**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 2021/22 Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABC Council) received a total of 1,310 planning applications, a decrease of 2.2% on 2020/21 (1,340 applications). However, the number of applications decided in 2021/22 increased significantly from 926 in 2020/21 to 1,374 in 2021/22, an increase of approximately 48%. The number of applications approved also increased in 2021/22 by 46% to 1,289 applications. A total of 79 applications were withdrawn in 2021/22.

|  All Applications | Received | Decided | Approved | Withdrawn |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 |
| 2021/22 | 1,310 | 1,374 | 1,289 | 79 |

*Table 1: All planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2021/22. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 1: All planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2021/22. 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 17 major development applications received by ABC Council in 2021/22. Decisions were made on 13 applications during this time with all decisions being for approval. The approval rate during the previous six financial years presented in the table was also 100.0%.

In 2021/22 the average processing times for major development applications improved significantly from 54.4 weeks in 2020/21 to 31.6 weeks in 2021/22. While average processing times have improved in Northern Ireland overall also, the borough is still taking an average of 18.2 weeks less to process a major development application.

Antrim and Newtownabbey was the only one of the 11 councils to meet the 30 week statutory target for major developments in 2021/22 achieving a turnaround of 25.1 weeks. Belfast achieved 31 weeks while Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon achieved 31.6 weeks. 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 |
| 2021/22 | 17 | 13 | 13 | 0 | 31.6 | 49.8 |

*Table 2: Major development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2021/22. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 2: Major development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2021/22. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

Local development applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications.

During 2021/22, ABC Council received 1,293 local development applications, a decrease of 2.8% on 2020/21 (1,330). A total of 1,361 local development applications were decided during 2021/22, of which 1,276 were approved. This gives an approval rate of 93.7% which has decreased slightly since 2020/21.

The time taken to process local development applications in the borough during 2021/22 was 24.8 weeks, a decrease of 1.6 weeks on 2020/21. 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 since 2020/21 is likely an impact of the restrictions put in place due to COVID-19 and the resultant backlog. In Northern Ireland overall, average processing times also increased in 2020/21 although not to the same extent as they did in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough, and have fallen again slightly in 2021/22.

| 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 |
| 2021/22 | 1,293 | 1,361 | 1,276 | 79 | 24.8 | 17.2 |

*Table 3: Local development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2021/22. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 3: Local development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2021/22. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

The number of residential applications received by ABC Council in 2021/22 decreased by 8.3% to 867 in 2021/22 from 946 in 2020/21. Decisions were made on 951 residential applications during 2021/22, of which 888 (93.4%) were approved.

Average processing times for residential applications decreased slightly to 24.8 weeks on average in 2021/22 in the borough.

During 2020/21, processing times were at their highest in both the borough and Northern Ireland overall which was most likely a direct result of the restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While processing times have fallen slightly in 2021/22 in both the borough and Northern Ireland, ABC is still approximately 8.8 weeks higher than the average time taken to process a residential planning application in Northern Ireland.

| 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 |
| 2021/22 | 867 | 951 | 888 | 60 | 24.8 | 16 |

*Table 4: Residential planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2021/22. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 4: Residential planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2021/22. 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)