

Planning Applications Committee

30 April 2025



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT - PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT, COMMITMENTS MONITORING BY PLANNING POLICY and BUILDING CONTROL.
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee
Report author	Julie Williams, Development Manager (Planning & Building Control)
Lead Councillor	Councillor Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets
Council priority	Secure Reading's economic & cultural success
Recommendations	The Committee is asked: To note the report.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. To advise Committee on the work and performance of the Planning Development Management team and the work of the Building Control team over the last year - April 2024 to March 2025 with comparison to previous years.

2. Policy context

Planning

- 2.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF). However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).
- 2.2. The current approach for measuring the performance of Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) when dealing with applications was introduced by the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013. It is based on an LPA's performance on the speed of determining applications and the quality of their decisions. The **Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government** (MHCLG) collects data from LPA's to enable performance tables to be published on a quarterly basis. LPA's are at risk of being designated as "underperforming" if targets are not met over the preceding 24 months. If an LPA is designated as underperforming applicants can submit their applications directly to the Planning Inspectorate (who act on behalf of the Secretary of State) to make the decision.

Building Control

- 2.3 Local authorities have a duty under the Building Act 1984 to enforce the Building Regulations 2010 in their area. To do this they are obliged to undertake a range of functions aimed at securing the health, safety, welfare, and convenience of people in and about buildings.

2.4 There has also been a series of regulatory changes brought forward by the Building Safety Act 2022, with one being the requirement for all building control surveyors to be registered, to practice. The Building Safety Regulator has responsibility for the oversight of all building control professionals in terms of their competence, ensuring building control teams have appropriate levels of competence to perform their roles. In addition to this, there are operational standards, which all building control bodies are expected to work within and report on. These operational standards include several broad themes including:

- Systems and controls
- Risk management
- People
- Building Control functions
- Enforcement and intervention activity

2.5 A range of key performance indicators (KPI's) has been established to monitor performance against these themes to ensure building control bodies are operating efficiently and effectively and delivering their intended purpose. It should be noted the Building Safety Regulator will have the power to intervene in cases where Building Control Bodies (including local authorities) are failing to meet requisite standards.

3. Planning Development Management Team Performance

3.1 The current approach for measuring the performance of Local Planning Authorities (LPA's), introduced by the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013, is based on an LPA's performance on the speed of determining applications and the quality of their decisions. The **Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government** (MHCLG) collects data from LPA's to enable performance tables to be published on a quarterly basis. LPA's are at risk of being designated as "underperforming" if targets are not met over the preceding 24 months. If an LPA is designated as underperforming applicants can submit their applications directly to the Planning Inspectorate (who act on behalf of the Secretary of State) to make the decision.

3.2 The criteria for designation as "underperforming" are:

a. Major development: less than **60 per cent** of an authority's decisions on major applications made within the statutory determination period or such extended period as agreed in writing with the applicant;

b. Non-major development: less than **70 per cent** of an authority's decisions on non-major applications made within the statutory determination period or such extended period as agreed in writing with the applicant.

c. For applications for both major and non-major development, above which a local planning authority is eligible for designation, is **10 per cent** of an authority's total number of decisions on major and non-major applications respectively made during the assessment period (previous 24 months) being overturned at appeal.

Speed – criteria a & b

3.3 Once a planning application has been validated the local planning authority should issue a decision on the proposal within the statutory time limits set. The statutory time limits are normally 13 weeks for applications for major development (when an application is subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment a 16 week limit applies) and 8 weeks for all other types of development.

3.4 Local planning authorities can agree with the applicant to extend the time needed. In most cases a written agreement is sufficient when it becomes apparent that more time is needed to address details. For more significant developments, where it is clear from the start that more than 13 weeks is needed, a formal Planning Performance Agreement can be used to set a timetable. When an applicant has agreed to extend time the "Planning Guarantee", which requires the planning application fee to be refunded to applicants if no decision has been made within 26 weeks, does not apply. (Regulation 9A of the 2012 Fees Regulations).

3.5 Table 1 below shows the performance on decisions issued last year and how many were decided within the statutory timeframe or an agreed extended timeframe for the different types of planning applications handled. Data for preceding years is provided for comparison.

TABLE 1: Application Performance in 2024/25 compared with previous years.

Description	DLUHC Target	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Number and Percentage of major applications decided within statutory 13 weeks or an extended period agreed with the applicant.	60%	25/29 86%	13/15 86%	20/20 100%	17/20 85%
Number and Percentage of minor applications decided within statutory 8 weeks or an extended period agreed with the applicant.	70%	150/179 84%	145/196 74%	145/159 91%	132/153 86%
Number and Percentage of other applications (including householder applications) decided within statutory 8 weeks or an extended period agreed with the applicant.	70%	471/554 85%	404/539 75%	377/417 90%	349/395 88%
Total decisions issued		762	750	596	568
Number and Percentage of householder applications decided within statutory 8 weeks or an extended period agreed with the applicant.	70%	377/438 86%	287/386 74%	269/295 91%	285/314 91%

3.6 Performance on speed of making decisions last year was slower than the previous year but was generally better than 21/22 and 22/23. Table 1a shows the teams worked well consistently over the year.

TABLE 1a: Application Performance by quarters in 2024/2025

Description	DLUHC Target	Q1 Apr-Jun	Q2 Jul-Sept	Q3 Oct-Dec	Q4 Jan-Mar
Major	60%	3/4 75%	8/10 80%	2/2 100%	4/4 100%
Minor	70%	28/31 90%	32/40 80%	42/48 88%	30/34 88%
Other	70%	84/88 95%	80/106 84%	105/112 94%	80/89 94%
Householders	70%	75/77 97%	74/89 83%	71/75 95%	65/73 91%

Types of applications received

3.7 In addition to planning applications for new development the Council also receives requests for pre-application advice, plus a variety of other applications. Table 1b shows the fluctuations in the various types of applications received over the last 4 years. The most notable change is the reduction in applications for prior approval to change to residential of all types – perhaps due to the article 4 direction restricting this permitted development route in parts of Reading as modified by the Secretary of State in October 2023.

TABLE 1b: No. of other types of applications received

	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Full Planning	251	265	240	233
Householder Applications	458	428	358	340
Advertisement consent	46	67	49	51
Pre-application advice	116	113	129	106
Certificates of lawfulness	163	167	157	182
Listed Building consent	42	59	55	39
Variations / s73	23	27	27	33
Householder Prior Approvals	55	32	28	42
New residential prior approvals	35	28	10	14
Non-Material Amendment	79	71	57	74
Approval of conditions	190	197	164	252
Works to TPO/CA trees	227	200	213	209
ADJ, Other prior approvals & miscellaneous	63	62	61	29
All types of applications	1748	1716	1548	1604

ADJ - Adjacent Authority Consultation

TPO – Works to trees with Tree Preservation Orders

CA – Works to trees in Conservation Areas

Quality – criteria c

Planning Appeals

- 3.8 Table 2 shows how many of the appeals lodged found favour with the Planning Inspector and were allowed but that in most of the appeal cases the Council's defence of the reasons for refusing planning permission were successful. Performance by officers dealing with appeals in 24/25 was excellent with just 3 appeal decisions allowing the application.

TABLE 2: Section 78 Appeals against the refusal of planning permission

	22/23	23/24	24/25
APPEALS LODGED	24	29	21
NUMBER OF ALL APPEAL DECISIONS	28	28	27
ALL APPEALS ALLOWED IN YEAR	9 (31%)	11 (39%)	3 (11%)

- 3.9 Local planning authorities' performance on appeals is measured by checking the proportion of all decisions made on applications that are subsequently overturned at appeal. Quality is given to be the number of non-major appeals allowed as a percentage of all non-major decisions issued and likewise for major appeals allowed as a percentage of all major decisions issued. As our overall figures have shown, we have been doing well when defending appeals but when broken down between non-major and major we have cause to be a little concerned. The threshold for designation on applications for both major and non-major development, above which a local planning authority is eligible for designation, is 10 per cent of an authority's total number of decisions on relevant applications made during the assessment period being overturned at appeal.
- 3.10 Table 2a shows a summary of the latest published government performance tables (P152 and P154) for the previous 24 months ending March 2024 (the qualifying period) for Reading and other local authorities in Berkshire. For non-majors our decision making was overwhelmingly upheld with 0.6% of all decisions overturned at appeal. However, for majors we have been categorised as a

“near miss” with 8.6% (3 out of the 35 decisions) of all decisions on major applications being overturned at appeal.

- 3.11 It is reassuring to note that over the past year, since March 2024, our appeal performance has continued to be good and as we have refused only 1 major application this year (we are still waiting on the appeal decision) it is anticipated that our performance on quality with major decisions will remain below the 10% threshold.

Table 2a – Government statistics

24 months to end of March 2024 – non-major appeals

	Total non-major decisions	Total non-major appeal decisions	Non-major decisions overturned at appeal	<i>Quality of decisions (% overturned at appeal)</i>
Reading	1,108	24	7	0.6
Wokingham	2,685	54	12	0.4
Bracknell Forest	1,204	36	12	1
West Berkshire	2,102	66	23	1.1
Slough	1,270	41	14	1.1
Windsor and Maidenhead	2,868	126	33	1.1

24 months to end of March 2024 - major appeals

	Total major decisions	Total major appeal decisions	major decisions overturned at appeal	<i>Quality of decisions (% overturned at appeal)</i>
Reading	35	6	3	8.6
Bracknell Forest	56	2	1	1.8
West Berkshire	148	6	3	2.0
Slough	32	3	1	3.1
Wokingham	84	10	6	7.1
Windsor and Maidenhead	73	9	6	8.1

- 3.12 This is why it is important when officers or Planning Applications Committee decide to refuse to grant planning permission that the grounds for refusal are carefully considered and tested to ensure that they derive from material planning considerations and are substantiated by reference to Local Plan policies. Appeal statements produced by officers are also checked to ensure that a robust defence of the Council’s decision is presented. However, despite all our efforts, sometimes a Planning Inspector can give different weight to concerns raised and the benefits of an application to justify reaching a position that supports allowing a planning application.

4. Planning fee income

- 4.1 The following table 3 shows fee income to the planning service from Major, Minors and Other applications last year. Table 3a provides a comparison of the same income over the previous 3 years. 21/22 saw some encouraging recovery after the Covid impact on development, however, this was not sustained over the following two years. Planning fees were increased in price in November 2023 but there was a drop in applications being submitted (see table 1b above). This drop has also been experienced by many local authorities across the country.
- 4.2 There has been a recovery this year with some owners seeking to redevelop or improve their property and Table 3 shows how a couple of Major and Minor applications submitted in quarter 2 gave a welcome boost to income. Without it, it is likely our income would have been around £720k.

TABLE 3: Income from applications for Major, Minor, Others submitted by Quarters

24/25	Majors £	Minors £	Others/HH £	Total Fee £
Q1 April - June	91,229.50	60,574.00	34,309.50	186,113.00
Q2 July - September	£ 252,220.90	£ 140,605.30	£ 23,216.50	£ 416,042.70
Q3 October - December	£ 79,135.00	£ 79,939.30	£ 23,547.00	£ 182,621.30
Q4 January - March	£ 51,141.00	£ 100,468.50	£ 31,101.50	£ 182,711.00
Totals	£ 473,726.40	£ 381,587.10	£ 112,174.50	£ 967,488.00

Table 3a – Total application fee income for 24/25 and previous 3 years

Application fee income	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Total Fee Income	815,164	733,703	596,412	967,488

7. Building Control

- 7.1 The building control team continues to struggle in an ever-changing regulatory environment, which is making recruitment to vacant posts a challenge. The Team Leader has worked hard to support the team and encourage retention of existing staff. Our trainee inspector qualified to become an assistant inspector while one of our business support team was able to successfully apply to become a trainee inspector. They are supported by the Team Leader, three agency building inspectors and a trainee building inspector, who is sponsored by the LABC.
- 7.2 Table 4 shows the case load for the quarters for this year 24/25 and the totals for the same work over the last two years. An explanation for the work carried out is given after the table. Fee income is holding steady compared to the previous year.

TABLE 4: Building Control work.

Case work	22/23	23/24	Q1 24/25	Q2 24/25	Q3 24/25	Q4 24/25	Total 24/25
Fee earning							
Building notices	197	235	33	41	68	34	176
Regularisations	52	55	16	16	24	26	82
Full Plans	257	180	47	58	44	35	184
Demolition notices	13	16	3	3	1	3	10
Partnerships	36	31	12	7	7	7	33
Fee Income	£266,588	£244,631	£62,284	£63,923	£48,671	£66,669	£241,547
Non-Fee earning							
Dangerous structures attended Non fee work	14	5	1	4	5	8	18
Competent Persons	0	1	6	7	15	0	28
AI Initial Notices	332	404	104	104	113	110	431
Advice & Quotes	83	38	4	13	0	2	19
Unauthorised work checks	3	17	2	59	6	19	86

Building notices - Submitted to the local authority building control (LABC) to notify them of planned minor building works, allowing the work to start within 2 days with minimal plans. Normally followed by a regularisation application. Work is inspected as it progresses to ensure compliance with regs.

Regularisations – submitted to obtain building control approval for works carried out already. Inspectors will check that the works met regs in operation at time of completion.

Full Plans applications – involves submitting all plans and details to ensure works comply. Plans will be checked and relevant authorities (water providers etc) consulted. A notice will be provided to confirm plans are approved and works can proceed as per the approved plans. When work finishes a completion certificate can be issued if work complies.

Demolition notices - Section 80 Demolition notices of intended demolition need to be served on an LABC giving 6 weeks to be approved. If not approved by then works can proceed by default. A counter notice can be issued if concerns raised or to impose conditions.

Partnership – Partnership Schemes allows companies to just use one LABC to process all their applications all over the country. This provides consistency with agent and fees for the company. That LABC then applies and usually pays the fee to the home authority to carry out inspections and to provide completion certificates.

NON-FEE EARNING

Unauthorised works – Enforcement notices are issued if works are carried out without first notifying the local authority of the works or getting approval for it if needed. Can lead to Regularisation applications.

Competent Persons schemes – scheme allows trade people to self-certify their work complies with building regs. Does not need an application but trades person should let the local authority know when complete.

8. Contribution to strategic aims

8.1 The Council's new Council Plan (2025-2028) has identified five priorities for the Council over the next three years. These are:

- Promote more equal communities in Reading
- Secure Reading's economic and cultural success
- Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce Reading's carbon footprint
- Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children
- Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future.

8.2 The processing of planning applications (also for work to trees and listed buildings) and associated enforcement work and building control activities contribute to securing Reading's economic and cultural success, delivers sustainable development and healthy environments and modern conditions within the Borough.

9. Community engagement

9.1 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. Facilitating engagement can influence the quality of public involvement and thereby the quality of the eventual decision.

10. Equality impact assessment

10.1 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.

10.2 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.

11. Environmental and climate implications

11.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

11.2 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.

12. Legal implications

12.1 The collection and monitoring of performance indicators and publication of financial performance 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.

13. Financial Implications

13.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report although we continue to monitor fee income and look for ways to improve our efficiency and boost fee income.