

**Minutes of MS Teams Meeting held between RSUA / RTPI Members and Head of**

**Planning CC&GBC held 15 October 2025**

Apologies:

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

Ciaran Fox - RSUA Chair

Attendance:

Denise Dickson - Head of Planning - (DD)

Jennifer Lundy – Principal Officer - Development Management Manager (JL)

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

Sharon Mulhern – Principal Officer - Development Plan, Trees and Conservation (SMul)

Andrew Minihan - DfI Roads (AM)

Sean Hasson – DfI Roads (SH)

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

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

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

Damien McLaughlin – HERE Architects – (DML)

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

Eoighin Farren – Farren Architects - (EF)

Scott Caithness – Montgomery Irwin Architects Ltd - (SC)

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

David Dalzell – Chartered Landscape Architect - (DDL)

Nathan Armstrong- Architect - (NA)

Philip Parker- Architect- (PP)

B Muldoon- Education Authority- (BM)

Stephen Kenning- Newline Architects- (SK) (Remote)

Niall Scullion- Newline Architects- (NS) (Remote)

Robbie McNaughton- Architect- (RMcN) (Remote)

## *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.

## *2.0 Minutes of Previous Meeting*

2.1 DD tabled the minutes from the meeting held 02 July 2025 advising that when agreed these will be published on Planning Section of Council's website.

2.2 Philip Parker requested amendment to reflect his attendance at the 02 July meeting.

2.3 It was agreed to amend as requested and to proceed to publish the minutes.

## *3.0 Action Points from Previous Meeting*

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

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

## *4.0 DfI Roads discussion on planning applications – Andrew Minihan and Sean Hasson*

4.1 AM set out the details that DfI Roads would like to see in drawings submitted:

- Radii
- Road widths
- Footpaths
- Visibility Splays and internal roads in developments
- Carparking spaces and visitor spaces in appropriate locations and workable
- Gulley locations on PSD drawings

- DfI may seek longitudinal sections. If so, add chainages
- Red/green/blue in article 42s and 34c's

4.2 SH advised that for 1 or 2 dwellings for example – make sure that visibility splays and third party lands are shown in different colours as there can be too much detail and its not required. It slows the process down (only 21 days to respond).

4.3 AM advised that block plans should be based on a topographical survey, not an OS map. Staff look at what's on the map then survey. If the arrangements are not clear, they will request a topographical survey.

4.4 DD agreed. Also advised to make sure that visibility splays are clear as planning officers need to be able to determine how much hedgerow needs to be removed – to determine integration and biodiversity loss. Also need to show lampposts in case these need to be relocated. Even with DfI's Standing Advice there is still a large number of consultations which we are trying to reduce and get applications through the system.

4.5 MB acknowledged that it's likely that those agents attending the meeting are likely to be submitting the requirements. However, others may not be. Questioned if this was set out in the Validation Checklist?

4.6 JL advised that we will only seek a topographical survey if DfI Roads requests it. It is not required for all applications.

4.7 DML noted that it is all about the quality of the application that are still being considered. Case officers should be able to write back and seek better quality submissions. Gave an example of a case they are commenting on at present – its based on an OSNI map, not a topographical survey.

4.8 DD acknowledged that the better quality applications are moving through the system much faster. However, we cannot insist on the higher quality submission.

4.9 EF stated that poor quality applications slow the system down.

4.10 DML acknowledged that key DfI Roads personnel are personable and approachable. Highlighted the importance of the PAD process. However, felt that DfI Roads responses are very generic. Need to know e.g required visibility splays, parking etc or not getting enough out of the process. Council should also advise DfI Roads on what it requires from them.

4.11 AM & SH acknowledge that generic responses have been issued but will now take this on board.

4.12 DML highlighted the difference in requirements for replacement dwellings in the countryside e.g up until about 5 years ago if Council considered it to be a genuine replacement there was just an informative re a substandard access. Have found difference in views between case officers and DfI Road officers.

4.13 DD advised that this issue was discussed internally, and planning officials will discuss with DfI. If it's clearly not a dwelling e.g only 4 walls (the old abandonment test), then will seek improvements. However, if lived in or habitable with minor changes then it is considered a genuine replacement, unlikely to seek improvements.

4.14 Sma advised that if there are any third party lands notice must be served on the owner in advance of the application under S.42, otherwise it will require an amended certificate and then needs to be readvertised – elongating the process.

4.15 DD thanked AM and SH for attending. They then left the meeting.

#### *5.0 DMIN 11 Self Catering/Short Term Let Accommodation*

5.1 DD read extracts from DMIN 11 and advised that it will be presented for agreement at the 22<sup>nd</sup> October Planning Committee. Emphasis was on whether there was a material change of use/ change in character of use from a dwelling.

5.2 PP queried if being registered with TourismNI was sufficient.

5.3 DD advised that it forms part of our evidence base. However, we can request further information to establish whether a material change of use has taken place e.g how many nights it is let out. Can also check online availability calendar. We need to look at the specific factors for each case/site. The impact on amenity e.g. from the number of arrivals/departures etc.

#### *6.0 Policy CTY 8 Infill Dwellings*

6.1 JL Gave presentation. Detailed Policy CTY 8 of PPS21. Referred to relevant High Court judgements. Considered what constitutes a substantial and continuously built up frontage and what constitutes a gap in such a frontage. Examples provided from both Building on Tradition and appeal decisions of acceptable and unacceptable sites.

6.2 NA queried the definition of an access e.g, relating to access to buildings on farmland.

6.3 JL clarified the PAC interpretation re buildings set back from a road and having a single road access – they were discounted as such sites do not have a frontage.

6.4 DD advised that individual applications will not be discussed at these meetings. The main concern is the visual gap between buildings. The gap does not need to be a large one. Each case looked at on its merits. Material facts must be considered. Denise 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. Planning Committee Members have received legal advice in relation to the East Road Drumsurn case.

6.5 MB discussed that the wider group of agents, outside of those attending the RSUA/RTPI meetings may not be aware of the change and may still be submitting infill applications on the basis of them going to Committee and giving their clients the expectation that they may get approval at Committee. Suggested an article on it.

6.6 DD advised that a DMIN on Infill Dwellings will be published, and it will pick up this issue.

6.7 EF requested that the interpretation of a road/laneway be added to the DMIN.

## *7.0 Performance Update – Q1 2025-26 Published Statistics*

7.1 DD read out key points from the performance update. Advised on the recent public consultations – Planning Application Fees, and DfI review of major application threshold.

7.2 BM from Education Authority queried re SEN classroom accommodation issues now and expected in the near future. We tend to find out in March re the requirements for September intake. So only really have 12 weeks to turn things around.

7.3 DD advised that planning officials have spoken with EA. We are processing the applications as soon as we can. However, we need to fulfil our statutory requirements too. Also advised EA to speak to DfI re PD rights as they are out of date. Maybe they need to be changed to enable modular classrooms etc.

7.4 DML advised that there are still issues arising with NIEA.

7.5 DD advised that the issue was raised at the Heads of Planning Group. NIEA is looking at standing advice in addition to their existing guidance. Legislation requires consultation with NIEA on specific types of applications unless standing advice is issued.

7.6 DML not sure in what order NIEA process applications as some complex schemes seem to be issued before more straightforward ones.

7.7 DD Advised that it is numerical. However, work is split between two teams so a higher number can be issued first.

7.8 JL discussed NIEA's flowchart – which is clear on ecologist qualifications. Planning staff are being trained on this.

7.9 DD advised that NIEA are not speaking to agents, even to give updates e.g how long it might take to get a response. Mark Hammon attended the NI Forum and said NIEA will speak with councils but not agents.

7.10 DD advised that planning officials can only raise a technical query with NIEA but can't speak to them directly. Maybe a liaison officer in due course.

## *8.0 Issues raised by agents for discussion*

### *(a) Bat Surveys –*

8.1 DD advised that we are not making applications invalid if it needs a bat survey. But need to be mindful of the timing of submission of planning applications as the surveys can only be carried out May-September so the application may not progress.

8.2 DD highlighted NED bat survey specifications. We will consider surveys up to 2 years old. For 1-2 year old surveys we will accept for e.g a change of house type application. We may seek a letter from an ecologist confirming they have been on the site since then and that there have been no changes. If older than 2 years, it will need an up-to-date survey.

8.3 DD also advised of legal requirements under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, regardless of planning permission granted.

8.4. EF queried the fall-back position.

8.5 Sma advised that because the importance of the protected species issue, we would likely seek the up to date survey.

8.6 DD informed that NIEA will be holding lunchbox seminars on particular topics that may be of interest.

*(b) Housing Allocations – affordable housing and second homes*

8.7 DD gave update on the LDP preparation. UU finalising housing research, then workshop with Members to discuss.

8.8 MB queried additional land supply – argument that if more land is available to develop it will assist house affordability.

8.9 DD advised that we will consider this at the Local Policies Plan stage of preparation. Will look at individual settlements. HGI figures are indicative. We will also look at Key Site Requirements, housing mix, red lines etc.

8.10 DD also advised that reviews are now built into the LDP process so we can review any particular topic at any time.

*(c) Planning Portal*

8.11 DD provided an update on the functionality of the Planning Portal.

9.0 AORB

9.1 DD advised agents of the DfI review of Planning Fees and DfE consultation on the regulation of tourist accommodation.

10. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026

**ACTIONS**

Issue	Action	Owner
DfI Roads consultation responses on replacement dwellings and PADs	Schedule meeting with DfI Roads	DD
Need for quick decisions on planning applications for Special Educational Needs (SEN) development	Prioritise processing of applications	JL
Accessibility of requests for amendments/ further information	Publish on Public Access (Planning Portal)	DD