

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 23 APRIL 2020
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING
AND GOVERNANCE)

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT

JANUARY – MARCH 2020

(All wards)

1 Introduction

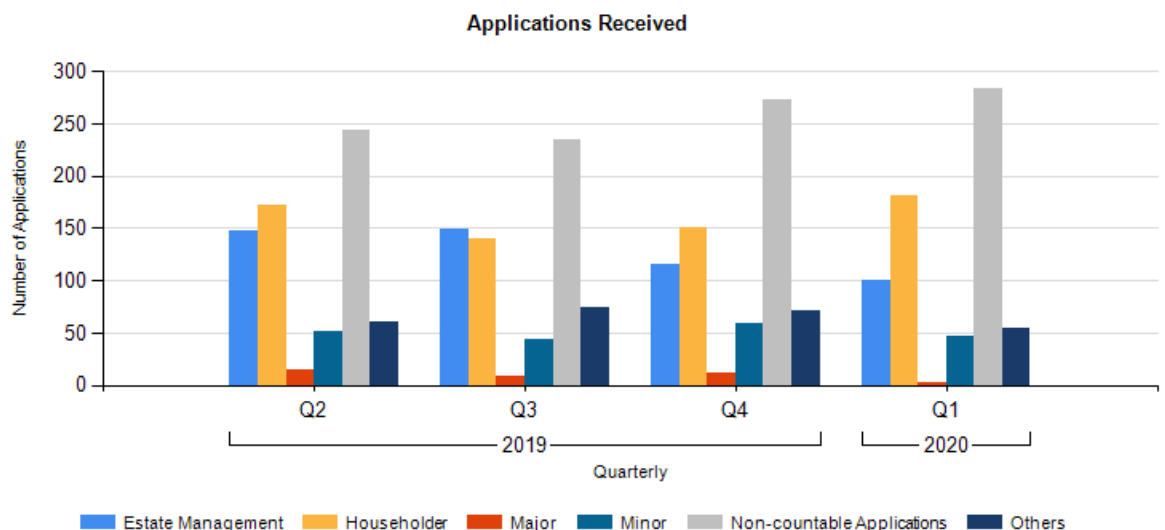
- 1.1 This report relates to the performance of the Development Management Service over the three month period January to March 2020.
- 1.2 Members should note that, whilst this quarter is traditionally considered to be quarter four of the financial year, the planning department software considers this to be quarter one, as with the calendar year. Therefore Members will see that some of the graphs reflect both of these approaches.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Members note the content of this report.

3 Application Numbers

- 3.1 The graphs below show the number of applications that have been received during the quarter two, three and four of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020 (the last four quarters). In summary, in quarter two 808 applications were received, in quarter three, 775 applications were received, in quarter four, 767 applications were received and in quarter one of 2020 791 applications were received. This data shows a slight increase in application numbers in the last quarter.



Major applications are those with 10 or more dwellings, sites of 1 hectare or more, or provision of 1,000m² new floor area or more.

Minor applications include (but are not limited to) up to 9 dwellings, gypsy and traveller sites and commercial proposals not falling within the major category.

Others include (but are not limited to) householder, advertisements and listed building applications.

The 'non countable' category are those applications which are not reported to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Such applications include, but are not limited to: prior approvals, discharge of conditions, etc.

Estate Management applications are not planning applications and therefore are subject to different policies and regulations compared to planning. However, they continue to comprise a significant amount of the department's work and have therefore been reported separately for information. These applications include proposals for both built development and for landscaping (tree/hedge removal) proposals.

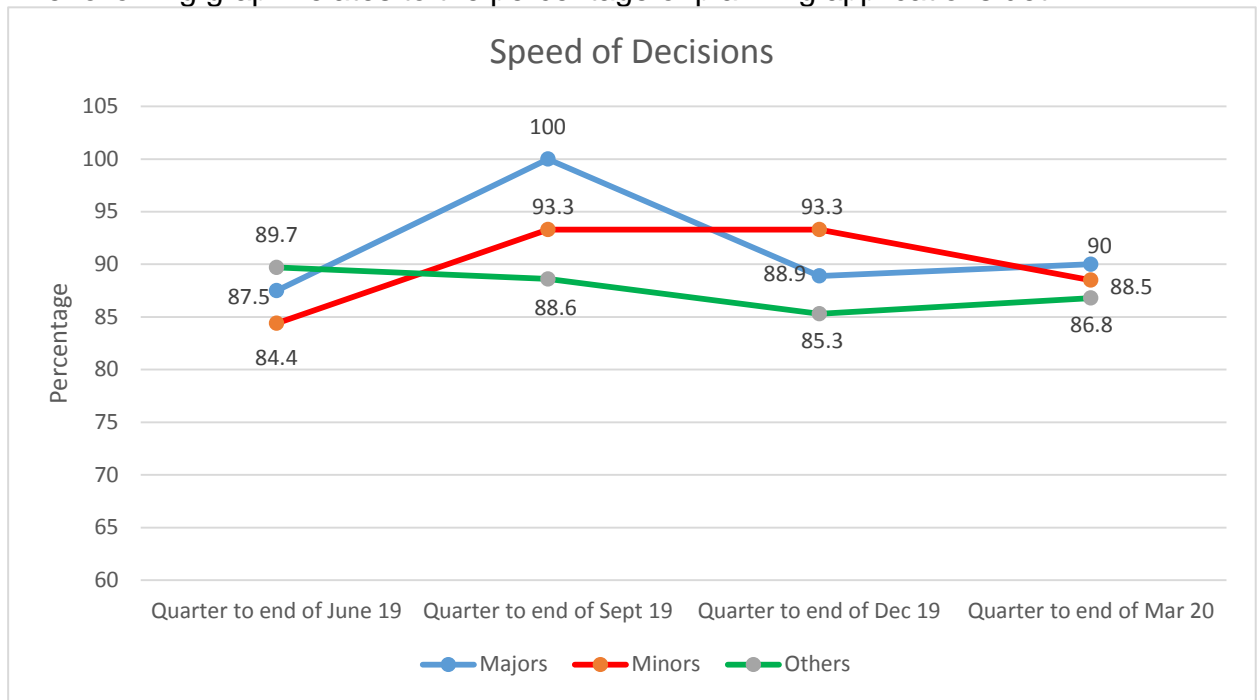
- 3.2 From the graph above, it can be seen that Estate Management, Non-countable and Householders remain the greatest number submitted. Officer workloads have remained higher than is desired. It is anticipated that the new proposals for dealing with Estate Management applications, in a separate team, will serve to reduce planning officer workloads to a more manageable level. The transition to these arrangements has now started to take place with the appointment of the new Estate Management Scheme Manager.

4 Performance

Applications

- 4.1 Government (MHCLG) monitor planning authorities on their speed of making decisions in relation to major and non-major applications. The target at national level is to determine 60% of major applications within the statutory period of 13 weeks or subject to the agreement of a time extension over a rolling two-year period. In addition, the Council has a local performance indicator for majors of 70%. For non-majors, it is 70% over a two-year period. For authorities who under-perform against this target, they will be classed as 'poorly performing' and applications for major development may be made by developers directly to the Planning Inspectorate should the target be missed. The Council would not receive the fees for these but would be expected to deal with all of the associated administration.

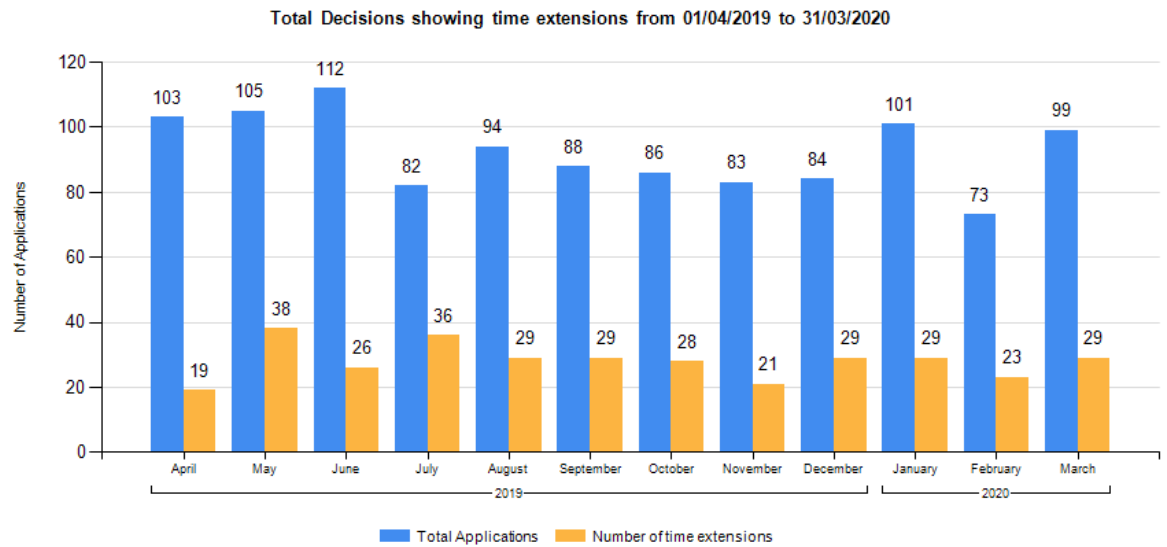
The following graph relates to the percentage of planning applications det



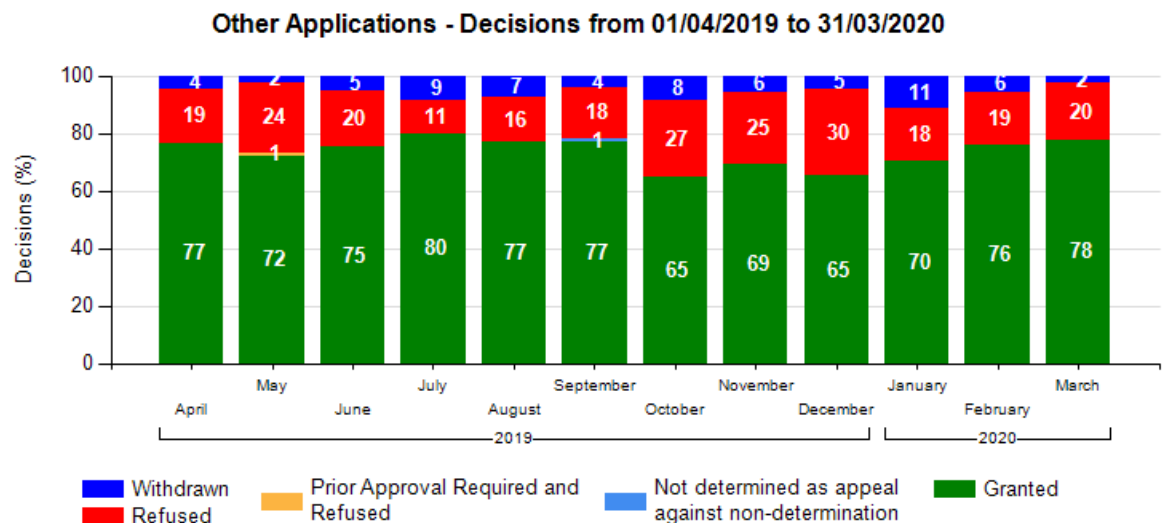
etermined within set timescales.

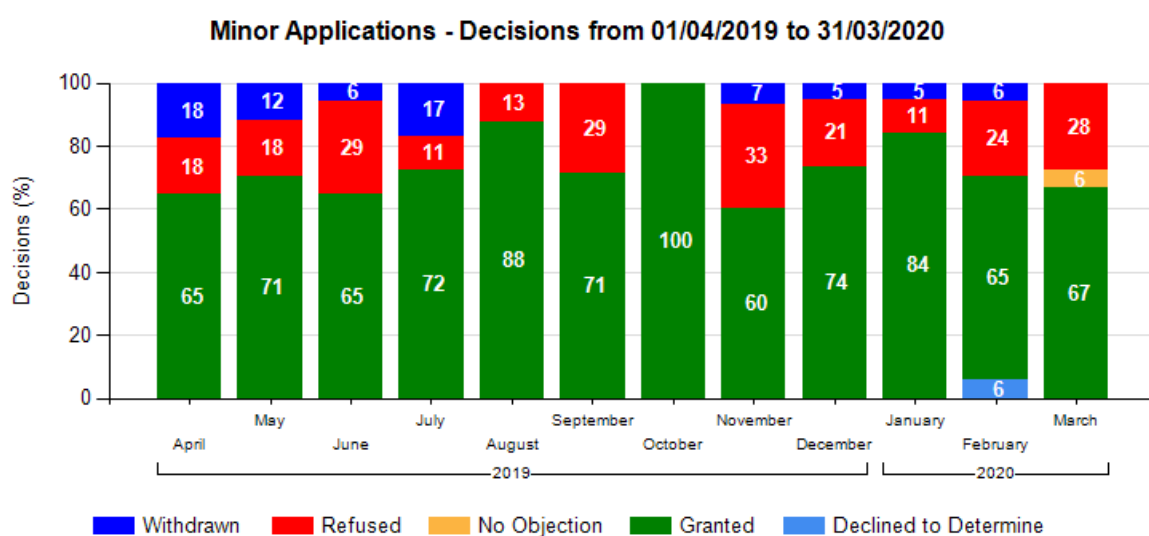
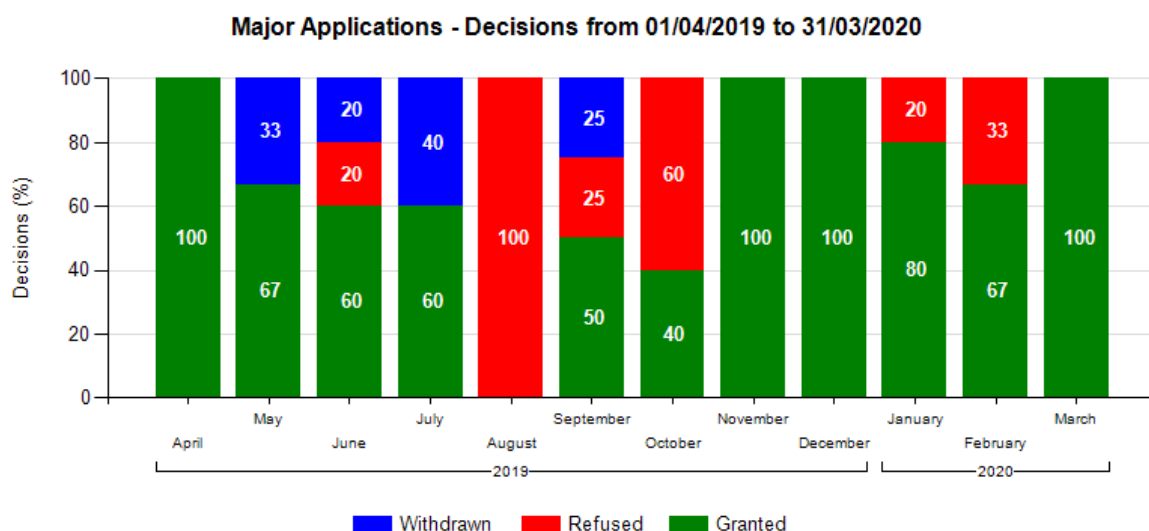
- 4.2 Over the last quarter performance for majors has increased to 90%. Performance for others has increased to 86.8%, with performance for minors taking a slight dip to 88.5%. Decisions are still being made within both statutory and local targets.

These targets do continue to be achieved due to seeking time extensions for dealing with the applications beyond their statutory time period from applicants. Time extensions might be sought for a variety of reasons but might include seeking negotiations, complex and/or controversial proposals and items presented to Committee. Time extensions do not go against the authority in terms of speed of decision making when reporting to the government. The graph below shows the total number of applications determined each month in blue and alongside this in yellow are the number of applications where time extensions have been sought on those determined. Seeking time extensions means that case officer workloads overall increase which makes dealing with newer applications on time more challenging. Over the longer term, approximately 25% of all applications determined are subject to a time extension.



- 4.3 Of the decisions reported above, the following graphs show the number of decisions that were granted, refused, split (i.e. part granted and part refused) and withdrawn across the major, minor and other categories. All three graphs demonstrate that the majority of applications are granted. Withdrawals are not reported as part of our overall performance to government but still will have involved a significant amount of work by the case officers. These applications are frequently resubmitted often as a 'free go'.

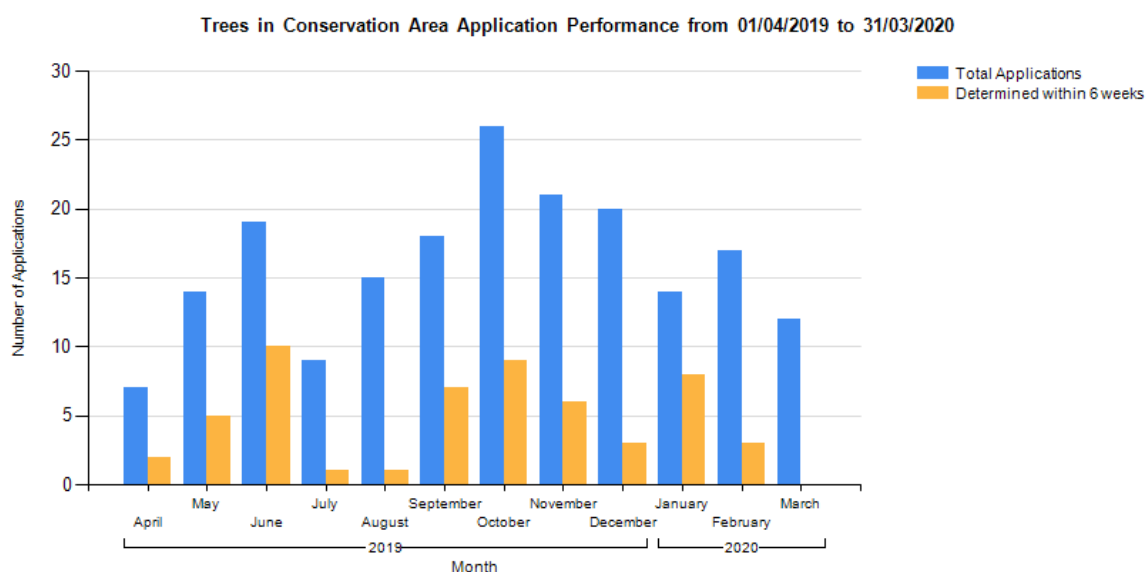
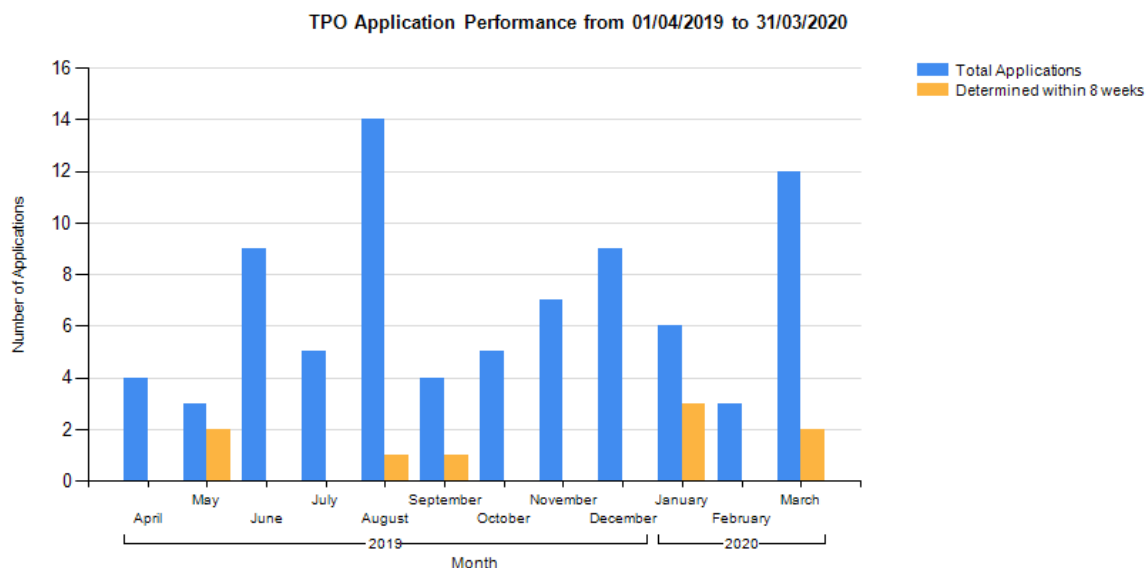




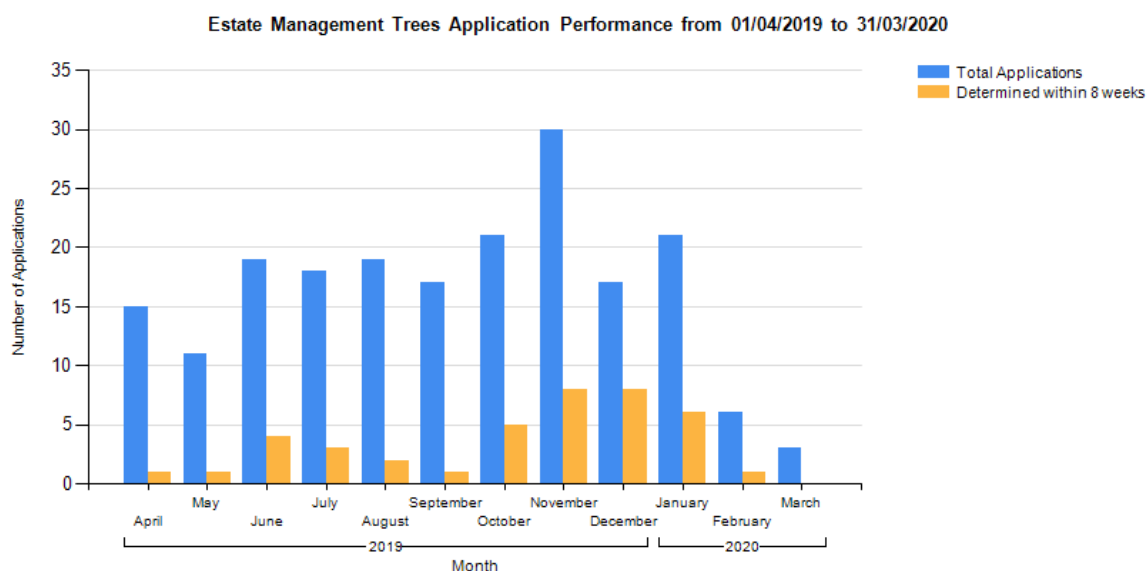
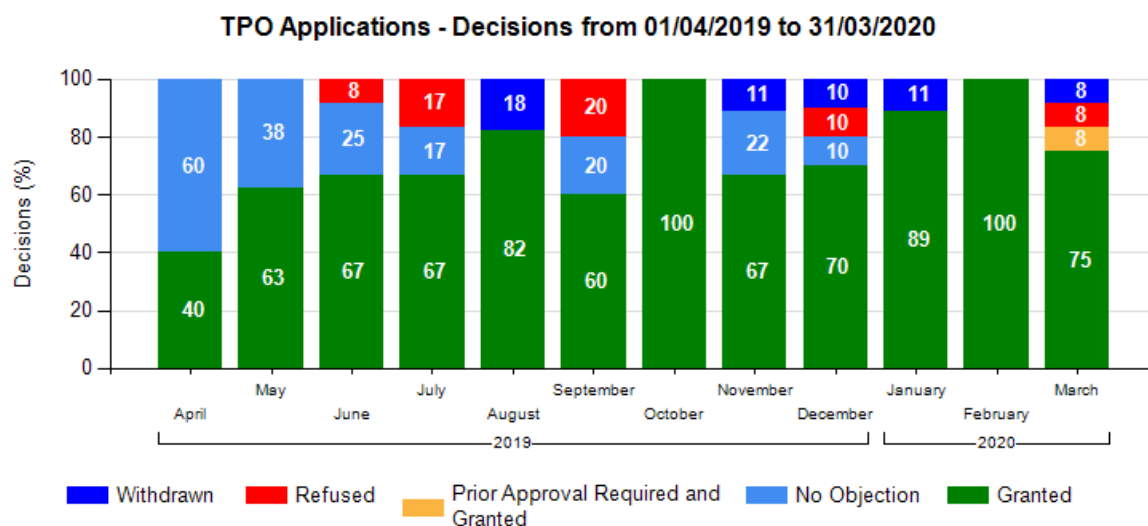
Landscaping

- 4.4 As with previous quarters, the performance of the landscaping team is being reported to enable Members to understand some of the work undertaken by landscape and tree officers which is not already reported to other committees such as the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.5 The landscaping team is responsible for dealing with applications relating to Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), applications for works to trees in Conservation Areas and Estate Management applications where works are proposed to trees or hedges. They are also involved in masterplanning for strategic, and other large, sites to advise on landscaping and planting plans.
- 4.6 In the region of 200 applications per annum are received which are Estate Management and 300 TPO and works to trees in Conservation Area applications. Applications for works to trees in Conservation Areas require the Council to determine whether or not the tree should be protected by a TPO. Decisions should be made within 6-weeks and the Order issued within this timescale. If a decision is not made on the first day of the 7th week, the applicant may undertake the works that they were seeking consent for.

- 4.7 The following graphs show the number of TPO and conservation area applications determined each month and whether they were determined within the statutory timescales. This shows little consistency with the number of applications received each month making resourcing more difficult and the number of decisions made in time are sensitive to changes in officer capacity. It should be noted however that where the Tree Officer identifies a potential risk to a tree of value, this is normally determined within the statutory period in order that further protection for the tree can be put in place if necessary.



- 4.8 The graph below shows the number of decisions made on TPO's and Trees in Conservation Areas during the reporting period. The Landscape Officer tries to negotiate acceptable schemes, hence a high approval or no objection rate.



4.9 The graph above shows the number of applications for works to trees within the Estate Management area.

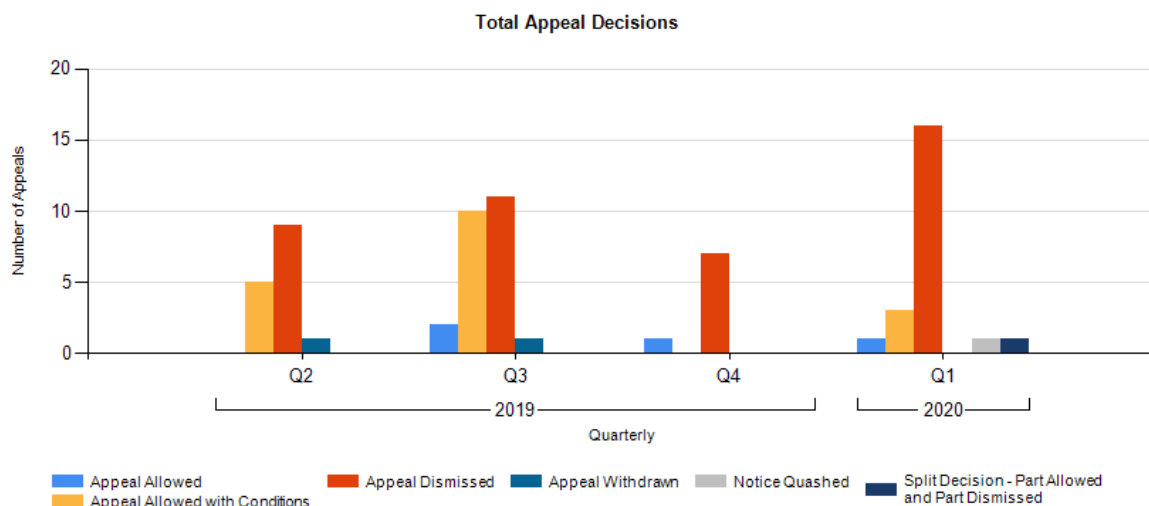
4.10 In addition to dealing with applications, Members will be aware from reports presented to Committee that the landscaping officer will comment on proposals that might have an impact on either existing landscaping or will provide an opinion on proposed landscaping. The following graphs show the average number of consultations per month is approximately 25. Each of these consultations has the potential to consume significant landscape officer time as they interrogate tree reports and seek to advise on landscaping improvements to proposals.



Appeals

- 4.11 The chart below shows the number of applications and enforcement notices that have been allowed, allowed with conditions, dismissed, split decisions (part allowed and part refused) and withdrawn at appeal. This quarter has seen an increase in the number of decisions compared to the previous quarter, from 8 to 22. It now appears that the Inspectorate is dealing with appeals in batches and so decisions come through in groups at a time. In the most recent quarter there were 16 appeals dismissed, 4 that were allowed, one enforcement notice that was quashed and one split decision. As has been noted previously, over the longer term, there continues to be a trend towards appeals being allowed or allowed with conditions by the Planning Inspectorate. It should be noted that, with the relatively small number of decisions received, the figures are particularly sensitive to minor changes.
- 4.12 As well as the Government monitoring authorities in relation to performance for determining applications, it also monitors quality in relation to the number of major and non-major applications overturned (i.e. allowed) at appeal. The threshold is for fewer than 10% of major applications overturned at appeal over a rolling two-year period. For authorities who exceed this target, they will be classed as 'poorly performing' and applications for major developments may be made by developers directly to the Planning Inspectorate.
- 4.13 As of 1 April 2018 the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) implemented a threshold for quality of decisions for non-major applications at 10%. For clarification, this is 10% of all non-major (i.e. minor and others) decisions refused by the Council and subsequently overturned at appeal over a rolling two-year period. The latest statistics collated by MHCLG have been published and relate to the two year period between July 2016 to June 2018 (latest available). For major applications, these figures show that a total of 91 major decisions have been determined with 5 being appealed and 2 overturned. The percentage is therefore 2.2%. For non-majors, these figures show that a total of 97 appeals have been determined of which 33 were allowed. Over the same time period 1,790 applications have been determined. The percentage is therefore 1.8%. The Council is therefore significantly within government's target and not at risk of being classed as poorly performing.

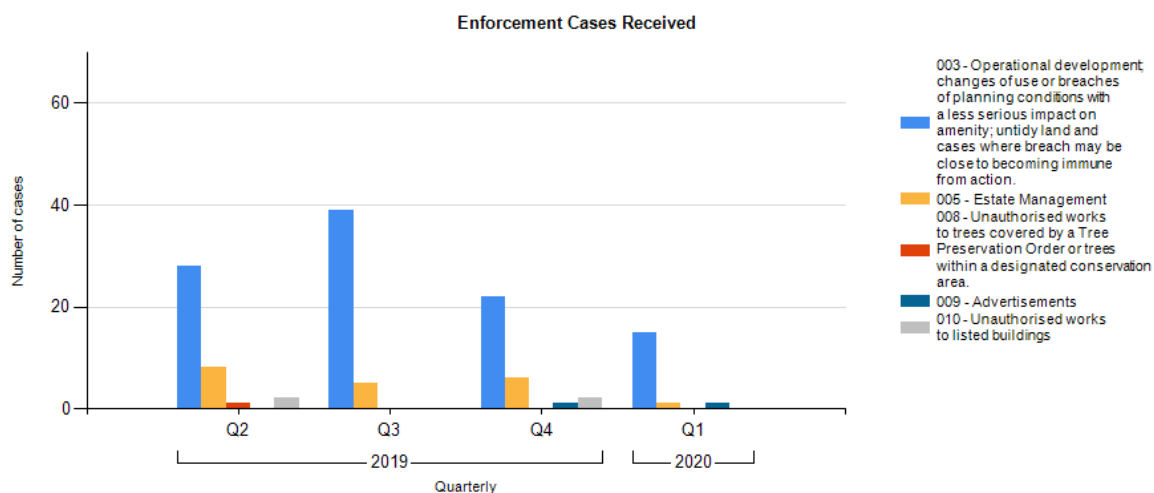
- 4.14 Planning appeals can be costly to administer in terms of officer time and expert advice. A straightforward householder appeal may take approximately 5 hours of officer time to register and respond to, assuming that it follows a written representations procedure.
- 4.15 As well as the cost of administration, the Council must have regard to the potential to have costs awarded against it, should it be found that the decision, or the Council's behaviour was unreasonable, such cases are reported to the Development Management Committee.



5 **Enforcement**

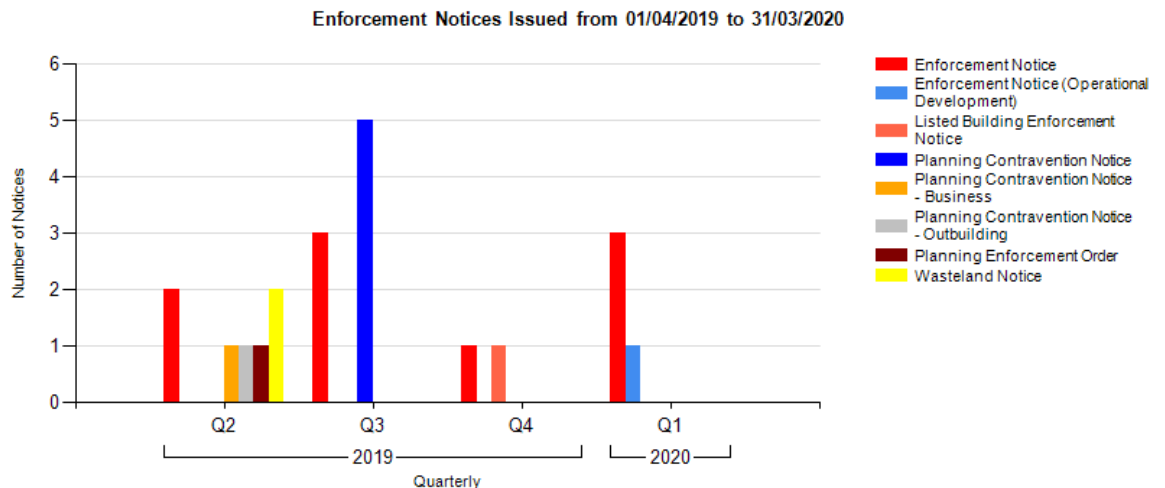
Number of cases received

- 5.1 Enforcement continues to be busy. However there has been a slight decrease in the number of new cases being registered in the last quarter.
- 5.2 As with previous quarters, a lot of cases reported are those considered as having a less serious impact upon amenity, shown in blue and yellow. One case reported consisted of an unauthorised advertisement.



Notices Issued

- 5.3 The chart below shows the number of notices issued. The issuing of an enforcement notice is the last resort for the Council. Government guidance requires local planning authorities to try to negotiate with a contravener to find alternative means by which an unacceptable development may be made acceptable. A significant amount of time is spent by the enforcement officers in negotiation. However, it can be seen that four enforcement notices have been issued in the last quarter.



- 5.4 There are currently 396 outstanding enforcement cases (both planning and Estate Management), some of which are awaiting prosecution, notices to be served or, in the case of estate management, for arbitration. Others are being investigated with the aim to find an acceptable resolution for all parties. The next report providing an update on enforcement action taken (i.e. notices issued) will be presented to the end of May's Development Management Committee (DMC meeting as a Part II (confidential) item.

6 Updates

- 6.1 Since the last report, there have been further changes to the staffing of the Development Management service. A number of Support staff have left. The service is however still reliant on agency staff to fill gaps in full time staff where permanent appointments have not yet been possible.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Performance has been largely maintained above required local and national levels. Recruitment remains very challenging but efforts continue to try and recruit high quality permanent staff.

Author: Sarah Smith (Development Management Service Manager)

Date: 3 April 2020