

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

14 November 2012

Guidance Note 3 – Site Visits

Introduction

A site visit by members of the Development Management Sub-Committee can give a better understanding of the site and the proposals. However, in most cases a proposal can be considered using only the material submitted with the application and any other photographs of the site.

Decision to Hold a Site Visit

There may be several reasons why a site visit is needed before a decision can be taken on a planning application.

- Members of the Development Management Sub-Committee are often asked by ward councillors to visit the site and the Committee will carefully consider whether this will inform its decision on the planning application.
- During the consideration of a planning application at the Committee meeting, members may feel they have insufficient understanding of the site and the impact of the development and will continue the application for a site visit.
- Where the Head of Planning and Building Standards has decided an application will be the subject of a hearing, a site visit will be arranged for members prior to that hearing. This ensures that members are given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the context for the development proposals.
- Where an application is continued by the Committee for a hearing at the request of the local ward member, the Committee will consider whether a site visit prior to the hearing is also required.

Procedure

- A site visit is a formal part of the Development Management Sub-Committee's consideration of the proposals. The site inspection by members of the Development Management Sub-committee should generally be accompanied only by planning officers to assist identification of key features.
- The applicant is informed about the site visit in order to obtain permission for access but is not required to attend. In some cases, it is necessary for the applicant or agent to be present to allow access to the site or premises but they should not participate in any discussion.

- The local ward members and community council will be informed of the site visit and may be present as observers.
- It may also be necessary for a consultee to attend a site visit to assist with technical issues, as requested by planning officers.
- On arrival at the site, the accompanying planning officer will give a brief presentation of the proposals to the Development Management Sub-committee and clarify procedures. If necessary, an information sheet will be distributed to other parties present at the site to assist their understanding of the site visit process.
- In some cases, it may be necessary for members of the Development Management Sub-committee to ask factual questions to the applicant or agent or to a ward councillor or to community representatives, to clarify understanding. These parties may also seek to bring particular site features or factual issues to the attention of the Sub-committee members. All such requests should be addressed via the planning officer to ensure that there is no perception of members debating issues with any of the parties present.
- Members of the Development Management Sub-committee participating in a site visit have no delegated powers in relation to the application – the visit is for inspection to inform discussion and decision at a later meeting of the Sub-committee. For that reason, there will be no conclusions drawn at the end of the site visit for any parties present other than clarification about the date of the meeting at which the application will be considered.

Role of Planning Officers

Planning officers accompanying members of the Development Management Sub-committee on a site visit will

- outline the background and issues in relation to the proposal
- show members around the site, liaising where appropriate with parties present and highlighting any relevant features and issues
- arrange for any factual information requested by members to be obtained from other parties

Role of Members

- Members must respect the purpose of the site visit as a site inspection. There should be no debate of the planning issues and members should ensure that there is no perception by other parties of any lack of fairness or impartiality.
- Members should decline to accept any lobbying or descriptive materials from others during the site visit. Any such material should be gathered by planning officers who will consider its relevance to the application and representations.

Further Information

You can view planning applications at
[Planning and Building Standards Online Services](#)

You can also view planning applications at
Planning & Building Standards Reception at
Waverley Court, 4 East Market Street, EDINBURGH, EH8 8BG

Agendas and reports for the Development Management Sub-Committee are available online at the Council's webpage on [Committee papers](#).

For more information about the process of deciding planning or related applications you should obtain a copy of the [Planning Service Charter](#). This is available on the Council's website.

Appendix 1

Material Considerations: typical examples

Valid considerations are those which relate to the development and use of land

Policies	Local Development Plans, Strategic Plans emerging Development Plans Council's supplementary guidance Scottish/UK/European Government Policies
Site Issues	contamination, flooding
Appearance	height, scale, massing, density, materials, daylighting, privacy, overshadowing
Impact	environmental, historical
Nuisance	noise, smell, hazards, disruption
Compatible	with existing uses, eg shops/cafés
Local needs	schools, commerce, social/leisure affordable housing economic benefits, eg employment, skills training
Infrastructure	drainage and water supply capacity, education, access and transport, parking, safety
Precedent	where consent might create a precedent or compromise future decisions
History	previous decisions, appeals, court cases

Non-valid considerations are those which relate to private interests and other non-planning issues

Property	loss of a private view, loss of property value, legal restraints in title deeds, ownership, rights of access
Commercial	creating competition to existing businesses, the cost of the building project
Ideology	political objections to private hospitals or schools
Moral	a dislike for non-planning reasons, eg because it involves Sunday trading, gambling, alcohol

No need	a perception that the proposal is not required (unless backed by sound planning reasons)
Ownership	applicant doesn't own site, or has a dubious reputation or track record
Construction	noise, traffic, disruption etc during demolition or construction
Unrealistic	uncertainty whether the developer can't / won't proceed
Permitted	where permission is not required, eg the proposals are not development, or are permitted development under the GDO
Other regimes	items covered by health and safety, licensing, building regulations etc where there is no overlap in legislation

If members are unsure whether a particular reason or objection constitutes acceptable planning grounds for a hearing request, the case officer or team principal will be willing to advise.