

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE		
Date:	29 MARCH 2023		
TITLE:	POTENTIAL SITE VISITS FOR COMMITTEE ITEMS		
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	BOROUGH WIDE
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1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 To identify those sites where, due to the sensitive or important nature of the proposals, Councillors are advised that a Site Visit would be appropriate before the matter is presented at Committee and to confirm how the visit will be arranged. A list of potential sites is appended to this report with an officer note added to say if recommended for a site visit or not.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That you note this report and confirm if the site(s) indicated on the appended list are to be visited by Councillors.
- 2.2 Confirm if there are any other sites Councillors consider necessary to visit before reaching a decision on an application.
- 2.3 Confirm if the site(s) agreed to be visited will be accompanied by officers or unaccompanied.

3. THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Appended to this report (appendix 1) is a list of applications received that may be presented to Committee for a decision in due course. Officers will normally indicate if a site would benefit from being visited to inform your decision making or Councillors may request that a site is visited.
- 3.2 A site visit will help if the impact of the proposed development is difficult to visualise from the plans and supporting material or where concerns raised by objectors need to be seen to be better understood.
- 3.3 While officers try to make site visit recommendations before a report comes to Committee sometimes, during consideration of an application, Councillors may request a deferral to allow a visit to be carried out to assist in reaching the correct decision.
- 3.4 Accompanied site visits are appropriate when access to private land is necessary to view the site and to appreciate matters raised. These visits will be arranged and attended by officers on the designated date and time.

Applicants and objectors may observe the process and answer questions when asked but lobbying is discouraged. A site visit is an information gathering opportunity to inform decision making.

3.5 Unaccompanied site visits are appropriate when the site can be easily seen from public areas and allow Councillors to visit when convenient to them. In these instances, the case officer will provide a briefing note on the application and the main issues to assist when visiting the site.

3.6 It is also possible for officers to suggest, or Councillors to request, a visit to a completed development to assess its quality.

3.7 Appendix 2 sets out a list of application sites that have been agreed to be visited at previous committee meetings but are still to be arranged.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

4.1 The processing of planning applications contributes to creating a sustainable environment with active communities and helping the economy within the Borough as identified as the themes of the Council's Corporate Plan:

1. Healthy Environments
2. Thriving Communities
3. Inclusive Economy

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

5.1 Statutory neighbour consultation takes place on planning applications.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 Officers when assessing an application and when making a recommendation to the Committee, will have regard to its duties Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, to have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None arising from this report.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). The Planning Service uses policies to encourage developers to build and use properties responsibly by making efficient use of land and using sustainable materials and building methods.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The cost of site visits is met through the normal planning service budget and Councillor costs.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Reading Borough Council Planning Code of Conduct.

APPENDIX 1

Potential Site Visit List:

None.

APPENDIX 2

Previously Agreed Site Visits with date requested:

- 220189 - 205-213 Henley Road - arranged for 23.03.23
- 220409 - Caversham Park - date pending
- 221345 - Curzon Club, 362 Oxford Road - agreed by PAC 7.12.22 to be Unaccompanied
- 221364 - Central Club, 36-42 London Street