



REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL EMERGENCY CABINET – 12 AUGUST 2020

**SUBJECT: PLANNING & REGULATORY SERVICES – TEMPORARY
ARRANGEMENTS DUE TO COVID-19**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT &
FINANCE)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To ask the Emergency Cabinet to consider and agree temporarily suspending the offer of site visits to members of the Planning & Regulatory Services Committee in relation to the determination of planning applications.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Emergency Cabinet following a decision of Moray Council on 25 March 2020 to temporarily suspend all delegations to committees as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (para 2 of the minute refers).

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Emergency Cabinet consider and agree:

- i) **that site visits no longer be offered to members of the Planning & Regulatory Services (P & RS) Committee and for these arrangements to be temporarily suspended; and**
- ii) **that committee information packs will be enhanced with additional photographs of the site and the immediate surroundings to aid decision-making.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 23 February 2016, the P & RS Committee agreed that site visits for planning applications should continue to be offered to members of this Committee, in accordance with the agreed Site Visit Procedure and Protocol, where the Appointed Officer, in consultation with the Chair, deems a site visit is required (para 12 of the minute refers).
- 3.2 Prior to the temporary delegation arrangements that were put in place as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic site visits were offered to members to attend site visits with Principal Planning Officers prior to the P & RS Committee being held. The time taken to visit sites which are spread across the Moray area

often results in a full day of travelling. The agents are advised in advance of the date and time of the site visit and where necessary, access arrangements are made. As many of the sites have access constraints it is necessary for a min bus to be used for these visits rather than a large coach.

4. CURRENT SITUATION

- 4.1 Given the current restrictions and need to maintain social distancing it is considered appropriate that the arrangement for site visits currently offered to members be temporarily suspended. To assist with the determination process it is proposed that the committee information packs that accompany the planning application recommendation and report are enhanced to include additional photographs of the site and their immediate surroundings.
- 4.2 It is regrettable that site visits are proposed to be temporarily suspended as they are considered to be an important part of the decision-making process, and their reinstatement will occur at the first available opportunity should the need to maintain social distancing be relaxed or removed.

5. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

It is important that the Council continue to carry on determining planning application irrespective of the offer of site visits to members.

(b) Policy and Legal

The agreed Site Visit and Procedure Protocol, attached as background paper.

(c) Financial implications

There would be some financial savings in relation to the mini bus cost along with staff and members time as site visits often requires a full day of attendance.

(d) Risk Implications

Temporarily suspending site visits, could compromise transparency in decision making. However, the proposals are considered to be reasonable along with enhanced committee information packs being available in light of the current circumstances.

(e) Staffing Implications

None

(f) Property

None

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

No direct implications have been identified.

(h) Consultations

Head of Development Services, Legal Services Manager, Neal MacPherson, Principal Planning Officer, Richard Smith, Principal Planning Officer and the Equalities Officer have all been consulted and any comments incorporated into the report.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 It is recognised that temporarily suspending the offer of site visits to members of the P & RS Committee is regrettable but in the current circumstances is deemed to be necessary taking into account the practical requirements of social distancing. Enhanced committee information packs will be provided with additional photographs of the sites and their immediate surroundings.**

Author of Report: Beverly Smith, Development Management & Building Standards Manager

Background Papers: Site visit and Procedure Protocol
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