



# The Planning Fees (Deemed Planning Applications and Appeal) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

December 2022

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## Context

The Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) is an independent body, set up under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which deals with a wide range of land use planning issues and related matters. PAC makes decisions on appeals against Council decisions on a wide range of planning and environmental matters. These may be made by a single Commissioner (a single decision) or by a panel of not fewer than four Commissioners (a panel decision). The Planning Fees (Deemed Planning Applications and Appeals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 ("the Regulations") prescribe the fees to be charged for planning appeals and deemed planning applications from 1 April 2015. The Regulations only affect the work of PAC. This consultation concerns amendments to the Regulations as regards the fees to be charged for planning appeals and deemed planning applications from 1st April 2023. The full consultation can be found [here](#).

## Response

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the largest professional institute for planners in Europe. We have over 27,000 members, with 750 in Northern Ireland, in the private, public, academic and voluntary sectors. The Institute seeks to advance the science and art of planning, working for the long-term common good and well-being of current and future generations. The RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, training and development. This response has been formed drawing on the expertise of the RTPI Northern Ireland Policy and Research Forum which includes a cross section of planning practitioners from the private and public sectors and academia, from across Northern Ireland.

**There needs to be a strong evidence base to inform planning fees**



This consultation concerns amendments to the Regulations as regards the fees to be charged for planning appeals and deemed planning applications by PAC from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. RTPI NI supports a well-resourced planning system, however, planning fee increases should be evidence based and supported by clear proposals to improve delivery. The NI Audit Office report on 'Planning in Northern Ireland' (2022) highlighted some important areas which need to be improved for the planning system to become more efficient and to reinstate public trust in the system. There needs to be a strong evidence base to inform planning fees so that confidence in the system is improved and not undermined.

RTPI NI makes no comment on the detail of fee amounts, however, efforts to deliver a more efficient and effective service should focus on skills and workforce development, and not just administrative costs. This applies to all levels of planning application determination – at Council, Department and PAC levels. Issues such as the stretching of planning officer capacity and a decrease in skills in key areas must be addressed. Supporting the development of project management skills in planners at all levels could be an effective means of ensuring that applications are processed to a high standard in a timely fashion. In addition, new technology may also offer opportunities for improving the working lives of planners. Digitised planning systems are able to offer more efficient processes, thereby enabling planners to focus on placemaking, and can facilitate wider access and increased participation in the planning process.

In summary, RTPI NI is supportive of planning fee increases, but there needs to be a strong evidence base for their introduction, with a clear programme of delivery of benefits.