

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL BOARD SITE VISIT PROCEDURE

In some instances, before reaching a decision on an application, members of the Development Control Board may consider it useful to visit a site before making a decision on the application. Site visits are usually arranged prior to a Board meeting, so as not to delay consideration of any applications. However, a site visit may take place following deferral of an application by the Development Control Board.

1. Purposes

The purposes of a site visit are:

- (i) to enable Councillors to obtain a better understanding of the proposal and of the issues involved and to understand aspects of the proposal that may not be readily apparent at the Board meeting, e.g., relationship to adjoining properties, topography etc.
- (ii) to provide applicants and/or their agents with the opportunity to more fully explain their proposed development on site and to answer Members' questions; and
- (iii) to permit at the discretion of the Chairman any interested parties who may be in attendance to clarify matters raised by Board Members.

If Councillors express an opinion, they should make it clear that they will only be in a position to take a final decision after having heard all the relevant evidence and arguments at the Board meeting.

2. Procedure

The onus is on Members to identify those cases where they think a site visit would assist in the decision making process before the meeting.

Requesting a site visit

The draft agenda will be published on the Wednesday, 15 days before the Board meeting and will be sent to all Borough Council members. The draft agenda will identify the applications to be reported to the next meeting, along with the case officer and the likely recommendation. The draft agenda will contain hyperlinks to the relevant application record on the Council's website.

Any Member requesting a site visit will need to notify the Planning Services' administration team by midday on the Monday in the week before the Board meeting. It will be helpful for Members to copy in the Chairman of the

Development Control Board to this request. Notification should be made by phone to 01322 343071 or via e mail to planning.admin@dartford.gov.uk. The timetable may need to be altered occasionally to accommodate Bank Holidays.

Any third parties, including Parish and Town Councils, which consider that a site visit is warranted will need to contact their ward Member and ask them to make a request (based on material planning considerations) in accordance with the above procedure.

Confirmation of details

The Assistant Planning Services Manager will agree the order and time of the site visits with the Chairman once all requests are known. The administration team will contact applicants/agents to confirm the details of the visit. Any variations to the running order that may be necessary will be discussed with the Chairman, including cases where it may not be possible to contact the applicant/agent. Once the final details are confirmed, they will be circulated to Members by Planning Services' administration.

Third parties and those who made representations will not be formally invited to the site visits but will not be precluded from attending.

Applications considered by the Board

Occasionally, during consideration of an application at a Board meeting, Members may decide that they need to visit the site before they can make a decision. In these circumstances, consideration of the application may be deferred to enable a site visit to take place. Members will be notified of the arrangements for the site visit/s, along with the applicant/agent.

3. Conduct of site visits

Site visits will take place on the Thursday or Saturday before the Board meeting, depending on the time of year.

Members should make themselves available to attend the site visit; in the event of unavailability a substitute should attend.

The Chairman will decide where best to commence the site visit. This may be on or near the application site. Sometimes, neighbours may wish the members of the Board to view a proposal from their property as well. It is entirely at the discretion of the owner/applicant and other parties as to whether or not they will allow on to their land, persons attending the site visit. The Chairman will decide whether or not it is necessary or helpful for Members to view a proposal from different vantage points.

The visit normally commences with an introduction by the Board Chairman with other Members being asked to identify themselves and declare any interests they may have in the application (refer to the para. 4 below) If

relevant, Members of the local Parish or Town Council may be asked to identify themselves.

The planning officer in attendance then explains the proposal, summarises the nature of representations received and assesses the proposal on the basis of the issues involved. In conclusion he/she states the officer recommendation – e.g. that the application should be approved (subject to conditions) or refused (for particular reasons).

The Chairman then usually invites Members to ask questions of the planning officer (and of other Council or Kent County Council officers who may be present, depending on the nature of the proposal) and to the applicant/agent. Finally, any third parties present may at the discretion of the Chairman be invited to make comment. Comments/questions should only be made through the Chairman and only when invited to do so.

It should be appreciated that no formal decisions are made at Members' site visits. Following a site visit, the relevant application is usually placed on the agenda of the next available meeting of the Development Control Board when a decision can reasonably be expected to be reached. The Board meeting is open to the public and public speaking is permitted.

4. Interests

Any Councillor with a disclosable pecuniary interest or prejudicial interest in a planning application, must not attend a site visit relating to that application.

Development Control Board members who have fettered their discretion by publicly committing themselves to a particular point of view (e.g. supporting or opposing a planning application or declaring their voting intention or a firm view on the merits of an application before the Board meeting) can attend the site visit relating to that application. Members in this position must not make representations at the site visit and should be mindful that they must not attempt to lobby other Board members about the matter, before, during or after the site visit, attempt to use their status as a Member to influence consideration of a submission, or try to get Officers to change a decision or recommendation.

Adopted by the Development Control Board 20.12.12 [Min.No 96]