

## **PLANNING SERVICES – ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL SITE VISITS (MIN 169/02)**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report seeks views on revised arrangements for Member site visits in connection with planning applications, arising from proposals considered during the Best Value review of the Development Control and Building Control Services.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Whilst on occasions site visits have been organised on an *ad hoc* basis in advance of planning applications being examined at Committee, the accepted arrangement over many years has been for Members to request a site visit on the night of the Committee meeting, with the result that a four week delay is introduced before an application is determined.
- 2.2 The Best Value review examined the procedure for site visits and concluded that as an alternative the decision on whether there should be a site visit should be delegated to the Head of Planning Services.
- 2.3 However, the proposal for delegation came with an important proviso that Members should be able to request a site visit by contacting the Planning department within 14 days of receiving the Parish List. Requests for site visits would not apply to delegated applications where arrangements for Ward Members' visits, as required, would continue as before.
- 2.4 Members discussed the arrangements for site visits during the debate on the Best Value Review action plan at Full Council on 25<sup>th</sup> April and indicated that whilst there was considerable value in seeking to introduce a system where site visits were arranged in advance, there would still be some value in retaining the facility to call for a visit at the Planning Committee.

### **3 DISCUSSION**

- 3.1 In examining the arrangements for site visits, the Best Value review team was conscious of the importance of ensuring that all opportunities were available and taken, as required, to examine Planning proposals. However, the team was also mindful of the fact that agreement by the Planning Services Committee to a site visit imposed an immediate delay of a further four weeks into the decision making process.

- 3.2 Therefore as an alternative, the identification at an early stage of applications that merited a site visit would avoid such a delay and arrangements could be put in hand as part of the administrative processes for dealing with the application.
- 3.3 Members would continue to be able to request site visits, but such requests would originate early in the application process rather than right at the end. This would mean there would be no requirement for Members to request a site visit at the Planning Services Committee, thus avoiding additional delays in decision making.
- 3.4 Some local planning authorities organise site visits to all application sites placed on each Committee agenda. Whilst there is merit in this approach, it is considered that visits to all sites are not always necessary and given Members' decision on the size of the Committee such an arrangement would be logistically impractical.
- 3.5 In conclusion, it is considered that a decision on the need for a site visit should be reached at an early stage in the application process to enable visits to be organised in advance of the Planning Services Committee. At Full Council on 25<sup>th</sup> April, Members indicated that there might be value in retaining the right to call for a site visit at the Planning Committee. If Members are minded to retain the right to call for a visit at the committee, it is considered that clear reasons should be required to be provided, particularly where the site has already been subject to an arranged visit prior to the meeting.

**4 RECOMMENDED**

It is recommended that Members consider the arrangements for site visits in connection with planning applications (HPS).

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