

# **Report to Constitution Working Group**

**Date of meeting: 28 March 2019**

**Portfolio:** Planning Services (Councillor J. Philip)

**Subject:** Area Plans Sub-Committees - Site Visits

**Officer contact for further information:** S. Tautz (01992 564180)

**Democratic Services Officer:** V. Messenger (01992 564265)

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Working Group review the operation of trial arrangements for the agreement of formal site visits with regard to planning applications listed in agenda for meetings of the Area Plans Sub-Committees.**

1. The Council has longstanding arrangements whereby formal member site visits may be undertaken in respect of any site subject of a current planning application, where this offers a substantial benefit to the decision-making process. Site visits are undertaken at an agreed time and are subject to the presence of a representative of the Service Director (Planning Services). Site visits are managed by the Chairman (or Vice-Chairman) of the relevant Area Plans Sub-Committee, or the Planning Officer in attendance. No discussion with interested parties as to the merit of the development proposal is permitted at any time during a site visit.
2. At its meeting on 20 February 2018, the Working Group agreed that trial arrangements be introduced for the agreement of formal site visits in respect of any planning application listed in an agenda for meetings of the Area Plans Sub-Committees, prior to the consideration of the application.
3. This arrangement was introduced with effect from the meeting of Area Plans Sub-Committee South held on 30 May 2018 and has since been operated on a trial basis, subject to the review of the operation and management of the process by the Working Group. All agenda for meetings of the Area Plans Sub-Committees since May 2018 have contained a standard item relating to the identification and agreement of potential site visits.
4. This report seeks to review the operation of the trial arrangements for the agreement of formal site visits by the Working Group. The Working Group may wish to consider the adoption of the trial arrangements on a permanent basis

## **Site Visits - Area Plans Sub-Committees**

5. The operation of the trial arrangements for the identification and agreement of requirements for formal site visits to be held with regard to any planning application listed in agenda for meetings of the Area Plans Sub-Committees, prior to consideration of the application, has recently been considered at a joint meeting of the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the sub-committees and the District Development Management Committee.

6. The chairmen and vice-chairmen of the sub-committees consider that, in general, the operation of this arrangement has worked effectively since May 2018. Members consider that the trial arrangements have assisted in ensuring the timely management of meetings of the sub-committees and that, as a result, registered speakers and other persons present at meetings have not had to await the consideration of specific applications through often lengthy agenda, for the determination of development proposals to be deferred for the holding of a site visit. The Service Director (Planning Services) also considers that the trial arrangements have led to increased efficiency in the conduct of business by the Area Plans Sub-Committees.
7. However, the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the sub-committees have indicated that on occasion, lengthy debate has arisen around the appropriateness of site visits proposed under the trial arrangement, that has served to negate the operational effectiveness of the identification of site visit requirements prior to the consideration of the relevant planning application. Should the Working Group wish to recommend the adoption of this arrangement on a permanent basis, it is considered that proposals for site visits should be voted upon without debate as to the specific merits of such site visit.
8. Subject to the above, the adoption of the trial arrangements for the identification of site visit requirements on a permanent basis is supported by the respective Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Area Plans Sub-Committees and the Service Director (Planning Services).

#### **Site Visits - District Development Management Committee**

9. The trial arrangements for the identification of site visits agreed by the Working Group in February 2018 apply only to agenda for meetings of the Area Plans Sub-Committees and not to the District Development Management Committee.
10. However, in circumstances where an application that has been subject to a formal site visit by members of one of the Area Plans Sub-Committees is subsequently referred to the District Development Management Committee for determination (either by minority reference or other constitutional requirement), it is suggested that a further site visit should be arranged for members of the District Development Management Committee prior to its consideration of the application. Dependent on the period of time arising between the consideration of relevant applications by an Area Plans Sub-Committee and the District Development Management Committee, it is recognised that the holding of such further site visits might present a delay in the determination of applications.
11. The adoption of this approach as part of the review of the trial arrangements for the identification of site visit requirements is supported by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the District Development Management Committee and the Service Director (Planning Services).
12. It is not intended that the trial arrangements for the identification of site visits be extended to the District Development Management Committee. It should be noted however that the holding of site visits on any application before the Committee for determination, can still be agreed by resolution of a majority of members of the Committee present at a meeting.

#### **Other Site Visits**

13. The Constitution (Article 10 (District Development Management Committee and Area Plans Sub-Committees)) provides that, in addition to being agreed at a meeting of a Sub-Committee in respect of any planning application listed in an agenda for a meeting,

the holding of formal site visits may also be approved by the Chairman of the Sub-Committee on the recommendation of the Service Director (Planning Services).

14. In order to ensure consistency of approach, it is suggested that this arrangement should also apply to applications to be considered by the District Development Management Committee and that Article 10 of the Constitution should be revised appropriately.
15. The Service Director (Planning Services) has identified a small increase in the overall number of site visits requested by the Area Plans Sub-Committees since May 2018. The noticeable changes in this respect have been in relation to Area Plans Sub-Committee South, which previously very rarely requested member site visits.
16. In considering whether the trial arrangement should now be applied on a permanent basis, the Working Group should recognise that there are resource implications arising from the holding of site visits, particularly as such visits are most usually held at weekend periods to ensure maximum member attendance.
17. All formal site visits will continue to be undertaken in accordance with the guidance set out at Appendix 2 to Article 10 of the Constitution.

**Resource Implications:**

The revisions to the arrangements for site visits will enable the District Development Management Committee and Area Plans Sub-Committees to operate more effectively.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

None.

**Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:**

There are no implications arising from the recommendations of this report in respect of the Council's commitment to the Climate Local Agreement, the corporate Safer, Cleaner, Greener initiative, or any crime and disorder issues within the district.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

The review of the operation of the trial site visit arrangements was reviewed at a joint meeting of the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the District Development Management Committee and Area Plans Sub-Committees on 4 March 2019.

**Background Papers:**

None

**Impact Assessments:**

**Risk Management** There are no risk management implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

**Equality:** There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

**Key Decision Y/N** No