

Planning Applications Committee

01 November 2023



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	POTENTIAL SITE VISITS FOR COMMITTEE ITEMS
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Julie Williams, Development Manager (Planning & Building Control)
Lead Councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Corporate priority	Not applicable, but still requires a decision
Recommendations	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. note this report and confirm if the site(s) indicated on the appended list are to be visited by Councillors.2. confirm if there are other sites Councillors wish to visit before reaching a decision on an application.3. confirm if the site(s) agreed to be visited will be arranged and accompanied by officers or unaccompanied with a briefing note provided by the case officer.

1. Executive Summary

- 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 with a note added to say if recommended for a site visit or not.

2. The Proposal

- 2.1. A site visit helps if a proposed development and context is difficult to visualise from the plans and supporting material or to better understand concerns or questions raised by a proposal.
- 2.2. Appendix 1 of this report provides a list of applications received that may be presented to Committee for a decision in due course. Officers will try to indicate in advance if visiting a site to inform your decision making is recommended. Also, Councillors can request that a site is visited by Committee in advance of consideration of the proposal.
- 2.3. However, on occasion, it is only during consideration of a report on a planning application that it becomes apparent that Councillors would benefit from visiting a site to assist in reaching the correct decision. In these instances, Officers or Councillors may request a deferral to allow a visit to be carried out.
- 2.4. Accompanied site visits are appropriate when access to private land is necessary 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.
- 2.5. 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.

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

2.7. 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.

3. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1 The processing of planning applications contributes to creating a healthy environment with thriving communities and helping the economy within the Borough, identified as the themes of the Council's Corporate Plan.

4. Environmental and Climate Implications

4.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

4.2. 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.

5. Community Engagement

5.1. Statutory neighbour consultation takes place on planning applications.

6. Equality Implications

6.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, 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.

6.2. It is considered that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to the decision on whether sites need to be visited by Planning Application Committee. The decision will not have a differential impact on people with the protected characteristics of; age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (gender) or sexual orientation.

7. Legal Implications

7.1. None arising from this report.

8. Financial Implications

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

9. Timetable for Implementation

9.1. Site visits are normally scheduled for the Thursday prior to committee. Planning Administration team sends out notification emails when a site visit is arranged.

10. Background Papers

10.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Potential Site Visit List:

Ward: Abbey

Application reference: 231495

Application type: REG3

Site address: Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU

Proposal: Proposals to extend the Reading Borough Council Offices on Bridge Street to enable the accommodation of the relocated Reading Central Library function, currently on Kings Road, Reading, and provide an enhanced Customer Services reception. Site is currently use class E, proposal to co-locate with library - use class F1.

Reason for Committee item: Council Application

2. Previously Agreed Site Visits with date requested:

- 230613 - Amethyst Lane – accompanied agreed by PAC 21.06.23
- 230612 - Dwyer Road – accompanied agreed by PAC 21.06.23
- 230745 - "Great Brighams Mead", Vastern Road – accompanied agreed by PAC 06.09.23
- 231041 - Portman Road – unaccompanied agreed by PAC 06.09.23