

# Public to have more say in planning decision making

17th May 2024



Residents will once again have the right to speak when councillors visit the sites of potentially controversial planning applications in South Gloucestershire. This follows a decision at Full Council on Wednesday 15 May.

While most planning decisions are made by planning officers, some are made by one of the council's planning committees. When this happens, members can choose to visit a site to see first-hand the context of a potential development. While the public can attend, a change made in 2018 meant they could not speak directly with councillors to point out issues they felt should be considered. The council has now reversed that change, so the public can once again have their say, in person and on the ground, whether for or against an application.

Members of the public, applicants for planning permission and other stakeholders will still be able to make representations to members of the planning committees when they meet formally to make their decisions.

South Gloucestershire Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning, councillor Chris Willmore, said: "We want to improve and increase transparency and accountability in

planning. This change gives people living near a site more opportunity to have their voice heard.

“Site visits are really important for councillors who need to enforce the planning laws and policies. They let us see a location, what surrounds it and how development might have an impact – good or bad – for themselves.

“We think people living nearby know the issues that are worrying them and this new system give them a chance to show councillors, face to face, before it goes to committee. Crucially, it will bring the decision making process to local people, in their community, giving them a chance to speak up and be heard.”

Wednesday’s decision also took away the power of the Chair to veto planning applications being considered by the planning committee. Now it will be a majority decision among the three planning spokespeople for the three political groups on the council, meaning that no single political group can override the others.

Councillor Willmore added: “We are a democratic organisation, with representation among councillors split across the political spectrum. Our partnership is built on hearing from different voices and finding a way forward, so it is only right that no one group is able to override others’ views. Wherever possible we want to find consensus, and this change will help us achieve that.

“Also, again, it is a clear demonstration that we want decision-making to be transparent and open to engagement with everyone.”