

Dear Committee for Infrastructure,

Thank you for your correspondence of 27th April 2026 and 6th May 2026 regarding your review into planning decisions for Regionally Significant Projects. Due to the limited time frame for response, it has not been possible to consult with elected members on your call for evidence, as the next Planning Committee is not scheduled until 3rd June 2026. The response attached will be presented to elected member on 3rd June and if any further comments are received those will be forwarded to your committee for information and consideration.

1. Views in on the effectiveness and timeliness of planning decisions for Regionally Significant Projects

Council acknowledges that DFI are unable to progress these applications in a timely manner, often due to several reasons including complexity and delayed consultee input. However, the reasons of delay should be clearly communicated to all parties involved in the processing of the case. Council notes the recent commitment through the Independent Inspectors project that will help progress the regionally significant case work.

In addition, Council would recommend that the Committee for Infrastructure consider a wider review to include “Called In” applications, and that consultation with all stakeholders in the planning process is incorporated into the review, with reasonable time frames for response provided. This Council has experienced significant and ongoing delays and lack of information on the progress of applications that have been referred to DFI to consider “Call in” as required under Section 29 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011, and also regarding the progress of two current applications that DFI have been called in under Section 29, one which has been with DFI for 6 years now. This delay and lack of information is causing great uncertainty economically and in the planning process for all parties involved.

2. Views on Judicial Reviews of Planning decisions on major capital projects

Council acknowledges the impact that judicial review of major infrastructure schemes can have through delay and again the uncertainty for all parties involved. Judicial review also impacts significantly on resources, which impacts on wider workload planning. The introduction of third-party appeals would significantly reduce litigation in the planning process, for those applications that are not subject to public inquiry.

3. Views on how planning decisions for Regionally Significant Projects can be improved

DFI should consider improving communication on the progress of regionally significant applications, over and above the quarterly and annual statistics that are produced. DFI should be timebound in legislation regarding “Call In” powers.

Thank you for the opportunity to input and please do not hesitate to contact me if you require clarification on anything included in this response.

Your sincerely

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Head of Planning