

## **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL SITE VIEW WORKING PARTY PROCEDURE AND HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE**

### **ATTENDANCE AT SITE INSPECTIONS**

The Site Viewing Working Party (SVWP) normally meets at the Civic Offices on the Thursday afternoon in the week preceding a Development Management Committee, although occasionally it is necessary for the time or the day to change in which case advance notice will be given.

A timetable/agenda is sent to Councillors on the Tuesday preceding the meeting of the SVWP. The Development Management Service also sends letters to both applicants and agents advising them of the intention of the SVWP to visit and the procedure. Where the Head of Planning (HP) considers it necessary to do so arrangements will be made in advance with the owners of adjoining sites to visit them. Any Councillor wishing to visit from third party land will need to discuss the matter with the HP as soon as possible, but no later than 48 hours before the meeting, although to do so at this stage may mean that access cannot be arranged in time.

The SVWP travels by coach/minibus between sites, but any Councillor interested in a matter on the agenda can meet the SVWP at a site, in order to have a better understanding of a proposal in their own ward or one that is of Borough wide interest.

However, other Councillors attending the SVWP will not be allowed to address the working party, other than to point out matters of fact, detail, local knowledge and history. Any Councillor not appointed to the Development Management Committee but wishing to so address the SVWP before it makes a decision should where possible advise the Chairman of the Working Party of their wish to do so by 10.00am on the morning of the SVWP. The Chairman will, at the meeting, put the request to the SVWP for the SVWP's approval.

Councillors intending to meet the SVWP at an individual site are requested to make contact with the Committee Administrator prior to the meeting, in order that the SVWP can keep in contact with individual Councillors if running later (or earlier) than the timetable.

Relevant Officers of the Council will attend sites to explain the proposal to Councillors and to answer any factual questions that may arise. A Committee Administrator will also attend to take minutes and to help the administrative aspects of the visit.

The applicant/agent or owner of a site may also attend, but only to facilitate access to the land and buildings. It is not an opportunity for applicants, their representatives and other interested persons to seek to influence or discuss the merits of a proposal with the Councillors.

## PROCEDURE AT SITE VISITS

The precise conduct of a site inspection will depend upon the nature of the site and the proposal, but in general the following will apply:

- A Councillor duly appointed at the annual meeting of the Council will chair each meeting. In the absence of that Councillor, the Vice-Chairman of the Working Party will chair the meeting (if present) or, if not, by another Councillor present and elected by the Working Party to chair the particular meeting.
- Councillors should familiarise themselves with the papers prior to the meeting.
- Upon arrival at each site the Head of Planning (or such Officer as decided by HP) will briefly describe the proposal and the main points raised by objectors before leaving the minibus. Whilst on site the Officers will draw to the Councillors' attention salient features of the application, site and locality.
- Wherever possible, Councillors and Officers should remain together throughout the inspection and should avoid becoming separated into small groups.
- Applicants, their agents and other interested parties will not normally be allowed to speak to Councillors during the visit of the SVWP. *Councillors should maintain a suitable distance between themselves and applicants, their agents and other interested parties and avoid discussing the merits of a proposal during the course of the visit. To do otherwise may lead to allegations of impropriety or undue influence at a later date. In circumstances where it is essential that an applicant or third party guides a SVWP around a site, or where complex technical information needs explanation by the applicant or a third party (including consultees), the HP will, in liaison with the Chairman of the SVWP consider the need for, and implications of doing so in advance of the meeting and will advise Councillors of the special arrangements for that particular site visit. The Committee Administrator will record in the minutes the reason for any variation in normal practice.*
- Questions and discussion should be of a factual nature and Councillors should avoid debating the application, as this is the proper role of the Development Management Committee. Questions which cannot be answered on site will be noted and the information supplied (where possible) in time for the Development Management Committee meeting.
- The Chairman will seek to secure a majority view at the conclusion of each individual site visit and, if it is apparent that a majority view cannot be obtained he will recommend that the SVWP do not record a view.
- The Committee Administrator will record in the minutes the reasons for the visit, the location(s) from which the Working Party viewed the proposals and any recommendation made by the Working Party to the Development Management Committee.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

Members of the SVWP, all Officers and other Councillors attending the meeting have a legal duty to dress appropriately for the occasion. The minimum standards are:

The reflective jackets/waistcoats as provided;

Appropriate footwear i.e. stout shoes and NOT open toe shoes, sandals or high heels.

*Where site rules or conditions dictate that safety footwear and hard hats are essential these will be provided.*

*The Chairman of the SVWP (upon advice of the HP or her representative) has the authority, in the interests of health and safety, to refuse access to a site by a Councillor or Officer not considered appropriately dressed. Additionally Councillors should observe specific advice on safety given by Officers present.* Councillors need to be aware that visits to sites/neighbouring land can only be undertaken with the agreement of the landowner(s) concerned. If such agreement is not forthcoming the Development Management Committee will need to rely on the report of the Officers authorised to gain entry under s324 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and s88 of the Listed Buildings Act as these Acts do not automatically give the SVWP the right to enter private property.

Councillors and Officers should also remember that when undertaking a site inspection on private property that they should be aware of this fact and care should be taken not to interfere with or damage any property. As Site Viewing is a meeting of the Council, Councillors and Officers are reminded that they should conduct themselves accordingly while on site.

The SVWP Committee Administrator will always carry a mobile phone for contact with the Civic Offices and for emergency purposes.