

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

<b>TO:</b>	<b>PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>11 DECEMBER 2019</b>		
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>POTENTIAL SITE VISITS FOR COMMITTEE ITEMS</b>		
<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>PLANNING</b>	<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>BOROUGH WIDE</b>
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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 might be appropriate before the meeting of the next Committee (or at a future date) and to confirm how the visit will be arranged.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That you resolve to visit the sites which will be identified by officers in a paper in the update Agenda on the day of the forthcoming Planning Applications Committee and confirm if there are any other sites Councillors consider necessary to visit before reaching a decision on an application.
- 2.2 That you confirm how the site will be visited, unaccompanied or accompanied, and if accompanied agree the site visit date and time.

#### 3. THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The potential list of agenda items submitted since the last meeting of the Planning Applications Committee will be provided with the update Agenda on the day of forthcoming Planning Applications Committee. Where appropriate, I will identify those applications that I feel warrant a site visit by the Committee prior to formal consideration of the proposals.
- 3.2 Councillors may also request a site visit to other sites on that list if they consider it relevant to their ability to reach a decision on the application.
- 3.3 Officers may also recommend a site visit if they intend to report a normally delegated application to the Committee for a decision.

- 3.4 A site visit may also be proposed in connection with a planning enforcement issue which is before the Committee for consideration.
- 3.5 Site visits in the above circumstances should all take place in advance of a Committee decision and should only be used where the expected benefit is substantial.
- 3.6 A site visit is only likely to be necessary if the impact of the proposed development is difficult to visualise from the plans and any supporting material including photographs taken by officers (although, if this is the case, additional illustrative material should have been requested); or, there is a good reason why the comments of the applicant and objectors cannot be expressed adequately in writing; or, the proposal is particularly contentious.
- 3.7 Accompanied site visits consist of an arranged inspection by a viewing Committee, with officers in attendance and by arrangement with the applicant or their agent. Applicants and objectors however will have no right to speak but may observe the process and answer questions when asked. The visit is an information gathering opportunity and not a decision making forum.
- 3.8 Recently Councillors have expressed a preference to carry out unaccompanied site visits, where the site is easily viewable from public areas, to enable them to visit the site when convenient to them. In these instances the case officer will provide a briefing note on the application and the main issues to be considered by Councillors when visiting the site.
- 3.9 There may also be occasions where officers or Councillors request a post completion site visit in order to review the quality or impact of a particular development.

#### **4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 4.1 The purpose of the planning service is to support the delivery of economic and sustainable growth while providing appropriate regulation to secure an attractive and safe town. We do this by maintaining planning performance and developing policy and systems to secure sustainable development. This contributes to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan 2018-21:
- Securing the economic success of Reading;
  - Improving access to decent housing to meet local needs;
  - Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe;
  - Promoting great education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.

#### **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. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The cost of site visits is met through the normal planning service budget.

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Reading Borough Council Planning Code of Conduct.

Local Safety Practice 2013 Planning Applications Committee site visits.