

North East Derbyshire District Council

Standards Committee

29th April 2026

Planning Committee In-person site visit protocol.

Report of the Assistant Director of Planning

Classification: This report is public

Report By: **Assistant Director of Planning**

Contact Officer: **David Thompson**

PURPOSE / SUMMARY

This report sets out the purpose of the current draft protocol for the conduct of in-person site visits by members of the Planning Committee and seeks to establish the protocol as part of the Council's constitution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Standards Committee approve the protocol for inclusion in the next update of the Council's Constitution. [Click here to enter text.](#)

IMPLICATIONS

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details: There are no financial consequences arising directly from this report.

On Behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details: If approved, the protocol should be referenced in Section 16 (Members Planning Rules) and appended to an updated version of the Council's Constitution

On Behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Staffing: Yes No

Details: The conduct of in-person site visits requires officer resource, to ensure that the in-person site visits appropriately inform Members on the key issues to be

assessed in determining the application and how these manifest themselves on the site and impacts on the surrounding area.

On behalf of the Head of Paid Service

DECISION INFORMATION

Decision Information	
<p>Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds:</p> <p>NEDDC: Revenue - £125,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £310,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i></p>	No
<p>Is the decision subject to Call-In? (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</p>	No
District Wards Significantly Affected	None
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) details:	
<p>Stage 1 screening undertaken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed EIA stage 1 to be appended if not required to do a stage 2 	EIA not required
<p>Stage 2 full assessment undertaken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed EIA stage 2 needs to be appended to the report 	No, not applicable

<p>Consultation:</p> <p>Leader / Deputy Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cabinet <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>SMT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Details: Consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Place, the Chair and Vice chair and all Members (including substitutes) of Planning Committee.</p>
<p>Links to Council Plan priorities;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A great place that cares for the environment • A great place to live well • A great place to work • A great place to access good public services 	

REPORT DETAILS

1 **Background** *(reasons for bringing the report)*

- 1.1 A draft protocol was adopted from September 2025 for the re-introduction of in-person site visits for major applications (generally 10 or more dwellings, 1000 square metres of floorspace or a site area of over a hectare). This followed consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee, followed by all other Councillors on the Committee (including substitute members). The draft protocol is attached as appendix 1 to this report.
- 1.2 In-person site visits for Committee items (often by the Chair, Vice Chair and another nominated Member only) were common prior to the Covid pandemic, although not all application sites were visited. With the restrictions imposed during the pandemic, 'virtual' visits via Microsoft Teams were introduced. These sessions involved an officer presentation, including photographs of the application sites, key views etc, for all application types.

2. **Details of the protocol and proposed actions**

- 2.1 Officers first consulted members of the Planning Committee on the idea of returning to in-person visits for major applications in May 2025, but organising these for all Councillors on the Committee. This was in part due to feedback from interested parties about the value to the decision maker of seeing a site in person before determining a planning application on the land and also officer view that such visits would aid the debate of the planning merits of the largest schemes.
- 2.2 Limiting the protocol to major scale planning applications was considered proportionate by officers due to a combination of the relatively low attendance at the 'virtual' visits and the officer resource involved in organising in-person visits for all applications referred to Planning Committee. The consultation with

Members in May 2025 did make clear that officers were open to widening the scope to non-major applications, but no feedback was received suggesting demand for this.

- 2.3 The 'virtual' visits for non-major applications being presented to Planning Committee remain in place.
- 2.4 Officers have added a review mechanism at the end of the draft protocol to incorporate the comments made at a recent Council meeting, allowing for consideration to be given to altering the scope of in-person site visits on an annual basis.
- 2.5 So far, there have been 2 in-person site visits held, which received a generally positive reception from Members.
- 2.6 The proposal is therefore for the protocol to be adopted and referred to in Section 16 (Members Planning Rules) and appended to an updated version of the Council's Constitution.

3. Reasons for Recommendation.

- 3.1 To ensure that there is a transparent and consistent approach to the types of application that Members will be invited to visit in-person and those visits that will remain 'virtual' prior to the applications being debated at Planning Committee.

4. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 4.1 The option to retain 'virtual' visits for all application types was rejected due to the benefit of in-person visit in helping Members understand the impacts of the larger planning applications that are being determined at Planning Committee.
- 4.2 The option of in-person visits for all applications was rejected due to the relatively inefficient use of resource that this would require, given the relatively low consistent attendance at the virtual visits and the 2 in-person visits that have been undertaken to date.
- 4.3 The option of not adopting a protocol for in-person visits was rejected due to the importance of having a written process that explains the purpose of the in-person site visits and how these will be conducted, for the benefit of officers, Councillors and the public

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Appendix No	Title
1	Draft site visit protocol

