

Applications on the up; permissions yet to catch up – October-December 2020

Latest planning performance by English districts and London boroughs: Planning Applications in England: October and December 2020

OVERVIEW

Between October and December 2020, district level planning authorities in England:

- received 111,700 applications for planning permission, up 11 per cent from the corresponding quarter of 2019;
- granted 86,000 decisions, up three per cent from the same quarter in 2019; this is equivalent to 87 per cent of decisions, unchanged from the same quarter of 2019;
- decided 88 per cent of major applications within 13 weeks or the agreed time, down one percentage point from the same quarter in 2019;
- granted 10,100 residential applications, down nine per cent on a year earlier: 1,300 for major developments and 8,800 for minors;
- granted 1,800 applications for commercial developments, down 14 per cent on a year earlier. In the year ending December 2020, district level planning authorities:
- granted 313,900 decisions, down 10 per cent on the year ending December 2019; and
- granted 39,300 decisions on residential developments, of which 5,000 were for major developments and 34,400 were for minors, down by 16 and 11 per cent respectively on the year ending December 2019. This is equivalent to a decrease of 12 per cent in the overall number of residential decisions granted.

Planning applications

During October to December 2020, authorities undertaking district level planning in England



received 111,700 applications for planning permission, up 11 per cent from the corresponding quarter in 2019. In the year ending December 2020, authorities received 410,700 planning applications, down five per cent on the year ending December 2019

Planning decisions

Authorities reported 98,300 decisions on planning applications in October to December 2020, an increase of three per cent on the 95,800 decisions in the same quarter of the previous year. In the 2 Planning Applications Statistical Release year ending December 2020, authorities decided 359,000 planning applications, down nine per cent on the number in the year ending December 2019

Applications granted

During October to December 2020, authorities granted 86,000 decisions, up three per cent on the same quarter in 2019. Authorities granted 87 per cent of all decisions, unchanged from the December quarter of 2019 (Live Tables P120/P133). Overall, 81 per cent of major and minor decisions were granted, down one percentage point from the quarter ending December 2019 (PS2 development types dashboard).

Over the 12 months to December 2020, 313,900 decisions were granted, down 10 per cent on the figure for the year to December 2019.

Historical context

Figure 1 shows that, since about 2009-10, the numbers of applications received, decisions made and applications granted have each followed a similar pattern. As well as the usual within-year pattern of peaks in the Summer (July to September quarter for applications and July to September for decisions) and troughs in the Autumn (October to December quarter for applications and January to March quarter for decisions), there was a clear downward trend during the 2008 economic downturn, followed by a period of stability with reductions in more recent quarters.

Regional breakdowns

Table 2 shows how numbers of applications received, decisions made and decisions granted varied by region. It also shows how the percentage of decisions granted varies widely by region, from 77 per cent in London to 94 per cent in the North East.

Speed of decisions

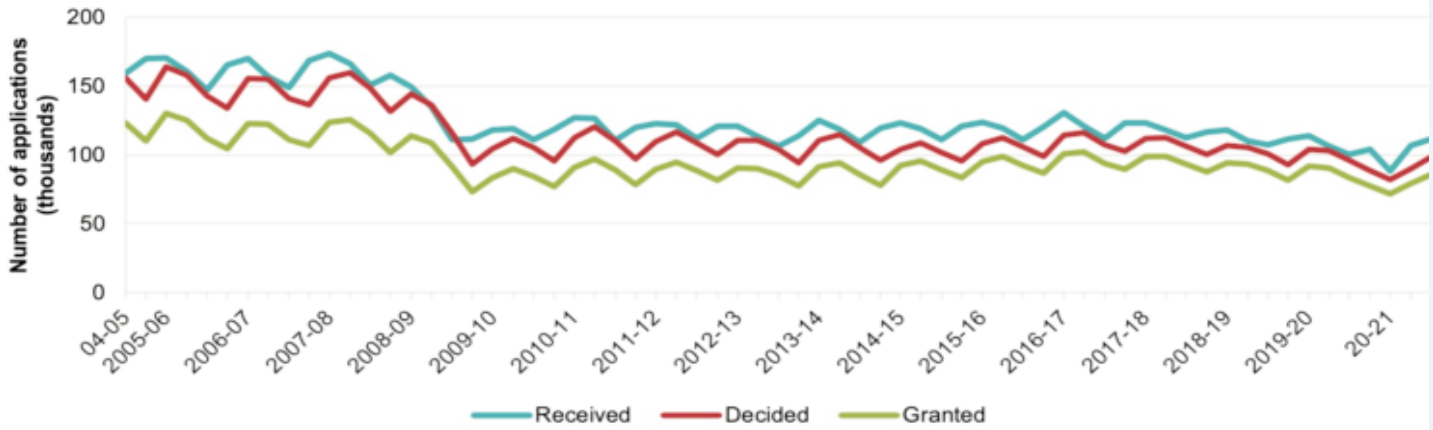
- In October to December 2020, 88 per cent of major applications were decided within 13 weeks or within the agreed time³, down one percentage point from the same quarter a year earlier.
- In the same quarter, 84 per cent of minor applications were decided within eight weeks or the agreed time, down one percentage point from a

Table 2: Regional breakdown of applications and decisions
Quarter ending December 2020

	Total applications received	Total decisions	Total decisions granted	Percentage of decisions granted
England	111,700	98,300	86,000	87
North East	3,200	3,000	2,800	94
North West	11,300	9,600	8,700	91
Yorkshire and the Humber	8,800	8,400	7,600	90
East Midlands	8,800	7,700	7,000	90
West Midlands	9,100	8,000	7,300	91
East of England	15,000	13,300	11,400	85
London	18,200	15,300	11,800	77
South East	21,800	19,100	16,700	88
South West	13,600	12,200	11,100	92
National Parks	1,900	1,700	1,500	88

1. National Parks are counted separately from each region: a few national parks straddle more than one region.

Figure 1: Number of planning applications received, decided and granted
 England, quarter ending December 2004 to quarter ending December 2020



year earlier.

- Also in the same quarter, 89 per cent of other applications were decided within eight weeks or the agreed time, down one percentage point from a year earlier.

Figure 3 summarises the distribution of the percentage of decisions made in time across authorities for major, minor and other developments using box and whisker plots. The ends of the box are the upper and lower quartiles, meaning that 50 per cent of local authorities fall within this range. The whiskers are the two lines above and below the box that extend to the highest and lowest observations (the range). Figure 3 shows that the variation in percentage of decisions made in time this quarter is widest between authorities for major developments (0 to 100 per cent), followed by minor developments (39 to 100 per cent) and other developments (57 to 100 per cent).

Planning decisions by development type, speed of decision and local planning authority. All tables and figures can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/32y4yjaf>
 Source: MHCLG/ONS

Use of performance agreements

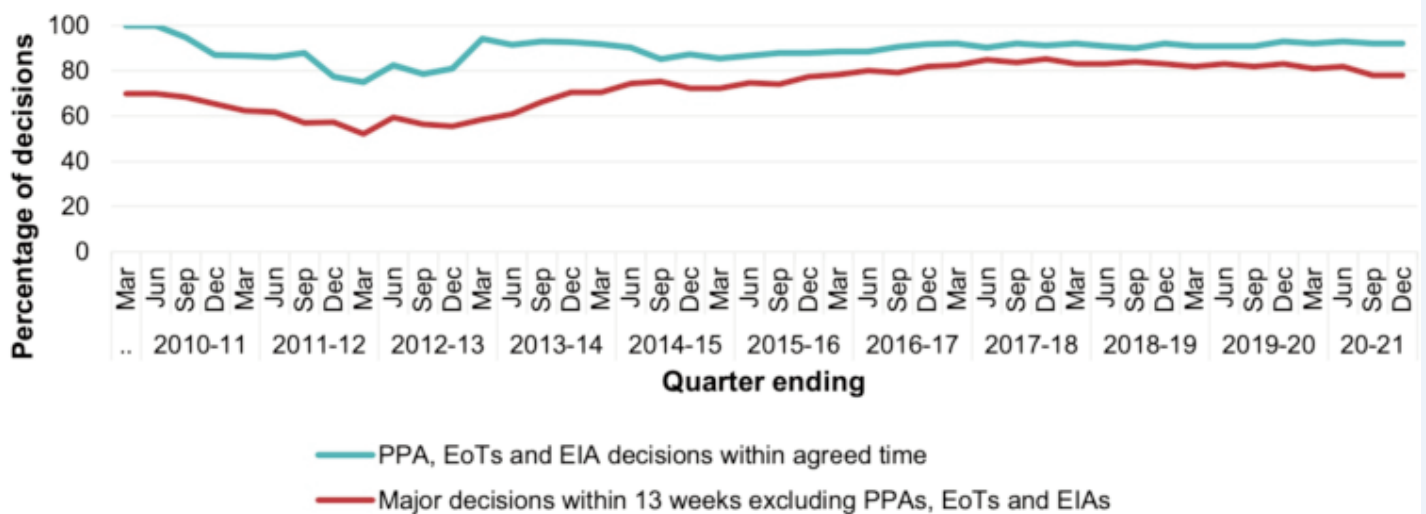
Table 4 summarises the recent use of performance agreements⁴. It shows that they are more commonly used for major developments than minor or other developments, with 70 per cent of major decisions made during October to December 2020 involving a planning agreement, compared with 46 per cent of minor decisions. Figure 4 shows, from 2010, numbers of decisions on major developments made involving a performance agreement, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of all decisions on major developments. The underlying historical figures are available in the PS2 development types dashboard. Notwithstanding defini-

tional changes, there has been a marked increase in the use of agreements since early 2013. In reality, this longer upward trend has been driven by both the additional scope for recording them and their additional use.

Performance of individual district level local planning authorities

Live Tables P151a and P153 present data on the performance of district level local planning authorities against the latest published criterion in Improving planning performance: criteria for designation on the speed of decision-making for informing decisions on the designation of poorly >>>

Figure 5: Percentage of major development decisions made within time¹
 England, quarter ending June 2010 to quarter ending December 2020



>>> performing local planning authorities under section 62B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In particular, Live Table P151a gives detailed figures for the time taken for major decisions to be made over the eight most recent quarters and Live Table P153 presents data for the time taken by district level local planning authorities for decisions on 'non-major developments' (previously 'minor and other developments', and defined as minor developments, changes of use and householder developments) to be made over the eight most recent quarters.

Similarly, Live Table P152a, presents data on the performance of district level local planning authorities against the latest published criterion in Improving planning performance: criteria for designation on the quality of decision-making for assessing performance under section 62B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In particular, it gives detailed figures for the percentage of major decisions subject to a successful planning appeal, by matching eight quarters of the department's data on decisions and all available quarters of Planning Inspectorate data on appeals. This table is usually published a few weeks after the statistical release and most of the other live tables, to take account of the latest appeals data.

Live Table P154 presents data for the percentage of decisions on minor and other developments (as defined for Table P153) subject to a successful planning appeal, by matching eight quarters of the department's data on decisions and all available quarters of Planning Inspectorate data on appeals. Like Table P152a, this table is usually published a few weeks after the statistical release and most of the other live tables, to take account of the latest appeals data.

Residential decisions

In October to December 2020, 13,800 decisions were made on applications for residential 5 developments, of which 10,100 (73 per cent) were granted. The number of residential decisions made decreased by nine per cent from the December quarter of 2019, with the number granted also dropping nine per cent.

The number of major residential decisions granted decreased by 14 per cent to 1,300, and the number of minor residential decisions granted decreased by 8 per cent, to 8,800 (Live Table P120A, and the PS2 development types dashboard). In the year ending December 2020, authorities granted 5,000 major and 34,400 minor residential applications, down by 16 and 11 per cent respectively on the year ending December 2019 (Live Table P120A and the PS2 local planning authorities dashboard). This is equivalent to a decrease of 12 per cent in the overall number of residential decisions granted.

Residential units

The figures collected by the department are the numbers of decisions on planning applications submitted to local planning authorities, rather than the number of units included in each application, such as the number of homes in the case of housing developments. The department supplements this information by obtaining statistics on housing permissions from a contractor, Glenigan.6 The latest provisional figures show that permission for 283,000 homes was given in the year to 31 December 2020, down 16 per cent from the 335,500 homes granted permission in the year to 31 December 2019.

On an ongoing basis, figures are revised to ensure that any duplicates are removed, and also to include any projects that local planning authorities may not have processed: they are therefore subject to change, and the latest quarter's provisional figures tend to be revised upwards. These figures are provided here to give contextual information to users and have not been designated as National Statistics.

Commercial decisions

In October to December 2020, 2,100 decisions were made on applications for commercial developments, of which 1,800 (89 per cent) were granted. The total number of commercial decisions granted decreased by 14 per cent on the same quarter of 2019. In the year ending December 2020, 7,100 applications for commercial developments were granted, down 17 per cent on the year ending December 2019

Trends in numbers of residential and commercial decisions

Historically, numbers of residential decisions dropped sharply during 2008 (particularly for minor decisions) but have been increasing since

2012, albeit with some decreases recently.

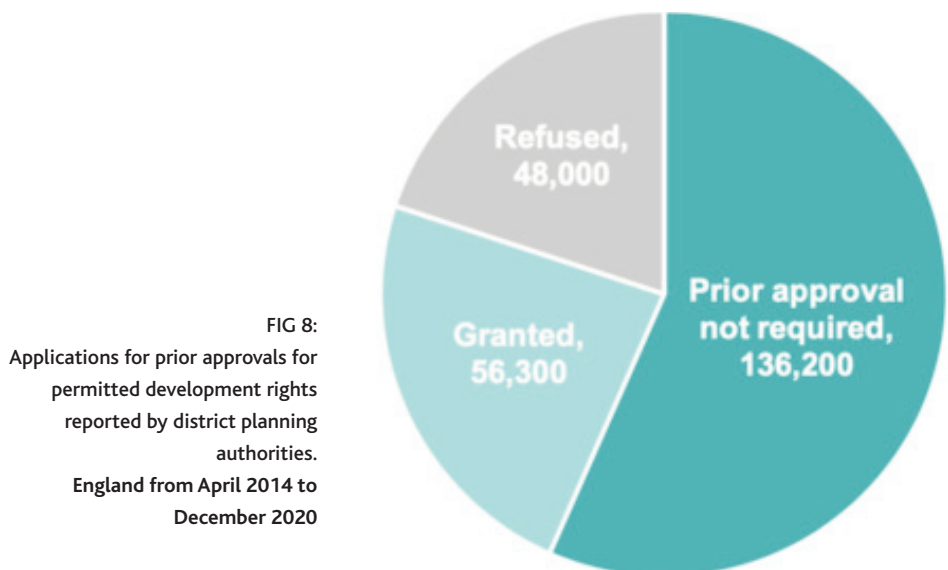
Numbers of commercial decisions made also decreased sharply during 2008 and then stabilised at around 2,100 per year for major and 10,000 per year for minor commercial decisions, but have undergone some further decreases recently, particularly for minor decisions. In 2019/20, numbers of major commercial decisions were at about 52 per cent of the pre-recession peak, with the numbers of minor commercial decisions being at about 34 per cent

Trends in the percentage of residential and commercial decisions granted

The percentages of major and minor residential decisions granted increased between 2008/09 (from about 65 per cent for each type) and 2010/11 (to about 80 per cent for majors and about 75 per cent for minors) and have stabilised since then. The percentages of major and minor commercial decisions granted increased steadily, from 89 and 85 per cent respectively in 2007/08, to 94 and 91 per cent respectively in 2014/15, and have both been largely stable since then, but have increased recently

Householder developments

Householder developments are those developments to a residence which require planning permission such as extensions, loft conversions and conservatories (more details are in the glossary accessible from the Definitions section). The number of decisions made on householder developments was 55,700 in the quarter ending December 2020, accounting for 57 per cent of all decisions, up from 49 per cent of all decisions made in the quarter ending December 2019. The 55,700 decisions were up 19 per cent from the 46,800 decisions made in the quarter ending December 2019. Authorities granted 90 per cent of these applications and decided 91 per cent within eight weeks or the agreed time



Permission in Principle/Technical Details consent decisions

Since 16 April 2017, local planning authorities have had the ability to grant permission in principle (PiP) to sites which have been entered on their brownfield land registers. Where sites have a grant of permission in principle, applicants have been able to submit an application for Technical Details Consent (TDC) for development on these sites. In addition, since 1 June 2018, it has also been possible to make an application for PiP for minor housing-led development as a separate application, independently of the brownfield register. Where a site has been granted PiP following an application, it is possible to apply for a TDC and a determination period of five weeks applies as it is minor development. Extensions of time may be agreed.

TDC applications have a 10-week determination period for major development and a five-week determination period for minor development. Extensions of time may be agreed and where it is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development, the 16-week determination period applies.

Figures on PiP/TDC decisions have been collected on the quarterly PS2 return with effect from 1 January 2020. They are provided at local planning authority level in Live Table PiP/TDC1. In summary, during January to March 2020, local planning authorities reported 64 PiP decisions (minor housing-led developments), five TDC (minor housing-led developments) and no TDC (major developments). The totals for the next three quarters have been similar, with 60, four and no decisions respectively in April to June 2020; 51, eight and no decisions respectively during July to September; and 80, five and no decisions respectively during October to December

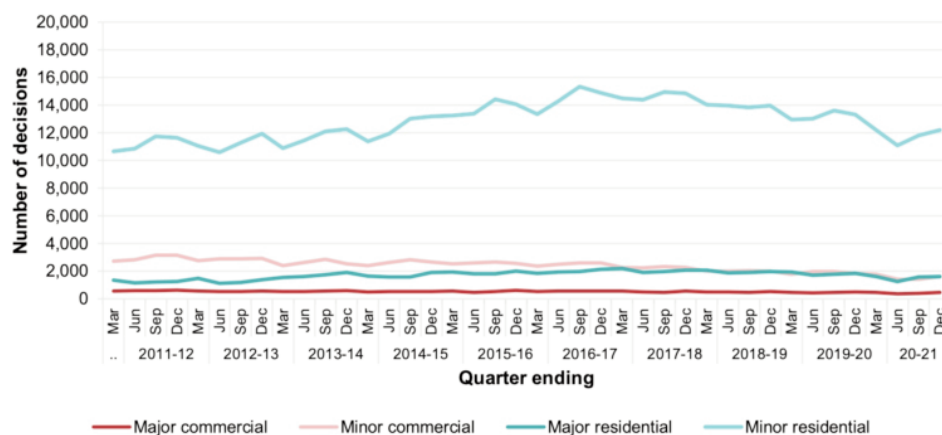
Permitted development rights

Planning permission for some types of development has been granted nationally through legislation, and the resulting rights are known as 'permitted development rights'. In some cases, if the legislation is complied with, developments can go ahead without the requirement to notify the local planning authority and hence no way of capturing data exists. In other cases, the legislation requires an application to the local planning authority to determine whether prior approval is required (more details are in the Definitions section). A local planning authority can withdraw specific permitted development rights across a defined geographical area, bringing these types of development within the control of the main planning process⁹.

The results for the latest quarter for which they have been collected (October to December 2020) are included in Live Tables PDR1 (local authority level figures) and PDR2 (England totals). Of the 8,300 applications reported in the October to December

Figure 6: Number of planning applications decided by district authorities, by type of development

England, quarter ending March 2010 to quarter ending December 2020



quarter of 2020, prior approval was not required for 4,800 and permission was granted for 1,800 and refused for 1,800. This resulted

in an overall acceptance rate of 78 per cent. Larger householder extensions accounted for 67 per cent of applications (5,600), with six per cent relating to agricultural to residential changes and five per cent to office to residential changes. 'All other' permitted development rights, accounted for 18 per cent of applications, up from 14 per cent a year earlier.

Taking i) granted applications and ii) those for which prior approval was not required together, 6,500 applications were approved without having to go through the full planning process, up 23 per cent from a year earlier. Within the 25 per cent increase in the reported total number of PDR applications between October to December 2019 and October to December 2020:

- larger householder extensions increased by 23 per cent;
- office to residential changes decreased by 9 per cent;
- agricultural to residential changes decreased by 16 per cent; and
- 'all other' permitted development rights increased by 68 per cent.

The large increase in 'all other' permitted development rights is due in part to the creation of several new permitted development rights in June and July 2020, largely relating to 'building up-wards'.¹¹

Figures for the total number of permitted development right applications made for changes to residential use for quarters from July to September 2014 are given in the quarterly worksheets in Live Table PDR1. These show that a total of 1,100 applications for changes to residential use were reported in October to December 2020, of which 700 (65 per cent) were given the go-ahead without having to go through the full planning process.

Overall during the twenty-seven quarters ending December 2020, district planning authorities reported 240,500 applications for prior approvals for per-

mitted developments. For 136,200 (57 per cent) of them prior approval was not required, 56,300 (23 per cent) were granted and 48,000 (20 per cent) were refused (Figure 8).

To put these recent figures into context, Live Table P128 and Figure 9 show how the number of 'determination applications' received remained broadly stable at around 5,000 to 8,000 per year from 2004/05 to 2012/13, but approximately doubled to 15,700 in 2013/14, following the creation of new permitted development right categories in May 2013.

Since April 2014, there have been 36,500 PDR applications in 2014-15, 40,200 in 2015-16, 39,400 in 2016-17, 36,800 in 2017-18, 34,900 in 2018-19 and 28,900 in 2019-20. The quarterly pattern since April 2014 reflects a combination of both: i) the introduction of new permitted development right categories on several occasions; and ii) the seasonal peaks and troughs that have previously also been observed for planning applications, as shown earlier in this release, in Figure 1..

The initially large increase since 2014 in reported numbers of PDR applications for a change of use (e.g. office to residential), followed by a more recent decrease, is consistent with the annual numbers of dwellings added to the net housing supply as a result of a change of use. These have shown increases of 65 per cent in 2014-15, 48 per cent in 2015-16 and 22 per cent in 2016-17, and decreases of 20 per cent in 2017-18, two per cent in 2018-19 and eight per cent in 2019-20.

Delegated decisions

- Of the 98,300 decisions made during the quarter, 94,100 (96 per cent) were delegated to officers. This percentage has been stable since 2014, having previously increased from around 75 per cent in 2000. ■