

**Code of Conduct for Planning Committee Members and Officers
Review of Procedures at Planning Committee Site Visits (Appendix 3)**
Report by Director of Planning and Resources

Summary:	This report suggests changes to the Procedures for conducting Planning Committee site visits.
Recommendation:	That the proposed amendments to the procedures for conducting site visits be endorsed.

1 Background

- 1.1 The procedures for conducting Planning Committee Site Visits were last reviewed in detail in 2007 when the Authority took the planning service in house. They are included as Appendix 3 in the Code of Conduct for Planning Committee Members and Officers.
- 1.2 It is therefore considered opportune to review these procedures in order to emphasise and clarify the fact finding nature of the visits and to ensure that all members are aware of this guidance. The following amendments are proposed in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 1.3 This review has been a joint exercise carried out by the Chairman of the Planning Committee, the Director of Planning and Resources and the Administrative Officer (Governance).
- 1.4 The views of members on the revised guidance are requested.

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Appendices: APPENDIX 1 – Broads Authority – Planning Committee Site Visits
(Proposed Amendments)

Broads Authority – Planning Committee Site Visits

1. Selection of Site Visits

Committee site visits are used as one means of ensuring that members have sufficient information about the site and the surrounding area to reach a decision on a particular application. They are used selectively as fact-finding exercises ~~to (similar to Planning Inspector site visits) to~~ supplement officer reports and other information. They will not be appropriate where matters of fundamental planning policy are involved and there are no significant other material considerations to take into account. As information gathering exercises, they are not formal Committee meetings and, no decisions or recommendations are made.

The decision to hold a site visit is at the Committee's discretion. Site visits may be appropriate where:

- Officers recommend a site visit because of specific aspects of the application;
- The issues are finely balanced and Member assessment and judgement can only be concluded by a site inspection;
- The details are complex or the impacts on neighbour amenity or the wider landscape are difficult to envisage other than by site assessment;
- It is expedient in the interests of local decision-making to demonstrate that all aspects of a proposal have been considered on site.

~~It can result from officer recommendation or from a member or members requesting a visit. They will often be appropriate for major or strategic sites but can also be used where there is particularly strong local concern, for example from a Parish Council. Site visits for small scale development in sensitive locations, or where issues are finely balanced, may also be appropriate. They may also be helpful where particular interests or functions of the Authority are involved, e.g. navigation or conservation. Determination of the great majority of applications does not involve the holding of a Committee site visit.~~

2. Member Attendance

All Planning Committee members are invited to attend site visits and are urged to do so wherever possible. Members will be sent details of the visit in advance, including a site location map. Members who are able to attend the Site Visit but are unable to attend the subsequent Committee consideration are invited to send any comments that they may have to the Administrative Officer prior to the Committee m

3. Site Visit Dates

These are published in advance and are normally 2 weeks before a Planning Committee meeting. The first site visit is normally scheduled for 10.00 am.

4. Invitations to Site Visits

In addition to Committee members, the following are invited to the site meeting in a consultative capacity:

- a representative from the Parish Council;
- the local District Council member;
- a representative from the Broads Society (as an observer).

The applicant's agent is notified of the proposed site visit date and permission is requested for access to the land, informing them of the fact finding nature of the visit.

5. Conduct of Site Visit

The site visit proceeds as follows:

- (i) Chairman welcomes those attending, stressing that the site visit is for fact finding, no decision will be made on site and the application will be considered for determination at a future Committee meeting. The aim is not to debate the issues, but to ensure that all participants are satisfied that Members have seen all the appropriate details of the site and its surroundings. He/She should remind Members of the issues in Notes section below.;
- (ii) Apologies.
- (iii) Planning Officer describes the application giving details of the site, the development proposed and any updated information. He/She should show and explain any relevant drawings and should pay particular attention to the context of the site in the Broads area. ~~He/She should refer to relevant planning policy and to results of consultations and, where appropriate, officers assessment and recommendation.~~
- (iv) Comments from other officers, where appropriate, including:
 - County Council (Highways) Officer;
 - Other Broads Authority officers if present, e.g. Conservation Officer, or Waterways Officer.

____(v)____
Questions from Broads Authority members.

~~(v) _____ Comments from all invitees, at the discretion of the Chairman, i.e. the Parish Council and/or the District Council member, may be invited to speak at this point.~~

Note ~~Although the applicants and/or his/her representative, or the occupier of the site, may be in attendance at the site meeting they are not invited to 'put their case'. At the Chairman's discretion, the applicants, other invitees or third parties may be asked to provide factual information concerning the application, but will not be invited to "put their case". Similarly, ~~uninvited third parties who attend will not normally be asked to speak, subject to the Chairman's discretion.~~~~

Representation in support of or objection to the application should be made in writing to the Authority.

~~(vi)~~ ~~Comments and questions from Broads Authority members.~~

~~(VI)~~ Opportunity for members and others to walk around the site as a (vii) group, if considered necessary. At each stop, the Chairman should ask if everyone is satisfied that all appropriate factual matters have been seen:

~~(viii)~~(vii) Chairman concludes and closes the meeting by reminding the group when the application will be heard by the Planning Committee (if known) when public speaking will be in operation:

- ~~– The Chair may wish to ask whether anyone (other than the applicant) wishes to raise any further points and refer to any points which require clarification before the Committee meeting;~~

~~(ix)~~

~~— in view of the fact finding nature of the visit, members should be as impartial as possible. It is important to avoid saying that the meeting has produced a particular decision or recommendation and to avoid discussing the application with any interested party immediately before or after the site visit. Members should be circumspect in their comments. The intention is to ensure that applicants and consultees, appreciate that the planning application will be considered with an open mind when the full report is considered by the Planning Committee.~~

~~— disperse.~~

A summary note of the site meeting is taken on the day and is included with the agenda papers for the relevant Committee meeting. The note of the site meeting is available on the public record of the application.

Notes for Members

1. In view of the fact-finding nature of the site visit Members should be as impartial as possible before, during and after the site visit.

2. When moving round a site, Members and other participants should keep together as a one group;
3. Members should avoid discussing the application with applicants, objectors etc. before, during or after a site visit. If Members wish to ask questions of any party this should take place when the whole group is present.
4. Members should politely deflect any attempts at lobbying, by suggesting that ~~(ix)~~—comments should be put in writing to the Authority or that the points should be made during public speaking at the Planning Committee.