

LONDON THAMES GATEWAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING: 21 June 2007

SITE VISIT PROTOCOL

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to the attached protocol for Planning Committee site visits. The protocol clarifies for Committee Members, Corporation officers, applicants and objectors the purpose of the visit and appropriate conduct during the visit.
- 1.2 A decision is sought on whether invitations to site visits should be extended to all objectors who have sent in objections or comments, or extended to only those who have spoken against the application at Planning Committee.

2 Background

- 2.1 This protocol augments the section on site visits in the Planning Code of Practice. That section reads:

Extract from Planning Code of Practice

6 Planning Committee site visits

The Corporation considers that where a site visit is advantageous in understanding a planning application the following requirements should be met:

6.1 Formal Planning Committee site visits should be triggered by advice from the planning officer or by a request from Planning Committee Members. The reason for the site visit should be recorded and placed on the application file. All Planning Committee Members should be given the opportunity to attend. A planning officer should also attend.

6.2 Planning Committee Members should avoid unofficial visits to sites in the presence of an applicant where a planning application has been submitted or is likely to be submitted. Should a Planning Committee Member have visited a site with an applicant or prospective applicant, he/she should notify the planning officer and supply the relevant details to be included in a note to be placed in the application file.

6.3 The attendance of an applicant or their agents at a formal site visit should be to answer questions about the application but not to make a presentation about the application.

6.4 A full record of the site visit, including details of questions raised and information supplied by the applicant in response, should be made by the planning officer, placed in the application file and noted in the planning officer's report to the Planning Committee.

3 Discussion

- 3.1 The protocol clarifies that the purpose of the visit is for Members to be able to familiarise themselves with the site itself and its surroundings, in order to understand the issues more clearly in considering the application at Committee.
- 3.2 No decision will be made during the site visit. It is not an opportunity for applicants or objectors to lobby Committee Members. Members may ask questions or seek clarification during the visit, particularly about the layout of the site, or the development and its surroundings, but not in relation to the merits of the application.
- 3.3 One issue for the Committee to consider is whether **all** objectors who have sent in objections or comments should be invited to attend a site visit, or whether the invitation is only extended to those people who have spoken against the application at Planning Committee.
- 3.4 Inviting all objectors means that those who were, for good reason, unable to speak at the Committee meeting but have strong views, are not excluded from the proceedings. As this is not an opportunity for objectors to express their point of view to Committee Members, there is a question of what value it would add to extend the invite to a larger group of people. It would mean however that they would be available to answer any questions the Members may have.

4 Recommendation

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Committee:
 - 4.1.1 **decide** whether site visit invitations should be extended to all people who have sent in objections or comments on the application under consideration, **or** whether the invitation is only extended to those people who spoke at the Planning Committee meeting [paragraph 4 of the protocol refers];
 - 4.1.2 **approve** the attached site visit protocol, subject to amendment to reflect the decision regarding 4.1.1 above.

PLANNING COMMITTEE SITE VISIT PROTOCOL LONDON THAMES GATEWAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Introduction

- 1 The following protocol is to be followed when Members of the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation Planning Committee undertake a site visit as part of determining a planning application.

Purpose of visit

- 2 The purpose of a Members' site visit is for Members to be able to familiarise themselves with the site itself and its surroundings, in order to understand the issues more clearly in considering the application at committee. No decision may be made on site.
- 3 Members should not accept representations or be subject to lobbying - either as a Committee or as individual Members - during a site visit. Members will not take any decision during the site visit, but may ask questions or seek clarification, particularly about the layout of the site, or the development and its surroundings, but not in relation to the merits of the application. The officers accompanying the group will record the date of the visit, Members present and any other relevant information.

Attendees at the Site Visit

- 4 In addition to Members of the Planning Committee and relevant officers, the applicant and/or his agent will be advised in writing of the details of the site visit and invited to attend. People who sent in objections or comments [**or** people who spoke against the proposal at the Planning Committee meeting] will also be advised of the site visit and invited to attend. As part of the invitation the purpose of, and the conduct during, the site visit will be explained – see paragraph 7 below.

Conduct at the site

- 5 Members should all arrive at the site either together in the arranged transport or in any event at the same time to receive a briefing from the accompanying officer. Any Member arriving late should arrange to have a pre-briefing.
- 6 The accompanying officer or the lead Member (as agreed) should introduce Members to whoever is ensuring access to the site and to the applicants, if they are present, and to any third parties (objectors/ supporters) if present.
- 7 The accompanying officer or the lead Member should make clear the following matters to those at the site:
 - a. No lobbying or representations are allowed;

- b. No decision will be made at the site;
 - c. Members are there to view the site and its surroundings so that they better understand the issues.
- 8 Members should avoid being separated; it is essential that they should not allow themselves to be lobbied or enter into a debate about the application (or possible ways to change it).
- 9 Members should ensure that they have seen all aspects of the site suggested by the accompanying officer or the lead Member during the briefing.

After the visit and at Committee

- 10 A lead Member should be selected from those Members attending the site visit. That lead Member should give a short report about Members' observations/conclusions about the site when the relevant application is being considered and following the officer's presentation of the report.