

# Applications and permissions granted jump in first quarter

Latest planning performance by English districts and London boroughs: Planning Applications in England between January and March 2021

## OVERVIEW

Between January and March 2021, district level planning authorities in England:

- received 124,400 applications for planning permission, up 20 per cent from the corresponding quarter of 2020;
- granted 87,100 decisions, up 13 per cent from the same quarter in 2020; this is equivalent to 88 per cent of decisions, up one percentage point from the same quarter of 2020;
- decided 88 per cent of major applications within 13 weeks or the agreed time, down one percentage point from the same quarter in 2020;
- granted 9,800 residential applications, down four per cent on a year earlier: 1,300 for major developments and 8,600 for minor developments;
- granted 1,900 applications for commercial developments, down five per cent on a year earlier. In the year ending March 2021, district level planning authorities:
- granted 324,200 decisions, down five per cent on the year ending March 2020; and
- granted 39,000 decisions on residential developments, of which 5,000 were for major developments and 34,100 were for minor developments, down by 12 and 10 per cent respectively on the year ending March 2020. This is equivalent to a decrease of 11 per cent in the overall number of residential decisions granted.

124,400 applications for planning permission, up 20 per cent from the corresponding quarter in 2020. In the year ending March 2021, authorities received 431,100 planning applications, up two per cent on the year ending March 2020.

## Planning decisions

Authorities reported 98,900 decisions on planning applications in January to March 2021, an increase of 12 per cent on the 88,500 decisions in the same quarter of the previous year. In the year ending March 2021, authorities decided 369,800 planning applications, down five per cent on the number in the year ending March 2020.

## Applications granted

During January to March 2021, authorities granted 87,100 decisions, up 13 per cent on the same quarter in 2020. Authorities granted 88 per cent of all decisions, up one percentage point from the March quarter of 2020 (Live Tables P120/P133). Overall, 82 per cent of major and minor decisions were granted, unchanged from the quarter ending March 2020.

Over the 12 months to March 2021, 324,200 decisions were granted, down five per cent on the figure for the year to March 2020.

## 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 80 per cent in London to 94 per cent in the North East.

## Speed of decisions

- In January to March 2021, 88 per cent of major applications were decided within 13 weeks or within the agreed time, 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 year earlier.
- Also in the same quarter, 88 per cent of other applications were decided within eight weeks or the agreed time, down two percentage points from a year earlier.

Figure 3 summarises the distribution of the per-

Figure 3: Speed of decision-making, by type of development  
Local planning authorities, quarter ending March 2021

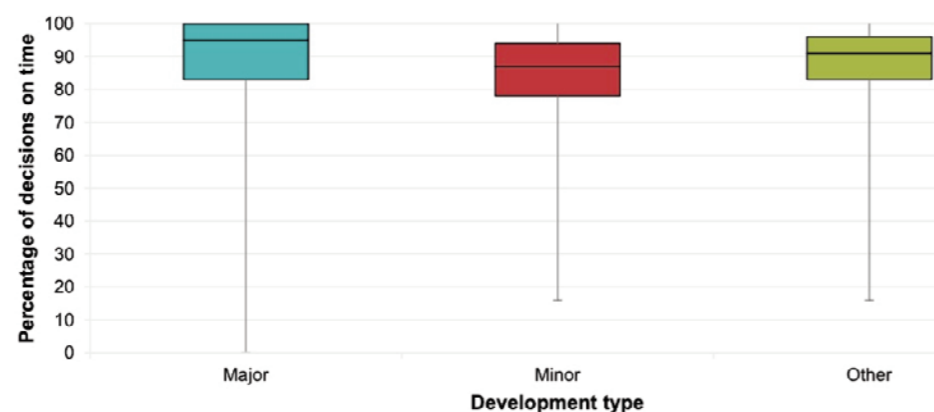
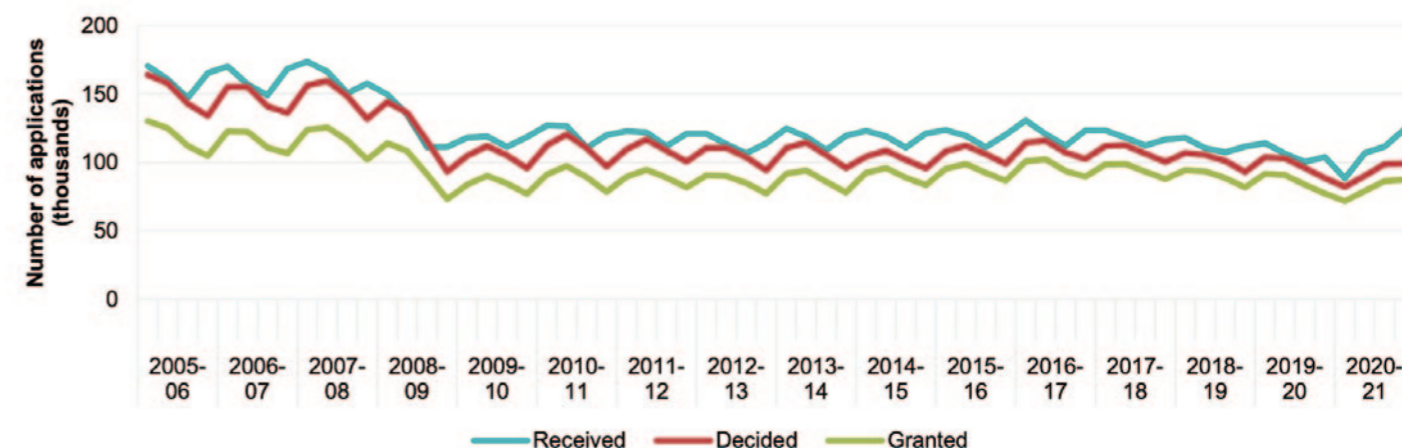


Figure 1: Number of planning applications received, decided and granted  
England, quarter ending June 2005 to quarter ending March 2021



centage 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 (16 to 100 per cent) and other developments (16 to 100 per cent).

## Use of performance agreements

Table 4 summarises the recent use of performance agreements. It shows that they are more commonly used for major developments than minor or

Planning decisions by development type, speed of decision and local planning authority. All tables and figures can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/3sy933t5>

Source: MHCLG/ONS

other developments, with 73 per cent of major decisions made during January to March 2021 involving a planning agreement, compared with 49 per cent of minor decisions and 34 per cent of other decisions.

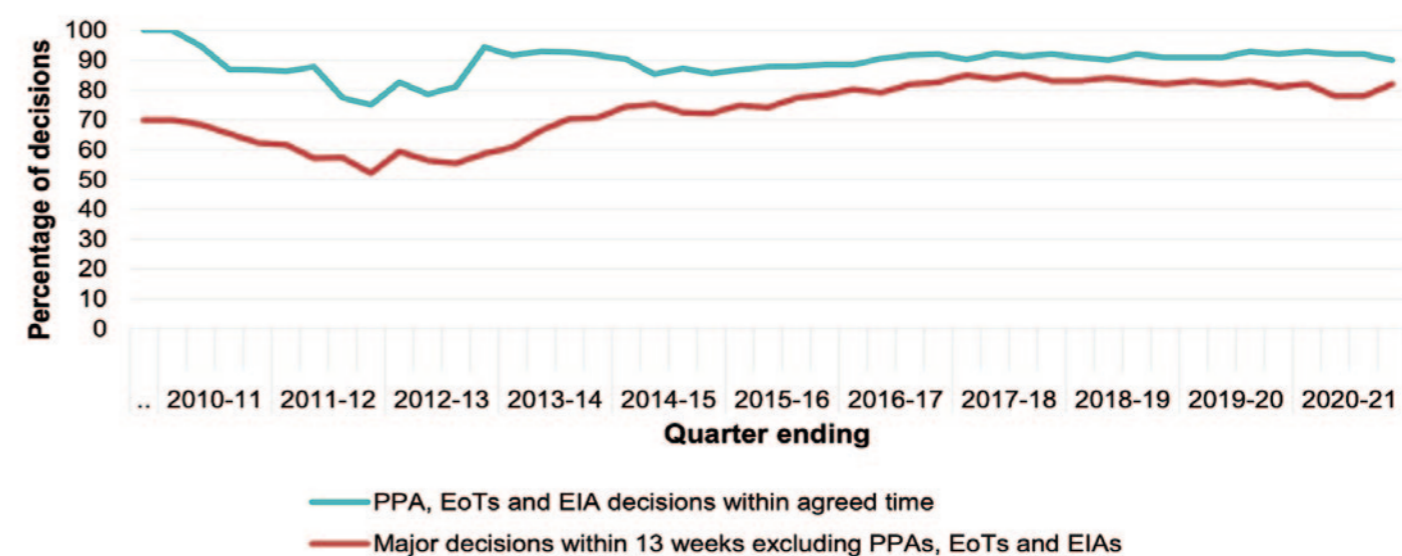
Figure 4 shows, from 2010, numbers of decisions on major developments made involving a performance agreement, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of all decisions on major developments. The underlying historical figures are available in the PS2 development type dashboard. Notwithstanding definitional 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 performing local planning authorities under sec- >>>

Figure 5: Percentage of major development decisions made within time<sup>1</sup>  
England, quarter ending March 2010 to quarter ending March 2021



1. Figures cover agreed extensions of time and environmental impact assessments from 1 April 2013

>>> tion 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' (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 non-major 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 January to March 2021, 13,300 decisions were made on applications for residential 5 developments, of which 9,800 (74 per cent) were granted. The number of residential decisions made decreased by four per cent from the March quarter of 2020, with the number granted also dropping four per cent.

The number of major residential decisions granted decreased by two per cent to 1,300, and the number of minor residential decisions granted decreased by four per cent, to 8,600 (Live Table P120A, and the PS2 development type dashboard). In the year ending March 2021, authorities granted 5,000 major and 34,100 minor residential applications, down by 12 and 10 per cent respectively on the year ending March 2020 (Live Table P120A and the PS2 local planning authorities dashboard). This is equivalent to a decrease of 11 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. The latest provisional figures show that permission for 295,000 homes was given in the year to 31 March 2021, down 6 per cent from the 315,000 homes granted permission in the year to 31 March 2020. This reflects very low figures in the April to June 2020 quarter, offset by a sharp increase in the final quarter (January to March 2021).

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 January to March 2021, 2,100 decisions were made on applications for commercial developments, of which 1,900 (90 per cent) were granted. The total number of commercial decisions granted decreased by five per cent on the same quarter of 2020. In the year ending March 2021, 7,100 applications for commercial developments were granted, down 17 per cent on the year ending March 2020.

**Trends in numbers of residential and commercial decisions**

Historically, numbers of residential decisions dropped sharply during 2008 (particularly for minor decisions) then increased from 2012, before decreasing since about 2018 (major decisions) and 2019 (minor decisions).

Numbers of commercial decisions 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 2020/21, numbers of major commercial decisions were at about 47 per cent of the pre-recession peak, with the numbers of minor commercial decisions being at about 27 per cent.

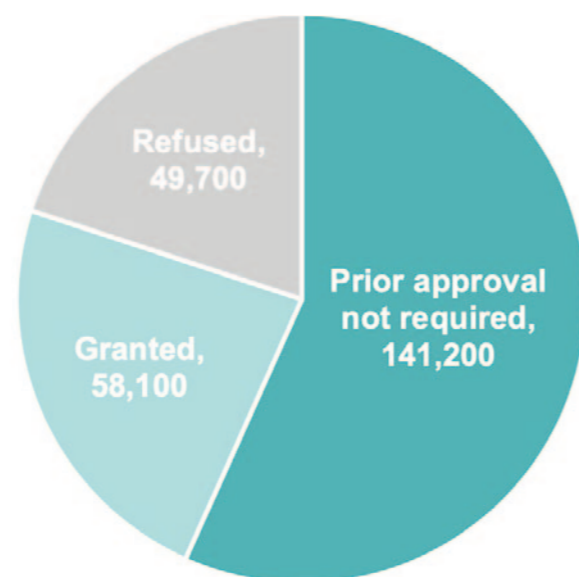
**Trends in the percentage of residential and commercial decisions granted**

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**

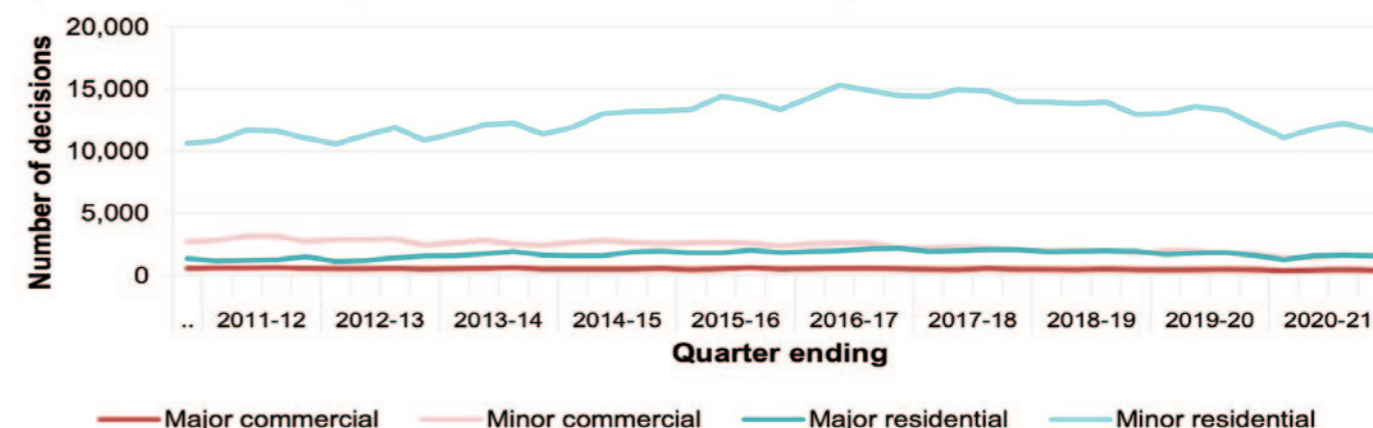
Householder developments are those developments to a residence which require planning permission such as extensions, loft conversions and conservatories (more details are in the glossary accessible from the Definitions section). The number of decisions made on householder developments was 57,300 in the quarter ending March 2021, accounting for 58 per cent of all decisions, up from 50 per cent of all decisions made in the quarter ending March 2020. The 57,300 decisions were up 31 per cent from the 43,900 decisions made in the quarter ending March 2020. Authorities granted 91 per cent of these applications and decided 89 per cent within eight weeks or the agreed time.

FIG 8: Applications for prior approvals for permitted development rights reported by district planning authorities. England from April 2014 to March 2021



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

England, quarter ending March 2010 to quarter ending March 2021



**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; 80, five and no decisions respectively during October to December; and 79, four and no decisions respectively during January to March 2021.

**Permitted development rights**

Planning permission for some types of develop-

ment 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 process.

The results for the latest quarter for which they have been collected (January to March 2021) are included in Live Tables PDR1 (local authority level figures) and PDR2 (England totals). Of the 8,600 applications reported in the January to March quarter of 2021, prior approval was not required for 5,000 and permission was granted for 1,900 and refused for 1,700. This resulted in an overall acceptance rate of 80 per cent. Larger householder extensions accounted for 64 per cent of applications (5,500), with seven per cent relating to change of use from agricultural to residential and six per cent to change of use from office to residential. '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, 6,900 applications were approved without having to go through the full planning process, up 24 per cent from a year earlier. Within the 25 per cent increase in the reported total number of PDR applications between January to March 2020 and January to March 2021:

- larger householder extensions increased by 15 per cent;
- change of use from office to residential increased by 28 per cent;

- change of use from agricultural to residential increased by 17 per cent; and
- 'all other' permitted development rights increased by 57 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 upwards'.

Figures for the total number of permitted development right applications made for changes to residential use for quarters from July to September 2014/12 are given in the quarterly worksheets in Live Table PDR1. These show that a total of 1,500 applications for changes to residential use were reported in January to March 2021, of which 1,100 (72 per cent) were given the go-ahead without having to go through the full planning process.

Overall during the twenty-eight quarters ending March 2021, district planning authorities reported 249,100 applications for prior approvals for permitted developments. For 141,200 (57 per cent) of them prior approval was not required, 58,100 (23 per cent) were granted and 49,700 (20 per cent) were refused (Figure 8).

**Delegated decisions**

- Of the 98,900 decisions made during the quarter, 94,900 (96 per cent) were delegated to officers. This percentage has been stable since 2014, having previously increased from around 75 per cent in 2000.

**Enforcement activity**

- During the quarter, authorities issued 925 enforcement notices and served 914 planning contravention notices, 106 breach of condition notices, 32 stop notices and 56 temporary stop notices, while 12 enforcement injunctions were granted by the High/County Court and one injunctive application refused.

In recent years, this level of activity has remained broadly proportionate to the number of planning decisions made ■