



From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire Council Development Management

Virtual Site Visit Guidance for Agents and Applicants

Version 1.2 – Sept 2020

Version	Date	Amended by	<u>Changes</u>
V1.1	June 2020	JW	Published update
V1.2	Sept 2020	JW	Amended figures

Virtual Planning Site Visit Guide for Agents and Applicants

Introduction

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts, the Planning Service are seeking to implement new ways of working including reducing the amount of physical site visits undertaken for planning applications and allowing progression of applications where a site visit could not currently be safely conducted. This has multiple benefits including reducing risk during the pandemic but also in general reducing the need to travel. This has long term benefits environmentally and financially. In this regard we would encourage Virtual Site Visits to be undertaken by applicants where they are on site to avoid the need for travel by agents.

Whilst undertaking of physical site visits will still be required for many applications, we may contact you to seek your cooperation in conducting a virtual site visit as an alternative. This involves the case officer contacting you via video call to be shown around the site. In addition, and in most cases, we will request supporting information such as photographs of the site to enable us to review the proposal further. In that regard and where possible we would encourage the submission of photographic surveys when submitting planning applications to Aberdeenshire Council.

Virtual site visits can be conducted using the Microsoft Teams app on a mobile device. As noted it will generally be most appropriate for the virtual site visit to be undertaken by the person residing at the site or near to the site to avoid the need for travel/unnecessary contact. Please note, a virtual site visit may not substitute the requirement for a physical site visit in all circumstances and a follow up site visit may still be required.

By agreeing to carrying out a virtual site visit you agree to the processing of this information in accordance with the Privacy Notice which will have been issued to you with the meeting invitation and is available on our website. Please note, a recording of the site visit will take place, and this will be held on record as sensitive information (not available for viewing by members public) throughout the determination period of the application and any subsequent period of appeal unless otherwise agreed in writing with the applicant. Photographs will be held on file separately and as sensitive information.

It would be beneficial if the meeting could be conducted by you on a smartphone or tablet to allow this to be physically mobile. This would need to be equipped with an internet connection, likely data usage rather than Wi-Fi, as Wi-Fi connections reduce out with homes/buildings.

Preparation- before conducting virtual site visit

Step 1: The case officer will phone you to discuss the process and make arrangements for a mutually convenient time to conduct the Virtual Site Visit. At this stage they may request any additional site photographs or other information in advance of the meeting and a contact email address for the purposes of arranging the meeting. The Case Officer may send an annotated plan which will help direct the virtual site visit, and they may request information requested by consultees.

Step 2: The case officer will then send an email containing a link to the meeting to be held via Microsoft Teams.

Step 3: In advance please download the Microsoft Teams App onto your device → sign up for free to a family/friends account by entering your email address. (Please note, this is the email address the meeting invite will be sent to, so be sure to use the same one you provided to the case officer above) → Please note you may be prompted to download or sign in to Skype, you can select and follow this link if you wish however **Skype is not required for the meeting**. You should now have a functioning teams app. Should you have any problems downloading the app please contact the case officer in advance who will hopefully be able to assist.

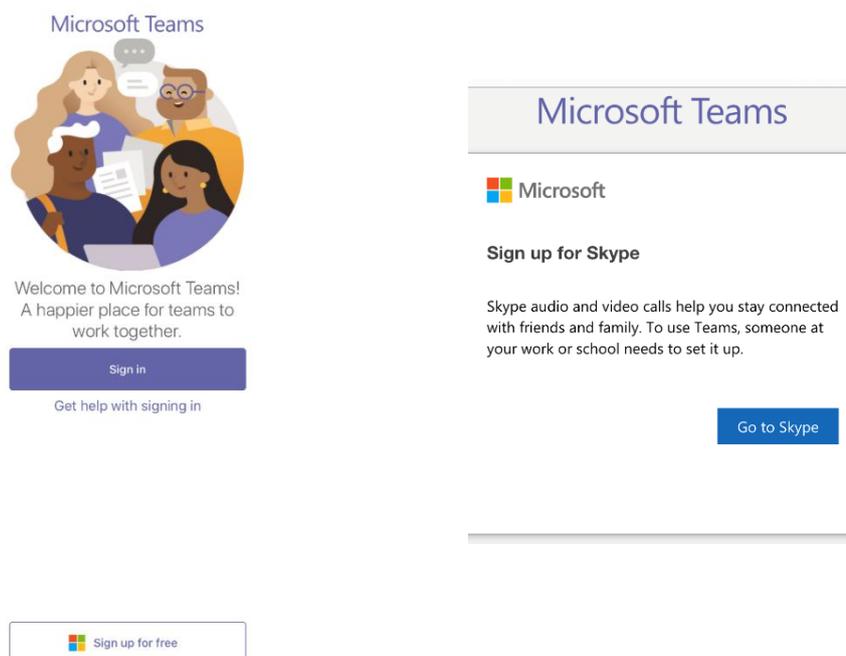


Figure 1: Microsoft Teams App

Joining the meeting

Step 1: You will receive an email from the case officer containing a link to the virtual meeting (Figure 2). If an annotated plan has been sent by the Case Officer make sure you are familiar with it before the meeting. At the time of the meeting click on this link. It will redirect you to the Microsoft Teams app and you should click 'join meeting'. You may be prompted to 'Join as a guest' if you have not set up a teams account as per step 3 above (Figure 3). Figure 2: Example of meeting invitation

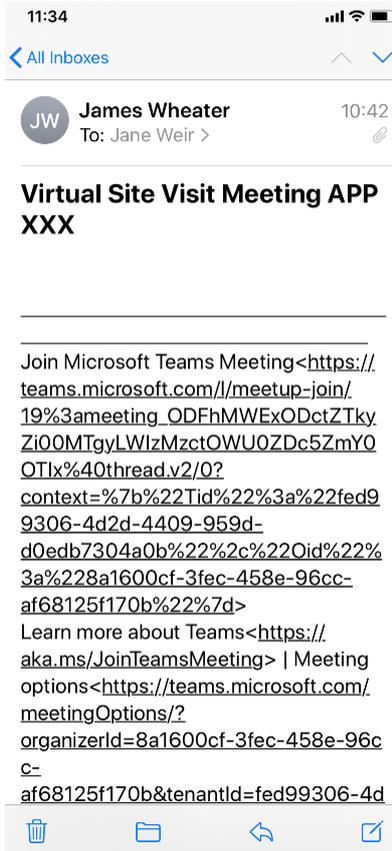


Figure 2: Example of meeting invitation

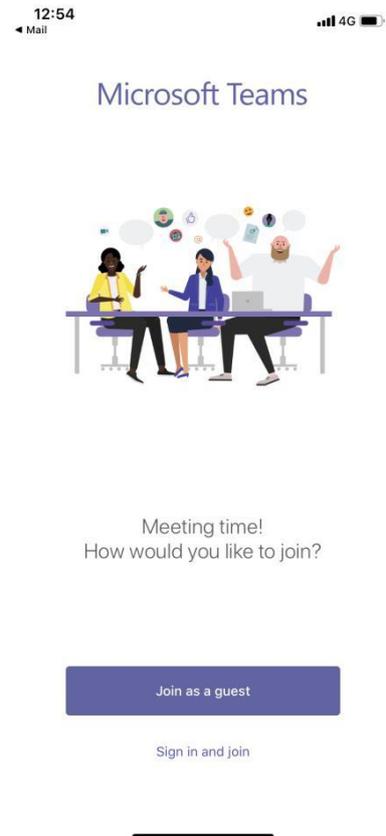


Figure 3: Prompt to join meeting as a guest

Before entering the meeting you will be asked to input your name (Figure 4 below).

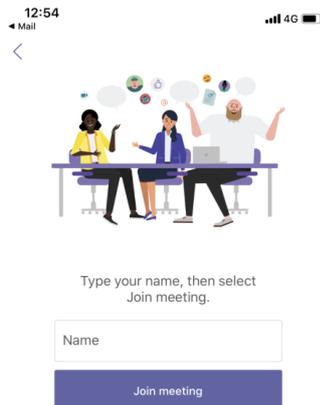


Figure 4: Enter your name before joining the meeting

You will then be directed to the meeting 'lobby'- the case officer will admit you to the meeting (Figure 5).

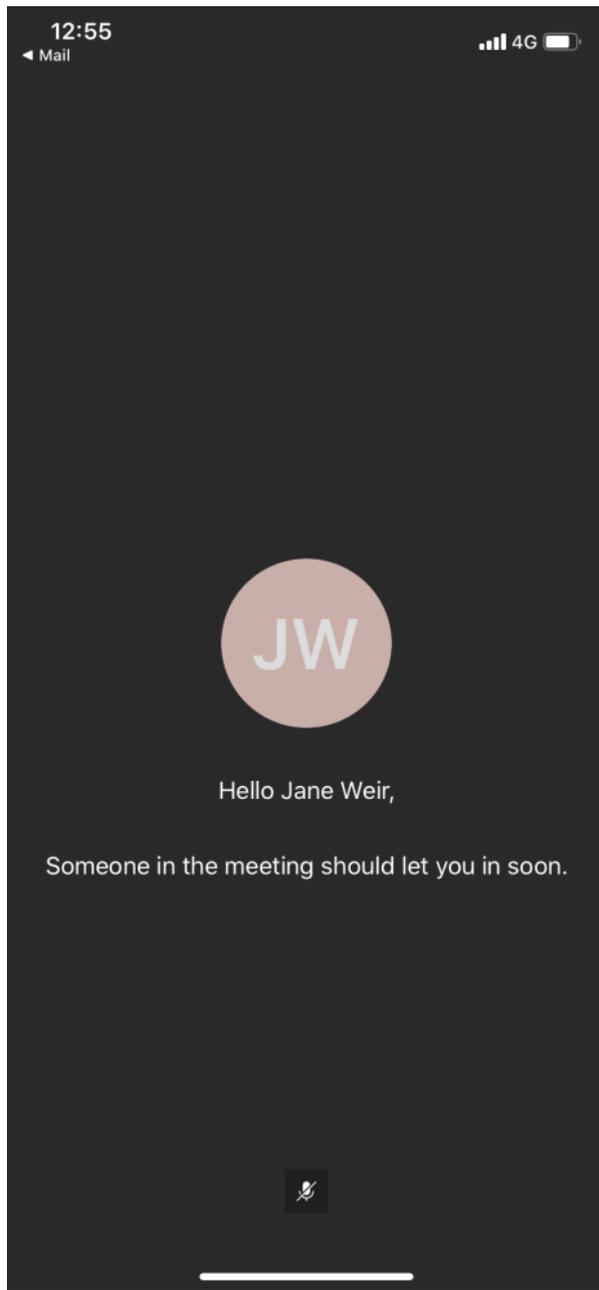


Figure 5: Please wait in the 'lobby' until the case officer admits you to the meeting

Please turn on your video and audio by clicking on the relevant icons. This may take a few moments. It is generally best to connect to the call using 4G if available rather than Wi-fi due to the limited range of Wi-fi. We appreciate that in some cases once the meeting has started it may not be possible to continue if there are connectivity issues.

During the meeting

Step 1: The case officer will appear on video call initially when the video call begins and introduce themselves and any consultees who are also joining the meeting. A recording of the site visit will be taken, at this stage the case officer will turn off their camera to allow for the site only to be recorded. Before showing us around your site the case officer will introduce the site, application reference, names of attendees, and the date and time of the meeting. The case officer will then ask you to show them around the site and may ask for certain views/features to be specifically shown. We appreciate your cooperation with this, please take your time and show us the site as clearly as possible. Please avoid videoing any other people as possible.

Please note additional photographs may be requested based on the video and the Case Officer may request these during or after the virtual site visit.

In the event of problems such as poor quality or video calls being disconnected the Case Officer will contact you by phone and may requested that you take a video of the site as directed by them and send it to the Case Officer. Due to file size this may need to be sent via an online file transfer or web sharing link such as Wetransfer. This can be discussed further with the Case Officer if required.

Ending the meeting

Step 1: The case officer will end the recording and then close the meeting. You can then press the X or Exit button on the app to end the call from your side and leave the meeting (Figures 6 & 7). You can then close the app.

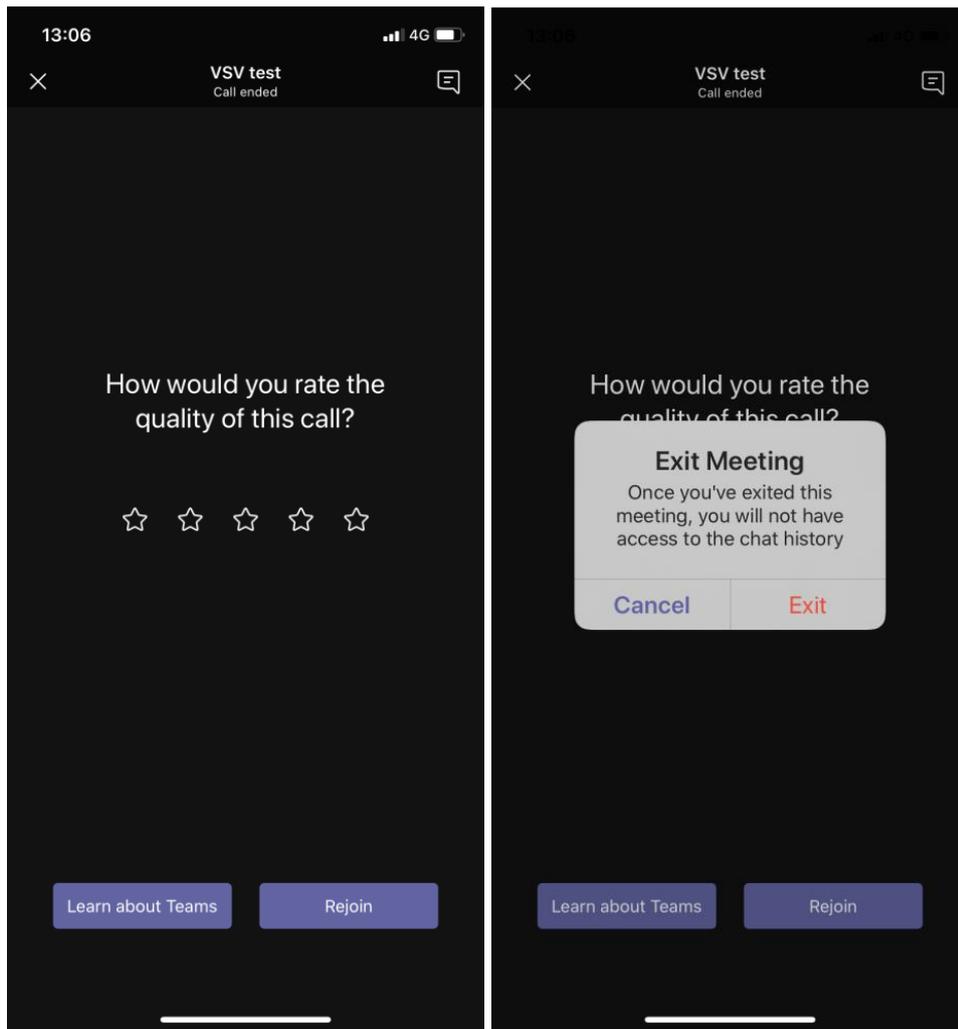


Figure 6: Press the X to end the meeting Figure 7: Press Exit to end, then leave the app.

Step 2: A copy of this recording will be saved for our records as outlined above.

Next steps

The case officer will assess whether they have enough information following the virtual site visit to progress with the application. If so, requests for supporting information may be sent, and the case officer will keep you updated on the progress of the application. If not, a physical site visit will be required, and we will be unable to determine your application until such a time we are able to carry this out. The case officer will advise you further on this. We would appreciate your cooperation on this by entering into a Planning Processing Agreement of which the case officer will send you further information on.