

REFORM OF PLANNING SERVICES: REVIEW OF PROGRESS 2025

Background

1. A report on the Planning Service was published in April 2023. One of the recommendations related to drawing up an Improvement Plan and a report on progress with the recommendations was published in April 2024. The Service had not been improved to any real extent and the Minister for the Environment, who has given a strong commitment to oversee significant improvements in the Planning Service, called for a further report to establish the extent to which progress was being made and to identify further actions/initiatives that could be strengthened or introduced to realise his aspirations
2. Efficiency can be measured by, for example, reporting time taken to register applications or issue decisions. Statistics are less suited to assessing customer service; instead, information from and perceptions of stakeholders, for the purposes of this Review, the Industry Partnership Board provide this input.

Approach

3. Discussions were held with the Minister for the Environment, the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, Chair of the Planning Committee, the Group Director of Regulation, the Head of Development and Land and 2 recently recruited Planning Managers (Applications and Compliance), the Registration Manager, the Head of Place and Spatial Planning as well as informal chats with staff in the Directorate. Information published in the Planning Dashboard series, the monthly Planning Newsletter and the 2024 Planning Performance Report have also been drawn on.
4. It is not intended to forensically examine progress with the recommendations from the 2023 and 2024 reports; indeed, there is a comprehensive summary in Planning Reform: Progress & Direction – Strategic Briefing Document (March 2025). Moreover, the recommendations were not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive, leaving scope for initiatives from within the service. This review has therefore adopted a holistic approach on progress.

Key Changes 2024/25

5. There have been several significant changes in the past 12 months: -
 - New Minister for the Environment
 - Jersey Government Priorities
 - New offices
 - Performance Reporting
 - Stakeholder Engagement
 - Staff resources

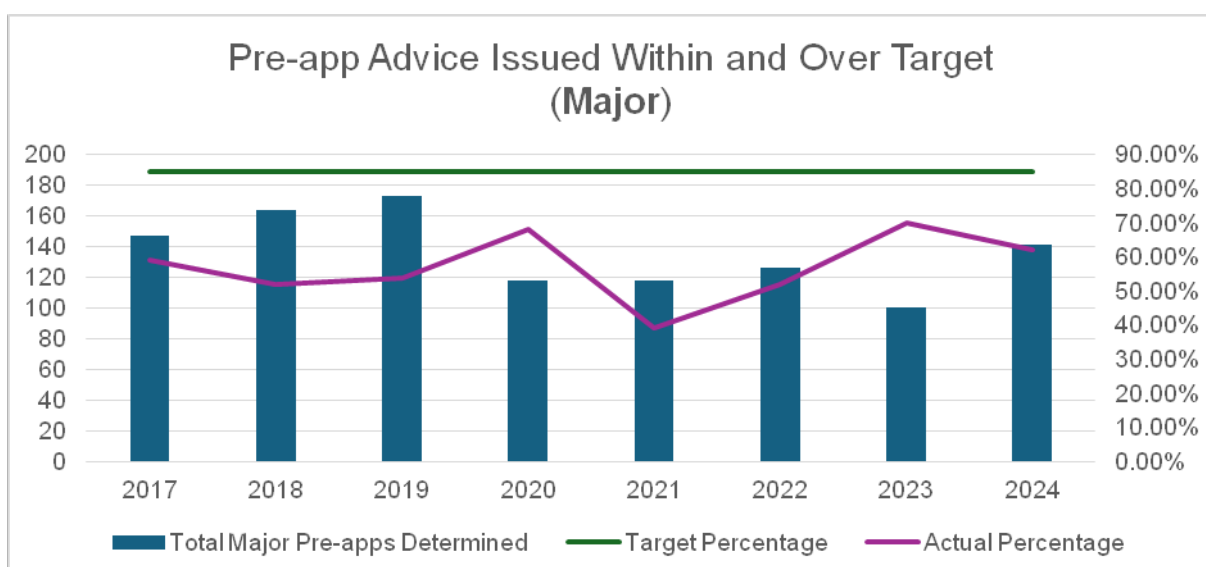
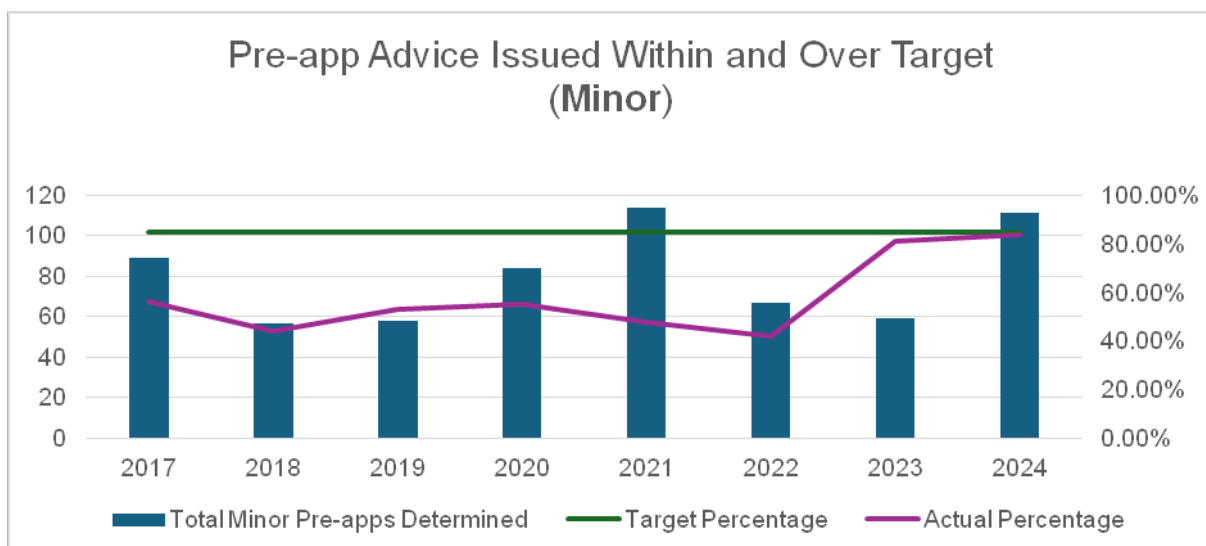
- Establishment of Industry Partnership Board
6. The new Minister for the Environment was appointed shortly before work on the 2024 Progress Report begun. He has taken an active and sustained interest in the Planning elements of his portfolio, in particular his commitments to improve the performance of the Service. This has been recognised and welcomed by staff and stakeholders.
 7. The Council of Ministers has identified the need for Planning Service Reform and Planning is listed as one of 13 priorities by the Government of Jersey in the updated Common Strategic Policy (2024). This has reinforced the importance the Government attaches to an efficient and responsive Planning Service. An ambitious programme for reform has also been drawn up covering 4 these – Rules, People, Process, Technology and Data. Also featured in the 13 priorities was the need to secure planning approval for a new general hospital. In February 2025 the Planning Committee voted in favour of the revised proposals and this is now progressing to the completion of a Planning Obligation Agreement which will then result in a decision letter to approve.
 8. The new offices provide a bright and airy working environment and staff are clearly much happier in their new surroundings. Staff were coming to the office on a more regular basis as distinct from working remotely. The establishment of a front office with a rotating Duty Office was long overdue and is clearly serving its purpose. The office of the Minister for the Environment is in the building and the Planning Committee also meets there.
 9. There has been a step change in the amount and frequency of publicly available information with, for example, the introduction of the Planning Dashboard series and the quarterly reports on Planning Performance, the most recent version of which was published in February 2025.
 10. The Industry Partnership Board has been established. The original intention was to meet quarterly, but these sessions are now scheduled every 2 months. The Board is chaired by the Head of Planning with representatives from across the development industry including planning consultants, house builders, architects, and construction professionals. The Minister has attended on one occasion and this will continue periodically. The monthly Planning Newsletter provides updates on current issues and introducing staff to the wider public.
 11. The Development and Land Service welcomed the new Planning Applications Manager and Appeals and Compliance Manager in January 2025, following successful

recruitment off-island after internal and on-island recruitment drives were unsuccessful. Both these posts were vacant for a period of over 18 months. The Service was also successful in recruiting an additional trainee planner, and a minor organisational change in January 2025 resulted in the creation of an additional post for a Special Projects Senior Planner which is currently unfilled, but recruitment is underway. Once this post is filled the Planning Applications team will have a full staff complement. Recruitment is also underway for the single remaining vacancy in the Appeals and Compliance team with interviews, later in April. A trainee Building Standards Officer has also been appointed, resulting in that team being fully staffed as well.

12. The RIDA project, which focuses on transforming the technology and systems supporting planning services, is now progressing well. The faster internet connection in the new building is very welcome. A key milestone was the successful introduction of the new document management system in 2024, which has streamlined the handling and processing of planning applications, improving efficiency and accessibility. This system has been integrated into the overall framework for replacing legacy platforms, ensuring that data handling across Planning, Building Standards, Compliance, and Listed Sites is both secure and efficient. The full RIDA project is expected to go live in summer 2025, marking a significant step forward in digital transformation within planning services.

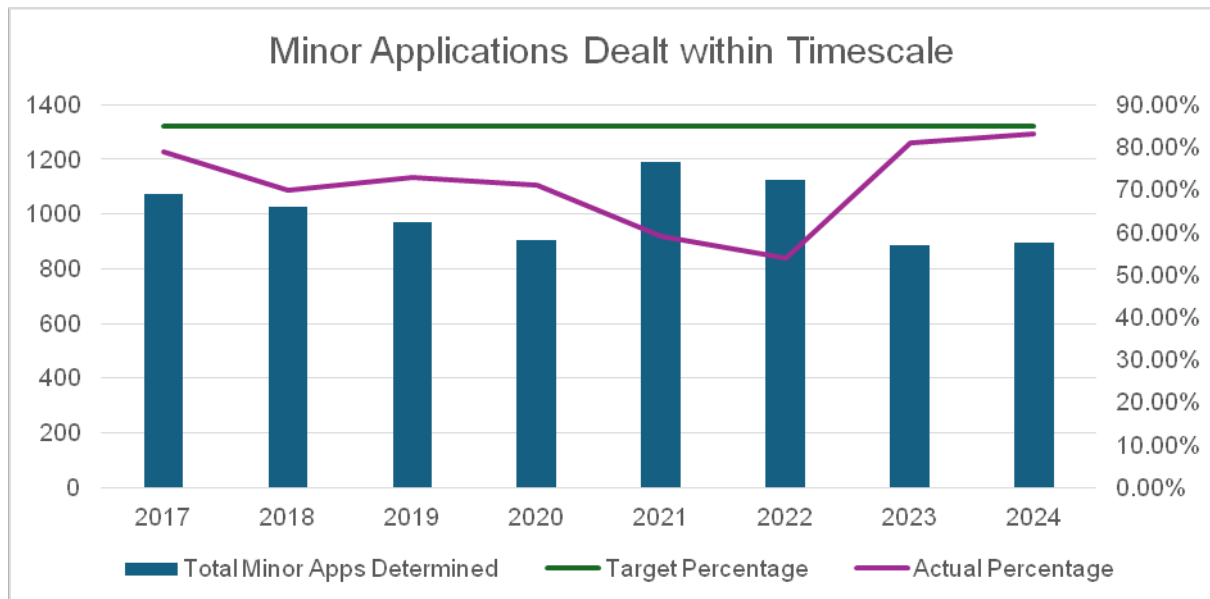
Performance Data

13. There is an old adage – lies, damn lies and statistics. Increasingly examples of this have become more common. However, the data with which this review was presented clearly identifies peaks and troughs in identifying general trends in the handling of planning applications, so this review has every confidence in the veracity of the figures. They also provide the basis for forceful rebuttals of what can be ill informed and ill-founded criticisms of performance.
14. The 2023 Review indicated that the number of requests for pre-application advice on minor applications was at its lowest level since 2018. However, in 85% of cases the advice was provided within the published target. Guidance is being developed on the conduct of pre application discussions and initial drafts have been well received by the industry. There was a significant increase in requests for pre-application advice in 2024 and the performance target was achieved. While requests for advice on pre-application advice on major applications increased performance against target fell. A draft flow chart, which is moving towards adoption, is appended.

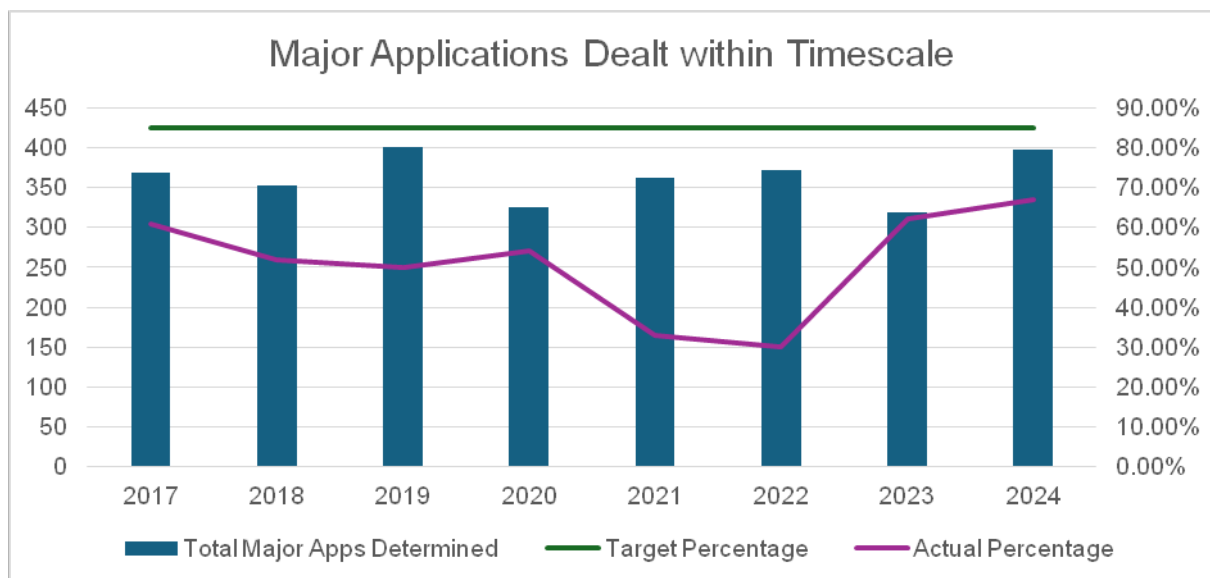


15. Planning Processing Agreements are now being used to support the management of complex and strategically important sites. These should not be seen as fast tracking of applications or a guarantee of a positive decision. The Head of Development and Land is anxious to avoid an overly formulaic approach to these agreements, for example by clarifying the date by which a decision is needed and working back from that.

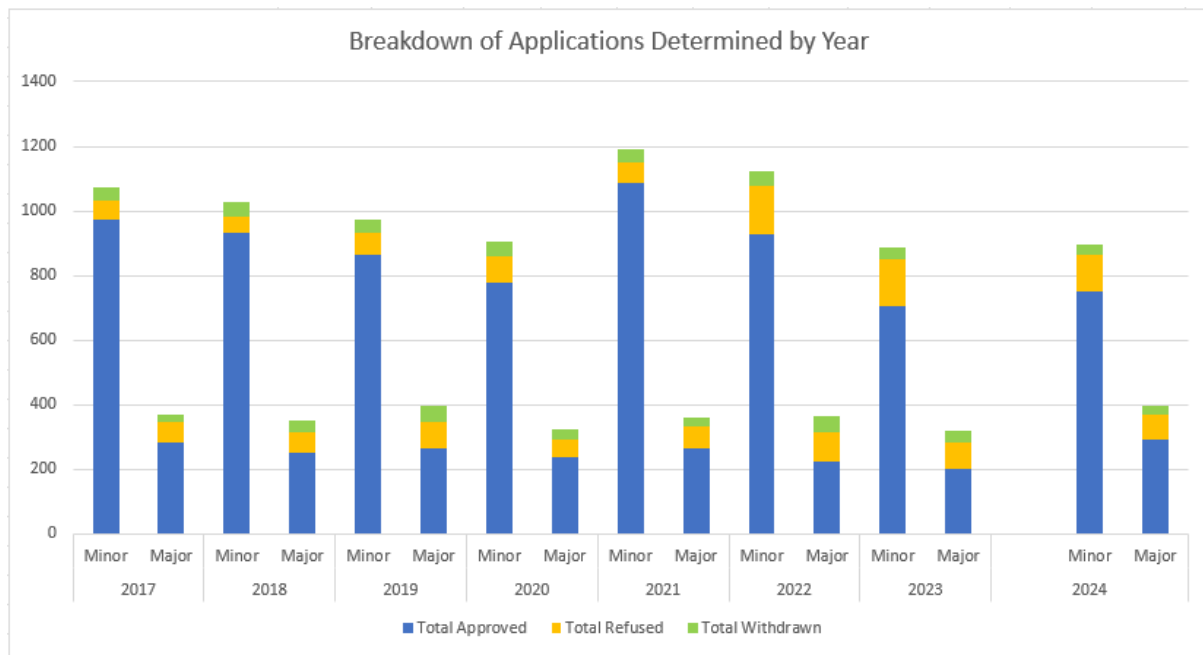
16. The number of minor applications has declined significantly since 2021 but performance against the 8-week target for a decision is now within touching distance of that target. It would have been disappointing had that not been the case.



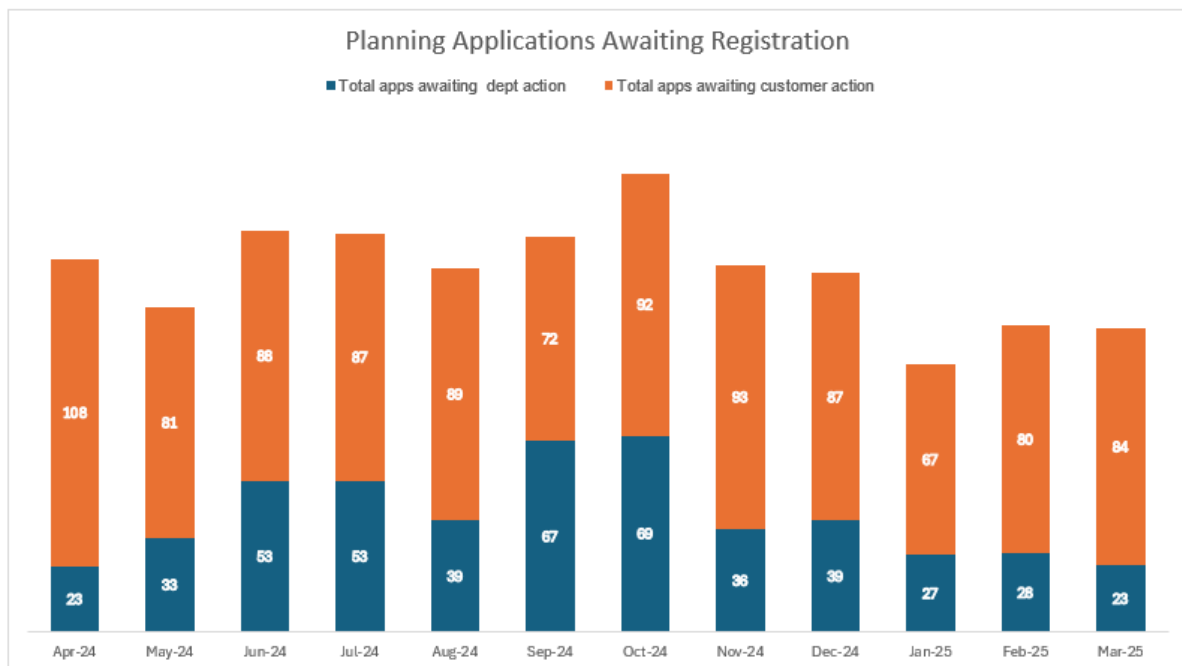
17. The definition of what constitutes a major application in Jersey is extremely low compared to what would be the case in planning authorities across the UK. 2024 saw the highest number of majors in the last 5 years. Performance against the 13-week timescale continues to improve but drawing conclusions on the timeous handling of majors is difficult as the scale ranges from over one to major redevelopment schemes, wind turbines, etc.

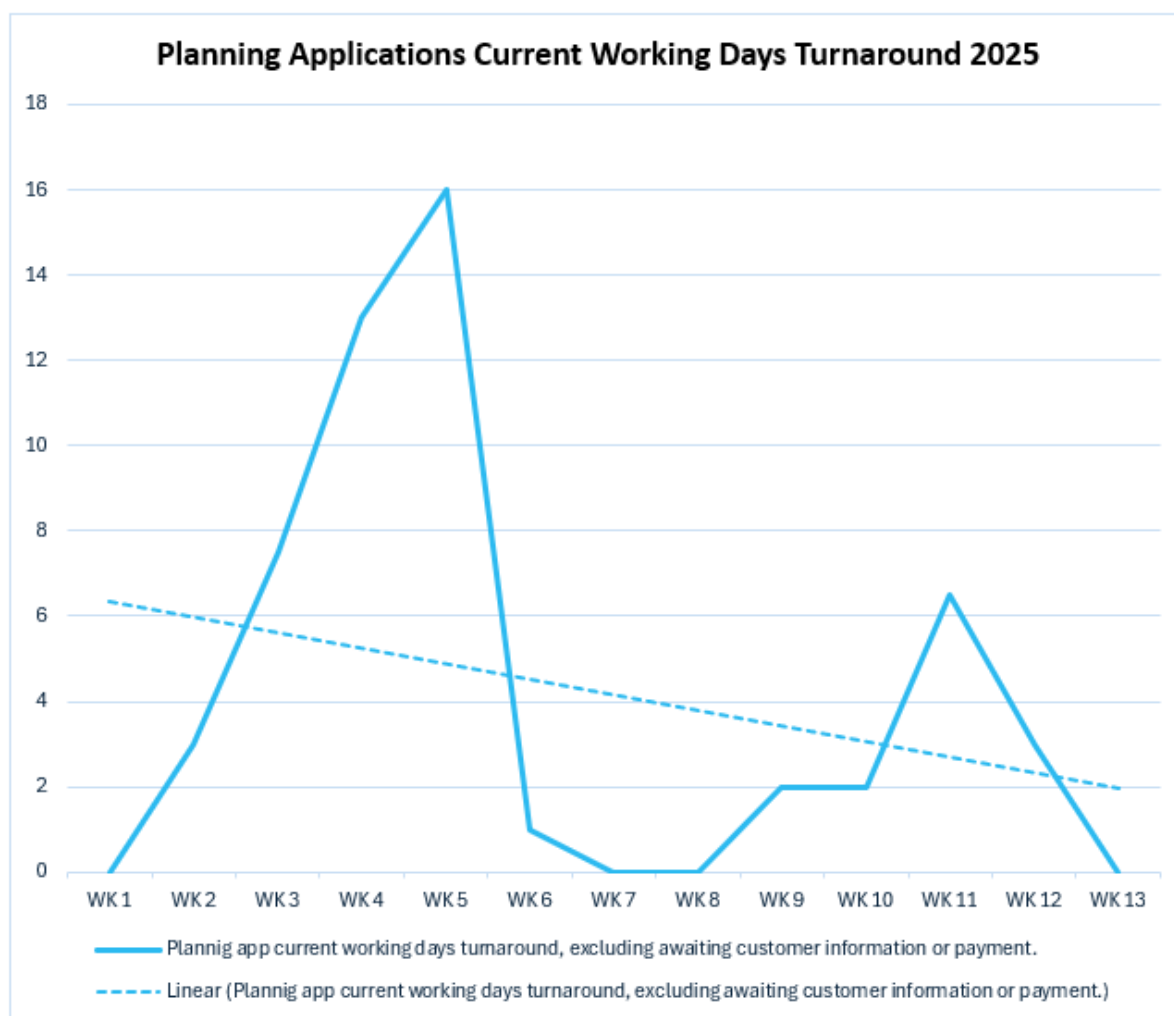


18. The % of minor applications approved was close on 90% in 2024; for majors it was just under 80%. These figures have remained broadly consistent over the past 7 years.



19. The number of applications awaiting registration shows a marked decline over the last 6 months. The number awaiting Departmental action was almost 70 in October but had fallen to 23 in March 2025. In contrast, most cases (ranging from 67 to 92 applications) still to be registered were awaiting further information from the applicant. The data for the second graph below indicates how significantly turnaround times (excluding those awaiting customer action) have improved in the first quarter of 2025.





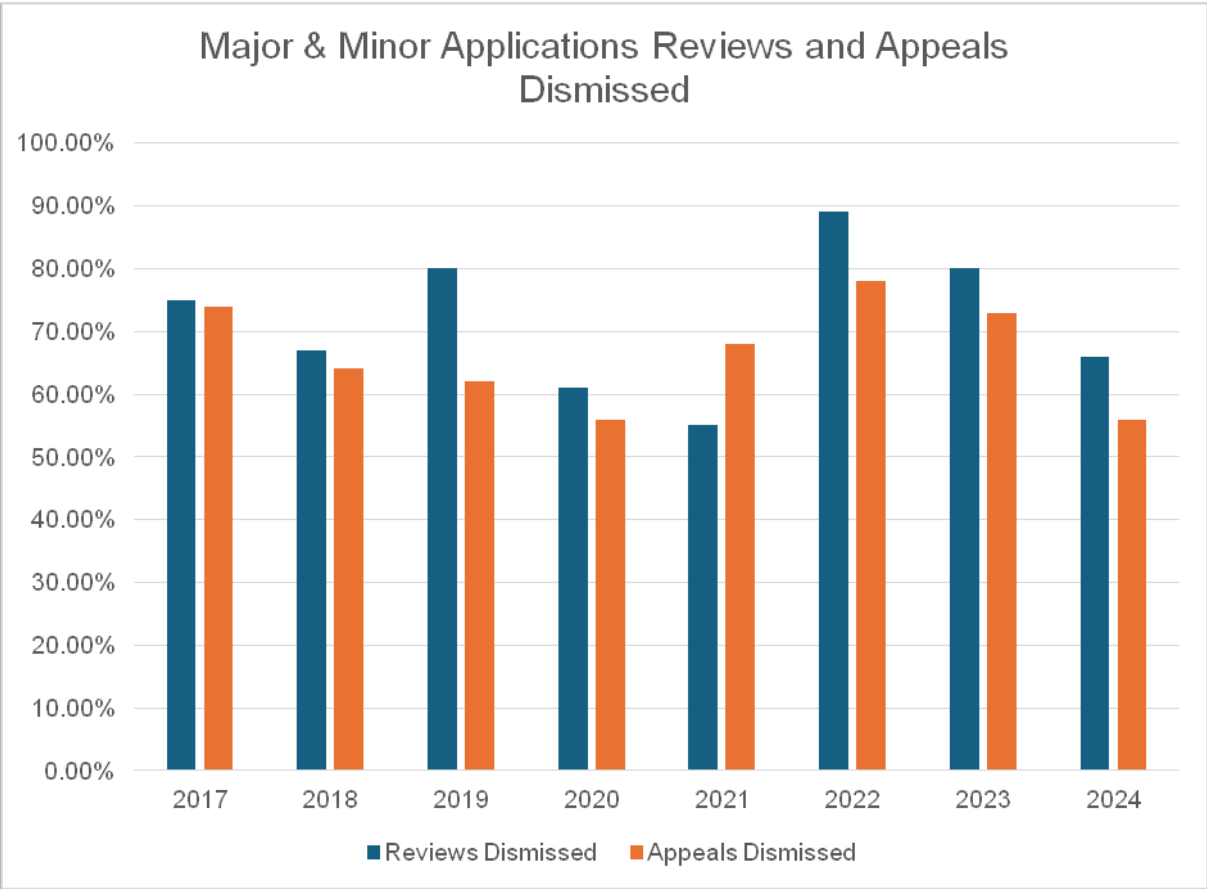
20. The 2024 Review recorded that the number of applications awaiting determination stood at 384; in March 2025 the figure was 284, a fall of over 25%.

21. In the 2024 report, a concern was raised about capricious or inconsistent decisions by the Planning Committee with more determinations being made against officers' recommendations. The 2023 report commented very positively on the conduct of these meetings and there is no doubt, from a discussion with the Chair, that the Committee discharges its business in a thoroughly impartial manner. The time devoted to handling representations on the new hospital provides a good example of its approach.

22. The Chair was aware of the significant improvements in performance and was very complementary about officer support. He did, however, voice concerns over the willingness of some Inspectors to accept revised drawings or additional information

which were not available at the time the Committee made its decision; planning officers confirmed this perspective.

23. In 2023 73% of appeals were dismissed although in 2024 almost 50% were dismissed (14 Major/13 Minor). In other words, a significant proportion of appeals were upheld (13 Major/8 Minor). Had this been evidence of a continuing trend it would have been worrying but of the 8 appeals decided in 2025, 7 were dismissed. Appeal decisions continue to be monitored to identify lessons for future decisions, for example if there are policies which are regularly being overturned on appeal. The position on reviews is quite volatile with two thirds dismissed in 2024 compared to 89% in 2022 and 80% in 2023.



Transparency

24. Significant efforts have been made to publish performance and other information of interest to the wider planning community in Jersey. The Industry Partnership Board met for the first time in June 2024 and is now scheduled to meet every 2 months. A Planning Newsletter is published monthly with over 150 subscribers. Online fora have been established with presentations followed by Q and A on topics of interest such as ecology, the carbon neutral road map and the redevelopment of glasshouse sites. A report on Planning Performance is published quarterly, most recently in February 2025 with a Ministerial Foreword.

25. Major concerns were raised in the 2023 and 2024 reports over the difficulties in contacting planners and the lack of responses to telephone calls and emails. These issues were discussed with the Industry Partnership Board and there was general agreement that contacts with planners had improved noticeably.

26. The comment from the Government's CEO about Jersey being over engineered and overregulated rang true, certainly to some members of the Partnership Board. There was general recognition by the Board that significant strides had been made over the past 12 months to improve performance although they wanted to see progress sustained. Issues/concerns they also raised: -

- Some Planning Processing Agreements had worked well and the value of getting consultees together with planners and applicants was seen as a positive development.
- But it was alleged some staff were unwilling to engage in the process and getting consultees to commit to timescales.
- Issue of factoring in economic considerations into planning policy and decisions highlighted but lack of clarity on how this was to be achieved.
- Perception that the reputation of the planning system in Jersey deterred investment (the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development gave an example of a potential retail investment on a brownfield site not being taken forward due to lack of certainty on the planning outcome)
- Planning policy team continues to be significantly under resourced.
- Reforms to the General Development Order should range wider than householder development.
- Important to recognise need for improvements in quality of design.
- Considerable uncertainty on how/when the Bridging Island Plan was to be updated/revised.
- The practice of a refusal where the Committee was equally split should be changed to give Chair a casting vote (or should it be a presumption in favour of approval?)

Discussion

27. The last 12 months has seen a demonstrable improvement in the performance of the service not just the speed of validation and decision making but also in making the

service more accessible to customers. Turnaround times for validation have improved as has the efficiency with which determinations are made. The appointment of new managers is already showing benefits in the way in which the application processes are managed. Weekly casework management meetings have brought significant benefits which monitor whether a performance target might not be met. This might involve taking a decision on whether to await the comments of a consultee(s) when the 6-week response period has expired or, with management support and guidance, to make decisions based on the professional expertise of planners.

28. The importance the Government attaches to planning reform is very evident and has been championed by the Minister for the Environment in terms of clarity of expectations, attending the Industry Partnership Board, taking on speaking engagements, for example at the Chamber lunch and contributing press articles. The Minister engages regularly with planning staff and was quick to acknowledge the individual and collective efforts of staff to get behind the reform agenda.
29. Much improved staff morale was evident and was confirmed in discussion with several staff. Ministerial commitment and support have undoubtedly contributed to this as has the new building with its much-improved working environment. New management have undoubtedly made their mark in terms of encouraging planners to take responsibility and supporting a less cautious and dirigiste approach to making decisions. This is not about taking decisions simply to avoid time over runs but taking what might be termed measured risks in coming to a recommendation or decision. This is encouraging personal development and greater self confidence among staff.
30. There have also been initiatives to exclude from planning control small scale developments causing no demonstrable harm or erosion of an area's character, for example the change of planning guidance in respect of non-original windows in Grade 3 and 4 Listed buildings. In addition, the guidance to remove the 3000 square ft floorspace limit on the development of larger homes has been removed, a decision welcomed by architects. Work is underway on possible changes to the General Development Order to assess the scope for extending Permitted Development although the Minister is aware of potential sensitivities around this.
31. The complexity of the Validation Matrix was highlighted in the 2023 and 2024 Reports. While it is widely accepted that the volume of information required to accompany planning applications, particularly for minor developments, appears excessive the requirements are, in the main, a legal requirement. The Head of Development and Land is asking planners and technical support staff to follow a proportionate and reasonable approach when validating planning applications, with a view to not place an unnecessary

burden on applicants to supply information over and above what is really needed to make an informed decision on a specific application.

32. The 2024 Report noted that the comprehensive policy content of the Bridging Island Plan is seen by the development industry and others as not attaching significant importance to economic policy considerations. In an appeal decision highlighted in the 2024 Review Report, an Inspector noted the policy requirements in the plan should not be interpreted as requirements. The policies are intended to guide development they are not legally binding as is the case with development plans in some countries. Other material considerations need to be taken in to account.

33. It was suggested by the Head of Development and Land that the wording in primary legislation governing planning decisions already provide the necessary flexibility that critics seek: -

- (1) All material considerations shall be taken into account in the determination of an application for planning permission.
- (2) In general planning permission shall be granted if the development proposed in the application is in accordance with the Island Plan.
- (3) Despite paragraph (2), planning permission may be granted where the proposed development is inconsistent with the Island Plan, if the Planning Committee is satisfied that there is sufficient justification for doing so.

34. The Review shares the view that the wording in (1) above appears a little more flexible than the equivalent requirement of S70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in England which states at (2)...”In dealing with an application for planning permission or permission in principle the authority shall have regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application...” The Scottish equivalent is arguably more restrictive in requiring decisions to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Conclusions and Ways Forward

35. The performance (efficiency and customer service) of the Planning Service in Jersey since the 2023 and 2024 Reviews has taken a major step forward. This is widely recognised – by the Minister, many in the development industry and by the staff who display a new sense of purpose and confidence. This was almost tangible as planners

and Technical Support Officers recognise that the investment they have made and continue to make is paying dividends.

36. Ministerial commitment, along with the Government of Jersey's 13 Priorities has put the need to show real progress with planning reform. While the Minister is rightly keen to recognise the efforts of staff the leadership, commitment and expectation have set a clear direction of travel, the importance of which should not be underestimated.
37. A full staff complement, particularly in recent months, has given the Group Director and the Head of Development and Land the space within which to lead and manage the process of change. More active casework management is bringing benefits while the weekly Planning Team meetings provide the opportunity to provide updates on corporate and other issues while presentation and discussion of complex/contentious/novel cases offer benefits for staff training and development. Previous Reviews have offered positive comments on support for trainee and less experienced planners; this continues to be the case.
38. The new office environment has brought clear benefits while IT systems, particularly with speedier internet connections has reduced the frustration of digital working that was a real bug bear and cause of low morale in the previous building. The intention to introduce the full RIDA project from June should bring further benefits. The cautious approach to its introduction which the Group Director intends is the right approach in the circumstances.
39. There is a willingness to make the planning system in Jersey more flexible, responsive, proportionate, and fleet of foot. The contents of the Validation Matrix remain daunting particularly for minor or other small-scale applications and efforts to reduce the amount and apparent complexity of supporting information need to be accelerated. This may require changes to legislation or alterations to the policy framework in the Bridging Island Plan.
40. In the interim the more pragmatic approach to information requirements for validating planning applications should continue to be supported. Supporting planners to have the confidence to make robust recommendations and judgements where there might be information outstanding – but which it is not regarded as essential in making a determination – should help foster the perception of an enabling and customer focused service.

41. Work on increasing permitted development limits and thresholds or exempting minor development from planning control is underway. The view from the Partnership Board about the need to look beyond householder development to embrace commercial and other developments. There will be a consultation exercise on the draft proposals before a new Order is finalised, but the Minister is alert to potential sensitivities and pitfalls.
42. At present there is no right of appeal to decisions on demountable structures, caravans or advertisements as these developments are not covered under planning legislation. At the same time there is a discussion about extending third party rights of appeal beyond the 50-metre limit but the impression from this and previous reviews is that the current arrangements work well.
43. There is a view in many quarters that the policies in the Bridging Island Plan are weighted in favour of social and environmental - considerations at the expense of economic objectives. However, the policies in the Plan on for example progress towards a carbon neutral economy, protection of Jersey's built, and natural heritage do not exist in isolation but stem from wider Government policies. It appears to be accepted that, in part, economic and business objectives were not sufficiently articulated when the Bridging Island Plan was being formulated. That is changing and the Government's economic policy department is now better able (although it is argued still not sufficiently resourced) to provide the necessary inputs.
44. Work is underway on revisions to the Bridging Island Plan but how this is to be taken forward, the likely content of the revisions and how consultation is to be conducted are not yet in the public domain. The Partnership Board had concerns about the level of resources available to the team to progress revisions to the Plan and there was discussion about what form the economic input might take. It is understood that whatever approach is taken an amendment(s) to primary legislation will be required.
45. Performance reporting on the time taken to decide minor applications provides a sound insight into the pace with which small scale proposals proceed through the system. The classification of majors is far too wide and embraces small residential developments, changes of use, etc to major redevelopment schemes, new infrastructure projects where a 13-week target period for determination is unrealistic. There is a compelling case for a more granular classification, with minor (householder type) applications, advertisements, changes of use in the built-up area below a certain floor area, and development of a single or replacement dwelling being classed as minor. Then 2 or 3 categories of major applications covering say, 2-9 houses, agricultural sheds, small retail etc); larger proposals for say 10-50 dwellings; retail over 250sqm etc; and strategic applications for example proposals covered by a Processing Agreement. This is a

potentially useful area for discussion with the Partnership Board. A revised classification would help provide a more accurate picture of performance.

Concluding Remarks

46. It is not intended to offer a lengthy list of recommendations as much of the progress and the credit has been generated from within the Service. Reforms to the GDO, simplifying the process of submitting a planning application, a more fine-grained categorisation of application types and providing clarification on how revisions to the Bridging Island Plan are key outstanding items to take forward but they are already on the radar.
47. There is also no shortage of ideas and initiatives from the team and the new managers that have recently taken up post are clearly there to manage and are demonstrating the ability to do this. The programme for further reform is set out under the headings Rules, People, Process, Technology and Data. With continuing Ministerial leadership and commitment this should deliver aspirations for a high performing service. However, it will be important to focus on what is a very comprehensive and detailed list of actions on those that will be the most straightforward to implement and which are most likely to have the most impact on the service. An excess of initiatives can have a negative impact, so prioritise.
48. The outcome of the 2024 Review was disappointing but the strides have been made in the last 12 months have been extremely heartening and the atmosphere in the office is buoyant. The need for culture change is easy to say but more difficult to give it practical effect; but it is observable in the Government of Jersey's Planning Service. Planning policy and decisions on the island are and will remain contentious while failures in process, perceived or actual, will still occur although it may be unfair to always lay these at the door of planners and Technical Support Officers.
49. An underlying concern from last year's Review that the feelings of discontent and frustration would breed a generation of planners who feel burdened and unappreciated. In a recent Planning Dashboard Report the service from a Trainee Planner was described as "simply amazing...her quick thinking, professionalism and kindness...literally saved the day." This unsolicited comment was extremely heartening as an indicator of changing attitudes to customer service. Instead of negative behaviours embedded at an early age and likely to become entrenched the signs of a "here to help" augurs well not just for the service but for the island.

Annex 1: Pre-Application Process Flow Diagram

PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS

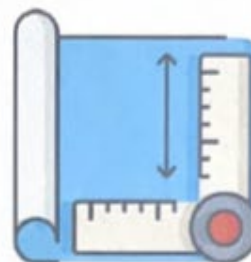
IN-PERSON ADVICE (FOR SMALL-SCALE PROJECTS)

VISIT THE CUSTOMER HUB: Available Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm. No appointment needed

DISCUSS YOUR PROPOSAL: Speak with a duty planning officer about small-scale projects (e.g. extensions, fences, signage, solar panels)

RECEIVE VERBAL GUIDANCE: Officers provide informal advice on planning requirements

NEXT STEPS: If your project is more complex, written pre-application advice may be recommended



WRITTEN PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE (FOR MAJOR OR DETAILED PROJECTS)

SUBMIT A REQUEST: Apply via the Planning and Building Portal (account required) or by email

PROVIDE INFORMATION: Include maps, photographs, sketches, and details of the proposal

REVIEW BY A PLANNING OFFICER: Your request is assessed, and consultation with other departments may occur

OPTIONAL MEETING: Request a 45-minute meeting when submitting your application. If requested, this will be scheduled within 2 weeks

RECEIVE WRITTEN ADVICE: Issued within 6 weeks, outlining any additional information required, potential changes, or consultations needed

POST-MEETING SUMMARY (IF APPLICABLE): A summary of discussions may form part of the written advice



LIMITATIONS OF PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

NON-BINDING ADVICE: Guidance is not a guarantee of approval

EXCLUSIONS: Does not include public consultation or input from all decision-makers

EVOLVING CIRCUMSTANCES: Planning policies and site conditions may change over time

SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT: For complex projects, consider hiring planning consultants, architects, or other specialists