**Planning Applications**

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 sets out the legislative framework for development management in Northern Ireland and provides that, from 1st April 2015, councils largely have responsibility for this planning function.

During 2020/21 Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABC Council) received a total of 1,340 planning applications, an increase of 6.1% on 2019/20 (1,263 applications). The number of applications decided in 2020/21 (926) fell by 18.2% from 2019/20 (1,132) and the number of applications approved declined by 18.1% to 885 applications. A total of 80 applications were withdrawn in 2020/21.

| All Applications | Received | Decided | Approved | Withdrawn |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2015/16 | 1,251 | 1,215 | 1,148 | 32 |
| 2016/17 | 1,383 | 1,423 | 1,358 | 58 |
| 2017/18 | 1,331 | 1,123 | 1,076 | 71 |
| 2018/19 | 1,348 | 1,244 | 1,189 | 78 |
| 2019/20 | 1,263 | 1,132 | 1,081 | 80 |
| 2020/21 | 1,340 | 926 | 885 | 80 |

*Table 1: All planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2020/21. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 1: All planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2020/21. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

Councils determine planning applications for development as being either major development or local development.

Major developments have important economic, social and environmental implications for councils. The majority of major applications are multiple housing, commercial and government and civic types of development.

There were 10 major development applications received by ABC Council in 2020/21. Decisions were made on 15 applications during this time with all decisions being for approval. The approval rate during the previous five financial years was also 100.0%.

2020/21 showed an increase of 9.2 weeks in the average processing times for major development applications, from 45.2 weeks in 2019/20 to 54.4 weeks in 2020/21 however this was still lower than the Northern Ireland average of 61.4 weeks in 2020/21. None of the 11 councils met the 30 week statutory target for major developments in 2020/21. However it is important to note that planning activity and processing performance were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic and thus caution should be taken when making comparisons with other time periods[[1]](#footnote-1).

| Major Development | Received | Decided | Approved | Withdrawn | Average Processing Times (Wks) ABC | Average Processing Times (Wks) NI |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2015/16 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 0 | 42.8 | 46.2 |
| 2016/17 | 13 | 17 | 17 | 1 | 52.8 | 68.6 |
| 2017/18 | 11 | 15 | 15 | 0 | 36.4 | 50.2 |
| 2018/19 | 13 | 8 | 8 | 1 | 23.6 | 59 |
| 2019/20 | 19 | 12 | 12 | 2 | 45.2 | 52.8 |
| 2020/21 | 10 | 15 | 15 | 0 | 54.4 | 61.4 |

*Table 2: Major development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2020/21. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 2: Major development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2020/21. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

Local development applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications.

During 2020/21, ABC Council received 1,330 local development applications, an increase of 6.9% on 2019/20 (1,244). A total of 911 local development applications were decided during 2020/21, of which 870 were approved. This gives an approval rate of 95.5% which has remained unchanged from 2019/20.

The time taken to process local development applications in the borough during 2020/21 was 26.4 weeks, an increase of 11.4 weeks on 2019/20. Processing times in the borough had been fairly consistent and within the 15 week statutory target since 2016/17 so the increase in processing times in 2020/21 is likely an impact of the restrictions put in place due to COVID-19. Northern Ireland average processing times also increased in 2020/21 but not to the same extent as they did in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough.

| Local Development | Received | Decided | Approved | Withdrawn | Average Processing Times (Wks) ABC | Average Processing Times (Wks) NI |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2015/16 | 1,238 | 1,202 | 1,135 | 32 | 22.0 | 19.4 |
| 2016/17 | 1,370 | 1,406 | 1,341 | 57 | 14.0 | 16.2 |
| 2017/18 | 1,320 | 1,108 | 1,061 | 71 | 14.0 | 15.2 |
| 2018/19 | 1,335 | 1,236 | 1,181 | 77 | 14.6 | 14.8 |
| 2019/20 | 1,244 | 1,120 | 1,069 | 78 | 14.6 | 14.0 |
| 2020/21 | 1,330 | 911 | 870 | 80 | 26.4 | 17.8 |

*Table 3: Local development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2020/21. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 3: Local development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2020/21. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

The number of residential applications received by ABC Council in 2020/21 increased by 11.4% to 946 in 2020/21 from 849 in 2019/20. Decisions were made on 661 residential applications during 2020/21, of which 632 (95.6%) were approved.

Average processing times for residential applications increased to 26 weeks on average in 2020/21 in the borough. This was their longest average processing time over the last five years but likely a direct result of the restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Processing times in Northern Ireland were also their highest over the last five years but almost 10 weeks less than the processing times in ABC.

| Residential | Received | Decided | Approved | Withdrawn | Average Processing Times (Wks) ABC | Average Processing Times (Wks) NI |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2015/16 | 749 | 756 | 710 | 18 | n/a | n/a |
| 2016/17 | 917 | 908 | 864 | 29 | 12.8 | 15.6 |
| 2017/18 | 866 | 739 | 704 | 41 | 13.4 | 15.0 |
| 2018/19 | 863 | 815 | 774 | 43 | 14.0 | 14.4 |
| 2019/20 | 849 | 731 | 697 | 55 | 14.2 | 13.4 |
| 2020/21 | 946 | 661 | 632 | 58 | 26.0 | 16.8 |

*Table 4: Residential planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2020/21. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 4: Residential planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2020/21. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

**Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic**

Restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic commenced on 12 March 2020 with the start of the delay phase, before lockdown was applied on 23 March 2020. Although lockdown was gradually eased from May 2020, certain restrictions remained in place over the summer. Varying levels of restrictions continued to be in place between September 2020 and March 2021. Planning activity and processing performance in 2020/21 were impacted by these restrictions and therefore caution should be taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.

Further information on planning statistics and details of the quarterly provisional results can be found via the following link:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-activity-statistics>

1. [Northern Ireland planning statistics April 2020 - March 2021 | Department for Infrastructure (infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)](https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-april-2020-march-2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)