Background

The Department of the Environment decides whether to approve or refuse planning applications. This factsheet looks at the different steps in assessing planning applications, the different factors taken into consideration and the role of local councils and other organisations in the planning process.
The normal process for assessing planning applications is outlined below.

1. Application submitted
2. Site inspected
3. Application advertised
4. Neighbours notified
5. Other agencies consulted eg Roads Service, Water Executive, Environmental Health
6. Consultation responses, objections and other representations received
7. Any necessary amendments or additional information submitted
8. Report prepared and considered at internal planning meeting
9. Office meeting or site visit to discuss issues
10. Council disagrees with planner’s decision
11. Decision issued
12. Application Approved
13. Application Refused
14. Streamlined application
15. District Council consulted
16. Decision issued
17. Appeal or submit new application
18. Build
Application Submitted

The planning application is checked to make sure the drawings and other information submitted is adequate and the fee is correct. If there is a problem with the application, it will be returned to the applicant. The applicant does not have to own the land in question to make an application.

Advertisement and Neighbour Notification

The planning application must be advertised in the local paper and it is normal practice for neighbours to be notified about the application.

Consultation with Other Agencies

The Department of the Environment will consult other agencies with relevant areas of expertise about the planning application. The agencies that are consulted will depend on the type of application. Some agencies that may be consulted include Roads Service, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Environmental Health and Water Service. They may have no objections, recommend that the application is refused, request additional information or recommend that certain conditions are attached to a planning application.

Case Officer Report and Internal Group Meeting

Each planning application is assigned to a planning officer. This planning officer will visit the site and once consultations are completed they will produce a report summarising the relevant issues in relation to the planning application and making a recommendation as to whether the application should be approved or refused.

An internal group meeting is normally held every two weeks between the case officer and senior planners. At this meeting the planning application and the case officer’s recommendation is discussed and the group decide if they agree with the case officer’s recommendation.

Amended Plans and Additional Information

While the planning application is being assessed, the Department of the Environment may request additional information from the applicant, for example, a noise impact assessment or a traffic impact assessment. This is normally as a result of a recommendation of one of the agencies consulted. The applicant may also submit amended plans to deal with any problems with the application. For example, if the planning officer notices that the windows in the proposed development are likely to cause overlooking to a neighbour, amended plans may be submitted with a new window layout to fix the problem.
Consultation with the Local Council

Once the application has been discussed at the planning group meeting, the local council will be consulted. The local council’s planning committee usually meets every month to discuss planning applications in the area. You can find out if your planning application is going before the council by checking the council schedule online. To check your council schedule go to www.planningni.gov.uk. The local council can defer the application on planning grounds.

If an application is deferred, an office meeting normally takes place to discuss the issues raised by the councillors. This meeting is usually between the applicant or the objectors, the Department of the Environment and the councillor who deferred the application.

The council can only defer an application for further consideration. The final decision on whether the application is approved or refused is taken by the Department of the Environment.

Streamlined Applications

Some applications are streamlined. This means that the council is not normally consulted on this type of application unless it requests that it is consulted on the application or there are objections to it.

Decision Issued

A refusal notice sets out the reasons for the refusal of the planning application. This decision can be appealed to the Planning Appeals Commission (an independent body) within six months.

If the application is approved, the planning permission is made up of the approval notice and the “stamped approved” drawings. The development must be built in accordance with these drawings. The decision notice will set out the conditions that must be complied with including the time within which the development must begin.

There is no right of appeal for objectors to a planning application if they are unhappy with the decision.
**Issues Taken into Consideration**

In assessing a planning application, the following will be taken into consideration:

| **Current planning policies including Planning Policy Statements and the relevant Area Plan;** | **Comments from other agencies;** |
| **Comments and objections;** | **Impact of the proposal on the environment;** |
| **Any other relevant planning matters.** |

The following are not relevant planning considerations:

| **Private property rights, for example, disputes about boundaries or access;** | **General disagreements between neighbours;** |
| **Developer’s reasons for making the application;** | **Moral issues relating to the proposal or the developer;** |
| **Comments of a discriminatory or racist nature;** | **Disturbance during building work;** |
| **Comments which are vexatious or frivolous.** |

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**For further information about any of the above please contact us:**

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