

Planning Applications Committee

31 January 2024



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	THIRD QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT - PLANNING & BUILDING CONTROL
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Julie Williams, Development Manager (Planning & Building Control)
Lead councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Corporate priority	Inclusive Economy
Recommendations	The Committee is asked: 1. To note the report.

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. To advise Committee on the work and performance of the Planning Development Management team and Building Control team for the third quarter of 2023/2024 (October to December) with comparison to same quarters in the previous year.
- 1.2. Unlike the annual report these quarterly reports are focussed on just planning and building control application processing performance.

2. Planning Development Management team

2.1 Performance Targets

a. For applications for major development: **60 per cent** of an authority's decisions should be made within the statutory determination period or such extended period as has been agreed in writing with the applicant.

b. For applications for non-major development: **70 per cent** of an authority's decisions should be made within the statutory determination period or such extended period as has been agreed in writing with the applicant.

Decisions Issued

2.2 The following Table 1a provides a breakdown on the decisions issued for the last three quarters of this year compared to the previous year's quarters. For those decisions issued within the statutory timeframe or within an agreed extended timeframe we have seen a welcome improvement to over 90% for the different types of planning applications handled even with a corresponding increase in overall decisions issued.

2.3 Fees for planning applications increased on 6 December 2023 (see next section) so it is too early to say if the increase (25% for most applications and 35% for Major applications) has had an impact on developers submitting applications.

**Table 1a: Planning Application Performance
By quarters in 2022/2023 and in quarter 1 2023/2024**

Description	DLUHC Target	Q1 2022 Apr-Jun	Q2 2022 Jul-Sept	Q3 22/23 Oct-Dec	Q1 2023 Apr-Jun	Q2 2023 Jul-Sept	Q3 2023 Oct - Dec
Major	60%	0/1 0%	5/5 100%	3/4 75%	7/7 100%	4/4 100%	5/5 100%
Minor	70%	35/57 61%	35/50 70%	37/44 84%	29/32 90%	29/35 82%	48/52 92%
Others (including householders)	70%	89/144 62%	60/111 54%	138/156 88%	110/119 92%	90/102 88%	85/92 92%
Overall Totals		124/202 61%	100/166 60%	178/204 87%	146/158 92%	123/141 87%	138/149 93%

Fee Income

- 2.4 Table 1b provides data on income from applications, pre-app enquiries and miscellaneous advice. It illustrates the continuing decline in applications and fees experienced across the country in 2023.
- 2.5 As explained above planning fees were increased in December 2023. The percentage increase seems high but it needs to be noted that this is the first increase since 2018. It is welcomed by local planning authorities given the increase in the costs of delivering the planning service over the past 5 years.
- 2.6 Also, most developers appreciate that the increase is overdue and welcome the ministerial statement which links the increase to achieving better performance. The Planning Guarantee for undetermined applications (which entitles applicants to a refund unless an extension of time is agreed) has been shortened to 16 weeks for the majority of applications (26 weeks still for Majors).

Table 1b provides information on fee income.

Fee Income	Q1 22/23 Apr-Jun	Q2 22/23 Jul-Sept	Q3 22/23 Oct-Dec	Q4 22/23 Jan-Mar	Q1 23/24 Apr-Jun	Q2 23/24 Jul-Sept	Q3 23/24 Oct - Dec
Applications	£189,196	£219,296	£222,689	£102,522	£203,555	£125,412	£117,368
Pre-App	£30,037	£29,074	£27,910	£9,498	£11,720	£47,813	£29,518.50
Miscellaneous	£5,161	£1,717	£4,943	£905	£1,436	£4,962	£358
Totals	£224,394	£250,087	£255,542	£112,925	£216,711	£178,187	£147,244

- 2.7 As well as the increase in fee and the tightening of timescales there was another significant change on 6 December with the removal of the entitlement to a “free go” for second applications of a determined or withdrawn application. Again, it is too early to report on the impact of this but could encourage the take up of pre-application advice to enable any formal application for planning permission to stand a better chance of being approved quickly.

3. Building Control

- 3.1 The team are in the process of reviewing processes and recruiting staff following the published amendments to the Building Regulations, which were introduced as of 1 October 2023. The new regulatory body is the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) and it is responsible for buildings classed as Higher Risk (mainly tall buildings) although the BSR would look to engage a Local Authority Building Control Building Inspector (Level 3) to work alongside them on such projects. Other development can be overseen by local authority building inspectors or private approved inspectors subject to staff having the correct certified competency for the work involved. The changes also place a legal responsibility on the client, the designer/architect and the contractor to confirm their competency in designing and carrying out the work.
- 3.2 Our team currently comprises the building control team leader, an assistant building control inspector, a trainee building inspector, three technical support officers and three agency surveyors (2 part time). The team is continues to recruit for experienced building control inspectors as it is the aim to employ a Level 3 Building Inspector to ensure we provide the level of competent inspector required in a town like Reading with such a diverse range of construction projects.
- 3.2 Table 2 shows performance for the team and applications dealt with for the past three quarters for this year 23/24 compared with the four quarters for last year.

Table 2: Building Control work performance.

Indicator	Q1 22/23	Q2 22/23	Q3 22/23	Q4 22/23	Q1 23/24	Q2 23/24	Q3 23/24
Dangerous structures attended.	5	4	7	11	12	8	5
Inspections carried out	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	Not recorded	333	339	380
Building Control applications submitted	97	92	140	64	70	165	91
Applications approved within 5 & 8 weeks Statutory limits	85/97 96%	88/92 96%	137/140 98%	44/44 100%	68/70 98%	155/165 95.2%	57/60 91.66%
Number of completion certificates issued	24	13	89	108	73	114	79
Fee income	£70,670	£62,044	£77,487	£69,597	£61,207	£63,651	£67,376
Approved Inspectors Initial Notices	131	65	124	43	107	97	92

4. Contribution to strategic aims

- 4.1 The processing of planning applications and associated work (trees, conservations areas and listed buildings) and building control activities contribute to creating a healthy environment with thriving communities and helps the economy within the Borough, identified as the themes of the Council's Corporate Plan in Section 2 of this report.

5. Community engagement

- 5.1 Statutory consultation takes place on most planning applications and appeals. The Council's website also allows the public to view information submitted and comments on planning applications and eventually the decision reached. There is also information on policy matters and the and this can influence the speed with which applications and appeals are decided. Information on development management performance is publicly available.

6. Equality impact assessment

- 6.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 6.2 In terms of the key equalities protected characteristics, it is considered that the development management performance set out in this report has no adverse impacts.

7. Environmental and climate implications

- 7.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 7.2 The Planning & Building Control and Planning Policy Services play a key part in mitigating impacts and adapting building techniques using adopted policies to encourage developers to build and use properties responsibly, making efficient use of land, using sustainable materials and building methods.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 The collection and monitoring of performance indicators is a statutory requirement. In addition, a number of the work targets referred to in this report are mandatory requirements including the determination of planning applications and the preparation of the development plan.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report although we welcome the commitment in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill to increase application fees which will help to better resource the planning service.