

Attending a Planning Committee Site Visit

Advice for members of the public who would like to attend a planning committee site visit.

This leaflet includes the following information.

- The types of planning application that the County Council deals with
- The purpose of a members Site Visit (MSV)
- When the MSV's are held
- Who can attend MSV
- How the MSV is run
- What happens after MSV.

What do we deal with?

We deal with planning applications relating to minerals and waste operations, and also to our own developments such as schools, fire stations and libraries. Most planning applications are decided by the Commissioning Director: Communities and Infrastructure (under powers delegated by the County Council's Planning Committee) but some planning applications are decided by the Planning Committee itself. For these applications a site visit may be arranged so that Members of the Committee can see the site of the proposed development for themselves.

What is the purpose of the Members' Site Visit?

Members' Site Visits (MSV's) are held so that Members can see the planning application site and report back to the Planning Committee on relevant site features. The merits of the application are not discussed nor is a decision reached at this time. The proper forum to discuss the application is at the Planning Committee meeting, when all information is in the public arena and Councillors debate and decide on the full proposal.

When is MSV held?

MSV is normally held a week before the Planning Committee meeting but, depending on the number of items to be discussed, may be held on the same day.

Who can attend MSV?

The following people can attend an MSV:

- Members of the Planning Committee,
- County Council planning officers and
- The applicant and/or their agent.

We also invite the local County Councillor and representatives of the relevant District and Parish Council. We will contact to everyone who has written to us about the

application telling them about the date of the MSV and other relevant information. Everyone who has written to us about the application is welcome to attend the MSV.

How is the MSV run?

Because of the regulations that govern public meetings, the MSV is a 'private' meeting as opposed to a properly convened 'public' meeting. The rules of the MSV are modelled on those of the Planning Inspectorate to ensure fairness, and on the concerns of the Government's Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life to ensure transparency and correct action. The Chair is under no obligation to hold the MSV and the right of anyone to address the MSV is entirely at the discretion of the Chair. If a disorganised or belligerent group of third parties are present the Chair may withdraw the Members at any time.

What happens at MSV?

Members of the Planning Committee and planning officers visit the site by coach. At the site the lead Officer will explain the process and sequence of events, after which the Chair of the Planning Committee will indicate whether she/he will allow any third parties to speak. The case officer will then describe the physical characteristics of the site, the surrounding area and the proposed development, after which the Committee Members can question the case officer about the proposal. The order of speaking is then as follows:

- the Parish representative,
- the District representative,
- any third party present (at the Chairman's discretion),
- the local County Councillor.

If a number of people attend who share the same concerns or who represent the same organisation, it may be best to appoint one spokesperson to speak on behalf of everyone. You may give a written copy of your statement to the lead officer who will copy it to all Members of the Planning Committee.

What can you say at MSV?

If the Chair asks you to address Members you should refer only to issues relevant to the site but not to matters of policy. We do not allow debate or argument on the merits of the proposal at MSV and anyone who discusses anything other than site-specific matters will be asked to stop. You must not attempt to lobby individual Members, as this would prejudice their ability to speak at Planning Committee.

What happens after MSV?

The Lead Officer will produce a report of the MSV for circulation to all Members before Planning Committee. We will put this report into the Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting and on our website for anyone to see. You can also contact County Council Democratic Services for more information **01452 425096**.

Legal Warning

Please remember that the authority will not condone any libel or slander made by your representation. Making such a statement in any meeting of the County Council **DOES NOT** afford you any protection from prosecution. Please also be aware that the MSV is insured to enter private sites but that this insurance will not cover you. You should ensure that you are covered for any injury on a site and have agreed beforehand with the owner of the site that you may enter. Accompanying the MSV **DOES NOT** mean that you are insured for injury or from legal proceedings if you trespass.

If you have any queries or want any further information, you can write, fax or e-mail your comments to us at the following address:

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