those few occasions when such site visits take place.

An accompanied site visit will result in a delay in a planning application's decision being taken. In view of this they will not be undertaken when applicants, objectors or constituents request them without good planning reasons – see below. National legislation requires North East Lincolnshire Council to not unduly delay decisions on planning applications and, dependent upon the application type, this delay may mean that the applicant is able to appeal against the Council not taking a decision if it does not do so in 8, 13 or 16 weeks. The decision on the planning application is then taken away from North East Lincolnshire Council and is decided by the Planning Inspectorate See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate> on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Why have a site visit?

A site visit will only take place following a formal resolution of the Planning Committee to do so. Individual Planning Committee Members do sometimes visit sites on an unaccompanied basis at other times but these visits are not the subject of this protocol.

The purpose of an organised site visit is to enable Members of Planning Committee to understand more fully:

- the details of a site where development is planned;
- the details of the surrounding area; and
- issues raised by residents and others about the plans

No decision on the related application will be taken at an accompanied site visit. Nor is it the purpose of the accompanied site visit to debate, at the site, the merits of the development; either between Members or with local residents or with the applicant or his agent. Debate about the application will only take place at the time when it is again in front of the Planning Committee for formal consideration.

If the accompanied site visit gives rise to excessive lobbying or demonstrations, Members may cancel the visit and arrange another in private.

Arranging Site Visits

All members of the Planning Committee will be invited to attend the site visit, as will local Ward Members, should they not be members of the committee.

Where a proposal is considered, by the Head of Development, to have a significant impact on an adjoining Ward, adjoining Ward Members will also be invited to attend.

Occasionally, officers of other services such as Highway Services will be invited (by the Head of Development) to attend a site visit to clarify factual matters.

Applicants and/or their agent will be advised of the intention to undertake a site visit and a copy of this protocol will be provided to them as well as all other attendees.

Members of the public will not be invited to take part in organised site visits in view of the visits' purpose, unless the Committee has specifically requested to view a development site from neighbouring private land.

Permission will be sought, before the accompanied site visit, to enter private land where this will assist in Members understanding the development, the site and its relationship to the surrounding area. In the unlikely event that the landowner will not give permission, the site will be viewed from the public highway or from other adjacent land with the owner's permission.

Procedure at Site Visits

Hospitality or assistance with travel to and from the accompanied site visit will not be accepted by Members from applicants or objectors given that this could be seen to show favour.

The Chair of Planning Committee will oversee the conduct of site visits and he will formally open and close the organised site visit.

The Strategic Director of Environment, Economy and Housing, or his nominated representative (hereafter referred to as the 'planning officer'), will note the names of all present; which will be included in a note of the visit subsequently added to the planning file and made available for public inspection.

At the request of the Chair, the planning officer will describe the proposal to Members and will display plans and drawings. It is expected that Members will already be familiar with the planning officer's report. The planning officer will also indicate matters of fact in relation to the proposal and surrounding land which Members should take account of.

Members may ask the planning officer for factual clarification of any planning matter relating to the proposal or surrounding land, for example, distances to adjoining or objectors' properties or the location of the planned development.

At no time during the site visit will Members debate or comment on the planning merits or otherwise of a proposal.

At no time during the site visit will the applicant, their agent, any objector or any other member of the public be allowed to debate the merits of the proposal with Members. This is because the accompanied site visit is not for further representations to be made; it is for Councillors to view the site and its surroundings so as to inform their subsequent decision taking when the application is presented to the Planning Committee.

In order to assist in ensuring that Members receive the same information, they are required to keep together in one group with the chair and the planning officer during the entirety of the accompanied site visit. They will not break-off to discuss the proposal separately with residents or the applicant.

Other Matters

Subsequent to the accompanied site visit, the Planning Officer will briefly describe during the presentation of the application to the Planning Committee the purpose of the site visit and the main aspects viewed.