

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 03 MARCH 2022
REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2021

(All wards)

1 Introduction

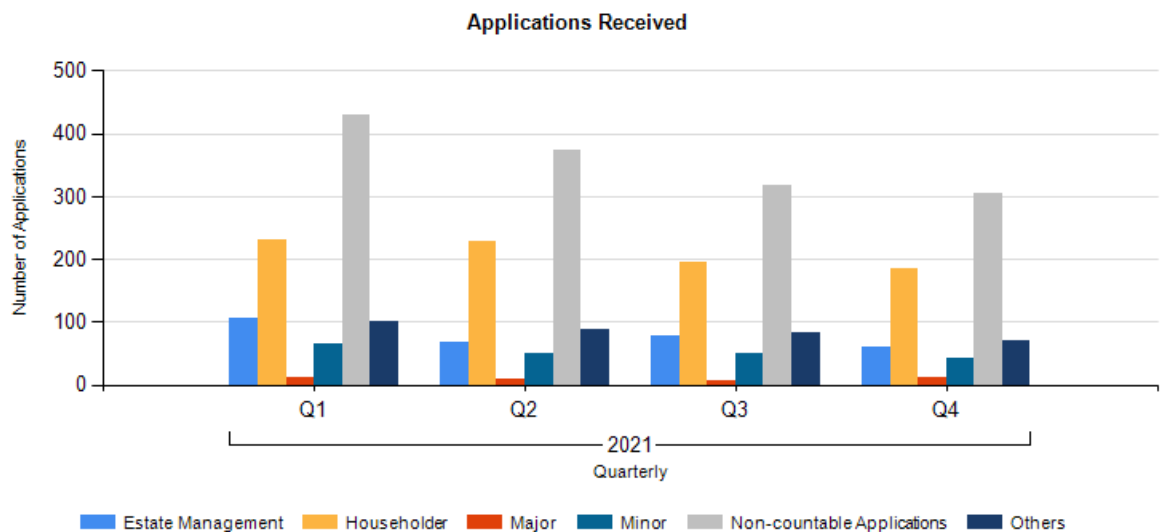
- 1.1 This report relates to the performance of the Development Management Service over the three month period October to December 2021 (quarter 4).
- 1.2 Members should note that, whilst this quarter is traditionally considered to be quarter 3 of the financial year, the planning department software considers it to be quarter 4, 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

The graphs below show the number of applications that have been received during the first, second, third and fourth quarters of 2021 (the last four quarters). In summary, in quarter 1 of 2021, 1059 applications were received, in quarter 2 of 2021 873 applications were received, in quarter 3 812 applications were received and in quarter 4 708 applications were received.



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.

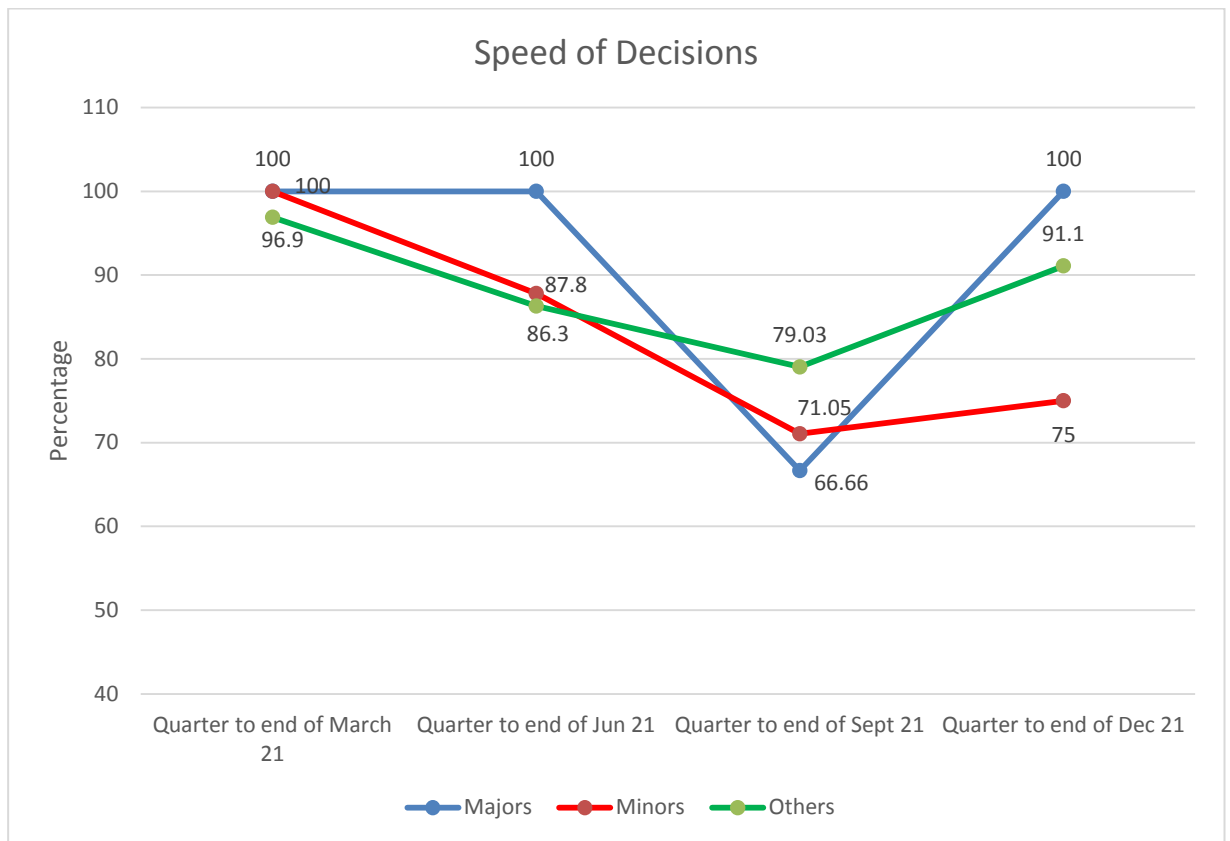
Estate Management applications are not planning applications and therefore are subject to different policies and regulations compared to planning. However, they continue to comprise a significant amount of the department's work and have therefore been reported separately for information. These applications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

- 3.1 From the graph above, it can be seen that Non-countable and Householders remain the greatest number submitted. Estate Management applications are dealt with in a separate team. Officer workloads have remained higher than has previously been the case with earlier periods as set out in former Performance Reports.

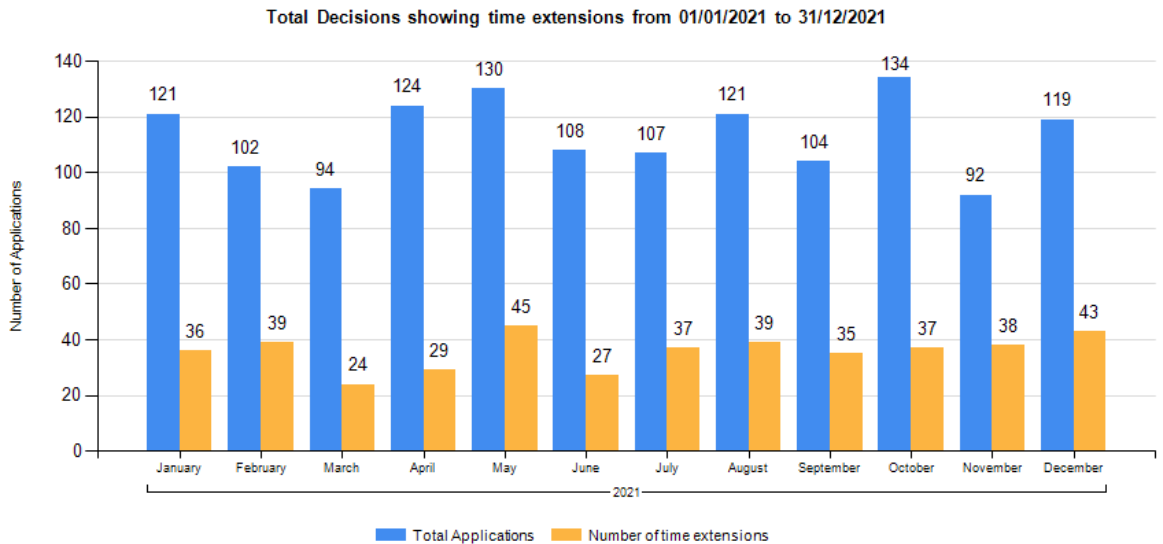
4 Performance

Applications

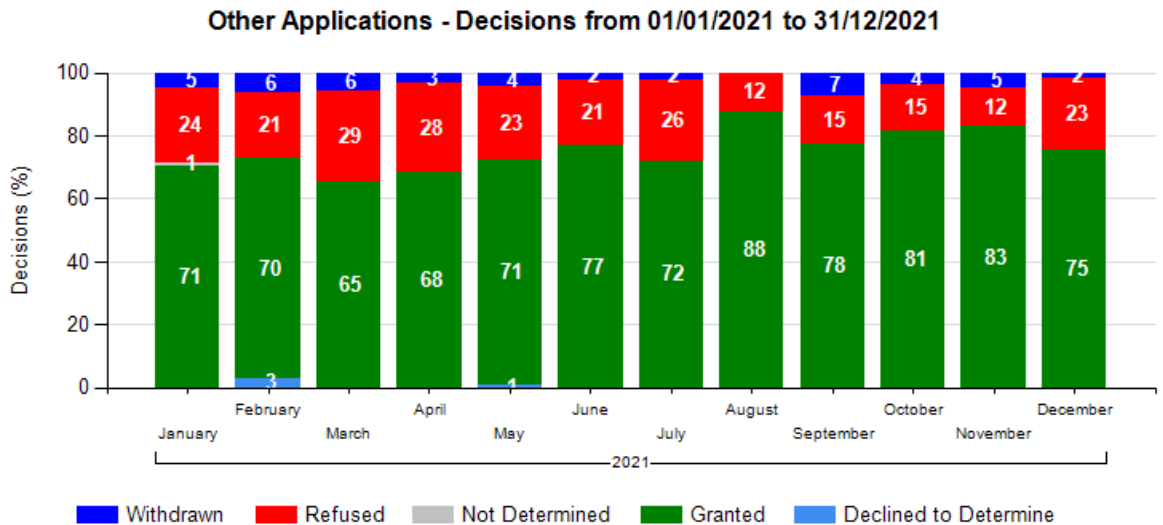
- 4.1 The Government (MHCLG) monitors planning authorities on their speed of making decisions in relation to major and non-major applications. The target at national level is to determine 60% of major applications within the statutory period of 13 weeks or subject to the agreement of a time extension over a rolling two-year period. For non-majors, the target at national level is 70% over a two-year period.
- 4.2 Where planning authorities under-perform against the government target, they can 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. In such cases the Council would not receive the fees for these applications but would be expected to deal with all of the associated administration.
- 4.3 The following graph relates to the percentage of planning applications determined within set timescales.



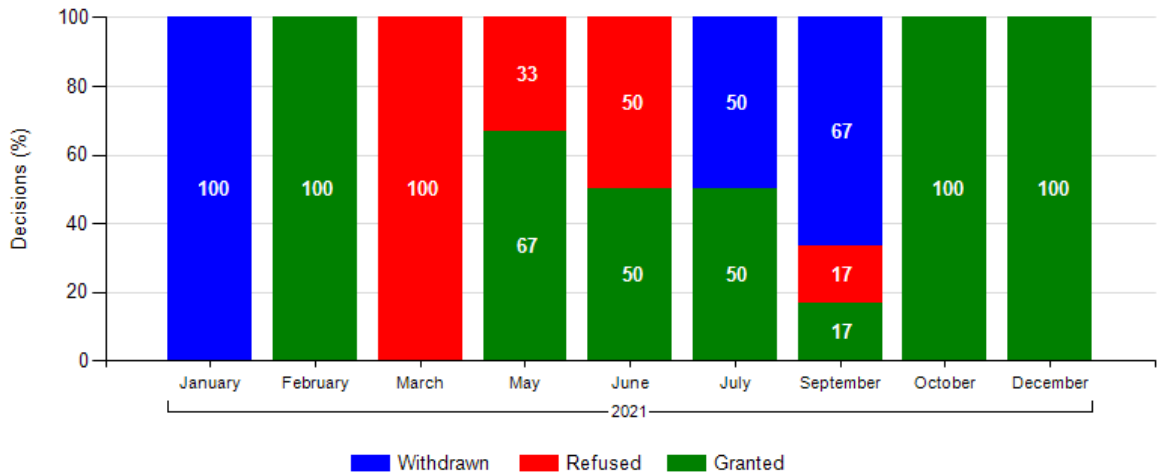
- 4.4 Over the last quarter performance for majors has increased back up to 100% with applications being determined within deadlines. Performance for others has increased to 91.1%, with performance for minors also increasing to 71.05%. Over the last quarter decisions are being made well above the statutory national targets.
- 4.5 These targets continue to be achieved due to seeking time extensions for dealing with the applications beyond their statutory time period from applicants. Time extensions can be sought for a variety of reasons but include seeking negotiations, complex and/or controversial proposals and items presented to Committee. Time extensions do not count 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 32% of all applications determined are subject to a time extension.



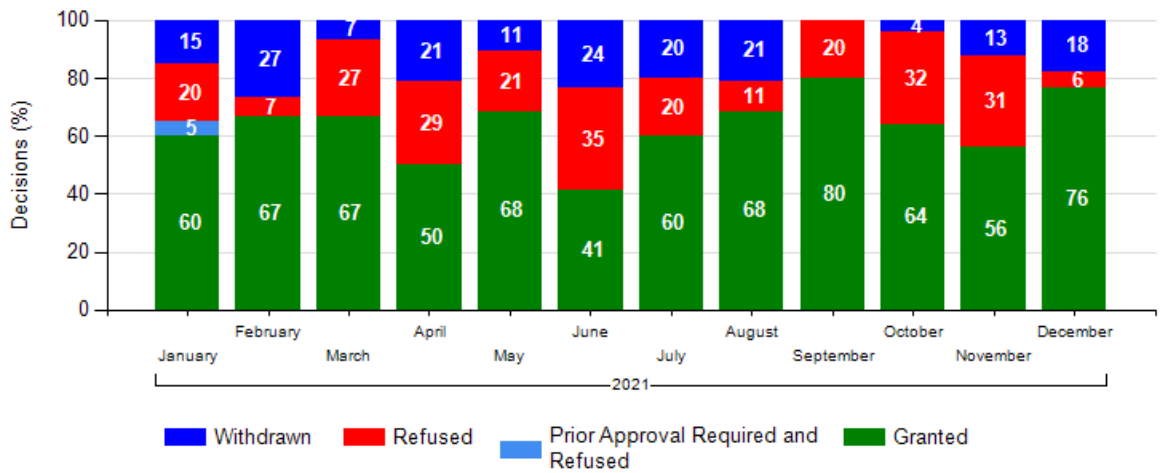
4.6 Of the decisions reported above, the following graphs show the number of decisions that were granted, refused, split (i.e. part granted and part refused) and withdrawn across the major, minor and other categories. All three graphs demonstrate that the majority of applications are granted. Withdrawals 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'.



Major Applications - Decisions from 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2021



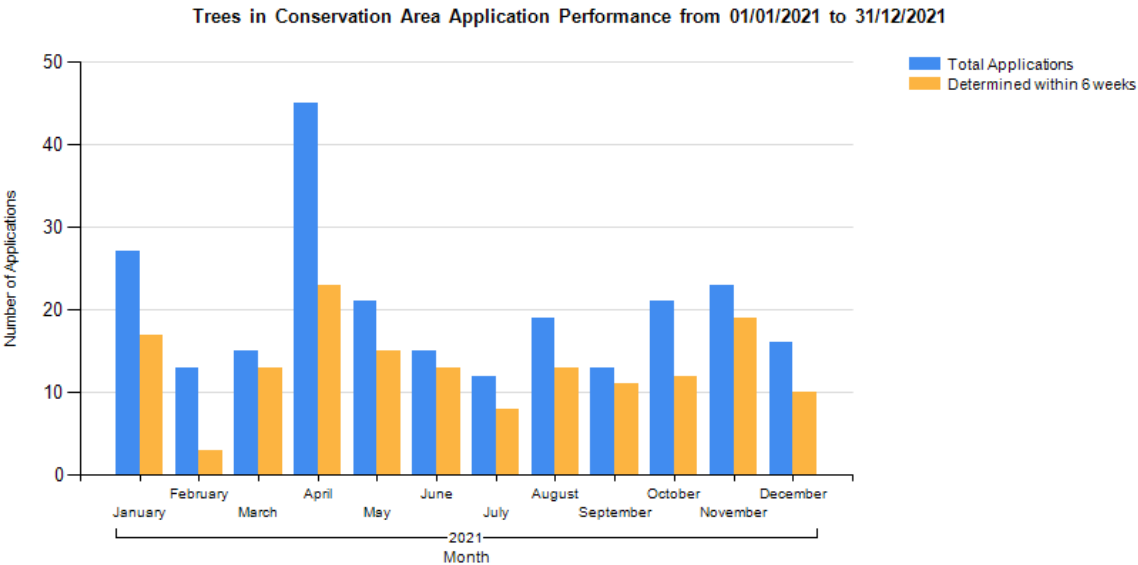
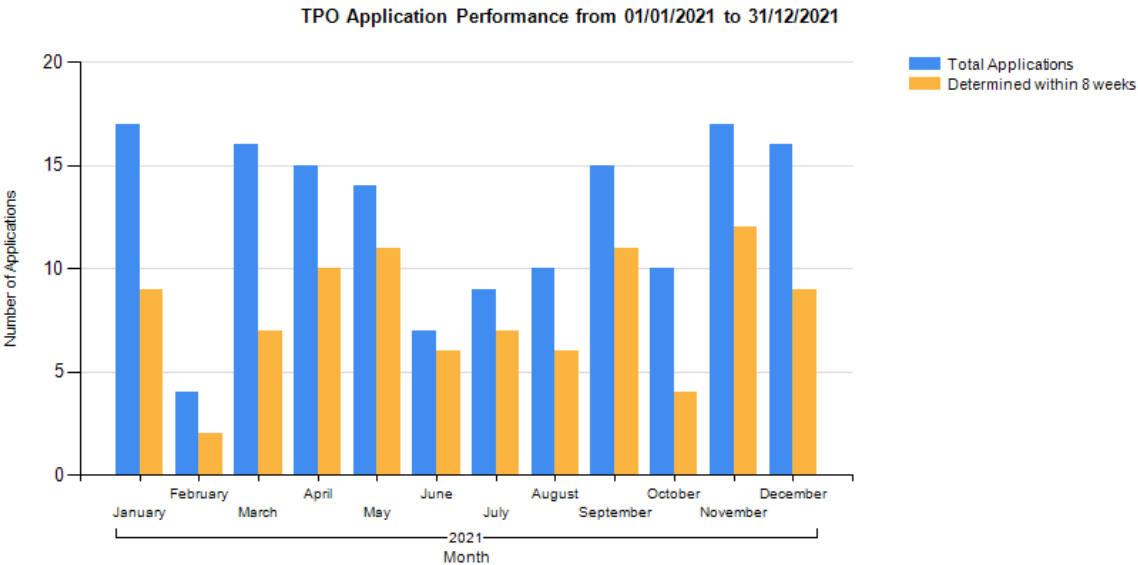
Minor Applications - Decisions from 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2021



Landscaping

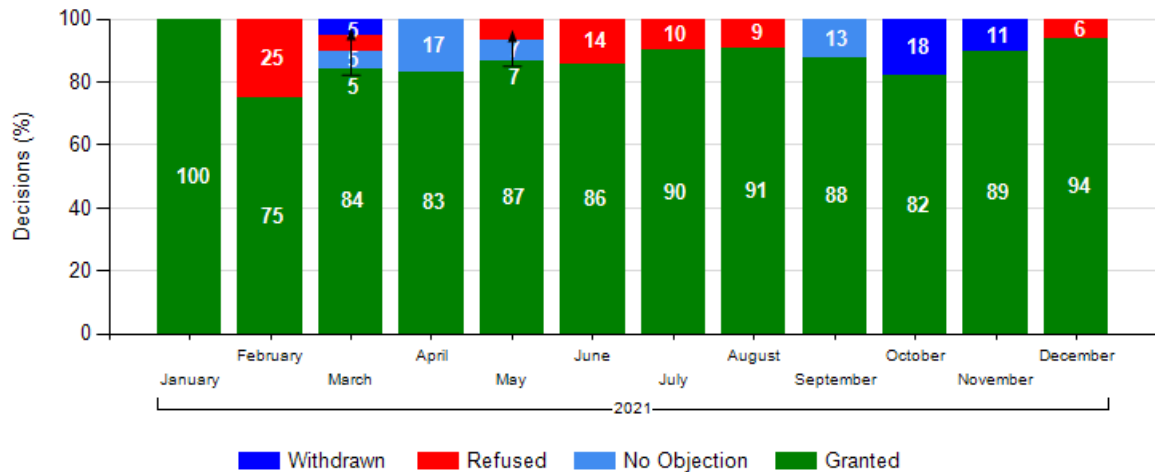
- 4.7 As with previous quarters, the performance of the landscaping team is being reported to enable Members to understand some of the work undertaken by landscape and tree officers which is not already reported to other committees such as the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.8 The landscaping 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.
- 4.9 In the region of 300 applications per annum are received which are Estate Management and 400 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.

4.10 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 which is challenging for resourcing 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.

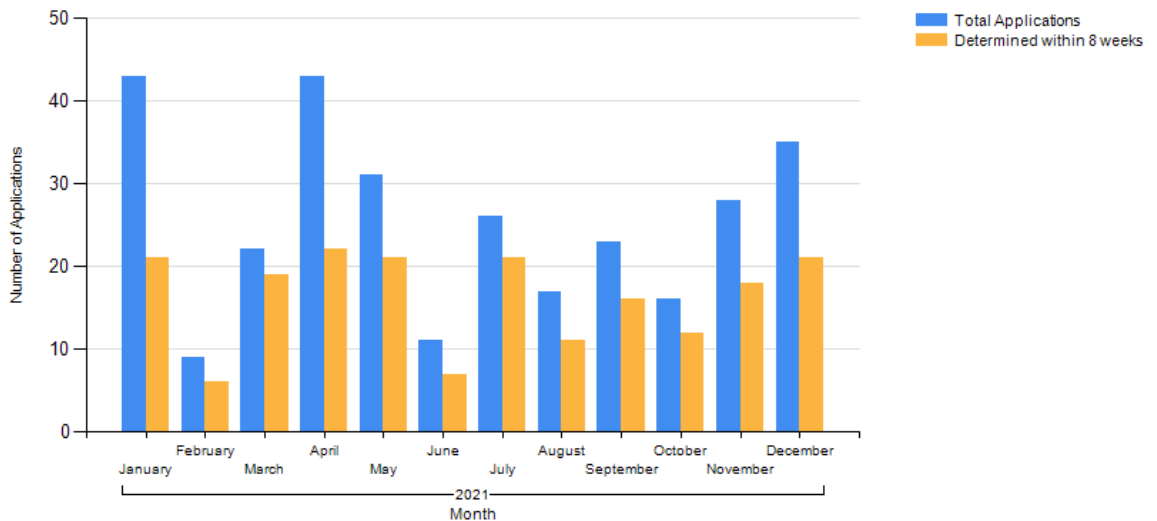


4.11 The graph below shows the number of decisions made on TPO’s and Trees in Conservation Areas during the reporting period. The Landscape Officer tries to negotiate acceptable schemes, hence a high approval or no objection rate.

TPO Applications - Decisions from 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2021



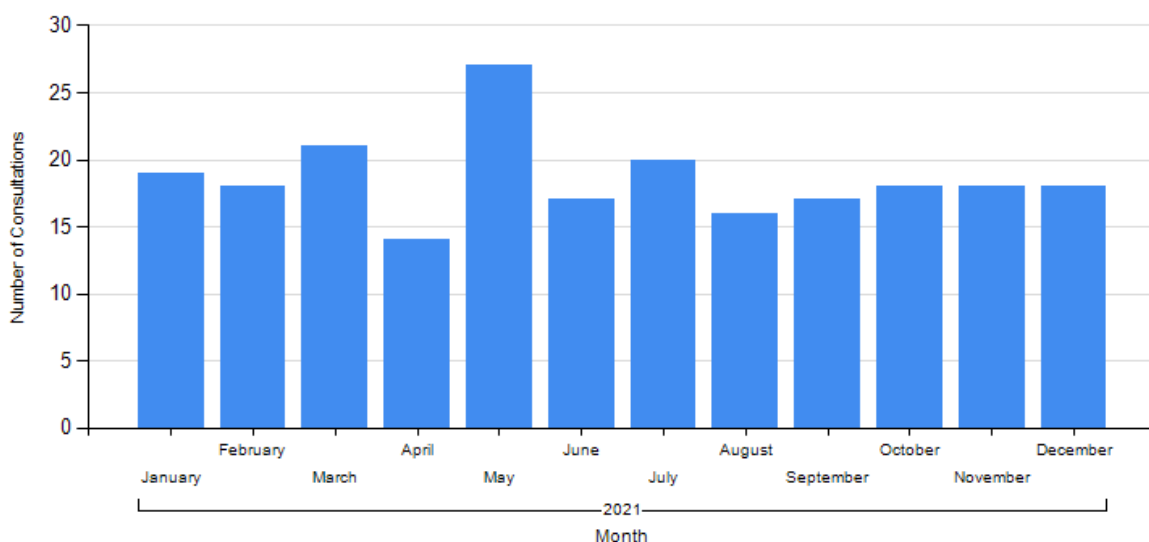
Estate Management Trees Application Performance from 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2021



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

4.13 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 number of consultations per month. Each of these consultations has the potential to consume significant landscape officer time as they need to review tree reports and seek to advise on landscaping improvements to proposals.

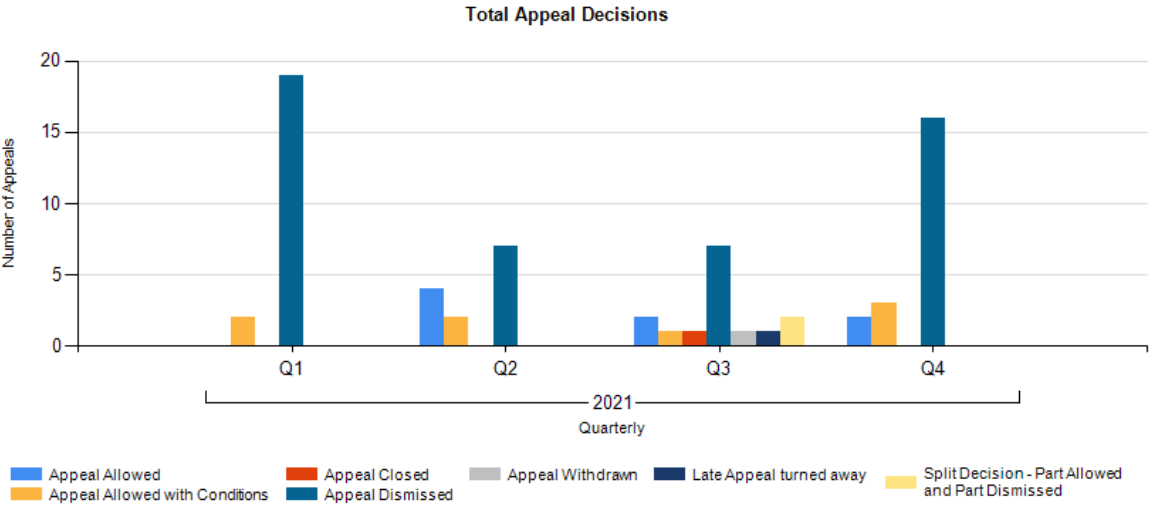
Number of Tree Officer Consultations Sent from 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2021



Appeals

- 4.14 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. In the most recent quarter there were 21 appeal decisions. Of these, 16 were appeal dismissed, 3 allowed with conditions and 2 appeal allowed. 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.
- 4.15 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.
- 4.16 The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) implemented a threshold for quality of decisions for major and 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 April 2018 to March 2020 (latest available). For major applications, these figures show that a total of 70 major decisions have been determined with 2 being appealed and 1 overturned. The percentage is therefore 1.4%. For non-majors, these figures show that a total of 1723 applications were determined of which 86 were appealed and 25 were allowed at appeal. The percentage is therefore 1.5%. The Council remains inside the government's target and not at risk of being classed as poorly performing.

- 4.17 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.
- 4.18 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.

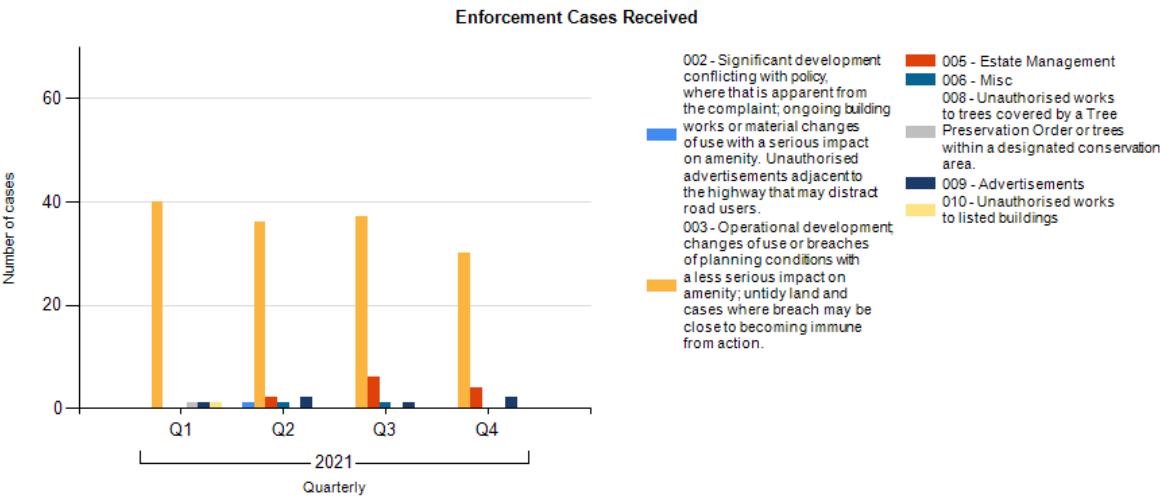


5 Enforcement

Number of cases received

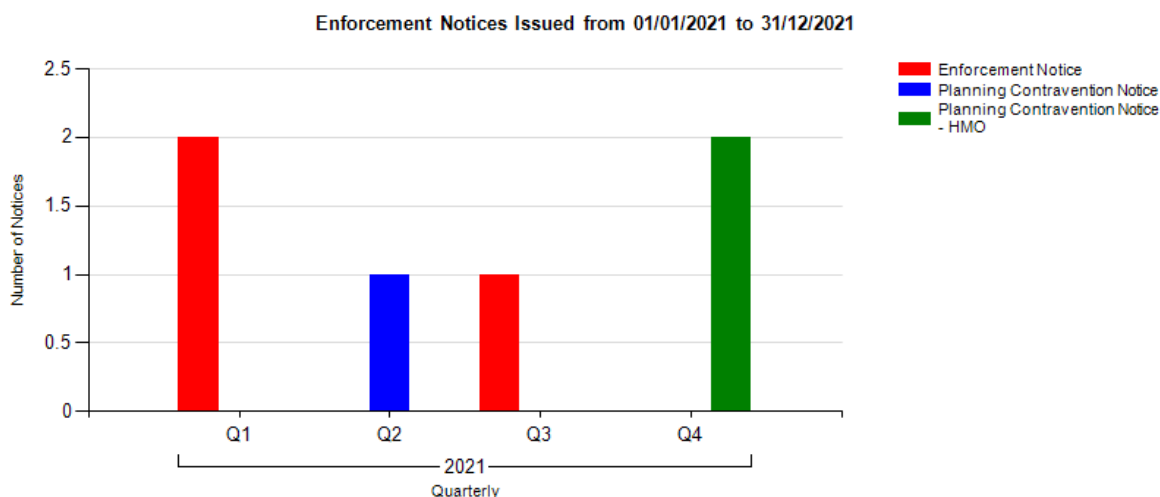
- 5.1 Enforcement continues to be busy. However there has been a slight decrease in the number of new cases being registered in the last quarter.

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.



Notices Issued

- 5.2 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. It can be seen that 1 enforcement notice and 2 planning contravention notices - HMO have been issued in the last two quarters.



- 5.3 There are currently 345 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.

6 Staffing Update

- 6.1 Planning continues to carry vacant posts which affects the capacity of Development Management
- 6.2 Two key posts continue to be covered by an Interim Development Management Service Manager and an Interim Principal Enforcement Officer. A permanent Principal Enforcement Officer has been recruited and will be joining the Council shortly. We are still proactively seeking to fill the Development Management Service Manager and Principal Planning Officer posts, together with an Assistant planner post, created by an internal promotion, but the response to advertisements for the senior posts has been disappointing.
- 6.3 The Validation Service for planning and related applications has now been brought back in house, which will lead to greater efficiencies and cost savings. 3 additional Planning Support Officers joined the team in January 2022 making a total of 7 Support Officers and a Planning Technical Manager in the Planning Support team.

7 **Conclusion**

- 7.1 Performance continues to be maintained above required local and national levels.