Minutes of MS Teams Meeting held between RSUA and RTPI Members and Principal Planning Officers CC&GBC held 14th January 2026

Apologies:

Denise Dickson – Head of Planning

Sharon Mulhern – Principal Officer – Development Plan, Trees and Conservation

Damien McLaughlin – HERE Architects

Scott Caithness – Montgomery Irwin Architects Ltd

Attendance:

Jennifer Lundy – Development Management (Locals) Manager (JL)

Shane Mathers – Development Management (Majors) and Enforcement Manager (SM)

Curtis Large – RSUA Policy and Public Affairs – (CL)

Murray Bell - Local RSUA Rep – Bell Architects Ltd – (MB)

Neal McCormick – Studio Rogers – (NMcC)

Graeme Montgomery – Montgomery Irwin Architects – (GM)

Nathan Armstrong – Nathan Armstrong Architects Ltd - (NA)

Philip Parker – Parker Architects - (PP)

David Mountstephen - Fleming Mounstephen Planning – (DM) (Remote)

Alana Durrent – Valley Architects - (AD) (Remote)

Eoighin Farren – Farren Architects - (EF) (Remote)

Andrew English – Education Authority (BM) (Remote)

Robbie McNaugher – AECOM - (RMN) (Remote)

Sarah Barrett – TSA Planning - (SB) (Remote)

Scott Kennedy – Bell Architects – (SK) (Remote)

1.0 Introduction

1.1 SM opened the meeting, welcoming attendees and providing introductions.

1.2 SM referred to the already circulated agenda for this meeting and thanked those who had contributed to the agenda items.

2.0 Minutes of Previous Meetings:

2.1 SM tabled the minutes from the meeting held 15 October 2025.

2.3 Minutes were agreed and the minutes will be published to Council website.

3.0 Action Points from Previous Meetings:

3.1 SM went through the action points from previous meetings and updated as follows:

- DfI Roads meeting to be arranged in relation to consultation responses on replacement dwellings and PADs –meeting arranged for April. Complete
- Need for quick decisions on planning applications for Special Educational Needs (SEN) development –meeting held with Educational Authority 19.03.26. Complete
- Accessibility of requests for amendments/further information – Complete

3.2 SM advised the issue regarding multiple alerts from Planning Portal being issued to agents was checked with ICF and raised at the Agent Forum. It has been agreed to change the time of the alert e-mails to 8am and will be enabled on 21 January 2026

3.3 MB advised it had taken 3 years for this confirmation. SM advised this is a central issue and is outside control of Council.

4.0 Publication of The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)-Edition 2 (December 2025):

4.1 SM gave an overview of the SPPS Edition 2:

- In early 2024 DfI undertook consultation on- "Call for evidence on a future focused review of the SPPS on the issue of climate change".
- The revised policy was published last month as "SPPS Edition 2 2025". This takes the form of a complete republication of the SPPS, with only the section on Renewable Energy having new planning policy content.
- PPS 18 Renewable Energy, published in 2009, has been cancelled. However, the guidance accompanying PPS 18 still applies.
- The revised policy was published to reflect and assist the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 targets of 80% electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2030 (and net zero emissions by 2050). The Executive's Programme for Government- Doing What Matters most, published March last year, shows the current production is around 47%.
- There is a clear link set between the planning system and the targets of the Climate Change Act.

- The main difference between the previous SPPS and Edition 2 is that while the previous one sought to “facilitate” renewable energy, Edition 2 seeks to “maximise” it.
- The new policy has 3 additional strategic objectives and is more ambitious. It has a clear link to the overarching aim of the SPPS and has a push towards climate change targets.
- The policy now includes supporting infrastructure- Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).
- The new policy adds provision regarding re-powering, expanding and extending the life of existing solar and wind farms, stating that “significant weight will be given to the benefits.”
- The new policy includes provision regarding onshore development to facilitate offshore development.
- Specific provision is made regarding solar farms, now stating “Solar farms which are well planned and well screened can have an acceptable visual impact…”
- Regarding AONBs, the new policy contains the same provision as the previous “A cautious approach will apply within designated landscapes which are of significant value such as AONB…” In the Borough, there are several AONBs- Sperrin, Binevenagh, Causeway Coast and Antrim Coast and Glens.
- The preamble clarifies that both PPS 18 and the provisions regarding renewables in the original SPPS are revoked. In practice, this means that any live application will be assessed using the policy in the new SPPS.

4.2 MB asked if there was any instruction on how CC&GBC responds to it.

4.3 SM advised relevant to all applications for renewable energy proposals. Includes having regard to the new policy when preparing Planning Committee Reports for major wind farm applications. SM advised, for example, the Planning Department will have to prepare an Addendum to the Planning Committee Report for the major wind farm application at Brishey as the new policy applies to that site, once the further environmental information has been received and assessed.

4.4 SM advised it is the same language for AONBs – cautious approach.

4.5 CL asked to what extent the Council are interested regarding focus on the new SPPS on wind farms.

4.6 SM advised regarding repowering – there was a gap in the previous policy- now addressed. Corkey and Rigged Hill wind farms approved in the mid 1990s, we approved repowering. Large solar farm approved recently which met the old policy but would not meet the new policy.

4.7 MB mentioned the Gateside application approved recently.

4.8 SM advised that application approved on balance.

4.9 MB asked about capacity within CC&GBC – export as a Borough and Planning Committee take caution around wind farms – we have enough.

4.10 SM stated NIE/SONI are proposing a link into Rasharkin sub station to facilitate transfer of electricity to and from the Borough.

4.11 MB stated the Chief Executive of SONI is from the Borough.

4.12 SM mentioned need for capacity in the grid to deal with changes/ new developments.

5.0 Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)-Overview since September 2024:

5.1 Shane Mathers gave an update on the new PADs process and invited comments:

- PADs are beneficial for customers by: offering a direction on the acceptability of a proposal at the outset; identifying constraints that require resolution and; by indicating technical requirements/ need for specific reports etc
- For the first time, a fee was levied, tailored to the scale of the proposal. This extends from the lowest fee for small scale development at £120 to major scale development at £535. Fee paying for PADs is limited to a few councils in Northern Ireland.
- Relative to the previous PAD process, this offered the following principal service improvements:
- A 5 day timeframe from receipt of the application for contact to arrange a meeting, if requested.
- The ability to select which consultees, if any, that are to be consulted on the proposal.
- Definitive structure on what advice will be provided including: various constraints; relevant planning history; specific consultations likely to be required and; technical requirements.
- Significantly, the process committed the Planning Department to provide “robust” advice- (specific adjective used).
- A 20 day timeframe for providing advice following the PAD meeting, if requested.
- Since the new PAD process was introduced in September 2024, there has been a reduction in the number received by approximately 25%. This may be due to a fee being levied or some other factor.
- Meetings in addition to a written response are available from the second tier in the Fee and Service Schedule with a fee of £300. The PAD meetings are central to the process and are available either in person or on-line. For major applications, the Planning Department offers either a single 2 hour meeting or two 1 hour meetings. Two meetings are popular in scenarios where there is an outstanding consultation response or where an agent wishes to table an amended scheme where the initial one identifies issues for resolution.

- For major proposals, we consistently underline that major applications are determined by the Planning Committee who may take a different position from the Planning Department. Therefore, advice is given without prejudice to that position.
- The process is popular, with 42 submitted since September 2024. 27 PADs have been decided with 15 under consideration.
- PADs have been submitted for a range of development types including, mainly: housing, sport/ recreation, tourism, agriculture and energy infrastructure.
- Housing (of various scales) has been the most popular type of development, accounting for 57% of applications submitted

5.2 CL asked if the reduction in the use of PADs is due to number of applications being processed.

5.3 SM advised the reason is not known/ is speculation.

5.4 MB advised the feedback is not all positive. Difficult experiences with one of the PADs in the new system. He stated the homework list given was diligent but the process lacked opinion/guidance. He had a 1.5 hour meeting on the PAD but didn't know 2 hour meetings were available.

5.5 JL advised the 2 hour meeting only applies to major applications.

5.6 SM advised the advice should be robust as per DMIN 05.

5.7 MB advised it opened more doors than closed doors. Not tangible in terms of steer. Opinion was limited.

5.8 NA asked about written responses for single housing applications and how detailed they are.

5.9 JL advised the response depends on what was submitted. Will advise whether it complies with policy.

5.10 NA mentioned the principle of development.

5.11 JL advised while not site inspected we review what has been submitted and use mapping and Google maps.

5.12 NA asked if more information is important.

5.13 JL advised that it is in relation to the detail you want us to assess.

5.14 GM asked about a gap site for two houses and stated it is ambiguous how to measure.

5.15 JL advised that can also be resolved by a Duty Planner query.

5.16 NMcC said his experience was good. Got good responses back.

5.17 JL advised housing schemes are front loaded. Successful PAD process, subsequent applications come in with a detailed Planning Statement and those applications that were informed through the PAD process are issuing quickly.

5.18 DM advised he had positive experience. Communication was good and was afforded the opportunity to meet and respond. Consultations were good and always room for improvement. Got standard responses and survey results good.

5.19 NMcC asked about schemes that don't fall to major but are still significant. Can Planning address again through PAD process.

5.20 SM advised can make a further submission after meeting but before written response issues. Response will be provided on further information.

5.22 SM advised the response on a PAD is a recap of issues raised at the meeting and amendments can be submitted at the meeting and agents/applicants should leave PAD meeting confident on what was discussed.

6.0 The Efficient Processing of Planning Applications Protocol:

6.1 Presentation by JL:

HoP had committed earlier this year to providing an efficient processing of planning applications protocol.

This has been circulated through Curtis and Julie before Christmas.

The document sets out the purpose of the Protocol to deliver a more efficient processing system to assist in meeting the statutory planning performance targets making improvements to the DM process. It updates previous protocols we would have had with the former DOE and when we first came across to Council.

The document sets out the legislative background for the setting of the statutory targets 30 weeks for major, 15 for local applications. It also sets of the requirement for advertisement and statutory consultation.

We encourage developers to engage early in Pre-Application Discussions at the initial stages in the formulation of a project to identify issues at the earliest opportunity.

As highlighted by Shane and noted in previous meetings the PAD process is working well.

We also ask that the applicants speak to their neighbours prior to submission.

Para 5 sets out a check list of what should be carried out as part of the planning application preparation. The document has been prepared for all those involved in the application process.

It is a commitment that when in receipt of a fully complete application that we will endeavour to proceed with the application as expediently as possible. Please note the fifth bullet point of para 5.2 is to be amended.

The Protocol now goes into further detail in the processing of an application.

Stage 1 - Validation the majority of applications are validated within 1-2 days of receipt the Protocol allows for 5 days to account for more complex larger scale applications that may also require fee checks. Further information can be provided within 10 days following the request.

Stage 2 - Allocation

Applications are usually allocated on a daily basis; we have provided 3 days to account for days when out of the office/ Planning Committee other competing priorities.

Stage 3 - Consultation with Statutory Bodies

Most consultations are sent within 48 hours of allocation. However, we have given up to 5 days to allow for days out on site and other priorities. With the exception of NIEA and SES the case officer will chase up the consultee response within one week from the expiry of the response timeframe. We seek that minor amendments or clarification are sent within 2 weeks of receipt of the request from the case officer. As set out in para 6.9, you may wish to discuss with the case officer the consultee requests before submission.

Stage 4 - Public Consultation (Advertising and Neighbour Notification)

Neighbour notification is carried out by the case officer at the same time as the consultations.

Stage 5 – Normally a site inspection will be carried out within three weeks of allocation.

Stage 6 - Initial Planning View

Senior Officers will review applications with Case Officers normally within three weeks of a site inspection to confirm the basis for assessing each proposal in terms of planning policy and to form an initial planning view. The need for this level of guidance will vary depending on the nature of the proposal and the experience of the Case Officer, and some officers will complete their report

When an initial planning view is formed, applications will normally fall into one of three categories:

(1) *Proposal is acceptable* – applications which can be recommended for approval with no or minor amendment (without requiring negotiation); or

(2) *Proposal requires amendment and/or additional information needed* – applications where it is judged that negotiation and amendment could lead to approval; or

(3) *Proposal is unacceptable and likely to be refused* – applications where negotiation is unlikely to lead to an acceptable proposal.

Stage 7 – Development Management Officer Report (DMOR)

The Case Officer shall endeavour to complete the assessment of the application and the DMOR within 3 weeks following discussions with a Senior Officer and completion of the public and statutory consultation timeframes.

Stage 8 – Corporate Opinion relates to the management of the teams workloads and one to one discussion with the senior planner. Its sets out the ability to meet on the application.

Stage 9 – Planning Committee Meeting

Stage 10 - Issuing Decisions

Comments received from the RSUA that have raised points/ areas for clarification.

JL advised that 40% of applications are issuing within 15 weeks with 48% of applications issued in the first 2 quarters under 20weeks. Most of those submitting applications are aware of the constraints/environmental issues in the area. For those applications where there is uncertainty of what to submit or how the proposal sits within planning policy/guidance, you may find the PAD process beneficial. Early engagement is key. Point 4 of the Protocol refers to early engagement. The PAD process is the first opportunity for discussion, engagement and negotiation. The Protocol is formulated around the stages of a planning application process, and the main stages all refer to communication with the applicant/agent and providing a meeting opportunity. The Protocol is a commitment to improve the way we work and to be expedient in the processing of planning applications.
The Protocol is arranged to issue applications at 10.5 weeks from the valid date. The Planning Department seeks the support of both the RSUA and RTPI on same.

JL invited comments from RTPI members.

6.2 MH stated it is a positive step.

6.3 RMcN echoed MH comment that it is a positive step, good for understanding and level of service to expect. Asked if a flow diagram would be more

visual/beneficial and simplified. Can we automate that when a meeting takes place an e-mail can go out with the actions so not being chased? It means positive engagement and clear where you are in the process so you can manage expectations. Statement of Ambition-simple things can go out early and if principle unacceptable, we can look at it early. Asked if 2 weeks can be given for updated information and dialogue if information cannot be provided-can we sway on that.

6.4 JL advised 2 weeks are given for minor information. If more complex, we will give longer. We assess all consultation responses and go back as soon as possible on principle of development.

6.5 DM agreed and empathised regarding giving a bit more time.

6.6 JL advised if the 2 week time frame is not achievable, let us know and provide a more realistic timeframe for submission of information. All parties to be open/transparent and communicate.

6.7 AE asked about the 21 days for consultation responses.

6.8 JL advised it is statutory and set in the legislation. Most consultation responses are returned within the timeframe and delays are mostly from NIEA/SES. Work is ongoing at a strategic level through the Performance Improvement Plan. NIEA Standing advice also being reviewed. There is work ongoing in background and we are feeding into it.

6.9 CL stated Council are being exemplar of engagement. No fault with engagement/transparency. Ongoing discussion and committed to being involved in improvements.

6.10 MB endorses notion of timeline.

6.11 JL advised that as it appears we have support from the RTPI we also would prefer agreement from the RSUA prior to taking it to the Planning Committee. There is improvement in minor applications/housing schemes so we know it is working while reducing our over 12 month plus applications. Referred to Belfast City Council document and CC&GBC have gone further to provide clarity in the process.

6.12 CL said next step is to articulate outstanding concerns and allow it to get moving.

6.13 JL agreeable to add a flow chart – quicker visual document.

6.14 MB raised concern about contact on releasing electronic notifications. It's not clear who provided this information and the website is not up to date with details of Senior Planning Officers managing which teams.

6.15 JL advised that they should always go back to the Case Officer and we will get website updated. She advised name of Case Officer will be typed in prior to notification being issued and the final report is always a 2 person report. It will be a brief note of the meeting and any issues and DMO Report uploaded.

6.16 CL advised the RSUA will come back with further comment.

7.0 Performance Update – Q2 2025-26 Published Statistics:

7.1 SM advised DfI has published the second Quarter 2025/26 Statistical Bulletin. He advised that the statutory targets and the Business Plan targets were met. He provided details on the major applications determined, the improvement in the local applications performance. SM also referred to progress in reducing older applications in the system and the improvements being made in this area.

7.2 CL asked if applications have dropped year on year.

7.3 SM advised only have the figures for Q2 at hand.

7.3 CL asked why applications were dropping and it's a record low from 20 years ago.

7.4 CC&CBG have not had a significant decrease compared to Mid Ulster and Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Councils.

7.5 CL said we need to gain insight into why there is a reduction in numbers.

7.6 SM advised has no data available to substantiate/explain the reduction in numbers.

7.5 RMcN stated if working on backlog this is commendable – its positive for applications coming in.

7.6 MB asked about the ability to move forward with negative conditions.

7.7 SM advised there was an obstacle with NI Water consultation responses which is now resolved and allows applications to move forward.

7.8 JL mentioned the ammonia issue for applications over 24 months.

8.0 Issues raised by agents for discussion:

(a) The Efficient Processing of Planning Applications Protocol

8.1 Discussed above.

9.0 AORB:

9.1 SM invited comments on any other issues to be discussed:

9.2 MB said 1 member has raised the issue of pause of decision notification and we need to speed up the process to get decision issued quickly.

9.3 SM outlined the Planning Committee process and we have to wait 5 days before decision can issue due to call-in procedure. He asked if the delay was regarding a delegated application and stated there must be a reason. He asked for the member to contact Planning Department and we will provide explanation.

9.4 MH referred to ongoing work with RTPI NI and CIHT around roads in housing schemes to reduce their dominance.

9.5 SM advised regarding the issue of housing layout. Mentioned the DOE document 'Creating Places' and doing away with formal layouts. Mentioned the Policy Guidance document and supporting shared surface roads as they are more appropriate. Roads should be connected and have access for emergency services. We encourage use of different finishes and the use of parking spaces included in PSD.

9.6 MB stated there needs to be more flexibility and conversation needs to take place with DfI. He was asked to delete the colour off drawings.

9.7 GM advised in his experience, DfI Roads are reluctant to adopt anything that is not asphalt.

9.8 NMcC stated it needs to be a joint approach.

9.9 CL met with DfI at end of last year and 2 Roads Officials advised they are not specialists in design layout. Need to get key players around the table. He is not familiar with Creating Places document. There is a need for revision – push for conversation to make it happen. Police representatives – vito over whether social housing gets funding. DfC review-responded to TOR

9.10 SM mentioned Secure by Design. We will work with Secure by Design. We seek a design with a positive contribution, and a balanced approach will be taken.

9.11 NMcC said there are benefits – boundary treatments – they look for design limiting access.

9.12 MB stated the CC&GBC admin team are supportive and efficient.

10.0 Date of next meeting:

10.1 The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 15th April 2026. The date doesn't suit MH but date agreed.

10.2 CL asked for the 3 hour time slot to be reduced and reflected in the next calendar invite as the meeting does not take this long.