**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 2023/24 Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABC Council) received a total of 963 planning applications, a decrease of almost 10% on 2022/23 (1,065 applications). The number of applications decided in 2023/24 increased by 4.3% from 1,041 in 2022/23 to 1,086 in 2023/24. The number of applications approved also increased by 3.5% in 2023/24 to 1,005 applications. A total of 42 applications were withdrawn in 2023/24, 30 less than the previous year.

|  All Applications | Received | Decided | Approved | Withdrawn |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 |
| 2022/23 | 1,065 | 1,041 | 971 | 72 |
| 2023/24 | 963 | 1,086 | 1,005 | 42 |

*Table 1: All planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2023/24. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 1: All planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2023/24. 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 15 major development applications received by ABC Council in 2023/24. Decisions were made on 11 applications during this time with all decisions being for approval. The approval rate during the previous eight financial years presented in the table was also 100.0%.

In 2023/24 the average processing times for major development applications fell by almost 20 weeks from 47 weeks in 2022/23 to 27.6 weeks in 2023/24. While average processing times fell in Northern Ireland overall also, the borough is now taking an average of 18.9 weeks less to process a major development application.

In 2023/24, three of the LGD’s including Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough met the 30 week statutory target for major developments. Information is provided on the percentage of cases processed within the 30 weeks for each LGD. In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, almost 73% of cases were processed within the 30 week target period compared to the Northern Ireland average of 36.8%.

| 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 |
| 2022/23 | 12 | 15 | 15 | 2 | 47.0 | 57.8 |
| 2023/24 | 15 | 11 | 11 | 0 | 27.6 | 46.5 |

*Table 2: Major development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2023/24. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 2: Major development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2023/24. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

Local development applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications.

During 2023/24, ABC Council received 948 local development applications, a decrease of 10% on 2022/23 (1,053). A total of 1,075 local development applications were decided during 2023/24, of which 994 were approved. This gives an approval rate of 92.5% which has decreased slightly since 2022/23 (93.2%).

The time taken to process local development applications in the borough during 2023/24 was 24.6 weeks, an increase of 3.4 weeks on 2022/23. Processing times in the borough had been fairly consistent and within the 15 week statutory target between 2016/17 and 2019/20 so the increase in processing times since 2020/21 may well be a result 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. In 2023/24, the average processing time for local development applications in Northern Ireland was 20.8 weeks which is 3.8 weeks quicker than in the 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 |
| 2021/22 | 1,293 | 1,361 | 1,276 | 79 | 24.8 | 17.2 |
| 2022/23 | 1,053 | 1,026 | 956 | 70 | 21.2 | 19.0 |
| 2023/24 | 948 | 1,075 | 994 | 42 | 24.6 | 20.8 |

*Table 3: Local development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2023/24. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 3: Local development planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2023/24. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

The number of residential applications received by ABC Council in 2023/24 decreased by 11% to 628 from 706 in 2022/23. Decisions were made on 723 residential applications during 2023/24, of which 666 (92.1%) were approved. Average processing times for residential applications increased to 23.8 weeks on average in 2023/24 in the Borough. In Northern Ireland overall, average processing times are now 19.4 weeks which is the highest it has been in Northern Ireland overall of the years presented, even during and after COVID and the backlog caused by the restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, while the average processing time in Northern Ireland is the highest it has been, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council is still taking approximately 4.4 weeks longer than the average time taken to process a residential planning application in Northern Ireland overall.

| 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 | 16.0 |
| 2022/23 | 706 | 703 | 651 | 43 | 21 | 17.6 |
| 2023/24 | 628 | 723 | 666 | 22 | 23.8 | 19.4 |

*Table 4: Residential planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2023/24. Source: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics, Department for Infrastructure.*

*Figure 4: Residential planning applications in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough 2015/16 to 2023/24. 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>