

Minutes of MS Teams Meeting held between RSUA Members and Head of Planning CC&GBC held 02 July 2025

Apologies:

Mark Hand – RTPI Director of Wales, Northern Ireland and Planning Aid England

Ciaran Fox - RSUA Chair

Jennifer Lundy – Development Management Manager Principal Officer (JL)

Attendance:

Julie Sullivan– RTPI Northern Ireland Administrator (Remote)

Denise Dickson - Head of Planning - (DD)

Shane Mathers – Development Management and Enforcement Manager Principal Officer (SM)

Tom Stokes - TSA Planning – (TS) (Remote)

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

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

Graeme Montgomery – Montgomery Irwin Architects Ltd – (GM)

Damien McLaughlin – HERE Architects – (DML)

Alana Durrent – Valley Architects - (AD)

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

Duncan Jamieson – Taggarts – (DJ)

Scott Caithness – Montgomery Irwin Architects Ltd - (SC)

Adam Larkin – Gravis Planning - (AL)

Jordan Mitchell – Bell Architects - (JM) (Remote)

David Dalzell – Chartered Landscape Architect (DDI)

Philip Parker – Parker Architects (PP)

1.0 Introduction

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

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

- 1.3 MB expressed his appreciation for these meetings as they are not offered by all Councils.

2.0 Minutes of Previous Meetings:

- 2.1 DD tabled the minutes from the meeting held 02 April 2025 advising that when agreed these will be published on Planning section of Council's website for those who cannot attend to view what has been discussed and for open and transparency.
- 2.2 It was agreed to proceed to publish the minutes.

3.0 Action Points from Previous Meetings:

- 3.1 DD went through the action points from previous meetings and updated as follows:
- Minutes of 30 January 2025 meeting have been published on website – **complete** - DD
 - Planning Statements – develop Development Management Information Note on Planning Statements complete and ready to publish on website – **ongoing** – DD
 - Planning Performance Agreement – further consider – **ongoing** – DD. Agreed to proceed with developing guidelines on efficient planning processing prior to proceeding with PPAs.
 - Efficiency of planning process – continue to review and seek improvements to delays at the beginning of the planning process – **ongoing** – DD. Agreed to proceed with developing guidelines on efficient planning processing.
 - Customer Service Training – customer service training to be provided to staff – **complete** – DD
 - Planning Reports – further review of planning reports will take place to streamline – **complete** - DD
 - Contentious list of applications – further advice provided on website - **complete** – DD
 - Planning Portal alert – check if alert can be included at group recommendation stage – would be extra cost - **complete** – DD. MB advised that multiple alerts are still being received and throughout the night. DD agreed to look into with ICF.
 - Special Planning Committee meeting – nominee received and meeting held – **complete** - DD
 - NI Water – proceed with negative condition at stage when solution identified – **complete** – DD. Agreed to circulate current negative conditions.
 - PADs process – survey issued – **complete** – DD
 - Second Homes – letter issued to Dfl requesting quarterly update on working group – **complete** - DD

4.0 Validation Checklist

- 4.1 DD advised that the mandatory Validation Checklist came into effect on 09 June 2025. Responses to the public consultation were taken into account and therefore there are revisions to the Checklist from that that went out to public consultation. She advised that biodiversity checklists will not be required for householder applications or advertisements and referred to DMIN 10 which sets out examples of what may be required for different use classes of applications.
- 4.2 DD advised that PDEs with NI Water are also not included within the Checklist as we are able to proceed with negative conditions on this issue at present. DD agreed to circulate the wording of the negative conditions which was amended following previous discussions at these meetings. DD advised that it was not possible to get agreement across all Councils on the wording of the negative conditions due to the different issues within each council.
- 4.3 AD queried consultations with NI Water. DD advised that a pilot exercise is being undertaken at present in agreement with NI Water on reducing the number of consultations sent to NI Water. This pilot is focused on single rural dwellings that do not have a connection to the public sewer network.
- 4.4 GM raised concerns regarding biodiversity issues and that this issue is nearly widespread on all applications. DD referred to updated guidance on DAERA website and advised that there is now added importance to the consideration of biodiversity and climate change especially with the Climate Change Act 2022. She advised that this may be something that may need to be considered in future reviews of the SPPS.

(a) DMIN 08 Planning Statements

- 4.5 DD stated that the Development Management Information Note on Planning Statements is now complete and ready to publish. Discussion took place around the content of the DMIN and the level of detail required depending on the complexity of each application. DD agreed that the Planning Statement can encompass the Design and Access Statement and Concept Statements but that these must be clearly labelled within the document.

5.0 Performance Update

- 5.1 DD referred to the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics Annual Statistical Bulletin and to the Planning Department's Business Plan 2024 and advised that performance was continually improving. She stated the report on performance is a very positive one. She advised that the targets set out in the business plan for processing local and major applications had been met as well as the targets

for enforcement. The statutory target for processing major planning applications has also been met.

- 5.2 DD acknowledged the role of agents in this improved performance through the submission of quality applications. However, she highlighted concerns regarding delays in consultation responses especially from NIEA that impacts processing times.
- 5.3 JS advised that David Reid, Chief Executive NIEA, has been invited to attend the next RTPI consultants meeting in September. DD suggested that RSUA may wish to consider inviting him to one of their meetings.
- 5.4 Discussions took place around the content of responses from NIEA and how to reduce the level of consultations issued to NIEA, including officers looking at minor changes and employing a biodiversity officer. It was agreed that the main concerns are with NED within NIEA. DD advised any changes to statutory consultations would require legislative change or Standing Order in place.
- 5.5 MB queried if potable water was the next arising issue. DD advised that she was not aware of it being an issue outside of a couple of planning applications in a specific area.

6.0 Planning Performance Agreements

- 6.1 DD stated that this had been discussed earlier under the action points and agree to put this on hold and focus on overall efficient processing.

7.0 Issues raised by agents for discussion

NI Water Conditions Update

- 7.1 DD stated that this had been discussed earlier under the action points and agree to circulate updated wording of negative conditions

8.0 AORB

(a) HMOs

- 8.1 DD provided an update on the number of live planning applications for HMOs. She advised the key issue is the impact on residential amenity and character of the area. MB raised concern regarding delays on a particular application and DD agreed to look into it.

(b) Short-term Holiday Lets

- 8.2 GM queried if there was any guidance on the need for planning permission for short-term holiday lets on the Council website. DD advised there is no DMIN on this topic published on the Planning section of Council's website.

Discussion took place around the identification of short-term holiday lets and when enforcement can be initiated. Specific policy relating to individual settlements can only come through Local Development Plan. DD agreed to put some information on website regarding the need for planning permission for short-term lets.

(c) Planning Portal

- 8.3 MB raised concerns regarding the map viewer and ability to carry out searches beyond the 500m radius. DD agreed to raise with ICF but advised that there would likely be a cost to extend this beyond the 500m radius.

(d) speed of processing applications

- 8.4 GM stated that he noticed a significant improvement in processing times since Validation Checklist implemented and better focus from officers. AD advised that the Validation Checklist has assisted in managing client expectations.

(e) Infill Dwellings

- 8.5 MB queried the assessment of these types of applications and different approaches taken. DD explained policy CTY8 and referred to recent JR decisions on East Road Drumsurn and Glassdrumman where Justice Scofield clearly set out how these applications should be considered. DD advised that Planning Committee Members have received legal advice in relation to the East Road Drumsurn case and there has been a noticeable change in their decision-making at the June Planning Committee meeting. AD and GM agreed that the policy is straightforward to interpret. MB queried the precedent set by previous decisions by Planning Committee. DD advised that clear line from previous decision-making and having now received legal advice on this issue. DD agreed to add Infill Dwellings policy CTY8 as an agenda item for next meeting and consider a DMIN on Infill Dwellings.

(f) quality of Dfl Roads consultation responses

- 8.6 DML raised concerns regarding the quality of consultation responses from Dfl Roads. DD agreed to invite Dfl Roads to next meeting to discuss in detail.

(g) Planning Committee agenda

- 8.7 DDI welcomed the requesting of site visits and deferrals at the beginning of the Planning Committee meeting.

9.0 Date of Next Meeting:

- 9.1 The date of the next meeting 15 October 2025.

ACTIONS

Issue	Action	Owner
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Minutes	Publish minutes of meeting on Planning section of Council's website	DD
Planning Statements	Publish Development Management Information Note on Planning Statements	DD - ongoing
Planning Performance Agreement	Further consider after developing guidelines on efficient planning processing	DD – to commence
Efficiency of planning process	Developing guidelines on efficient planning processing	DD - ongoing
Planning Portal	Agents continue to receive multiple alerts and at early hours of morning – raise with ICF Ability to search planning histories beyond 500m radius – raise with ICF	DD - update DD - update
NI Water Conditions	Circulate wording of negative conditions	DD – circulated - complete
Short-Term Lets	Put information on website regarding the need for planning permission for short-term lets.	DD - ongoing
Infill Dwellings	Add to agenda for next meeting	DD – agenda item
Dfl Roads Consultations	Invite Dfl Roads to next meeting	DD – agenda item