

Exeter City Council Planning Committee's Site Visit Protocol

Purpose of the Site Visit

1. **Familiarisation:** Members of the Planning Committee are expected to familiarise themselves with the location and context of applications to be considered, to the extent possible from adjacent roads, public spaces and the relevant officer report.
2. **Exceptional Cases:** A site visit may be deemed necessary in instances where:
 - (i) particular site factors are significant in terms of the weight attached to them relative to other factors or the difficulty of their assessment in the absence of a site inspection; or
 - (ii) there are significant policy or precedent implications and specific site factors need to be carefully addressed.

Requesting a Site Visit

3. **Pre-Planning Committee Meeting Requests:** If members consider a site visit necessary before the Committee meeting, requests should be made to Democratic Services prior to the Chair's briefing. The Chair will decide whenever a request is received prior to a planning committee meeting, in consultation with officers, if the visit is necessary or if additional visual information from officers will suffice.
4. **During Planning Committee Meetings:** If a site visit was not identified beforehand, members can propose an adjournment or deferral during the debate to arrange a visit. Justifications must be provided, explaining why the visit is necessary and whether additional information could negate the need for a visit.

Arranging the Visit

5. **Timing of the Site Visit:** Site visits will be scheduled before the next Planning Committee meeting. The Chair and officers will determine the timetable and invitees.
6. **Attendees:** All Planning Committee members and Ward Councillors will be invited, and, if necessary, officers from other services or Authorities (such as the Highway Authority) may attend to clarify factual matters.
7. **Notification:** Planning Officers will inform the applicant or their agent about the site visit and seek permission for the Planning Committee, Ward Councillors and officers to access the site if it is on private land. The applicant or agent will facilitate access without engaging in discussions about the proposal.
8. **Private Land:** Councillors must wait until an officer has contacted the landowner before entering private land. If permission is not granted, the site will be viewed from public highways or adjacent land with permission.

Pre-Visit

9. **Objective:** The site visit aims to help Committee members understand the site and its surroundings to make an informed decision at the meeting. Members should review the location and context beforehand as much as possible.

10. **Members Planning Code of Good Practice:** Committee members should review and be familiar with the Council's Members Planning Code of Good Practice prior to undertaking the site visit and in particular the principles relating to site visits/inspections.
11. **Health and Safety:** Officers will identify relevant health and safety issues in advance of a site visit. All issued instructions must be strictly followed. Protective clothing will be provided if necessary. Councillors should be prepared to wear appropriate footwear and clothing during the visit.
12. **Sustainability:** Car-sharing is encouraged for sustainability and safety. Councillors with special access requirements should notify the case officer early to make necessary arrangements.

Conduct of the Visit

13. **Chair's Role:** The visit is chaired by the Chair, who will formally open and close the visit. The planning officer will describe the application and indicate material facts. Questions should be factual and directed to the planning officer.
14. **Unified Movement:** Committee members should stay together and avoid lobbying or discussions about the application during the visit.
15. **Interaction:** While the applicant or agent may be present for access or safety reasons, discussions with them or any third party should be avoided. Lobbying during the visit is unacceptable, and presentations by applicants are not allowed.
16. **Non-Debate:** Councillors should not debate or comment on the merits of the proposal during the visit. Ward Councillors can however highlight site features relevant to the understanding of the site but not discuss the merits of the application.
17. **Public Attendance:** Members of the public can attend with the landowner's permission but are not allowed to lobby or present during the visit.
18. **Comprehensive Viewing:** Members should ensure they have seen all aspects suggested by the officer or Chair.

Post-Visit

19. **Documentation:** An officer will document the visit, including the timetable, attendees, observed features and retain the record in the planning application file.
20. **Agenda Priority:** The application will typically be among the first items on the following Planning Committee meeting's agenda.
21. **Reporting Back:** Share any information gained from the site visit with the Committee that you feel would benefit all Members of the Committee.

General

22. **No Formal Decisions:** No formal decisions are made during the site visit.
23. **Chair's Authority:** The Chair's decisions regarding questions regarding this site visit protocol and which have been made in consultation with the planning officer are final.