

Key Planning Forum Actions

Actions completed - March 2021	
Action	Update
Consider the establishment of a cross-government Planning Forum of senior leaders to take ownership of the conclusions and areas of further work identified in the review paper.	Planning Forum established since December 2019. Membership of the Forum includes key statutory consultees of the planning system and representatives from local government. Meetings are held every 2/3 months.
Consider the appointment of a SRO to provide a strategic oversight role to monitor the passage of major or economically sensitive applications, with the potential to deliver significant local or regional outcomes, through the system.	SRO has been appointed at Deputy Secretary level within Dfl. Project Team has been established within Regional Planning Directorate with regular meetings held and work being undertaken by all stakeholders involved.
Develop a suite of reports to manage and monitor the planning statutory consultation process.	Quarterly and Annual Reports have been developed showing the performance of statutory consultees. These reports highlight the volume and varied types of work required from statutory consultees of the planning system. The reports are published on the Dfl website.
Ensure the new planning IT system allows for effective monitoring and reporting of statutory consultee responses.	The specification for the new IT system includes the ability for statutory consultees to produce their own management reports.
Carry out an urgent review of staff structures and staff numbers in Dfl Rivers against current workloads.	Dfl rivers conducted a review and received additional resource to carry out their planning consultation work. This will be kept under review.
Ensure capacity issues in Shared Environmental Services, an essential element on the critical path of planning processes, are addressed.	The issue around resourcing of Shared Environmental Services has been resolved with all councils now providing financial support. SES are also rolling out training for the councils, and it is hoped that this will ultimately lead to fewer and better informed/ proportionate consultations – thereby reducing the pressure on SES and hence the need for more resource/funding in the longer term. This dovetails with the Department’s training programme.
Actions to be completed by June 2021	
Action	Update
Review proposals for outcomes within the draft PfG 2020/21 in relation to planning	Planning/Built Environment is identified in the draft as a Key Priority (“Creating and shaping high quality, sustainable, places for people to live, work and spend leisure time. Furthering sustainable development and supporting positive

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	<p>place-making and effective stewardship.”) in connection with the Outcomes: “People want to live, work and visit here” and “We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment. This action will be kept under review during the next stages of the PfG process to ensure that the importance of Planning - as a vital cross cutting, multi-sectoral enabling process - is recognised in so far as possible.</p>
<p>Consultee bodies to review their approach to case management to ensure responses are targeted and proportionate.</p>	<p>Two workshops have been held with statutory consultees and local government. A best practice draft document ‘10 Principles of the Management of Statutory Consultation’ has been developed and will be circulated to key stakeholders for comment. Belfast City Council has developed checklist for the statutory consultation process which will be highlighted as an example of good practice in this regard going forward. The Planning IT system now highlights major applications to the statutory consultee to allow for prioritisation.</p>
<p>Review current practices to ensure all consultation requests are correctly and absolutely necessary, particularly to ensure that consultation requests are not forwarded to statutory consultees until sufficient evidence and information has been provided by the applicant.</p>	<p>A best practice draft document ‘10 Principles of the Management of Statutory Consultation’ has been developed and will be circulated for comment to key stakeholders. Belfast City Council has developed checklist for the statutory consultation process which will be highlighted as an example of good practice in this regard going forward. (As above).</p>
<p>Consider more proactive collaboration between planning authorities and statutory consultees to assess and expedite the processing of major or economically sensitive applications (e.g. planning authorities could identify relevant applications and dedicated consultee staff could ensure resources are directed accordingly, working with planning authorities). Issue of what is a priority application needs to be addressed.</p>	<p>This action is being taken forward in a number of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of client liaison meetings between consultee and planning authority by DAERA. • Regular meetings between statutory consultees and planning authorities. • New identification of major and regionally significant applications through the planning portal. • Reviews undertaken by statutory consultees of resourcing issues. • Regular meetings of Planning Forum. • Review of PAD process etc.
<p>Statutory consultees to review their resource requirements against workloads</p>	<p>All key statutory consultees have commenced a review of their resource requirements against workloads. The outcome of the 2021 budget process will have obvious impacts but all are</p>

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	continuing to actively monitor to ensure improvement in performance.
Identify necessary guidance and place it in a suitably structured way onto the Planning Portal, with links to consultee websites.	Work due to commence on this action - it is linked to the ongoing review by statutory consultees of online and published information currently available.
Improve and cleanse the data in the Planning IT system.	Work on this task is well underway. It is intended that engagement with councils will happen in March to identify and update the data.
Explore delegating road safety assessments of access standards to councils	A number of legal and practical constraints and challenges have been identified with this proposal, including the statutory duty to consult Roads, professional competence and accountability. The self-certification option was also not recommended by DSO. DfI roads is now (if not already doing) considering monthly bi/ monthly meetings with Council planning staff to quickly resolve issues affecting applications.
Consider the benefits of embedding roads engineer within council planning teams.	The potential for Roads officials to attend regular meetings with council officials (as above) to discuss and assess applications is being considered.
Produce a protocol for statutory consultees which sets out in writing what involvement/support is required from them to support an effective and efficient planning system. This should include statutory consultee role in the wider/full planning process (e.g. PADs, enforcement, appeals, JRs, discharge of conditions, planning agreements etc.	Work is ongoing – a first draft internal document has been prepared and circulated for discussion.
Review existing PAD process and identify/agree/implement improvements in practice between planning authorities and statutory consultees. Include how to enforce compliance with PAD advice and options around charging/fees. Produce an updated practice note to support.	Engagement is ongoing with consultees in local government to seek views of their experiences pros & cons of the current PAD process. A questionnaire has issued to key stakeholders and nominees have been sought for follow-up action when results from this are analysed.
Consider a wider roll out of DfI training proposals on environmental compliance to the wider stakeholder community (industry, statutory consultees, political reps etc.).	Department's contracted expert trainer has delivered two training sessions to a cross section of elected representatives from councils. This training was focused on the role of Councillors as decision makers in the planning process and their obligations under environmental law and procedures. Letters to the key statutory consultees with environmental responsibilities will issue scoping

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	their interests and needs for training on environmental impact assessment.
Consider making the NIW pre-development enquiry (PDE) process mandatory.	High Level End to End Process signed off. New charges agreed for Impact Assessment Forms. Work commenced drafting new PDE responses and reviewing PDE application form.
Actions to be completed post June 2021	
Action	Update
'Subject to Ministerial Approval' Implement legislative change to introduce statutory local validation check lists (following consideration of BCC pilot review report).	Further development of draft policy paper is currently underway. Belfast City Council have now submitted their findings from the administratively based validation list pilot. This data is being considered within RPD and validation by ASRB colleagues. Following Ministerial consideration, stakeholder engagement will then be required to inform the refinement of policy options. In the meantime, the Department will write to councils encouraging them to follow BCC's example in advance of any legislative changes.
Establish workshops to rectify the common mistakes arising from information/ evidence submitted.	It is considered that this action will be addressed as part of the validation checklist (above).
'Subject to Ministerial Approval' - Implement legislative change to prevent the late submission of information with an application (when the council has resolved to take a decision based on the information previously submitted).	A number of meetings have been held re this action - it was considered that there are a number of challenges and constraints around this proposal, including the requirement for a change to primary legislation. It is considered that this would be a very difficult provision to implement as there will be circumstances where the late submission of information cannot and should not be refused. Further clarity is needed from Local Government and when received a decision will be taken on how to progress.
Explore further the potential use of the transport model for the assessment of major planning applications.	The Department is in the initial stages of procuring a Managed Services Framework for transport planning and modelling services which would include for the construction of the transport model and the fore-running tasks of data collection. However, due to the COVID emergency there is substantial doubt over the validity of any data until a 'new normal' is established.

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	Therefore the decision on the construction of the transport model is currently deferred – this impacts the achievement of this action.
Review DfI’s approach to transport assessments (TAs), drawing in appropriate stakeholders and including an analysis of resource requirements.	Roads Internal Consultancy Services has advised that they have carried out an assessment resulting in the need for 1 additional SPTO and 2 X HPTOs’ to enable the achievement of targets – this requires further review by the Planning Forum Project Team before considering next steps.
Produce a report for discussion/agreement with the Forum on which ‘non-planning’ elements should be considered for removal from the planning system. Implement any agreed recommendations.	We are currently awaiting information from the Councils to consider which non planning elements could be removed from the planning system. Roads have provided previous legal advice on the link between private streets determinations and planning legislation- potential for PSDs to be removed from development management process. Once material received we will consider with DSO.
Build capacity and capability in the system through targeted training.	The Department to seek a training needs assessments (TNA) from councils and liaise with statutory consultees with a view to developing a suitable training programme.
Review online and published information currently available to applicants and consider potential gaps and the resources required to plug these gaps.	A number of statutory consultees have commenced work in this area. Some have developed work streams to complete this action. This action will be monitored going forward.
Take forward a commission to measure the public value of the planning system.	Work is deferred pending outcome of work on PFG.

Belfast City Council Planning Service

Review of the Application Checklist

February 2021

Executive Summary

Belfast City Council (BCC) has identified that one of the most significant contributing factors in delaying the planning application process is the poor quality of applications on submission. In particular, applications have often been “incomplete” and not supported by the information required by planning policy and best practice. This means that applications cannot be given a positive determination at the first time of asking and there are inevitably delays as the information is sought and finally submitted. This also places unnecessary burdens on already stretched statutory consultees, wasting their time and resources on reviewing incomplete applications.

In response to this problem, BCC Planning Service has published its *Application Checklist*, which provides guidance to customers on which information they need to submit with their application, depending on its characteristics, scale and spatial constraints. Information requirements are divided into two categories: “Basic Requirements” – necessary to make the application valid in accordance with planning legislation; and “Other supporting information” – required by planning policy and best practice so that the application can be fully considered. Applications are checked on receipt and if information is missing then the applicant is requested to provide it within 14 days otherwise the application is returned along with the planning fee. Applicants are asked to resubmit the application only once all the information is available.

Data shows that 68% of Major applications submitted in 2019/20 were incomplete on submission, demonstrating the severity of this issue of poor quality planning applications. Since publication of its Application Checklist in November 2018, BCC returned its best ever statutory planning application performance of 37 weeks for Major applications and 14.0 weeks for Local applications in 2019/20. Much of this performance improvement is attributed to implementation of the Application Checklist. This saw Major application performance improve from 41.4 weeks in 2018/19 to 37 weeks in 2019/20. There was an even greater improvement in performance for largescale Local applications with a substantial 31.4 week improvement when comparing a sample of 2018/19 and 2019/20 applications.

Feedback from customers has generally been very positive. Agents and architects see significant value in the Council publishing a list of documents required with planning applications. It assists them when pricing work and justifying to their client which information is needed. Agents have said that they are now less likely to submit an incomplete application to BCC because they know the Council will send it back. Constructive feedback includes the need for officers to apply the Application Checklist proportionately and that it must not be used as a simple administrative tick-list – information should only be required where it is fundamentally needed.

Feedback from consultees and staff have similarly been positive. Statutory consultees are very supportive of the Application Checklist as a means to frontload information and improve the quality of applications, thereby making the assessment process much more efficient. They unanimously support legislative change to improve information requirements at the beginning of the process.

Staff have said that the Application Checklist provides a structured approach to information requirements. It requires information to be provided up front which in turn helps validation and processing times. The Application Checklist is particularly helpful when discussing information requirements for Major and large scale Local applications at the PAD stage.

In conclusion, the Application Checklist has been a significant success in improving the quality of planning applications submitted to BCC. It has had a marked positive effect on determination times and performance. It has also begun to shift the culture and attitude of customers towards submitting much better quality planning application at the outset of the process.

The following recommendations are made:

1. This review should be shared with the Department for Infrastructure to support the case for much needed change to planning legislation, aimed at improving information requirements on submission of planning applications;
2. The review should be shared with the Northern Ireland Audit Office (currently undertaking an audit of the NI planning system) as part of BCC's engagement in that process;
3. The review should also be shared with the other 10 councils in Northern Ireland in the context of the above;
4. BCC Planning Service should proceed with implementation of Phase 3 of the Application Checklist to include all applications other than Householder proposals, Advertisement Consent and other minor Local applications; and
5. Further training should be provided to BCC staff to ensure that the Application Checklist is applied in a proportionate and consistent way.

Introduction

1. This report comprises a review of BCC Planning Service's Application Checklist, first published in November 2018.
2. The objectives of the review are twofold:
 - a) To review the effectiveness of the Application Checklist in enhancing the quality of planning applications on submission and in turn improving application performance against the statutory targets of 15 weeks for Local applications and 30 weeks for Major applications; and
 - b) To support the case for changes to NI planning legislation to improve the quality of information at the beginning of the application process (by empowering individual Planning Authorities to publish a "Local Validation List" which sets out mandatory information requirements). This front-loading of information will improve the quality of applications, in turn speed up decision making, reduce pressure on statutory consultees, and improve the planning application process generally across NI.

Background

3. BCC has identified that one of the key factors to under performance in processing planning applications in Northern Ireland is the **poor quality of applications** on submission.
4. Development Management best practice is to **front-load** the planning application process. For example, by providing a Pre Application Discussion (PADs) service to improve the quality of submissions, and to make sure that applications are supported by the right level of information at the beginning.
5. Information requirements for planning applications are set out in the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.
6. Article 3 of the Order sets a **low bar** for the level of information that is required at submission for an application to be legally "valid". This amounts to:
 - a written description of the proposal
 - the address or description of the location of the site
 - name and address of the applicant (and agent where applicable)
 - a plan showing the location of the site and its surrounding context
 - such other plans necessary to describe the proposal
 - a plan identifying other neighbouring land owned by the applicant
 - the appropriate ownership certificate
7. Other select information may also be required depending on the nature and location of the application such as a Pre-application Community Consultation Report or Design and Access Statement.

8. The time period for determining planning applications (15 weeks for Local applications and 30 weeks for Major applications) starts **on receipt of a valid application** – the “clock starts ticking” at this point.
9. Crucially, there is **no legal requirement** for applicants to submit other supporting documentation required by planning policy or good practice – essential information to address the usual range of land-use planning considerations. For example, there is no requirement for applicants to provide the following on submission:
 - × Archaeological assessments
 - × Biodiversity Checklists
 - × Biodiversity Surveys
 - × Contaminated Land Reports
 - × Daylight, sunlight and overshadowing assessments
 - × Drainage Strategies
 - × Environmental Statements (EIA)
 - × Flood Risk Assessments
 - × Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments
 - × Parking Surveys
 - × Retail Impact Assessments
 - × Sequential tests (retail)
 - × Structural Surveys
 - × Transport Assessments
 - × Transport Assessment Forms
 - × Travel Plans
 - × Tree Surveys
 - × Waste Management Plans
10. Since there is no requirement for applicants to supply this information with an application on submission it is invariably not provided.
11. This has a considerable **adverse impact** on the planning application process including, but not limited to, the following:
 - It allows incomplete, “bad” applications to enter the system
 - Consequently the public and consultees are consulted on poor quality applications that do not adequately address the various issues and this attracts objections, conflict and unnecessary additional work
 - Statutory and non-consultees – who are already overwhelmed – waste precious time and resources commenting on deficient applications
 - Potential to create an antagonistic and frustrating environment for all users of the system including applicants, agents, planners, councillors, interest groups and communities
 - Significant delays in processing applications contributing to under performance and poor customer experience – the “clock” does not stop when the Planning Authority has requested and is awaiting the necessary additional information
 - An unhealthy and undisciplined culture where information deficient applications become the norm, compounding the problems.

Under performance

12. The NI planning system is **under performing**. In 2019/20, the average processing time for determining Major applications in Northern Ireland was **52.8 weeks**, a modest increase over 59 weeks for 2018/19, and still almost double the statutory target of **30 weeks**. This is a very clear indicator that the planning process in NI is not working effectively.
13. Even the 30 week target is not especially strenuous when compared to the statutory targets in England and Wales. Whilst the categorisation of applications in GB is different to NI, the target in England and Wales for determining Major applications is 13 weeks and performance there is generally significantly better. The fact that the regional target in NI is being missed by such a considerable margin should be a **real concern**.
14. Notwithstanding the fact that it deals with the most Major applications of any Planning Authority in Northern Ireland, BCC's performance returns for Major applications is significantly better than the NI average at 37 weeks compared to 52.8 weeks, but there is **still room for improvement**.
15. It is also considered that there is scope to improve **Local application performance**. In 2019/20, the average processing time for Local applications in Northern Ireland was 14.0 weeks, just inside the 15 week statutory target. BCC's performance was the same as the regional average. Whilst the categorisation of applications in GB is different to NI, the target in England and Wales for determining Minor applications is 8 weeks and performance there is generally significantly better.
16. Under-performance has a range of negative consequences including:
 - Adverse economic impacts including delays to construction and negative impacts on growth
 - Frustration for customers and the public
 - Inefficiency and poor use of public money
 - Reputational damage to the City and Northern Ireland with potential loss of investment and economic harm
17. It is essential that **Northern Ireland** has an efficient, competitive and **fit for purpose** planning system that supports the region rather than hinders it. This is especially important in a post COVID-19, post BREXIT world with investment likely to be more difficult to secure for Northern Ireland in an increasingly competitive environment. High performing and efficient Planning Authorities are much more likely to attract economic activity to their area and this is especially important for **Belfast** being the first city in Northern Ireland and **economic driver** for the region. It is critical that Belfast is able to compete with other major cities, not only locally but internationally.

Illustrative Example


18. As a hypothetical but typical example, let's say a developer has submitted a planning application for 10 houses. It is only accompanied by the bare minimum information required by the Order for it to be legally valid. The "clock has therefore already started ticking" on the application. The council proceeds to consult on the application. Several weeks later one of the statutory consultees responds advising that a Drainage Strategy – required by PPS15 for housing schemes of 10 units or more – is missing.
19. The planning officer communicates this requirement to the planning agent. The planning agent then has a meeting with their client – the applicant – advising them that the documentation needs to be submitted if the application is to have a chance of being approved. There is then a delay as the agent obtains quotes for this additional works and the developer argues with the agent whether the information is absolutely necessary. Eventually the documentation is commissioned but it takes several weeks for it to be prepared. The Drainage Strategy is finally submitted, some months after the application was originally submitted. The council re-consults on the application and a further month later the statutory consultee responds, advising that it is dissatisfied with the technical conclusions in the document.
20. The table at **Appendix 1** illustrates the above scenario using what might reasonably be considered a "best case scenario" compared to the very often much longer delays experienced by Planning Authorities in processing "incomplete" applications with key information missing at the start of the process. In the example at Appendix 1, the Local application is not decided until Week 23 – 8 weeks and 53% above the statutory target of 15 weeks. In many cases, the time taken to complete this process will typically be **much longer**. It should be noted that the example involves **three** rounds of consultation by the Planning Authority, adding considerable burden and wasteful costs to both the Council and statutory consultees.
21. It can clearly be seen how it typically takes many months – and **a lot more time than should be necessary** – for a Planning Authority to determine even a medium scale planning application. Some planning agents have even admitted that they submit incomplete applications for their client just so that they can say it is in the system and being processed.

Application Checklist

22. In order to address the quality of applications on submission, BCC recognised the **need to publish guidance** for its customers on which information is needed with applications at the outset.
23. Unlike in England Wales, there is **no legislative provision** in Northern Ireland to compel customers to provide this information. Planning Authorities here are unable to publish a *Local Validation List* which identifies which information is mandatory on the submission of applications. This means that BCC's approach could only be a work-around of the legislation.

24. In November 2018, BCC published its *Guide to the Planning Application Process* (see **Appendix 3**). This set out for the very first time how the Council processes planning applications in Belfast. The approach aligns with the Planning Service’s “10 Operating Principles”. These Operating Principles were informed by Development Management best practice in GB, based on lean-systems thinking, and developed in consultation with planning staff. Their implementation was the central recommendation of an independent review of Belfast City Council’s Planning Service¹, aimed at improving customer service. The objective was to provide a faster, much more responsive planning application process, better delivering for its customers and wider city.

25. Operating Principle 1 directly addresses the quality of information when planning applications are submitted and reads:



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We make sure we have the right information to support an application at the start of the process.

- We tell our customers what information we need with their application before they submit it. Our **Application Checklist** will set out what information is required and when.
- We check if the required information has been submitted and ask for it if it is missing.
- If the information we need and ask for is not provided we may refuse permission.

26. BCC introduced its Application Checklist in November 2018 in parallel with publication of its *Guide to the Planning Application Process*, enshrining the 10 Operating Principles and Council’s new approach.

27. The Application Checklist is a comprehensive guide for customers that sets out which information is required with any given type of planning application, according to its characteristics, scale and spatial constraints. Essentially based on the principle of a *Local Validation List* in England and Wales but without the statutory weight.

Structure of the Application Checklist

28. The Application Checklist is structured in four parts:

- **Main document** – describes the information requirements for planning applications and categorising them into two areas: “Basic information” that is legally required by the Order to make an application legally valid; and “Other supporting information” required to make an application “complete”. The

¹ Review conducted by Jim MacKinnon, former Chief Planner for Scotland, in 2017

main document also describes the process of front-loading this information at the validation stage;

- **Appendix 1 – Information Checklist:** essentially a checklist that both applicants and the Planning Service can use to prompt and verify which Basic and Other supporting information is required with the application. Applicants are encouraged to submit the Information Checklist alongside their application;
- **Appendix 2 – Basic Requirements:** guidance on information requirements for an application to be legally valid in accordance with the Order;
- **Appendix 3 – Other Supporting Information:** detailed guidance on which other information is required to make the application “complete” and to give the Council reasonable chance of making a positive determination at the first time of asking. Typically this information is required by Planning Policy Statements and good practice. Appendix 3 advises which information is needed according to the characteristics of the proposal, its scale and any specific spatial constraints.

Implementing the Application Checklist

29. Since the Order does not permit BCC to legally compel the applicant to provide “Other supporting information” upfront with an application, the Council has implemented the following improvised work-around.

- 1) On first submission of the application, the Planning Service checks whether it is **a) valid** (i.e. the Basic information has been provided in accordance with Article 3 of the Order); **and b) complete** (i.e. the correct Other supporting information has been provided in accordance with the Application Checklist)
- 2) If information is missing then the Planning Service writes to the applicant requesting the information
- 3) If the missing information is Basic information then the application is invalid and cannot legally be processed. If the missing information is Other supporting information then the applicant is given 14 days to provide the information, otherwise the application is returned to the applicant along with the planning fee and not registered. The applicant is advised to resubmit their application along with planning fee once they are in a position to provide the missing information. This means that the determination period for the application does not start until the new application is made.

30. **Phase 1** of the Application Checklist was implemented in January 2019, shortly after publication in November 2018. Initially, the Checklist was applied to the following largescale Local applications (Major applications were deliberately excluded at first in order to give applicants a “bedding in” period):

- 10 residential units and above
- Commercial proposals of 1,000 sqm or more

- Sites of 0.5ha and above
31. **Phase 2** was then implemented in May 2019, extended to include Major applications as follows:
- **Proposals for Major development**
 - 10 residential units and above
 - Commercial proposals of 1,000 sqm or more
 - Sites of 0.5ha and above
32. The Council plans to introduce **Phase 3** of the Application Checklist on 01 April 2021. Implementation will be extended to include all applications for planning permission, save for Householder proposals, Advertisement Consents and some other minor Local application types.

Pre Application Discussions

33. In accordance with its 10 Operating Principles, BCC places great emphasis on Pre Application Discussions (PADs) as a means to improve the quality and **front-load** the application process. The Council actively encourages PADs for Major schemes and more complex Local proposals.
34. The PAD process provides opportunity for the Planning Authority to advise the applicant on the **level of information** required to support their planning application when submitted. The Application Checklist is an **incredibly useful tool** which planning officers are able to refer to at the PAD stage, strongly encouraging the applicant to follow it when putting together their application.

Pre-implementation Engagement with Customers

35. Before the Application Checklist was introduced, BCC was very careful to **engage with customers** around the systemic problems within the planning application process in Northern Ireland. Particular reference was made to information requirements on submission of an application. Engagement took place with applicants, agents and developers across a series of Development Industry Workshops in 2018. The feedback from customers was that they **understood the problems** and the reasons why the Council needed to publish an Application Checklist.
36. Feedback from customers following implementation of the Application Checklist is provided later on in this report.

Impact of the Application Checklist

37. Since its introduction, the Application Checklist has had a **significant positive impact** on the Council's delivery of its Development Management service. In most cases it has allowed the Council to secure the Other supporting information upfront, resulting in less delays to the application process and less pressure on statutory and non-statutory consultees.

Major applications

38. Although the Application Checklist was not directly applied to Major applications until 01 May 2019, it was implemented for most of the 2019/20 performance year.
39. In 2019/20, BCC returned its **best ever performance** against the statutory target with an average processing time of **37 weeks**. This compares to 41.4 weeks in 2018/19 and 51.5 weeks in 2017/18, demonstrating marked improvement.
40. A key factor was the implementation of the Application Checklist which meant that the Council could secure the Other supporting information upfront, necessary to fully consider the applications as submitted.
41. As an indicator of the extent to which incomplete Major applications has been a problem, of the 34 new applications received in 2019/20, **only 11 (32%) were both valid and complete** on receipt. Or to put it the other way, 68% of all Major applications received by the Council did not have sufficient information to fully assess them. Had the Council continued to determine those applications without requiring the additional information then either it would have led to delays in the processing of the applications as the information was sought at a later stage; or refusal of the application due to lack of information.
42. In requesting the additional information in line with the Application Checklist, the following pattern emerged:
- 22 (64%) applications became both valid and complete within 14 days of the receipt date (up from 32% on receipt);
 - 25 (74%) applications within 21 days;
 - 29 (85%) applications within 30 days.
 - 34 (100%) applications within 86 days.
43. This demonstrates that in the majority of cases incomplete Major applications were **made complete within a relatively short space of time**, thereby speeding up the application process and placing less pressure on statutory and non-statutory consultees who would have otherwise been asked to comment on incomplete applications.

Local applications

44. Phase 1 of the Application Checklist was introduced in January 2019 and applied to large scale Local applications as set out above. The Application Checklist was therefore applied to all those Local applications for the whole of the 2019/20 performance year.
45. In 2019/20, BCC returned its **best ever performance** against the statutory target of an average processing time of **14 weeks** (the first time BCC had achieved the Local statutory target since transfer of planning powers in 2015).

This compares to 15.2 weeks in 2018/19 and 15.2 weeks in 2017/18, demonstrating marked improvement.

46. Once again, an **important factor** was the implementation of the Application Checklist which meant that the Council could secure the Other supporting information upfront, necessary to fully consider those larger scale Local applications, rather than asking for it later resulting in delays.
47. In 2019/20, BCC received 1,545 Local applications. Taking a sample of 21 larger scale Local applications to which the Application Checklist was applied, the average processing time for those applications was 43.8 weeks. Significantly, taking a similar sample of 21 large scale Local applications in 2018/19, the average processing time was 75.4 weeks – representing a **31.6 week improvement** (42%) improvement since the Application Checklist was implemented.
48. Data for 2020/21 is considered unrepresentative of performance because of the significant impacts of COVID-19 and has not been used.

Feedback from Customers

Development Industry Workshop – October 2019

49. In October 2019, BCC held a **Development Industry Workshop** and sought feedback from customers on the Application Checklist, first implemented in January of that year.
50. Over 200 customers were invited and attendees included: NIFHA, Radius Housing, Turley, Cherton, SustransNI, Newington Housing, Titanic Quarter Ltd, Clanmil Housing, TSA Planning, Lacuna Developments and the Royal Society of Ulster Architects.
51. Feedback was generally **very positive**. Agents found the Application Checklist to be a useful tool in advising their clients on the information required to be provided with their applications – this was particularly helpful when dealing with inexperienced clients. Agents noted that this can sometimes be a difficult conversation with their client because of the costs associated with providing additional information. Therefore, it was extremely helpful to agents to have the information requirements published in written form so that they could clearly evidence to their clients which information was needed. The Application Checklist reinforced agents' advice and helped them when quoting their professional fees.
52. Agents said that they were **less likely to submit an incomplete application** following implementation of the Application Checklist as they knew that the Council would send the application back to them. The requirement for reports is now factored into the project timeline and costed for. If a developer is serious about developing a site then following the Application Checklist de-

risks their scheme. One developer stressed the importance of collaboration with the Council and that it is better to provide more information than less.

53. In terms of **constructive criticism**, customers pointed out that whilst the Application Checklist theoretically speeded up the process, consultees are often still slow to respond to applications, sometimes requesting information at the application stage that they should have identified at the PAD. Further frustration was expressed about **consultee response times** and that consultees are not always fully engaged with the PAD process (officers advise that this issue falls outside the scope of this review but will be necessary to pick up with the Department and statutory consultees).
54. Particularly useful was customer feedback that the Application Checklist should be **flexible and not overly prescriptive** as two sites are never the same. It is important that information requirements are not over-zealous and do not result in unnecessary costs for the applicant. It was recognised that the Application Checklist needs a bedding in period and it was queried whether information sought is always necessary. BCC recognises this and the Application Checklist itself advises customers that the Planning Service ‘...*will take a proportionate approach to requests for other supporting information. [It] will only ask for it where it is reasonable and necessary to enable us to assess your application.*’ Other comments were that the Council should always double-check that the requested information has not already been provided in a different document or form.
55. A copy of the feedback from the event is provided at **Appendix 2**.

Telephone Interviews with Agents – 2021

56. Several **telephone interviews** were conducted with agents in February 2021 in order to provide updated customer feedback on the Application Checklist.
57. Agents remained of the view that the Application Checklist provides a **helpful list of documents** required with planning applications.
58. One agent said that their practice already prided itself in providing comprehensive applications, even before the Application Checklist was introduced. In this regard the Application Checklist should really be aimed at “bad agents” who do not routinely provide the right information with applications. The Application Checklist is also particularly helpful to younger, less experienced members of a planning consultant’s team in helping them better understand application information requirements.
59. Agents recognised the **importance of the PAD process** and that the Application Checklist provides a very valuable reference point for discussing information requirements at the PAD stage. However, agents are surprised when consultees sometimes request additional information after the application has been submitted even though it was not specifically requested by the consultee during the PAD – agents said that this calls into question how much consultees are engaging in the PAD process.

60. One agent said that 14 days is generally too short to provide additional information at the validation stage – in some cases agents have to secure three quotations for the work. The work then has to be programmed into the winning consultant's schedule and completed. However, officers advise that this point actually **affirms the need** for the Council's tougher approach to information requirements – it proves that missing information can sometimes take a considerable amount of time to submit, unnecessarily and unreasonably prolonging the application process with the “clock continuing to tick” on the determination period.
61. The agents remain of the opinion that a **flexible approach** should be taken by the Council in applying the Application Checklist. This would allow applications to be validated and up and running with the understanding that the additional information will follow in due course. They said that it's important that the Council uses “**human discretion and judgement**” when applying the Application Checklist and that it's not just seen as an administrative tick-box exercise by officers with no proper thought on whether the information is fundamentally necessary to the assessment of the application. There should not be a “one size fits all” approach, recognising that no two sites will be the same and that information requirements will vary from one application to the next, even if ostensibly they seem similar.
62. In this regard it's important that the Council sees the “bigger picture” when requesting information. Some information – such as a Construction Environmental Management Plan – can be secured by condition and does not always need to be provided up front when the application is submitted.
63. It is also important that there is **consistency** between officers and teams when applying the Application Checklist.

Feedback from Staff

64. Feedback from staff about the Application Checklist has also been very positive. Comments include the following:

Principal Planning Officer (Local applications): *'The Application Checklist provides the basis under which all applications should be submitted and in our experience to date, in applying it, it has been unchallenged by the industry. The list of requirements has provided an invaluable guide to developers, their agents and architects and has assisted planning officers in front loading the system. This has helped prevent delays as incomplete applications are not getting into the system and duplication of consultation has been kept to a minimum; ultimately this has resulted to some extent in a more effective and efficient system.*

The Application checklist has also started to imbed a culture change in Belfast and brings the process more in line with our counterparts in GB. That culture change has resulted in better quality submissions, with the development industry taking greater responsibility for their part in the planning

process. The proposed legislative change to validation requirements is now critical to maintain the momentum of the Checklist and bring the benefits forward for the process across Northern Ireland.'

Senior Planning Officer (Major applications): 'I have found the Application Checklist (AC) to be helpful – it provides a structured approach to the validation of planning applications and importantly from a process point of view ensures the application of a consistent approach which is of benefit to validating officers and customers. In my experience, it has resulted in information being sent back and resubmitted, which has aided our processing times. In other instances I have waited a number of weeks for information to be submitted which has delayed the start of the processing of the valid application but I suppose that is the balance that has to be struck to ensure that we have all the relevant information at the outset of the process. We would require changes in legislation to assist us in this regard.'

Ultimately we want to front load the system with all the necessary information and I consider that the PAD process has a significant role to play in highlighting the information required to determine the application. However, the PAD process does not apply to all applications and therefore applications will be received requiring officer judgement/experience to decide whether the necessary information has been submitted such as for example Contamination report, Air Quality Impact Assessment etc.'

There still remains issues with the quality of information provided and whilst the application checklist may be used by some as a tick-list to get the application up and running I have a number of applications whereby information submitted has been insufficient and has required further information (Air Quality, Contaminated Land, Noise Impact Assessments), which has then resulted in delays in processing. This is something I think we need to keep an eye on to ensure that reports are not prepared in haste just to satisfy the Application Checklist.'

Again the PAD process could be of benefit in this regard if the necessary info is submitted at this stage for consideration but will not apply to all applications. On the flip side this would result in protracted PAD process and possible duplication of work for consultees. It's all about striking the right balance!'

Senior Planning Officer (Major applications): 'I personally think it is an assistance in simply encouraging case officers to think about the main issues of an application at an early stage in the process. Similarly it seems to have stimulated the same thought process for agents with most Major applications submitted with a comprehensive suite of reports and supporting information, and giving us something of a foundation and support to seek the relevant information at the outset. In fairness this was something which has improved over the last few years but certainly the Application Checklist has helped inform and expedite the process.'

Planning Officer (Local applications): *'Overall it's a positive tool which was long overdue. It's proved to be very useful for both officers and our customers. If customers are confused on any aspect of validation we can refer them to it. Previously we had no real point of reference other than legislation which at times can be difficult to understand. I think it has helped to speed up validation processing times and resulted in the front loading of applications. It's also helped officers to understand the link between policy and supporting information. Going forward I think it would be useful if we had similar user friendly guides for Permitted development, Development Plan searches, how to calculate your fee, idiots guide to Use class order and how to do a comprehensive history search etc.'*

Planning Officer (Local applications): *'I have found the Application Checklist useful for pre-application submission of information that is clearly laid out in policy, such as drainage assessment, TAF etc. On occasion, I've encountered problems where much of this information is front loaded with the application, however when we go to a different consultee, e.g. EHO / NIEA, additional information is requested, thus resulting in delay. Obviously, the applications that have been subject to PAD will have all this information, generally making things easier.'*

Business Support (administrative team): *'The majority of agents are aware of the Application Checklist and use it, albeit at times they seek clarification on why something is needed. However whilst they are aware of it, it would not, as a general rule always be submitted with an application.'*

Both agents and general public are co-operative in providing additional information on request. There may need to be more work done around 'awareness and use of the checklist' to ensure a quality application at the start of the process as opposed to continually request additional information, taking up officer time, by both Planning Officers and Business Support staff.'

Feedback from Consultees

65. Several statutory consultees were asked to provide their feedback on the Application Checklist. Responses were received from the following.

66. **DFI Roads** provided the following positive feedback.

'Unfortunately there are too many poor quality planning applications submitted that seek to use the planning service like an MOT check – put it in and see what's wrong. The current planning system supports this approach, rather than encouraging applicants to submit good quality planning applications. This would provide a much better, more efficient and quicker planning service for all. DfI Roads, as a statutory consultee, fully supports the

efforts made by BCC Planning Service to improve the quality of planning applications through the Application Checklist. However, at this stage it is difficult to accurately determine if the Application Checklist has had a noticeable difference to the quality of planning applications since its launch. This is partly due to it still being relatively new and the Application Checklist having no legislative support.

The Department, as Roads authority and as a Statutory Consultee, would be generally supportive of any initiative that improves the quality of planning applications, including setting legal minimum requirements for information to be submitted with a planning application.'

67. DfI Rivers responded as follows.

'DfI Rivers have not proactively monitored the impact the introduction of the Application Checklist has had on the consultation process, however, generally speaking we are very much in support of this checklist approach, as it focuses applicants on front-loading their applications with the relevant information. This ultimately gives rise to less re-consultations being received by the Statutory Consultee (SC) and overall improves the efficiency and effectiveness of the SC process.

DfI Rivers would support legislative changes [to make the Application Checklist mandatory] as a statutory obligation would embody a stronger approach in dealing with poor applications – this statutory requirement would now be placed on the applicant/agent to provide the required information before the “planning target clock” starts.'

68. DAERA also welcomed the Application Checklist.

'The approach being adopted by Belfast City Council very much aligns with the Department's position to improve the quality of planning consultations being submitted to the Department as a Statutory Consultee.'

69. DfC HED responded as below.

'With regard to what is required for HED to make a substantive response, the Application Checklist has made some positive impact on the quality of applications/consultation process. However, our proposed changes to the LB1 form - and related changes to the Application Checklist - should deliver more 'fit for purpose' applications. HED still receives consultations that do not have all of the required information and has to request further information to facilitate a full assessment before we can make a substantive response. This often requires re-consultations, which impacts on our performance/ability to meet targets effectively. (HED has provided details of the information required (as in my email 18/02/2021 12:00).'

HED would support such legislative changes, as we consider it could add significant efficiencies in our role as a statutory consultee. Applications are more likely to contain the required information for a full assessment /substantive response, and this would reduce significantly the quantity of re-consultations.'

Case for Legislative Change

70. As has been previously stated, BCC's Application Checklist is essentially a **work-around** of the legislation and, unlike in England and Wales, it does not have the “legislative teeth” to make additional information requirements at validation stage mandatory. This means the Council remains **susceptible** to applicants/agents insisting that their applications are determined on the basis of valid but incomplete applications. There is **no legislative provision** which prevents that information being submitted later and a Planning Authority is duty bound to consider it before deciding the application. This inevitably drags out the planning application process, often by a significant amount of time, heavily contributing to under performance, not only by BCC but also in a wider regional context. This can only realistically be overcome through changes to the planning legislation.
71. Whilst progress is being made, there remains a fundamental need to **change and improve** the culture of planning application submissions in Northern Ireland so that quality is improved. The NI planning system is drastically **underperforming**, particularly in relation to Major and large scale Local applications, and intervention is absolutely necessary if planning is to be effective in supporting the regional economy and its communities. Planning Authorities are on the back foot from the off because information that is required by planning policy – and necessary if a positive determination is to be made at the first time of asking – is more often than not missing at the outset. This means that **Northern Ireland cannot compete** with other jurisdictions such as in GB and Republic of Ireland, putting the region at serious disadvantage, particularly in a post-BREXIT, post COVID-19 world when competition for investment is expected to increase substantially.
72. There continues to be significant need for **much greater discipline** in the planning application process in Northern Ireland and realistically this can only be achieved through legislative change to make additional information requirements mandatory. Legislative change to validation requirements is now critical to maintain the momentum of BCC's Application Checklist and share the benefits with other Planning Authorities across Northern Ireland.
73. There is no one size fits all solution to information requirements and each Planning Authority may wish to take a **different approach** to best suit their particular needs and circumstances. If the Department adopts the “England and Wales” model, individual councils will be able to publish their own “**Local Validation Lists**” (following a period of public consultation) and tailor the guidance accordingly. Or they have the option of not bring forward a Local Validation List at all and maintaining the status quo.

74. It is very noteworthy that the “**John Irvine**” report (2019 review of the effectiveness of the planning system in Northern Ireland, commissioned by the Department) also supports the raising of the bar in relation to information requirements at validation through changes to the legislation.

75. “Key Conclusion 3” of the John Irvine report reads:

‘To improve the quality of planning applications and the efficiency of the process, DfI, taking account of the views of the Planning Appeals Commission and the other planning authorities, should consider and advise returning ministers on, the case for proportionate change to legislation (or other means to improve quality) to make the validation test more stringent and to potentially introduce a cut-off date for submission of information.’

76. The need for legislative change in this area has formed a key part of BCC's feedback to the Northern Ireland Audit Office, currently undertaking an audit of the NI planning system. It will also be a central point in BCC's upcoming response to the Department's “call for evidence” in relation to its review of the implementation of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Conclusions and Recommendations

77. BCC's Application Checklist has been an **undoubted success**. It has contributed significantly to improved application performance in 2019/20 with the Council achieving the statutory Local target for the first time since transfer at **14.0 weeks** average processing time. It also directly assisted BCC achieve its best ever average processing time for Major applications of **37.0 weeks** – a respectable return given the very high volume of Major applications processed by the Council compared to other Planning Authorities.

78. The Application Checklist is helping shift the culture of poor application submissions in Belfast. Feedback from customers, staff and statutory consultees has generally been **very positive**. However, to keep up the momentum and achieve the next level, it is of fundamental importance that there is legislative change to raise the bar for information requirements on submission of planning applications. This will improve quality, greatly enhance performance and reduce pressure on overstretched consultees.

79. It remains important that the Council takes a **measured and proportionate** approach when applying the Application Checklist and that its implementation does not result in unwarranted additional “red tape”.

80. Having regard to the findings of this review, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) The review should be shared with the Department for Infrastructure to support the case for much needed change to planning legislation, aimed at improving information requirements on submission of planning applications;

- 2) The review should be shared with the Northern Ireland Audit Office (currently undertaking an audit of the NI planning system) as part of BCC's engagement in that process;
- 3) The review should also be shared with the other 10 councils in Northern Ireland in the context of the above;
- 4) BCC Planning Service should proceed with implementation of Phase 3 of the Application Checklist to include all applications other than Householder proposals, Advertisement Consent and other minor Local applications; and
- 5) Further training should be provided to BCC staff to ensure that the Application Checklist is applied in a proportionate and consistent way.

Appendix 1 – Example Illustration of the impact of incomplete information on application processing times

Event	Time taken	Total Weeks
Submission of application	N/A	0
Validation Check	1 week	1
Registration	0.5 weeks	1.5
Consultations issued	0.5 weeks	2
Statutory consultee responds identifying need for further information	5 weeks	7
Case officer requests additional information	1 week	8
Agents relays requirement to applicant	0.5 weeks	8.5
Agent commissions third party consultant to provide additional information	0.5 weeks	9
Additional information compiled by consultant and submitted to agent	4 weeks	13
Additional information reviewed by the agent and submitted to Planning Authority	1 week	14
Additional information uploaded by admin team	0.5 weeks	14.5
Re-consultation issued	0.5 weeks	15*
Statutory consultee responds identifying additional information is inadequate	4 weeks	19
Case officer requests revised information	1 week	20
Agents relays requirement to applicant	0.5 weeks	20.5
Agent commissions third party consultant to revised information	0.5 weeks	21
Revised information compiled by consultant and submitted to agent	2 weeks	23
Revised information reviewed by the agent and submitted to Planning Authority	1 week	24
Additional information uploaded by admin team	0.5 weeks	24.5
Re-consultation issued	0.5 weeks	25.0
Statutory consultee responds confirming that the information is adequate	3 weeks	19
Case officer prepares report and application reported to Planning Committee	3 weeks	22
Decision notice prepared and decision issued	1 week	23
Total – 23 weeks to determine (8 weeks beyond the statutory target)		23

* Rounds of consultation

** 15 week Local application target missed

Appendix 2 – Feedback from Development Industry Workshop held in October 2019

Positives to note:

- The checklist has proven very useful to agents and developers.
- Useful tool to advise clients, especially if working with less experienced clients.
- Its use is standard practice and helps when quoting professional fees as agents and clients have an understanding of what reports are required.
- The checklist reinforces the agent's advice.
- The client can see that it is a BCC requirement therefore less push-back.
- Now professional developers understand the shopping list of reports and why they are necessary
- Less likely to ask agents to submit without them as they know BCC will send it back
- Reports are now factored into the project timeline and costed for
- If a developer is serious about developing a site then adhering to the checklist de-risks the scheme
- Links it to the PAD process to confirm which information required. Getting balance of certainty and judgement.
- Clanmil – it is better to provide more information than less. Importance of working collaboratively.

Concerns:

- Main concern is that using the checklist should theoretically speed things up and front load the assessment but consultees are slow to respond and even ask for more information at the application stage than requested at the PAD stage.
There was a concern that some consultees were not fully engaging at the PAD stage – DfI Roads and Rivers agency were identified as asking for more information or inconsistent in what information was required
- Attendees expressed frustration with response times from statutory consultees feeding into the planning process.
- Concern that more needs to be flexible and not overtly prescriptive, no two sites or proposals are the same. Important that doesn't lead to unnecessary costs.
- There will be a bedding down time for the checklist.
- Is it a tick box exercise – is the information sought always necessary?
Sometimes the information is provided in another form/document
- Problem of saying info is missing – when they had actually submitted it in a different format within the application that validator/planner did not pick up on Impact/1 year review and get data for customers.

Suggestions:

- It was suggested that a fire safety strategy should be added to the checklist so that schemes do not need to be amended following receipt of planning permission. It was recognised that fire safety is a Building Control matter, but wanted this integrated in the design stage.

- PADs can scope out the detail of information that is needed – there is an overlap with the PAD process.
- Need statistical evidence that the new checklist is working and actually improving application performance.
- Need to share views and expressions of what will be a good scheme – not just exchange reports – and value of some of the reports being written/submitted – tick the box but are they worthwhile? Examples of good/bad submissions for next session with stats on how it's doing
- Too early to say if this is successful in terms of improving turn-around time/Performance
- Flexibility is important so don't have to incur nugatory costs for reports not really needed – that won't affect decision making process - just because on tick list.
- Need availability for dialogue, added value of PAD is that get active engagement of what is really required – lets you know specifics to consider, the tick box won't do this and providing everything doesn't make an easy planning application process.
- Building Control could do something similar – raised submission – for next session

Appendix 3 – BCC Guide to the Planning Application Process (including the Planning Service’s 10 Operating Principles)

[Provided in separate attachment]

PLANNING PORTAL USER NOTE

STATUTORY CONSULTEES

MARCH 2015



Department of the
Environment
www.doeni.gov.uk

This note outlines changes to the Statutory Consultees functionality on the Planning Portal

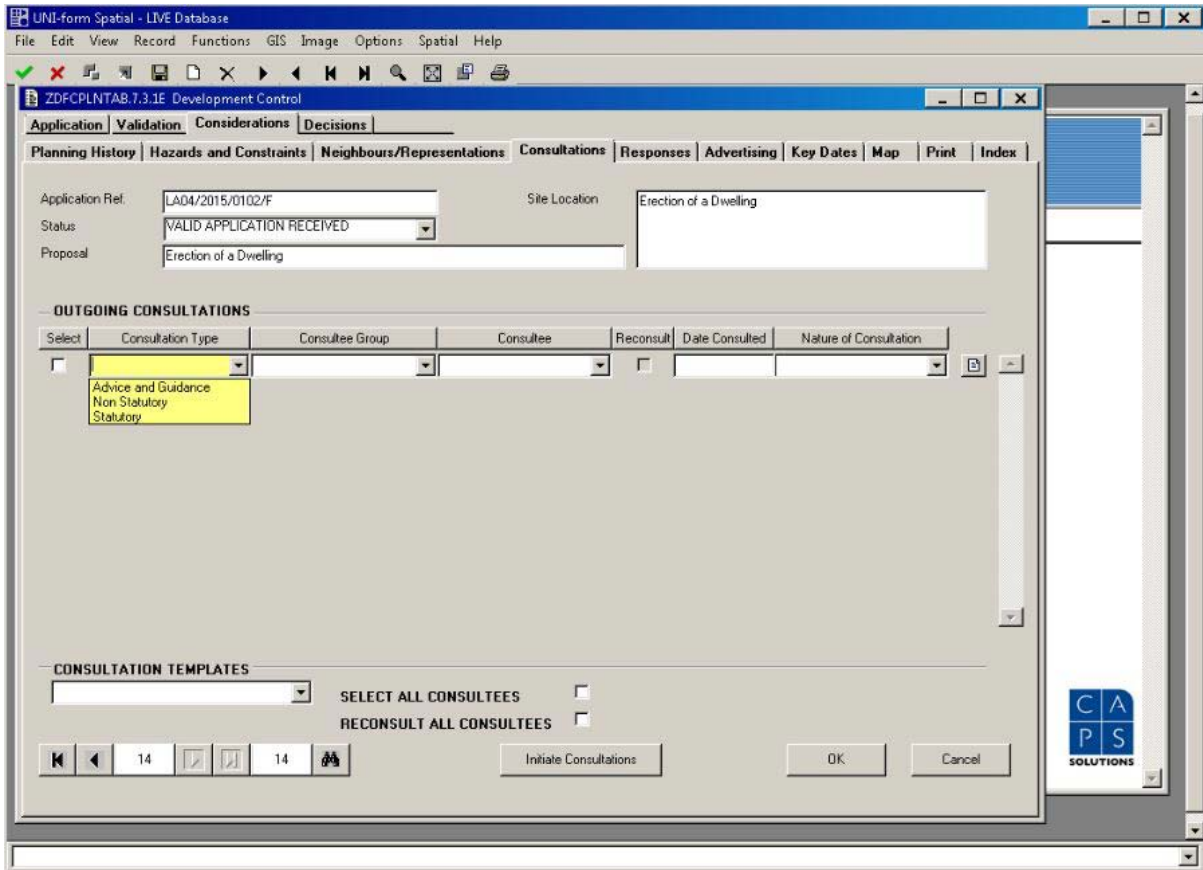
1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 From 01st April 2015 a single consultation (statutory, non statutory or internal advice) per application will be assigned to a consultee against a specific planning application and all further correspondence will be delivered as an Alert/Notification to the consultees' work queue **until** that initial consultation is closed. Therefore if a consultation remains open and the case officer selects a template to, for example send additional information, this will create a new target date and will not update any of the key date fields or statistics.

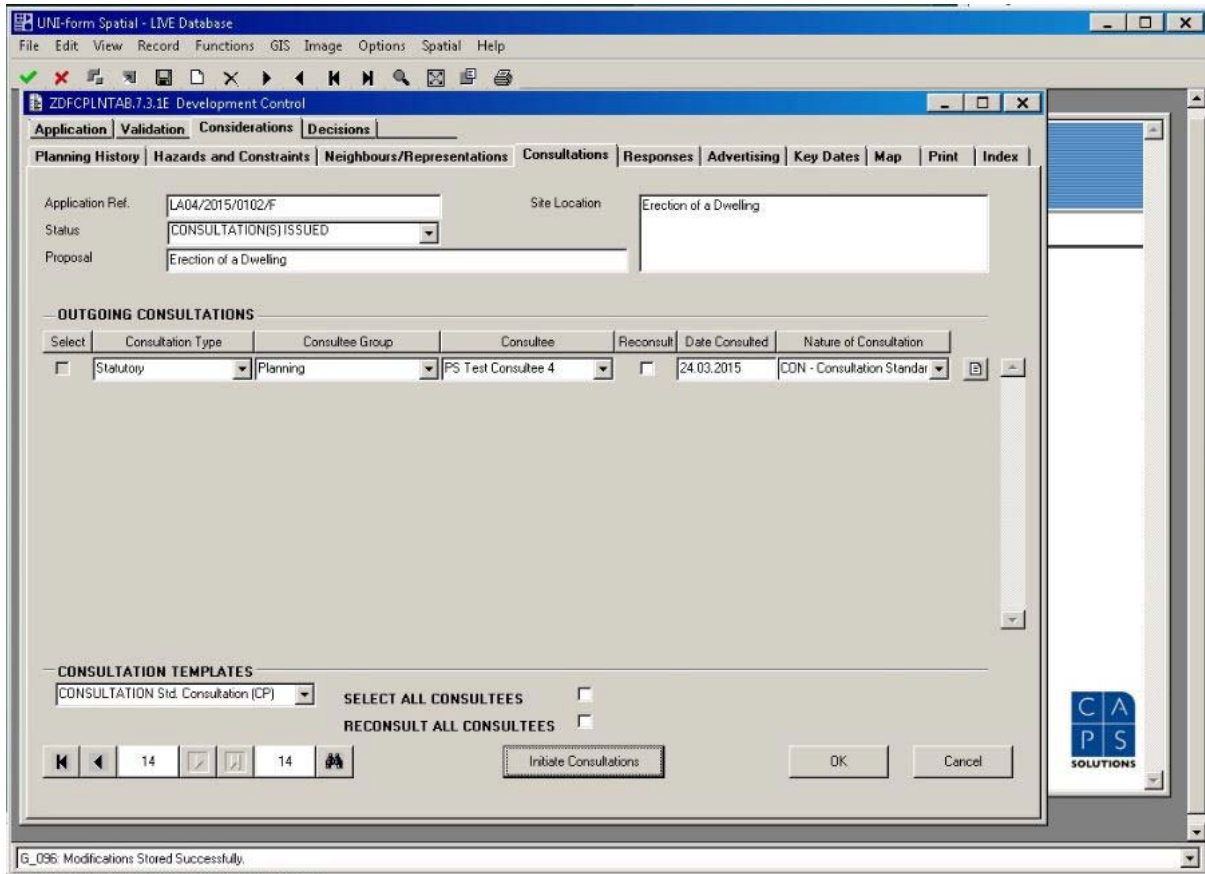
1.2 When the consultation (statutory, non statutory or internal advice) is however **closed** and the case officer selects any template, this will go onto the consultee workqueue as a full consultation (ie a second consultation will be logged) and a new target date will be logged.

2.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS

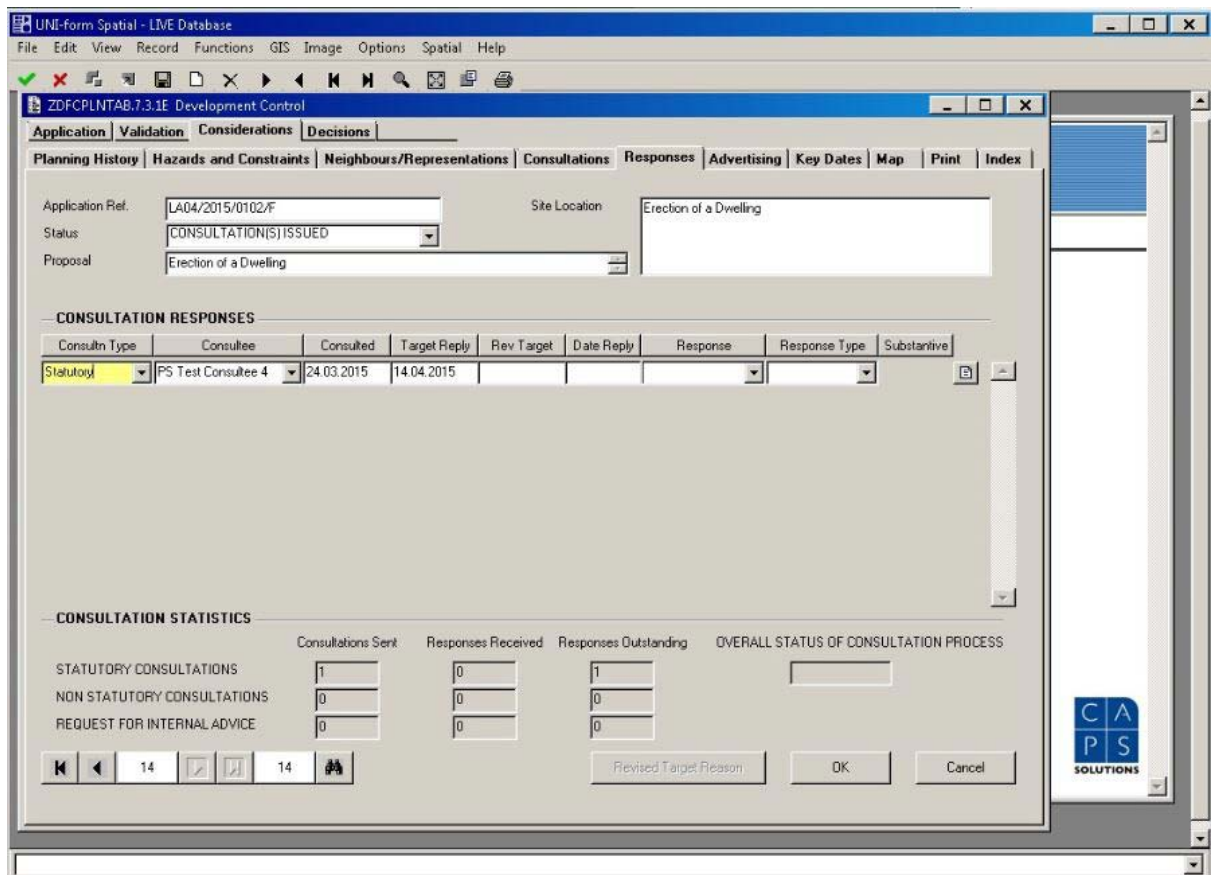
2.1 A Case Officer selects the appropriate template and initiates it:



2.2 Date a consultation is sent is logged in the "Date Consulted" field (day 0) in Consideration: Consultations tab



- 2.3 In the Consideration: Responses tab, the date on which the consultation was sent is logged in the “Consulted” field and a target date of 21 calendar days is generated in the “Target reply” field.
- 2.4 The Counter updates in the Consultation Statistics section of Consideration: Responses tab to show the type of consultation sent and how many are still outstanding.



2.5 On receiving the consultation the consultees have a range of options and any response will be returned as a Final Substantive Response automatically. With Statutory Consultees, the consultee can either select 'interim reply' or 'provisional reply'

3.0 CONSULTEE RESPONDS WITH AN INTERIM RESPONSE

3.1 When a consultee selects interim reply, their 'consultee response' options will be

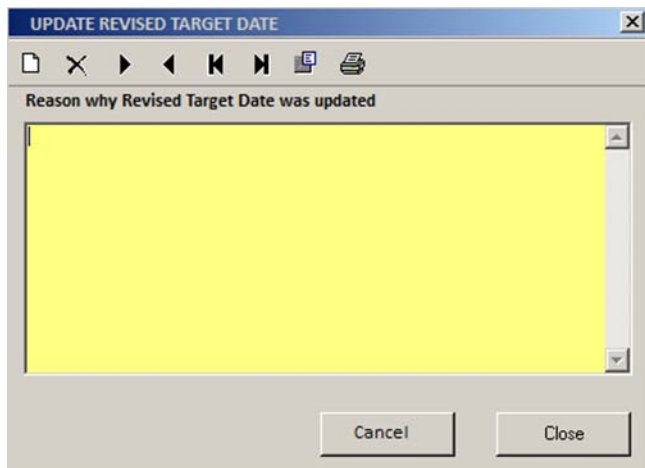
1. Extension required
2. Additional information required
3. Scanned documents unclear

NB The consultation will remain in the consultee workqueue.

3.2 If the case office wishes to agree to an extension, the following actions should be completed

1. In the Considerations/Responses tab enter the revised target date in the revised target date field for the consultee and save.
2. A Revised Target window opens enter reason in pop up and save.

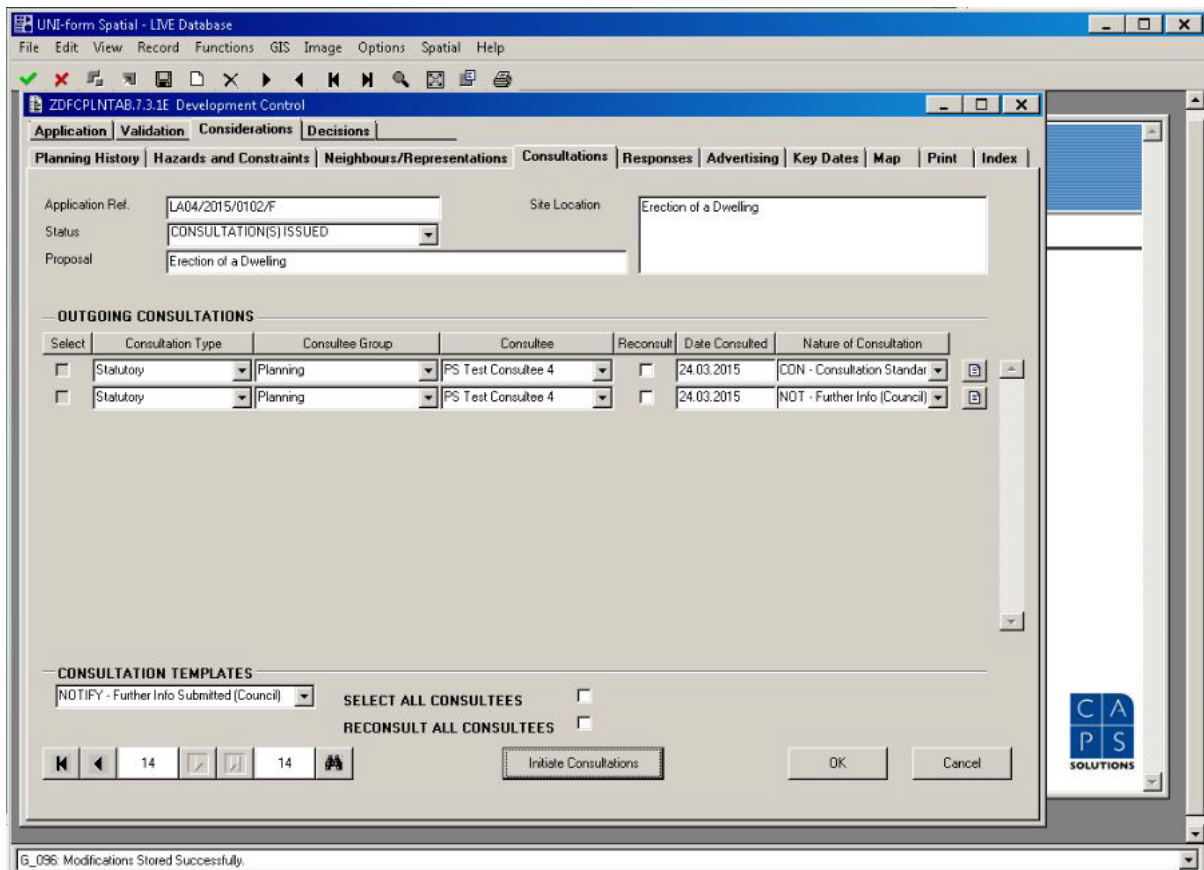
(A revised target can only be entered by a user who has the requisite authority)



3. In the Considerations/Consultations tab enter a new line for the consultee and select "NOTIFY – Agree extension" template to send notification to consultee that this is acceptable
4. This notification does not record as a consultation but is uploaded to EDRMS and the event log .
5. The consultee receives an alert saying "Please see email for details of further information" and the email will contain details of the new date. This new date will be populated in the "Rev Target" field.

3.3 If Additional Information is provided or Scanned Documents are re-scanned the following actions should be completed

1. Case officer selects appropriate template to send notification to consultee
2. This notification does not record as a consultation.
3. The consultee receives an alert saying "Please see email for details of further information"



4.0 CONSULTEE RESPONDS WITH A PROVISIONAL RESPONSE

4.1 When a statutory consultee selects 'provisional reply', the options available to the consultee will be

1. **No Comment:** States that the consultee has no comment to make
2. **Content:** States that, on the basis of the information available the consultee is content with the development as proposed
3. **Standing advice:** Refers the planning authority to current standing advice by the consultee on the subject of the consultation
4. **Advice:** Provides advice to the planning authority to enable the determination of the application
5. **Error:** Consulted in error

4.2 Case will then be greyed out on the consultee workqueue and the date of response logs in the "Target Reply" field

4.3 Case officer is notified by email of new response, the response type is listed as "Provisional" and Substantive field is "TBC"

UNI-form Spatial - LIVE Database

File Edit View Record Functions GIS Image Options Spatial Help

ZDFCPLNTAB.7.3.1E Development Control

Application Validation Considerations Decisions

Planning History Development Plan Neighbours Consultations Responses Advertising Key Dates Map Print Index

Application Ref: 0/2013/0214/F Site Location: Lands Between Two Proposed New NIE Substation At The Rear Of 152 Trewmount Road Moy Co Tyrone In The Townland Of Turleenan To The Townlands

Status: CONSULTATIONS ISSUED

Proposal: Carry out associated works required for the erection of a single circuit 400kV

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Consultn Type	Consultee	Consulted	Target Reply	Rev Target	Date Reply	Response	Response Type	Substantive
Non Statutory	En Health Newry & Mourne	05.02.2013	02.06.2013		23.05.2013	No Objections	Substantive	
Non Statutory	Building Control Newry & M	05.02.2013	03.06.2013		24.05.2013	No Objections	Substantive	
Statutory	DRD - Roads Service Craiga	06.02.2013	04.06.2013	04.07.2103	03.07.2013	No Objections	Provisional	TBC

CONSULTATION STATISTICS

	Consultations Sent	Responses Received	Responses Outstanding	OVERALL STATUS OF CONSULTATION PROCESS
STATUTORY CONSULTATIONS	5	5	0	Complete
NON STATUTORY CONSULTATIONS	5	5	0	
REQUESTS FOR INTERNAL ADVICE	5	5	0	

OK Cancel

4.4 At this point the Case officer can either accept or reject the response.

4.5 If response accepted

- 1 "Substantive" field changes to "Final Substantive" and the field is greyed out to denote the consultation is complete
- 2 The Counter updates to show that the response has been received
- 3 An alert is sent to the consultee workqueue to show that the response has been accepted.
- 4 Consultation drops off the consultee workqueue once alert has been viewed

4.6 If response rejected

- 1 "Substantive" field changes to "Rejected"
- 2 The consultation is enabled (ungreys) on the consultee workqueue
- 3 An alert is sent to the consultee workqueue to advise that further consideration is required.

5.0 OTHER INFORMATION TO NOTE

- 5.1 If an applicant/agent submits further information prior to the consultee response being returned the case officer can select the appropriate template to send notification to consultee. This notification does not record as a new consultation but is uploaded to EDRMS and the event log. The consultee receives an alert saying "Please see email for details of further information".
- 5.2 If a consultee fails to respond and a decision is to be issued then the user should select the Notify of Decision template which will close the consultation. **Consultations should not be deleted.**
- 5.3 Construction Service will not provide comments on any post April consultations from councils. They will be returned on every occasion without action/no comment.
- 5.4 NIEA will have a central contact point for consultation for all their divisions, therefore for best practice and to assist in consultation times, reasons for consultation should be included, so the consultation can be sent to the appropriate NIEA division(s).



To be completed by the applicant/agent and submitted alongside the application

Basic requirements (must be completed for all applications)		Please circle whichever of the following applies:		OFFICIAL USE ONLY
1	Completed application form	Yes	n/a	
2	Ownership certificate	Yes	n/a	
3	Location Plan (Scale of 1:1250 or 1:2500)	Yes	n/a	
4	Plans and Drawings; to include:	Yes	n/a	
	- Block Plan 1:200 or 1:500	Yes	n/a	
	- Existing and Proposed Elevation 1:50 or 1:100	Yes	n/a	
	- Floor plans 1:50 or 1:100	Yes	n/a	
	- Roof plan 1:50 or 1:100	Yes	n/a	
	- Spot levels	Yes	n/a	
	- Sections on sloping land and adjacent land	Yes	n/a	
	- Demolition plans (If LBC/ DCA)	Yes	n/a	
5	Design & Access Statement ¹	Yes	n/a	
6	Pre-application Community Consultation Report (Major applications only)	Yes	n/a	
7	Fee	Yes	n/a	

OFFICIAL USE ONLY		
Basic requirements met? (valid)	Yes	No
Other supporting information met?	Yes	No

¹ A Design & Access Statement is required for the following applications:

- Major development
- Listed Building Consent
- Proposals of ≥ 1 dwelling house or ≥ 100 sqm where the site falls within any of the following areas:
 - Conservation Area
 - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 - World Heritage Site
 - Area of Townscape Character



Other supporting information (must be completed in all cases except Householder applications and applications for Advertisement Consent)		Please circle whichever of the following applies:	OFFICIAL USE ONLY
1	Air Quality Impact Assessment	Yes n/a	
2	Archaeological Assessment	Yes n/a	
3	Archaeological Field Evaluation	Yes n/a	
4	Biodiversity Checklist	Yes n/a	
5	Biodiversity Survey	Yes n/a	
6	Concept Statement or Concept Masterplan	Yes n/a	
7	Construction Environmental Management Plan	Yes n/a	
8	Contaminated Land Report	Yes n/a	
9	Contextual Design Information	Yes n/a	
10	Daylight, Sunlight and Overshadowing Assessment	Yes n/a	
11	Demolition Justification Report	Yes n/a	
12	Drainage Assessment	Yes n/a	
13	Economic Statement	Yes n/a	
14	Event Management Plan	Yes n/a	
15	Environmental Statement (EIA)	Yes n/a	
16	Flood Risk Assessment	Yes n/a	
17	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	Yes n/a	
18	Lighting Assessment	Yes n/a	
19	Market Testing Report	Yes n/a	
20	Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment	Yes n/a	
21	Odour Abatement System (flue and ventilation details)	Yes n/a	
22	Parking Survey	Yes n/a	
22	Phasing Plan	Yes n/a	
23	Planning Agreement (Heads of Terms)	Yes n/a	
24	Planning Statement	Yes n/a	
25	Retail Impact Assessment	Yes n/a	
26	Sequential Test (Main Town Centre Uses)	Yes n/a	
27	Structural Survey	Yes n/a	
28	Student Accommodation Need Statement	Yes n/a	
29	Transport Assessment	Yes n/a	
30	Transport Assessment Form	Yes n/a	
31	Travel Plan	Yes n/a	
33	Tree Survey	Yes n/a	
33	Viability Appraisal	Yes n/a	
34	Waste Management Plan	Yes n/a	

1. Application Form	
Requirement	Advice
<p>All applications must be accompanied by a Planning Application form</p> <p>Exceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmation of details required by a condition (discharge of condition) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete all parts of the form The name and address of the applicant must be included in all cases, even where there is an agent Description – keep this concise and only include the aspects of the proposal that requires consent Forms can be found at the following website link or in our Planning Reception: www.planningni.gov.uk/index/advice/fees_forms/forms/forms.htm
2. Ownership Certificate	
Requirement	Advice
<p>All applications must be accompanied by an Ownership Certificate</p> <p>Exceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of Reserved Matters Advertisement Consent Certificate of Lawful Development Non-Material Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete one of Certificate A, B, C and D, as applicable Complete all of the relevant section and sign it Ownership Certificates form part of the application form, which can be found at the following website link or in our Planning Reception: www.planningni.gov.uk/index/advice/fees_forms/forms/forms.htm
3. Site Location Plan	
Requirement	Advice
<p>All applications must be accompanied by a Site Location Plan</p> <p>Exceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of Reserved Matters Non-Material Change to a previous permission Remove or variation of a condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use an up-to-date map that shows surrounding properties Show the North point Outline the application using an unbroken red line Outline any other neighbouring land controlled by the applicant using an unbroken blue line We recommend a scale of 1:2500 or 1:1250
4. Plans and Drawings	
Requirement	Advice
<p>Applications must be accompanied by appropriate plans and drawings to a specified scale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See guidance in the following sections of this table Applications for Demolition in a Conservation Area only require existing and proposed plans for the demolition itself (not any new buildings)



Requirement	Advice
<p>Elevations A technical drawing that shows the external appearance of the proposal from each of its four sides</p> <p>Exceptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applications for change of use only (where no external changes proposed) </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide both existing and proposed elevations • Provide all elevations affected by the proposal including both side elevations of an extension • Make sure that the elevations match the floor plans • Label the orientation of the elevation (e.g. North, South, East, West; or North West, North East, South East and South West) • We recommend a scale of 1:50 or 1:100
<p>Floor Plans A technical drawing that shows the internal layout of the building</p> <p>When is it needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All applications including proposals for a change of use </p> <p>Exceptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applications for Advertisement Consent </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide both existing and proposed floor plans • Make sure that the floor plans match the elevations • Include each floor of the building/s • Label the floors (e.g. basement, ground, first, second, third, fourth floor etc.) • We recommend a scale of 1:50 or 1:100
<p>Roof Plan A technical drawing that shows the design of the roof from above</p> <p>When is it needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For complex roof designs • Proposals that include a roof terrace • Alterations to the roof of a Listed Building </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide both existing and proposed roof plans • Label as a roof plan • We recommend a scale of 1:50 or 1:100
<p>Levels “Spot levels” show ground and finished floor levels on a plan</p> <p>When is it needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For proposals that involve a change of existing ground or floor levels (e.g. a raised deck, raised patio, sunken terrace garden, new buildings or development on a slope) </p> <p>Exceptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the change in ground or floor levels are clear from the elevation drawings </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide both existing and proposed ground <u>and</u> finished floor levels • Levels to indicate a specified datum point • Provide a good spread of levels across the site • Include levels on adjacent land impacted by the proposal
<p>Sections A technical drawing that shows a cut-away section of the building or land</p> <p>When is it needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For proposals that involve a change of existing ground or floor levels (e.g. a raised deck, raised patio, sunken terrace garden, new buildings or development on a slope) • To demonstrate the internal cill height of a window where overlooking issues are critical (e.g. a roof light or high level window) • Internal changes to the floor of a Listed Building or alterations to a staircase in a Listed Building </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide both existing and proposed sections • We recommend a scale of 1:50, 1:100 or 1:200 • Include levels on adjacent land impacted by the proposal

5. Pre-application Community Consultation Report

Requirement	Advice
<p>All Major Planning Applications A report that confirms that pre-application community consultation has taken place in line with the statutory minimum requirements and any other requirements set out in the Council’s response to the “Prior Application Notice” (PAN)</p> <p>When is it needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All applications for Major development </p> <p>Why is it needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that there has been appropriate pre-application engagement with communities before the application is made • To comply with Sections 27 and 28 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; Article 3(3)(e) of the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report should include the following details: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Details of any community or residents’ steering group(s) established; ✓ what consultation was undertaken, when and with whom; ✓ dates, venues and numbers attended for all consultation events and meetings; ✓ details of how public events were made as accessible as possible to all members of the community; ✓ evidence of the consultation, e.g. dates and copies of advertisements, reference to material made available at events, minutes of meetings, samples of letters / leaflets if applicable; ✓ the comments made by the general public and those consulted; ✓ whether and how these comments have been taken into account in the development proposals; ✓ summary of the main issues/comments raised through the consultation and how they have been responded to; ✓ details of any amendments to the proposal as a result of the consultation; and ✓ details of any existing liaison arrangements, agreements with the local community or monitoring that is proposed during the construction and operational phases. • Further guidance can be found in <i>Development Management Practice Note 10</i>, at the following link: https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/advice/practice-notes/dm_prctice_note_10_pacc-2.pdf

6. Design and Access Statement

Requirement	Advice
<p>A written statement required for certain types of application that sets out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development; and • how issues relating to access to the development have been dealt with. <p>When is it needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All proposals for Major development • Where the site is within any of the following areas, all proposals for one dwelling or more (including flats and apartments); or where the floor space of the proposed building/s is 100 sqm or greater: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Conservation Area ✓ Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) ✓ World Heritage Site ✓ Area of Townscape Character • All applications for Listed Building Consent <p>Exceptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposals to develop land without compliance with previous conditions • Engineering or mining operations • Change of use (except where the new use involves access by an employee or involves the provision of services to the public – in such case a statement is required on access only) • Waste development <p>Further advice: Development Practice Note 12: Design and Access Statements</p> </p></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Design & Access Statement must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development; ✓ demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the development and how the design of the development takes that context into account; ✓ explain the policy or approach adopted as to access, and in particular, how— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ policies relating to access to, from and within the development have been taken into account, ▪ policies relating to access in the local development plan have been taken into account, and ▪ any specific issues which might affect access to the development for disabled people have been addressed; ✓ describe how features which ensure access to the development for disabled people will be maintained; ✓ state what, if any, consultation has been undertaken on issues relating to access to the development and what account has been taken of the outcome of any such consultation; ✓ explain how any specific issues which might affect access to the development have been addressed; and ✓ explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to take into account environmental sustainability. <p>Why is it needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enable the Council to assess the design and access impacts of proposals of a certain scale or within a designated area To comply with Sections 40(3) an 86(2) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; and Article 3(3)(f) and 6 of the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 </p>

7. Fee

Requirement	Advice
<p>Applications for the following must be accompanied by a Fee (*exemptions apply):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• planning permission• approval of reserved matters• removal or variation of condition• advertisement consent• hazardous substance consent• certificate of lawful use or development <p>A fee is not required for applications for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• discharge of conditions• works to a tree covered by a Tree Preservation Order or within a Conservation Area• determine whether Listed Building Consent is required• Listed Building Consent• demolish a building with an Area of Townscape Character• determine whether Conservation Area Consent is required• Conservation Area Consent• Non-Material Change to a planning permission• Modify or discharge a planning agreement <p>*Exceptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works to a dwelling or within its curtilage to provide access for, or improve the safety, health or comfort of a disabled person• Works for the purpose of providing means of access for disabled persons to or within a public building or premises• Change of use whereby planning permission would not normally be required were it not for a restrictive planning condition• Applications made by or on behalf of a club, society or other organisation (including any persons administering a trust) which is not established or conducted for profit, and the following conditions specified are satisfied:<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ the application relates to the provision of community facilities (including sports grounds) and playing fields; and✓ the council is satisfied that the development is to be carried out on land which is, or is intended to be, occupied by the club, society or other organisation and to be used wholly or mainly for the carrying out of its objects <p>Why is it needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To comply with Article 3(3)(i) of the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015; and the Planning (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015;• To support the Council's administrative costs for dealing with the application	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other than Categories 6, 8 and 9, the fee shall be calculated as the total amount for each category in Schedule 2• For Categories 6, 8 and 9, the fee shall be whichever is the highest category in Schedule 2• Certain fees are based on the area to be developed. The site area will be taken as the site identified by the Site Location Plan (red line)• Where the fee is based on gross floor space, the external measurement of floor space is used, include the thickness of walls• EIA development – an additional £10,632 is payable where the proposal is for EIA development and an environmental statement is required• Further guidance can be found at the following links: https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/advice/fees_forms/fees.htm https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/advice/fees_forms/planning-fees-explanatory-notes-for-applicants.pdf• The Fees Regulations can be found at the following link: https://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/advice/fees_forms/fees.htm

Basic Requirements (by Application Type)

The basic information needed may vary according to the type of application and permission that is sought. The following table indicates basic information requirements according to type of application

* See Appendix 2

Application Type	Required Information
Full Planning Permission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Ownership Certificate • Fee • Site location plan • Plans and drawings • Design and Access Statement* • Pre-Application Community Consultation Report*
Outline Planning Permission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Ownership Certificate • Fee • Site location plan • Plans and drawings • Design and Access Statement* • Pre-Application Community Consultation Report*
Approval of Reserved Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Fee • Plans and drawings
Variation or removal of a condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Ownership Certificate • Fee
Advertisement Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Fee • Site location plan • Plans and drawings
Listed Building Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Ownership Certificate • Site location plan • Plans and drawings • Design & Access Statement
Conservation Area Consent (Demolition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Ownership Certificate • Site location plan • Plans and drawings
Certificate of Lawful Development (Existing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Fee • Site Location Plan • Plans and drawings (if applicable)
Certificate of Lawful Development (Proposed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Fee • Plans and drawings (if applicable)
Prior Application Notice (PAN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form (Belfast City Council website only) • Site Location Plan
Confirmation of details required by a condition (discharge of condition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covering letter or email (please include the application reference number and the condition number/s you seek confirmation of details for) • Plans and drawings, sample materials etc. (if applicable)
Non-Material Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Form • Covering letter or email (please describe the proposed changes and why you are making them. The proposed changes should be annotated on the plans/drawings) • Plans and drawings (if applicable)



Planning Service Application Checklist

A guide for customers who intend to submit a planning application

We're committed to helping our customers get a timely planning decision that benefits the city.

To help achieve this, we want to make sure that planning applications are supported by the right information at the start of the process.

Having all the relevant information from the outset enables us to assess applications properly. If supporting information is missing, it can lead to delays or could even result in refusal of your application.

Our Application Checklist provides guidance on the information that you need to submit with your planning application. The information will fall into one of the two categories:

- **Basic requirements** - this information is required by law and we cannot process your application without it.
- **Other supporting information** - additional information we need to fully assess your application, which will give you a better chance of getting permission (see Appendix 3).

Basic requirements (see Appendix 2)

Planning legislation¹ sets out the minimum information that you must submit when making a planning application. Without this information, your application is not valid and we **cannot legally deal with it**. Our Application Checklist sets out what basic information we need.

Table 1 provides a summary of the types of basic information that may be required with your application.

Appendix 2 of this Checklist provides detailed guidance on what basic information you will need to submit. This includes a description of each of the basic requirements and which are needed by type of application.

If the basic information is missing when you submit your application we will write to tell you. Please note that we cannot deal with your application until the basic information is provided.

Table 1: Basic requirements (see Appendix 2)

Application form
Ownership certificate
Site location plan
Plans and drawings
Pre-application Community Consultation Report ²
Design and Access Statement ³
Fee ⁴

¹ Articles 3 to 7 (inclusive) of the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015

² Required for all applications for Major development

³ Required for certain types of application - see Appendix 2 (Design and Access Statements)

⁴ Subject to exemptions

Continued overleaf

Applications can be submitted by post or hand delivered to us at the following address:

Belfast Planning Service

Ground Floor, Cecil Ward Building,
4-10 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 8BP
Email: planning@belfastcity.gov.uk



Other supporting information (see Appendix 3)

In addition to the basic requirements, we often require other supporting information to fully assess planning applications. The level of supporting information will depend on the specific circumstances of the proposal including its scale, use and location.

Table 2 below lists the types of other supporting information you may need to provide with your application. **Appendix 3** provides detailed guidance on what is required and when. **This does not apply to Householder or Advertisement Consent applications.**

Table 2: Other Supporting Information (see Appendix 3)

Air Quality Impact Assessment	Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment
Archaeological Assessment	Odour Abatement Strategy
Archaeological Field Evaluation	Parking Strategy
Biodiversity Checklist	Phasing Plan
Biodiversity Survey	Planning Agreement (Heads of Terms for)
Concept Statement	Planning Statement
Construction Environmental Management Plan	Retail Impact Assessment
Contamination Report	Sequential Test (Main Town Centre Uses)
Contextual Design Information	Structural Survey
Daylight, Sunlight and Overshadowing Assessment	Student Accommodation Needs Assessment
Drainage Assessment	Transport Assessment
Economic Statement	Transport Construction Management Plan
Environmental Statement (EIA)	Travel Plan
Flood Risk Assessment	Tree Survey
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	Viability Appraisal
Lighting Assessment	Waste Management Plan

We will take a proportionate approach to requests for other supporting information. We will only ask for it where it is reasonable and necessary to enable us to assess your application.

If we believe any information in Table 2 is necessary and you have not provided it with the application we will write to you and ask you to submit it **within 14 days**. If you are unable to provide the information in time we will arrange for the application to be returned (including the fee) so that you can submit it again when all the information we need is ready. We currently apply this approach to the following planning applications:

- Major development
- 10 residential units and above
- commercial proposals of 1,000 sqm or more
- sites of 0.5ha and above

We will phase in other types of applications in due course.

If you choose to ask for your application to be decided without the necessary information then there is a risk that it will be refused and we will not return your fee.

Information Checklist

Our Information Checklist at **Appendix 1** is a useful tool to help you identify what information you need to provide with your application. We ask that you complete it in all cases and **submit it with your application** as missing information can lead to delays or could even result in refusal of your application. You can cross reference with Appendices 2 and 3 to help you.

Pre-Application Discussions

We offer a **Pre-Application Discussion (PAD)**⁵ service so you can discuss your proposals with a planning officer before submitting a planning application. This helps to identify any

issues at an early stage. As part of this process, you can clarify what information you need to submit with your application.

How do I submit an application to the council?

It is not currently possible to submit an online planning application in Northern Ireland. You will need to provide **four copies** of your application, including the application form, plans and drawings and other documentation in paper form (unless the council agrees otherwise - see below).

Electronic copies of documentation (other than plans and drawings)

To speed up the registration process, you can submit an **electronic copy** of any reports and supporting documentation (other than plans and drawings), in addition to paper copies. Where an electronic copy is provided, we only require **two paper copies** of that documentation instead of four. Please note that electronic documents must be in PDF format and each file should be no more than 10mb in size.

Amended plans and supporting information

If you are submitting amended plans and supporting information please explain in a covering letter what the changes are and why you are making them. We recommend you label the drawing with a revision number (e.g. Revision A, B, C, D etc.) and include a revision schedule on the drawing that shows the revision number, description of the change and the date it was made.

Planning application process

For further guidance on how we deal with planning applications please see our guide to processing planning applications go to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/planning

⁵ There may be a charge for this service



A guide to the planning application process

Our aim is to help our customers get a timely planning decision that benefits our city.

To help achieve this, we follow our ten operating principles (see Appendix 1).

Introduction

The planning process has a vital role to play in shaping our city for the better. It ensures that development is properly managed in the public interest, taking opportunities to further sustainable development that meets the needs of both current and future generations.

Planning is also a significant tool in delivering the Belfast Agenda, the city's first Community Plan. Belfast has ambitious plans for growth including increasing the population of Belfast by 66,000 with 46,000 additional jobs by 2035. The planning process will help ensure that this change happens in a sustainable and managed way.

Belfast City Council has responsibility for most planning functions in the city, including:

- publishing a Local Development Plan that outlines how land should be used and developed in the future;
- making decisions on the majority of planning applications;
- making Tree Preservation Orders;
- investigating and enforcing breaches of planning control; and
- providing advice to customers on the planning process including our Pre-Application Discussion service.

This guidance is specifically aimed at the planning application process and how we deal with planning applications.

Our aim is to provide a responsive planning service that meets the needs of all citizens including applicants, developers, communities, interest groups and businesses.

Belfast City Council's [Statement of Community Involvement](#) sets out how we involve the community in making decisions on planning applications, as well as preparing our new Belfast Local Development Plan.

Legislation and policy context

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides the legislative framework for the planning system in Northern Ireland.

The Act requires that planning applications are decided in accordance with the Local Development Plan for the area, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

You can find more information on the Local Development Plan, including the draft Belfast Local Development Plan on the [Belfast City Council website](#).

For guidance on what is a material consideration, go to the [Planning Portal](#).

The Department for Infrastructure is responsible for planning at regional level. It has published a series of planning policy documents that are an important material consideration in the decision-making process. These include:

- [Regional Development Strategy 2035 \(RDS\)](#)
- [Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland 2015 \(SPPS\)](#)
- [Planning Policy Statements \(PPSs\)](#)

Do I need to apply for planning permission?

Different types of consent

You may need to apply to us for the following types of consent:

- [Planning permission](#) for building works (including new buildings, structures and external alterations, change to ground levels, mining operations and changes of use of land or buildings)
- Advertisement Consent for new signage
- Listed Building Consent for external or internal alterations to the built fabric of a Listed Building
- [Conservation Area Consent](#)¹ for demolition of a building or structure in a Conservation Area (where the structure exceeds 115 cubic metres)
- [Works to a tree covered by a Tree Preservation Order](#)
- [Works to a tree within a conservation area](#)

¹ Subject to the Planning (Control of Demolition in Conservation Areas) Direction 2015



Permitted development

Certain minor works or uses do not require planning permission from us and may be carried out as 'permitted development'.

The specific rules for permitted development are set out in the [Planning \(General Permitted Development\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#). This includes certain proposals within the curtilage of a dwelling house, some changes of use and other minor operations.

You can find further advice on when planning permission is required on the [Planning Portal](#).

If you would like us to confirm whether your proposal requires planning permission, you can apply for a [Certificate of Lawful Use or Development \(Proposed\)](#). This is a legally binding decision from the council and may be useful confirmation when you come to sell your home or property.

Deemed advertisement consent

Certain adverts and signs can be erected without the need for Advertisement Consent. These circumstances are set out in Schedules 2 and 3 of the [Advertisement Regulations](#).

How do I submit a planning application?

The information requirements for submitting a planning application are set by [legislation](#).

Our [Application Checklist](#) sets out what information you need to provide with your planning application.

It is vital that applications are supported by the right information so that we can assess them properly and deal with them in a timely manner. If supporting information is missing, it can lead to delays or could even result in your application being refused.

We therefore strongly encourage you to use our Application Checklist.

Our Pre-Application Discussion service provides opportunity for you to discuss your proposals with a planning officer before you make a planning application. We can advise you on how to make your application and what the likely issues will be when it is considered. For advice on smaller scale proposals such as domestic extensions, other home improvements and advertisements, we provide a Duty Planning Officer service.

You can submit a planning application yourself or appoint an agent or architect to act on your behalf. Please note that if you use an agent or architect, our contact during the application process will always be with them.

Pre-Application Discussions

We offer a [Pre-Application Discussion service](#)² so you have better chance of getting permission when you submit your application.

A Pre-Application Discussion should improve the quality of your proposal, reduce the time it takes to determine your application, and give you peace of mind that you are on the right lines before making a planning application.

We are committed to providing a quality planning service, both in terms of the quality of new development and the timescale in which we make our decisions. Good quality decisions, made in a timely manner need commitment and input from both our officers and applicants.

Please note that if you choose not to follow our advice given at the pre-application stage, this could lead to your planning application being refused. Applications that do not follow advice can undermine the Pre-Application Discussion process and our ability to process applications efficiently and in a timely manner.

Duty Planning Officer

For general enquiries or advice on smaller scale proposals such as domestic extensions, other home improvements and advertisements, we provide a Duty Planning Officer service. The Duty Planning Officer is available between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday and can be contacted either by telephone (028 9050 0510) or in person (at the Cecil Ward Building, 4-10 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 8BP).

How do we process your application?

Receipt of your application

When we receive your application, we will check if you have submitted the correct information using our Application Checklist.

If information is missing, we will write to you and ask for it to be provided with 14 days. If you are unable to provide the information in time we will arrange for the application to be returned (including the fee) so that you can submit it again when all the information we need is ready. We will phase in this new approach gradually.

If you choose to ask for your application to be decided without the necessary information then there is a risk that it will be refused and we will not return your fee.

When you submit a complete application with all the information we need, we will send you an acknowledgement and include the case officer's contact details, normally within seven days. The case officer will be responsible for managing your planning application and will be your point of contact throughout the process.

Consultation

Once we have all the information we need we will carry out consultations on the application in accordance with the [legislative requirements](#).

We will:

- publish notice of the application in the press;
- notify neighbours by way of a letter;
- publish information about the application on the [Planning Portal](#) website;
- notify statutory consultees such as government departments; and
- consult relevant non-statutory consultees such as other service areas within the council.

We are unable to give a decision on the application until at least 14 days from when notice of the application is published in the press or from when neighbours are notified, whichever is the later. We are also unable to give a decision until at least 21 days after we have consulted a statutory consultee. (Please note that applications requiring an Environmental Statement under the [Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations](#) have a longer consultation period).

² Please note that there may be a charge for this service

Site visits

In the vast majority of cases, we will visit the site to help our assessment of your planning application. The case officer aims to visit the site within 21 days of the complete application being submitted. We will not always advise you of when we will visit the site because planning officers frequently visit several sites on the same day and it is difficult to give a precise time. However, if the site is inaccessible we will contact you to arrange access to the site in advance.

Feedback on your application

We will contact you once we have carried out our initial assessment of the application to tell you how the process is going. Normally this will be after the consultation period has ended.

If we find a problem with your application, we will let you know as soon as possible. Our aim will be to work with you to try to find a solution, where this is feasible. Please note that it will not always be possible to address the concerns under the current application and sometimes a new application may be required.

If we feel that an application should be refused, we will always let you know beforehand. Applications that have fundamental problems will be refused straightaway.

You can track the progress of a planning application on the [Planning Portal website](#). This includes the option of registering for [email notifications](#) about tracked applications.

Timely decision-making

We aim to decide local applications³ within an average processing time of 15 weeks and major applications⁴ within an average processing time of 30 weeks, in accordance with statutory indicators. In addition, we have introduced a further indicator for deciding householder applications⁵ within an average processing time of 12 weeks.

These indicators are an average processing time and we will not be able to decide all applications within these time periods.

If there is a problem with your application, we will let you know. If it is not possible to resolve the issue within the above timeframes we may invite you to withdraw the application and submit a new application that addresses our concerns to avoid your original application being refused. We will not accept significant changes to a proposal once the application is submitted because this undermines our ability to make timely decisions. Therefore, you should use our Pre-Application Discussion service to resolve any issues first.

Our [Pre-Application Discussion](#) service is aimed at identifying issues early and will give you a better chance of your application being determined more quickly.

Case Officer report

In all cases, the Case Officer will write a report that sets out their recommendation as to whether the planning application should be approved or refused. The report is a professional and impartial assessment of the relevant issues and only [material planning considerations](#) may be considered as part of the assessment. The case officer report is always countersigned by another officer.

In the interests of transparency, the Case Officer report will be made publicly available once the decision is made so that

reasons for the decision are clear. A copy of the report will be published on both the [Planning Portal website](#) and planning application file.

How we make decisions

Around 90% of planning applications are determined in accordance with the officer recommendation under 'delegated powers'. Our [Scheme of Delegation](#) sets out in detail when decisions are delegated to officers and when they must be made by the Planning Committee.

Planning Committee

Our Planning Committee meets monthly (other than July during the summer recess) and determines all applications for major development, those where the council has an estate and certain other applications set out in our [Scheme of Delegation](#).

If you would like to speak at our Planning Committee about a planning application that it is going to be considered you will need to complete our [online form](#). You will need to submit the request at least 48 hours before the committee meeting. Once we receive your request we will get in touch with you with more information.

Speaking rights at the committee are limited to the applicant, anyone who has submitted a written response to the application, and elected representatives.

Please note that we will not notify you when an application is going to be heard by the Planning Committee. You can check the agenda for upcoming Planning Committees on the [council website](#).

Regionally significant planning applications

The Department for Infrastructure has responsibility for dealing with planning applications that have [regional significance](#). If you have a query relating to a regionally significant planning application you should contact the Department directly. Call 0300 200 7830 or email planning@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Making comments on an application

Anyone may make a comment on a planning application. Comments must be made in writing and may be made online on the [Planning Portal website](#) or by email or post to the address at the bottom of this guidance.

We accept petitions but will only correspond with whoever submitted the petition and not with other signatories on the petition.

In assessing a planning application, we can only take account of material planning considerations. Any comments you make should be restricted to [material planning considerations](#) only. For example, we are unable to take into consideration civil disputes or issues which are regulated by other non-planning legislation.

The case officer will summarise any submitted comments in their report and the council will take them into consideration when it makes its decision.

If you have made a comment on an application, you can track the progress of the application on the [Planning Portal website](#). This includes the option of registering for future email notifications.

³ All other development that does not fall within the definition of major development

⁴ The definition of a 'major' development is provided by the Planning (Development Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

⁵ Householder applications are for domestic proposals such as an extension, garage, outbuilding, shed or satellite dish, alterations to an access or driveway, and other home improvements

Please note that we will not notify you when an application is going to be heard by the Planning Committee. You can check the agenda for upcoming Planning Committees on the [council website](#). Due to volume, we are unable to respond to individual comments submitted on planning applications. We are also unable to advise the outcome of the application, however, you can check the decision on the [Planning Portal](#) website.

Post-decision

The making of a decision on a planning application is not the end of the planning application process.

As the applicant you must ensure that you carry out the proposal in accordance with the approved plans. You will also need to make sure that you comply with any condition/s specified on the planning permission. Failure to do so may be a breach of planning control.

Discharging planning conditions

Sometimes we impose a planning condition that requires you to submit further details to us for approval before certain works or uses can commence. You should allow at least eight weeks for this information to be assessed following its submission and you should take this into account in your project timeline. More complex information may take longer to process. Failure to comply with these conditions could make your proposal unauthorised and liable to enforcement action.

Monitoring Conditions and Planning Agreements

In the interest of compliance and identifying breaches of planning control, we actively monitor planning agreements made under Section 76 of the Act to ensure they are complied with. We may also monitor certain planning conditions to make sure they are followed.

Other non-planning consents

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure compliance with any relevant non-planning legislation when they implement their permission or consent, such as licensing, roads, drainage, water or other environmental permits.

Works or use of land without permission

We investigate complaints about unauthorised works or use of land carried out in breach of planning control. You can find further information about our planning enforcement service and how to make an enforcement complaint on [our website](#).

Re-issued July 2020 (first issued November 2018)

Right of appeal

If you as the applicant are dissatisfied with our decision you have the right to lodge an appeal to the [Planning Appeals Commission NI](#). Planning appeals may be made in respect of the following:

- refusal of permission or consent, or
- imposing of a planning condition on the decision.

Please note that the right of appeal is limited to the applicant only and appeals must be lodged within **four months** of the decision. There is no third-party right of appeal in Northern Ireland.

Complaints

If you are unhappy with how we have dealt with an application or any aspect of the planning application process you can make a complaint which will be dealt with in accordance with Belfast City Council's corporate complaints procedure.

You can find further details on how to make a complaint [here](#).

Contacting the Planning Service

You can contact our Planning Service in the following ways:

Email: planning@belfastcity.gov.uk

Tel: 028 9050 0510

Post: Belfast Planning Service
Ground Floor
Cecil Ward Building
4-10 Linenhall Street
Belfast, BT2 8BP

Service standards

In order to provide an efficient and effective planning application service we will aim to meet the following service standards:

- Acknowledgement of planning application - within **seven days** of a complete application
- Site visit by Case Officer - within **21 days** of a complete application
- Average time for processing major applications - **30 weeks**
- Average processing time for processing local applications - **15 weeks**
- Average processing time for processing householder applications - **12 weeks**

Planning application process map



Planning Applications – 10 Operating Principles

Helping our customers get a timely planning decision that benefits our city.

1



We make sure we have the right information to support an application at the start of the process.

- We tell our customers what information we need with their application before they submit it. Our **Application Checklist** will set out what information is required and when.
- We check if the required information has been submitted and ask for it if it is missing.
- If the information we need and ask for is not provided we may refuse permission.

2



We make sure we consult the right people.

- We consult the right people at the beginning of the process and follow the correct consultation procedures.
- We will use a **Consultation Checklist** to help us do this.

3



We get on site as soon as possible

- We can only properly assess a proposal once we have been on site. We get on site no later than 21 days after an application is valid.
- We record site visits on the back-office system so that we can measure our ability to get on site quickly.

4



We make sure that we understand our customers' requirements

- We need to understand why our customers have submitted their proposal and the timescales required for their project. This will enable us to help our customers achieve their objectives (if this is possible) within the planning rules.

5



We decide the 'path' of an application as soon as possible (whether it will be approved, refused or if changes are needed).

- This means that any problems with an application are dealt with at the outset, where possible, and that our customers know at an early stage about how we will deal with their application.

6



We inform the applicant or agent as soon as we know that there is a problem with an application and try to find a solution.

- Our customers need to know our views on their application. We give them an opportunity to address problems as soon as possible, where there is a likely solution.

7



We provide a Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) service so that issues can be identified at the beginning of the process, before the application is made.

- This leads to better quality planning applications which should be determined in a more timely manner.
- If applications do not accord with officer advice pre-application, we may refuse permission. This is because it can undermine the PAD process and our ability to process applications quickly and efficiently.

8



If there's a fundamental problem with an application which can't be resolved following discussion with the applicant, we will immediately refuse the application.

- Unacceptable applications should be determined as quickly as possible in the interests of the efficiency of the overall service.

9



We take advice from technical consultees into consideration but always ask, "Must we follow this advice in this particular situation?"

- While we're obliged to consult and take account of advice from the relevant technical consultees, we take a proportionate approach to the handling of each planning application.
- If we do not receive a response from technical consultees in time, we may need to ask ourselves whether we can go ahead and make the decision without it.

10



We keep the work moving at all times!

- Any blockages in the process cause delays. We make sure that the blockage is never at our end. We constantly manage our work to make sure that the 'ball is always in the applicant's court, not ours'. We keep the work constantly moving!