

# Planning Inspectorate Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update 16 April 2020

In light of the latest government advice it is necessary for us to continue to avoid non-essential travel and maintain social distancing. This means that physical events, planned to take place during the lockdown period, will need to be postponed. We are therefore reviewing cases on a rolling basis, deciding the most appropriate action to take in each case. This is to ensure the safety of our staff and all parties involved in a case.

At the same time, we are working hard on finding ways to minimise any delay caused by exploring alternative options of progressing casework safely and fairly. A great deal of work is going on behind the scenes to process cases. This also includes trialling holding events using telephone or video conferencing where it is accessible to all parties. [We previously explained the principles for this](#)

We expect to be holding our first digital pilot case either at the end of this month or early next month, and we are currently in the process of firming up details with the parties concerned. We will provide an update on this as soon as practically possible.

Where we are postponing events or identifying some as early pilots, we are advising parties accordingly. We will also continue to review the situation as and when Government advice changes and expect to publish further updates on an ongoing basis.

We have also started a trial of 'virtual site visits' with a small group of inspectors. If a case is deemed suitable for inclusion as part of this pilot, we will be contacting the main parties for their views. If this confirms that the proposed written representations appeal can be properly decided on the basis of digital images, a physical visit will not take place and the case will be decided purely on the basis of the written evidence received. This will include inviting the submission of further specific information. We will review this approach in a few weeks' time before considering whether to extend the pilot.

Four advisory visits to local planning authorities in connection with intended local plan submissions have also been undertaken remotely via video call. Similarly, six telephone conference calls on inquiries to take place later this summer have also already taken place during the lock down. This is an important contribution to maintaining progress of casework wherever possible whilst ensuring it is achieved safely and fairly, which is the Planning Inspectorate's overriding aim during this period.