

Planning Site Visits – Procedural Guide

This note has been prepared to advise anyone who is invited to attend a planning site visit.

Site visits are carried out so that Exmoor National Park Authority Members can review sites and gather factual information about a planning proposal. This will help them make an informed decision at a subsequent Authority Committee meeting, when the Planning Officer's presentation will set out the factual information gained so that all Authority Members have the same information, whether or not they attended the site visit.

It is important to note that a site visit is a [fact-finding exercise](#) and is not an opportunity for Authority Members or other attendees to debate the merits of the application. During a site visit Members of the Authority Committee will seek clarification of matters of fact and will not express any opinion.

Members of the public have the opportunity to express their views about an application through written representations to Planning Officers and/or by participating in public speaking at the Authority meeting when the application is considered (see '[Having Your Say – Public Speaking at Authority meetings](#)' – attached to this note).

Procedure at planning site visits

1. Arrangements

- 1.1 Site visits are held only when necessary, for example in order to help Members understand specific and important issues affecting the site, or if the issues are complex or difficult to envisage, or on the recommendation of Planning Officers.
- 1.2 Site visits can be arranged either when the Authority Committee defer an application to visit the site or when the Deputy Chairperson (Planning), in conjunction with the Chief Executive, judge that a site visit in advance of the Authority Committee meeting will bring substantial benefits and improve the efficiency of the meeting. The reasons for holding a site visit will be recorded in the minutes.
- 1.2 A minimum of five Members should be appointed to attend the site visit.
- 1.3 Dates are set aside for possible site visits (the Friday preceding the Committee meeting if the site visit is to be in advance of the meeting, or the Friday preceding the next Committee meeting if the application has been deferred for a site visit).

2. Attendance - planning site visits will be attended by:

- 2.1 A group of Exmoor National Park Authority members as appointed by the Authority Committee.
- 2.2 The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development and/or a Planning Officer as their representative, and any other Authority Officers as necessary to advise on the issues under consideration, for example Landscape Officer or Conservation Officer.
- 2.3 Representatives from key statutory consultees, for example the Highway Authority or the Environment Agency, as necessary to advise on the issues under consideration.
- 2.4 The following will also be invited to attend:
 - The ward member from the appropriate County or District Council (the ward member may also be a member of Exmoor National Park Authority).
 - Representatives from the appropriate Town/Parish Council or Parish Meeting.
 - The applicant and/or their agent.
 - Anyone who has lodged written representation with Planning Officers about the application. This representation may support or object to the application, or make neutral observations.

3. Procedure on Site - the following procedure will be followed:

- 3.1 The Chairperson will open the meeting and will invite everyone to identify themselves.
- 3.2 The Chairperson will then:
 - explain the purpose of the site visit in terms of the specific issues to be considered;
 - confirm that the purpose of the site visit is solely as a fact-finding exercise;
 - confirm that no decision will be taken and the application will be determined at a subsequent Authority meeting;
 - confirm that the site visit is not a forum for debating the merits of the application.
- 3.3 The Head of Planning and Sustainable Development or their representative will outline the nature of the application, paying particular attention to the specific issues that warranted the need for the site visit.
- 3.4 Other Officers of Exmoor National Park Authority will then be invited to comment on the issues under consideration.
- 3.5 Representatives from statutory consultee agencies (eg Highway Authority / Environment Agency) will then be invited to comment on the issues under consideration.
- 3.6 All questions from Members will be made via the Chairperson and will be put to the Planning Officer in the first instance.
- 3.7 At the Chairperson's discretion, the applicant or agent, other invitees or third parties may be asked to provide **factual information** concerning the application but will not be invited to make representations in support of, or objection to, the application. **The Authority recognises that opinions and views about applications are important; and there are opportunities separately for members of the public to support or object to an application by contacting Planning Officers during the application process and/or by participating in public speaking at the Authority meeting when the application is considered.**
- 3.8 The Chairperson will ask if there are any further points of clarification and if so, these will be dealt with as per the above procedure.
- 3.9 The meeting will then be closed and the Chairperson will provide an indication of when the application is likely to be determined by the Authority Committee.
- 3.10 A summary note will be taken of the issues considered and the factual information provided and this will be included in any future report to the Authority Committee.

4. Conduct at Site Visits

- 4.1 Everyone attending the site visit must move around the site as one group.
- 4.2 Authority Members will not at any time during the meeting enter into any discussion with the applicant or third parties, or with other Members, separate from the main site visit meeting. Everything said at the site visit must be able to be heard by all parties in attendance.
- 4.3 The visit may involve viewing a proposed development site from a number of locations or vantage points. Please be aware that when moving between locations, Authority Members will not engage in any private conversations with individuals or groups. Again, this is to ensure that everything said at the site visit meeting is heard by everyone.
- 4.4 Authority Members will not express opinions or views on the proposal at any time during the site visit meeting.
- 4.5 Authority Members will not enter into any discussion about the planning proposal with the applicant or third parties after the site visit meeting has been formally closed and will not accept invitations from applicants or agents to view sites privately.