



FORMAL PLANNING COMMITTEE PROTOCOL FOR OFFICER-LED SITE VISITS

**JOINT DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (JDMC) CAMBRIDGE CITY
COUNCIL PLANNING COMMITTEE (City PC;
SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL PLANNING COMMITTEE
(SCDC PC)**

April 2025

Purpose of a Planning Committee Site Visit

Planning committee site visits are solely for the purpose of Members of that committee viewing the site, understanding its location and context immediate environs to be able to put the development proposal into context, and discussing the facts of the application.

As a private inspection to gain an understanding of the facts relating to an application, site visits are not part of the formal consideration of the application, and public rights of attendance and speaking do not apply.

Site visits will be led by the relevant Lead Delivery Manager (Lead DM) and/or the planning case officer with support from the Chair of Planning Committee. On occasion, technical officers of the Council or officers from other authorities may be invited by the planning case officer to attend a site visit to clarify factual or technical matters.

A site visit is not a meeting to discuss the merits of a development proposal, and no decisions will be made at the site visit by the Planning Committee. The Lead DM/planning case officer will make this clear at the beginning of the visit within their introduction.

Requests for Site Visits:

The decision on whether to organise a formal committee site visit rests with the relevant Lead DM. For the JDMC this is the Strategic Sites Delivery Manager and for the City PC and SCDC PC this is the Delivery Manager (or Area Team Leaders in their absence). The Lead DM will take into consideration the views of the relevant Planning Committee Chair with regard to:

1. The complexity or sensitivity of the development proposal.
2. The characteristics of the site and its surroundings.

A site visit can result from any one of the following:

1. A request by a Member of the JDMC, City PC or SCDC PC in writing (giving reasons why the site visit is considered necessary) during the time that an application is being processed.
2. The Director of Planning and Economic Development, or Lead DM considers that one is necessary in the interests of proper decision making.
3. The JDMC, City PC or SCDC PC calls for a site visit following a deferral of a decision purposely for a site visit.
4. A request for a site visit from a local ward Member
5. A request for a site visit from a Parish Council

The site visit will take place at a date and time fixed by the Lead DM and/or the planning case officer following discussion with both the Chair of the relevant Planning Committee (or if they are not available, the Vice Chair), and the Committee Services Manager.

Members will travel to the meeting point for the site visit independently, unless the Director of Planning agrees that alternative arrangements shall be provided by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSPS).

For complex or sensitive applications which are being referred to a Planning Committee, a site visit agenda as appropriate will be prepared by the planning case officer and circulated to Members of that committee in advance of the site visit. The site visit agenda will confirm the meeting point, set out the purpose and format of the visit, and highlight any important notes such as the need for appropriate attire.

Members are encouraged to attend organised site visits. In the event that this is not possible, and Members wish to independently visit, the site visit should be undertaken from public land only and contact with applicants and objectors should be avoided. By failing to do so a perception of bias could arise which in turn might lead to the Planning Committee's decision being susceptible to challenge.

Conduct of Site Visits:

- Members will view the site from the nearest public space and any other public spaces as considered appropriate by the planning case officer. Should access to the application site (or any other private land) be considered necessary to view the site, the planning case officer will seek the consent of the relevant landowner in advance.
- The site visit will usually only be attended by Members of the Planning Committee unless there are circumstances where it is necessary for the landowner or their representatives to be in attendance (such as to facilitate access for example).
- Local ward Members may also attend the site visit but must abide by the terms of the protocol and be briefed on the site visit protocol procedures and conduct in advance of that visit, by the lead Delivery Manager or planning case officer.
- Officers will open the site visit; give a brief presentation on the site, the setting of the proposed development and the specific reasons why the site inspection was requested.
- Members may ask their questions of officers including any requests for specific information that may be required to assist their consideration of the item at the Committee meeting. Exceptionally, questions may be asked directly to the Applicant's representative should they be present. Members need to ensure that they can hear the officers' presentation and the questions and answers.
- Before closing the site visit the Lead DM or planning case officer will seek confirmation that Members are satisfied that they have seen everything they need, after which will draw the site visit to a close.
- Members should avoid engaging in private conversations on the subject of the application with each other during the site visit as this can give the wrong impression to others present or anyone observing the site visit outside of it.
- Members should avoid engaging in conversations with the public should any be present at the time of the site visit.
- Members should avoid engaging in conversations with the applicant (or any representatives of the applicant) if they are present at the time of the site visit.

Questions regarding points of clarification in relation to the proposed development may be asked at the discretion of the Lead DM/planning case officer.

- For the purposes of factual record, no formal notes of the site visit will be made. The Lead DM or planning case officer will make a record of the date and time of the site visit, attendance and the locations visited.