LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	**WARDS:** ALL
REPORT TITLE Development Management Performance Report	
REPORT OF: Director of Economy, Regeneration and Investment	
FOR SUBMISSION TO: Planning Committee	**DATE** 8 April 2024

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides an update on performance within Development Management including: applications, pre-application submissions and local land charges for the period of Quarter 3 & Quarter 4 of 2023/24.

Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information

No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.

Contact Officer:

Jenna Litherland, Planning Improvement and Support Manager
5 Pancras Square
London N1C 4AG
Tel: 020 7974 3070
E-mail: Jenna.Litherland@camden.gov.uk

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Planning Committee is asked to note the report.

Signed: Daren

Director of Economy, Regeneration and Investment

Date: 25th March 2024

1. **Introduction**

1.1 This report provides an update on performance within Development Management for Quarter 3 & Quarter 4 2023/24. The update includes data relating to applications, pre-application submissions and local land charges.

2. **Development Management and Local Land Charges Update**

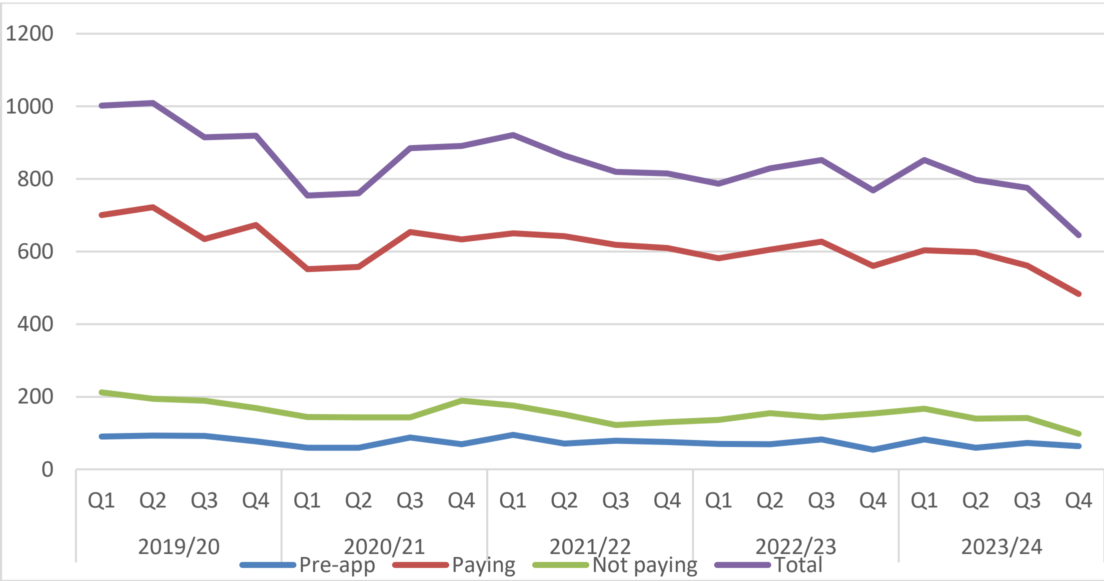
2.1 This section of the report provides an update on the Development Management service's performance in Quarter 3 (Q3) & Quarter 4 (Q4) of 2023/24. Due to the timing of the end of Quarter 4 it is not possible to report on the whole quarter. Therefore, in this section of the report the Q4 data covers 1 January 2024 – 15 March 2024, missing data from the final sixth of the quarter. This should be take into consideration when reading this report.

2.2 The report examines trends in terms of the volume and type of applications being submitted and assesses performance taking account of local and national targets. The report also provides an update on the performance of the Local Land Charges Service over the same period.

3. **Planning Applications**

3.1 Figure 1.1 shows a breakdown of the total number and types of applications received from the beginning of 2019/20 to date.

<u>Figure 1.1 - Applications submitted</u>



3.2 There has been a small, slow and steady reduction in the number of planning applications over the 5 year period. We have seen some troughs such as at the start of the Covid Pandemic, and some peaks such as during the period at the later part of 2020/21 which saw an increase in applications for home improvements. A smaller peak was also seen at the beginning of 2023/24. Looking at 2023/24 Q1 saw a high number of submission, 852, then following

3.3 this a more rapid reduction in application submissions, even taking into consideration that we do not have the complete data for Q4 at this time. The change in numbers show a similar pattern across both fee paying and non-fee paying applications.

3.4 Pre-application requests remain reasonably steady and consistent in comparisons to applications. Pre-application performance is discussed in greater details in Section 4 of this report.

3.5 Figure 1.2 shows the number and type of applications submitted in the past five years.

Figure 1.2 - Applications by type

3.6 Over the 5 years period the total number of applications has reduced slightly, but the proportion of different types of applications has remained largely consistent.

Year	Advertisement Consent	Approval of Details	Full Planning Permission	Householder Application	Listed Building Consent	Others	Pre-apps	Total
2023/24	169 (6%)	482 (16%)	913 (30%)	400 (13%)	397 (13%)	430 (14%)	278 (9%)	3,069
2022/23	169 (5%)	492 (15%)	987 (31%)	418 (13%)	430 (13%)	465 (14%)	275 (8%)	3,236
2021/22	198 (6%)	471 (14%)	1,064 (31%)	486 (14%)	424 (12%)	456 (13%)	320 (9%)	3,419
2020/21	119 (4%)	529 (16%)	1,001 (30%)	444 (13%)	394 (12%)	528 (16%)	275 (8%)	3,290
2019/20	240 (6%)	608 (16%)	1,168 (30%)	385 (10%)	547 (14%)	545 (14%)	352 (9%)	3,845

Figure 1.3 – Income from applications

Year	Total statutory	Total from majors (approx)	Total non majors (approx)	% of income from majors
2023/24	1,149,289	471,426	677,863	41%
2022/23	1,028,002	274,523	753,479	27%
2021/22	1,506,074	657,064	849,010	44%
2020/21	1,292,041	694,614	597,427	54%
2019/20	1,412,174	328,724	1,083,450	23%

3.7 As can be seen in Figure 1.3, income from applications in 2022/23 was at its lowest for the past 4 years. This was due to receiving fewer applications overall but particularly fewer major applications. Total income in 2023/24 has improved from last year, but is still lower than previous years which accords with the general reduction of applications over time. We have seen a higher proportion of income from major applications which is promising and there continues to be a good number of major application in the pipeline. A small proportion of this uplift is a result of statutory planning fees being increased in December 2023. This was a 35% increase for major applications and 25% increase for all other applications. The fee regulations also introduced annual indexation of fees, capped at 10% from 1 April 2025, and the removal of 'free go' applications. The fee regulations are also discussed in report 4 on this agenda.

Figure 1.4 – Applications decided by quarter

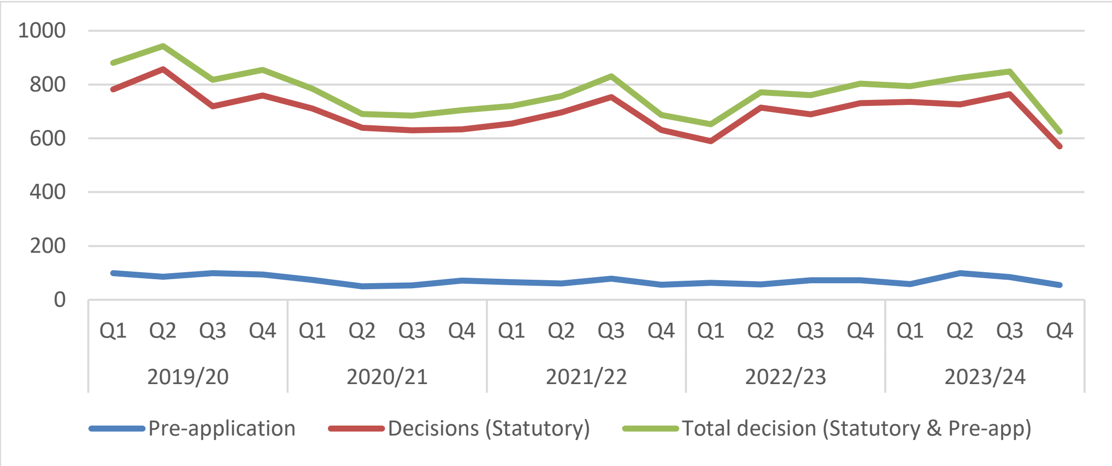
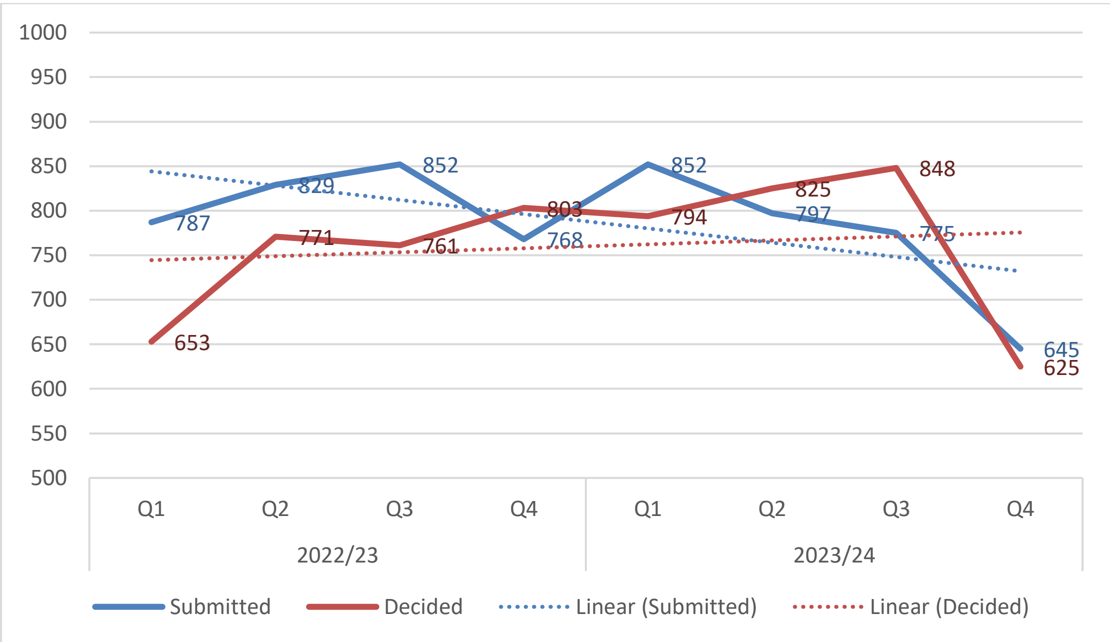


Figure 1.5 – Comparison of application submitted and decided by quarter



3.8 As can be seen in figures 1.4 and 1.5 above 2023/24 has seen an increase in the number of decisions being issued particularly Q1 through to Q3. This is partially down to initiatives taken throughout the year to increase throughput and the number of application being determined. We have tried various different approaches including:

- department wide application blitz weeks - where applications are selected and triaged by managers to give officers a clear steer on how they should be assessed, then grouped by proposals type and assessed and determined in batches;
- individual team blitz weeks; and
- managers working with officer to unblock issues for more complex older cases to get them to a decision.

3.9 Q4 has seen a decrease in the number of decision being made even taking into account that the results are not for the full quarter. This is likely due to a number of officers leaving in this quarter, so less officers to determined applications. We have been seeking to recruit into vacant roles and have a number of officers due to start in the next couple of months, but it has been challenging to fill all the posts. This issue is not unique to Camden as other London Boroughs have reported similar issues and may be due to the shortage of experienced planning officers seeking employment in the public sector. When we have less officers, caseloads increase and this slows down the time taken to assess applications and make decisions. We also see an increase in failure demand requests such as chasers on application and complaints, which again takes additional time. The additional planning officers who are due to start in Q1 2024/25 should assist in addressing the situation.

3.10 Figure 1.5 demonstrates that in Q2 and Q3 we were determining a higher number of applications than were being submitted, reducing the number of application in hand which is really positive. Q4 shows decision numbers falling below application submitted with a difference of 20 applications. We will continue to monitor this and take action to prevent the number of applications in hand increasing again. The new officers due to start next quarter will help in this regard.

Figure 1.6 – Decision route and outcome

Year	Total decisions	Total delegated decisions	% delegated	Number presented to Members' Briefing Panel	% Members' Briefing Panel of all decisions	Number Presented to Committee	Number referred to committee from Members' Briefing	% C'tee	Total approved decisions	% approved
2023/24	2,796	2,764	98.86%	227	8.12%	32	2	1.14%	2,567	91.81%
2022/23	2,724	2,684	98.53%	242	8.88%	40	3	1.47%	2,520	92.51%
2021/22	2,735	2,682	98.06%	227	8.30%	53	11	1.94%	2,469	90.27%
2020/21	2,615	2,578	98.59%	242	9.25%	37	8	1.41%	2,356	90.10%
2019/20	3,118	3,078	98.72%	285	9.14%	40	6	1.28%	2,834	90.89%

3.9 As can be seen in figure 1.6 the number of applications determined in 2023/24 is higher than any of the past four years. There has been a small decline in the number being presented to Members Briefing and Committee however, this is not significant and will vary year on year depending on the nature and scale of the proposals and local views on them. There has been a slight decrease in the percentage of applications being approved which could be due to taking a stricter view on negotiations where officer consider amendments would not resolve unacceptable aspects of a scheme. Moving forward, in light of the planning reforms (see report 4 on the agenda), we will need to determine applications quicker to avoid the risk of being 'designated'. This will likely mean than our approval rate will reduce as the timeframe will allow for very little negotiation during the course of an application.

4. Pre- application advice

Figure 1.7 – Pre-application advice requests by type

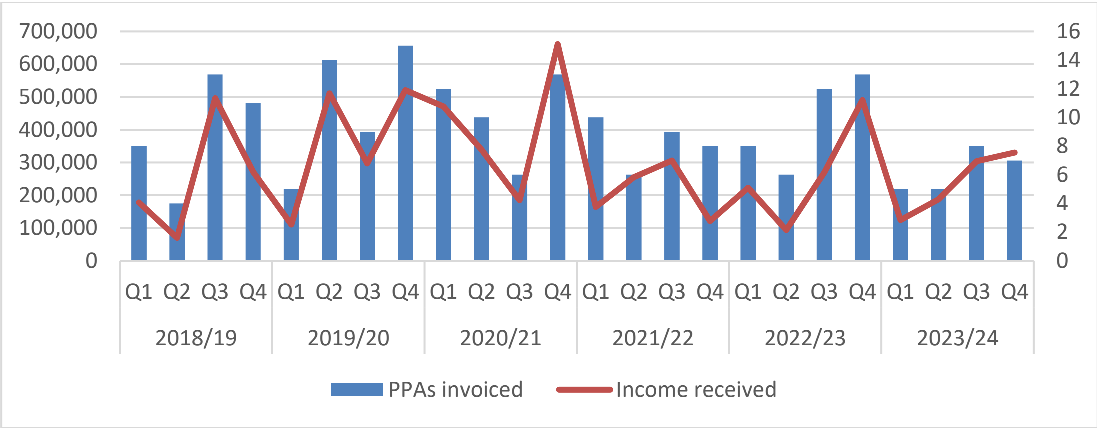
Year	Large Major	Major	Medium	Minor	Householder	Listed Building Consent	Total	Income (inc PPA)
2023/24	19	21	33	72	86	47	278	£1.36m
2022/23	17	17	53	68	95	25	275	£1.68m
2021/22	19	27	48	73	116	37	320	£1.66m
2020/21	6	25	52	68	88	36	275	£2.52m
2019/20	17	22	68	91	110	44	352	£1.75m

4.1 Over the past 4 years the number of pre-application requests had been relatively consistent with some fluctuation in 2021/22. Looking at the number of requests made, 2023/24 exceeds 2022/23 and could increase more given that reporting does not include the whole of Q4. In terms of type, there has also been a high proportion of major and large major pre-application requests. The overall number of pre-application advice requests, particularly the higher proportion of major and large majors, would suggest higher associated income levels. However, this has not been the case with the income c. £300,000 lower than 2022/23. This appears to be due to reduced take up of the PPA service (see figure 1.8). This needs to be closely monitored and addressed if it becomes a trend.

4.2 2022/23 had lower numbers of listed building pre-application requests for standalone listed building works. 2023/24 has seen a significant increase with 47 requests, higher than any other year in the past 5 years. This is promising and shows that customers see value in this service.

4.3 The increase in pre-application submissions, particularly for major developments is promising and suggests some confidence in the market despite other economic factors.

Figure 1.8 – Planning Performance Agreements (PPA)



4.4 Figure 1.8 demonstrates the number of PPAs secured by quarter and associated income from them. This income in figure 1.8 is for the PPA only and not standalone pre-application meetings. In 2023/24 we secured 25 PPAs which is a significant reduction from the 39 secured in 2022/23. This is concerning and needs to be carefully monitored. We rely on PPAs to identify key planning consideration and allow issues to be addressed up front. They enable the Council to develop a programme for the proposals with the project team. They help ensure meaningful consultation is undertaken with the relevant stakeholders and help the Council secure the best quality development. They are also used to agree target dates for submission and determination.

4.5 Possible reasons for the reduced uptake could be due to projects coming in for a couple of standalone pre-application meetings and then not progressing further, or that stand alone pre-application meetings are used to support sales and purchases so it is not the right time for that project to enter into a PPA. We will continue to promote this service to applicants, developers and their agents.

5. Review of performance against key national and local indicators

5.1 Development Management performance is set against three main measures: nationally set targets, and locally the timeliness of decision-making and customer satisfaction. Taken together, this set of measures allows the service to focus on ensuring it is addressing the variety of needs of major stakeholders in the planning process.

National measures

Figure 1.9 - Percentage of decisions made within the target deadline or agreed extension of time for 24 months to December 2023

Area	Average 2023	Average 2022	Average 2021
Majors			
Camden	**85.2%**	94%	95%
Inner London Boroughs Average	93.5%	93.36%	93%
London Boroughs Average	92.7%	90.8%	91.8%
Minors			
Camden	**79.7%**	80%	84%
Inner London Boroughs Average	86.8%	82.4%	84.6%
London Boroughs Average	85.6%	83.7%	86.6%

5.2 National performance target are expected to change in October 2024 following the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities recent consultation on 'An accelerated planning system'. This is discussed in greater detail in Report 4 on this agenda.

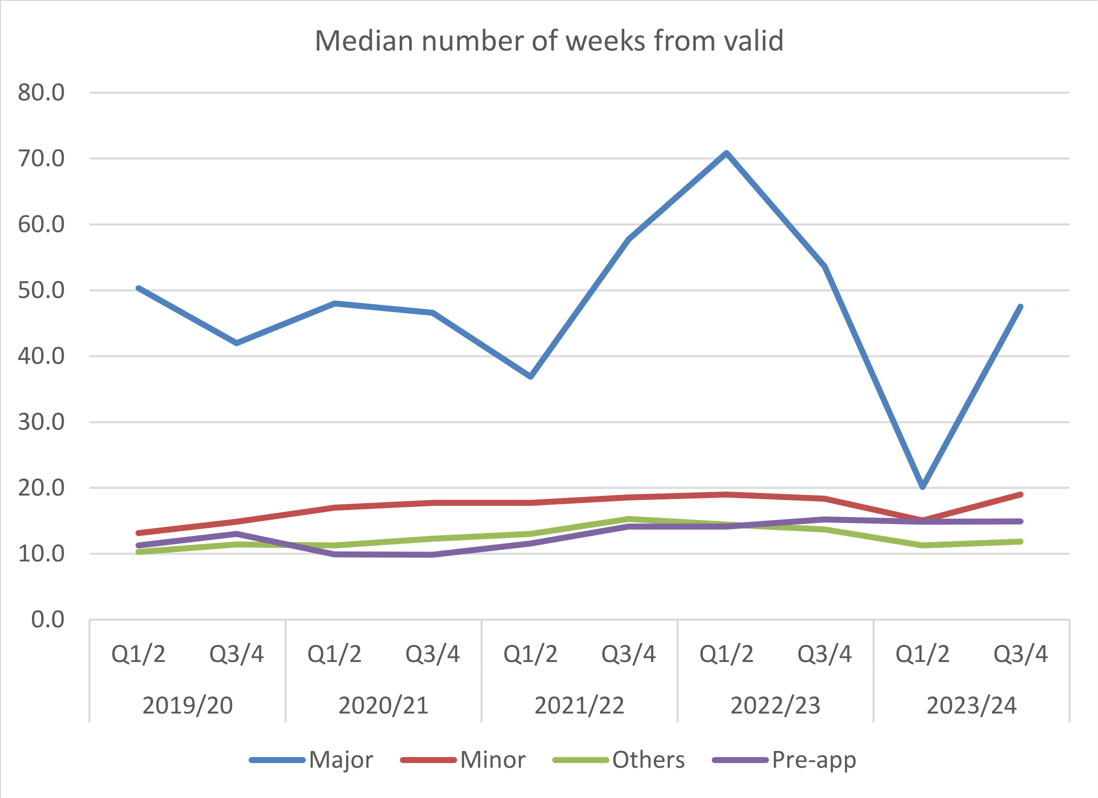
5.3 There is currently a national target for 70% of non-majors and 60% of majors to be decided within the target timeframe. Failing to meet these targets can result in 'designation' – meaning the authority's Development Management function and decision making could be taken over by central government.

5.4 Camden is falling below the London average in respect of both major and minor applications. We do ask for EoTs but it is harder to secure those when determination of applications is delayed or the outcome is a refusal. The figures significantly exceed the government targets meaning there is little risk of 'designation' at this time.

5.5 'Designation' is also a risk if the quality of decisions made by a local authority is poor as measured by 10% or more of the total number of decisions on major planning applications being overturned at appeal. The most recent data published covers the period from January 2021 to December 2022. During this period, 1 decisions on major applications were overturned at appeal (reference: 2021/3087/P - Middlesex Hospital Annex), equating to 1.5% of major decisions, this is an increased from the previous period in which no major decisions were overturned. The data can be found here (Table P152). This does not put the Council as risk of designation.

Local measures

Figure 1.10 – Timeliness of decision making



5.6 Other than pre-application requests, which remain steady, figure 1.10 shows an increase in the time taken to determine applications. For major applications a sharp increase is shown, however given the lower number of major applications this could be skewed by one application which has taken longer for determine. In respect of minor applications the time taken to determine has increased from 14.9 weeks to 19 weeks which is the longest average time in the past 5 years. During this period we have been pushing to clear out the oldest applications on officer's caseloads ahead of the Planning Guarantee changes (See Report 4). This is likely the reason for the increase.

5.7 We continue to ensure that we meet performance targets by using extensions of time where appropriate. However, the use of extension of time is currently being reviewed and it is likely measures will need to be put in place to ensure applications are determined quicker (See Report 4).

5.8 In July 2023 DLUHC announced the Planning Skills Delivery Fund to help local authorities across the country clear backlogs of planning applications and address skills gaps. We did make an application for funding to help with our backlog but were unsuccessful. There will be an opportunity to apply again for the second tranche of funding.

Figure 1.11 – Customer satisfaction survey responses October 2023 – March 2024 (April 2023 – July 2023 given in brackets as a comparison)

	Positive responses	Neutral responses	Negative responses
How quickly did the officer make initial contact	**79% (75%)**	**10% (15%)**	**11% (10%)**
Do you feel that you were kept well informed throughout the process?	**96% (95%)**	**4% (0%)**	**0% (5%)**
Clear reasons for decision were given	**100% (95%)**	**0% (5%)**	**0% (0%)**
Overall, you feel that your application was dealt with promptly?	**85% (80%)**	**11% (1%)**	**4% (10%)**
Overall how satisfied were you with the service you received?	**100% (90%)**	**0% (10%)**	**0% (0%)**

5.9 In terms of overall satisfaction 100% of applicants surveyed gave a positive response. This is positive and shows an improvement from the previous period. The survey results show an improvement in terms of timeliness despite applications times actually increasing as shown in figure 1.10. 85% on respondents felt there application was dealt with promptly. The survey provides a small snapshot of customer feedback and must be considered in the context of the hundreds of people that use the planning service each quarter. The lowest positive response is in respect of the first question about how quickly the officer made initial contact. We currently have a backlog of applications waiting to be validated and allocated so there is often a delay of a few weeks between submission of the application and first contact by the case officer. Managers are currently looking at ways to improve this part of the process, we will report on this at the next policy and performance committee.

5.10 We are currently in the process of changing our survey using Govmetrics which is a citizens experience solution. This would enable us to send bespoke emails to our customers to gauge feedback at various points of the application process.

5.11 The customer satisfaction survey is not the only way in which our customers feedback to the department. The survey results are overwhelmingly positive, but we know this is not the experience of all our customers. Managers are continuing to get complaints and the following themes can be drawn from them: delays in applications being allocated due to the backlog, delays in the assessment of applications and disagreement with decisions made. Managers are in agreement that the delays to the allocation, processing and determination of applications is problematic and we are looking for a solution to this matter.

5.12 The number of complaints from people unhappy with a decision on a planning application feels as though it has increased, there will always be stakeholders, applicants and neighbours who have a different view on whether a scheme should be approved or not, but it feels as though people are expressing these views more strongly. Planning involves change to the built environment which means it affects people's homes and there are also financial implications, it is unsurprising therefore that it is an issue which can generate a lot of emotion, upset and complaints, particularly at the current time. Even the best performing local planning authority will have complaints from an applicant or community unhappy with the outcome of an application. It is almost impossible to please everyone, although that is of course what we are striving for. We do get many letters of thanks and social media posts, a few of the recent ones are quoted below:

- **Montague Evans –January 2024** – "Used correctly a PPA can solve a number of serious and perpetual problems confronted by those within and engagement with the english planning system…Camden Council's planning officers are among the at this IMHO (in my humble opinion) – a borough where PPAs are promoted and resources flowing from them put to good use."

- **UCS – January 2024** – "In September 2023 UCS entered into a Planning Performance Agreement with the London Borough of Camden for detailed consultation and workshops…UCS are grateful for their advice and guidance in what was a very positive experience for the Client team and the project."

- **Robinson Escott Planning LLP – December 2023** – "I have found this a very positive planning process…I must say I'm very impressed with the way the application has been handled. The level of diagnose and updates has been very refreshing compared to some other London Boroughs. Please pass onto management as I think this type of experience should be highlighted."

6. Local Land Charges

Figure 1.12 – No. of searches received and completed

Quarter	***Total searches received***	***Total searches completed***	***Total Searches created***	***% of searches completed within time***

					(from date received)
	Q4	620	733	926	12%
	Q3	896	717	744	30%
	Q2	988	910	913	82%
2023/24	Q1	1,180	1,183	1,136	95%
	Q4	976	1,082	1,083	67%
	Q3	1,021	1,284	1,201	27%
	Q2	1,190	1,215	1,155	8%
2022/23	Q1	1,377	1,181	1,297	28%
	Q4	1,187	1,117	1,140	48%
	Q3	1,069	1,111	1,063	34%
	Q2	1,137	1,262	1,025	25%
2021/22	Q1	1,424	1,447	1,707	14%

Figure 1.13 – No of working days to complete searches

Quarter		Average days from receiving to completion (EIR only)	Average days from receiving to completion (Non-EIR only)
	Q4	31.5	47.3
	Q3	16.6	24.4
	Q2	8.1	13.4
2023/24	Q1	3.9	8.6
	Q4	11.8	17.8
	Q3	20.1	30.4
	Q2	23.8	34.7
2022/23	Q1	18.8	30.5
	Q4	12.7	24.8
	Q3	15.6	22.4
	Q2	16.0	23.8
2021/22	Q1	22.1	35.7

6.1 Figure 1.12 shows that the number of searches being submitted has reduced in Q3 and Q4 to the lowest than any other period in the past 3 years. This could indicate a slight slowing in the property market which should be monitored.

6.2 Figure 1.13 demonstrates that it is taking longer to return search requests than any other time in the past 3 years. This is due to a backlog accumulating whilst the team were asked to prioritise data improvement works by HM Land Registry as part of the project to migrate the Local Land Changes Register to HM Land Registry. The team have completed that data improvement work and are now focused on reducing the backlog of searches. This is being closely monitored and the overall backlog and search turnaround time is reducing week on week.

6.3 The purpose of the HM Land Registry migration project is to help speed up the conveyancing process and will enable customer to have instant online access to conduct a search of the Local Land Charges Register. It is expected that the Local Land Charges Register will be fully migrated to HM Land Registry next financial year 2023/24.

7. Conclusion – applications, pre-application advice and local land charges

7.1 As this section of the report evidences, the Development Management and Local Land Charges services are both having to deal with backlogs which have accumulated for different reasons, but despite this performance is above local and national targets and there is no risk of designation. The slowdown in submissions has given the opportunity to reduce the number of applications in hand and the planning team despite resource issues has determined more applications this year that any other over the past five years. Pre-application requests remain steady, but we have seen a reduction in income due to a downturn in use of PPAs. Whilst, we do receive complaints in respect of delays within the service, the vast majority of applicants remain satisfied with the service they are receiving. The Local Land Charges team have worked hard to complete the necessary data improvement work to enable to HMLR Migration project to move forward and are now concentrating efforts of reducing the backlog of search request.

8. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

8.1 There are no finance implications arising from this report.

9. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

9.1 The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no legal comments.

10. Environmental Implications

10.1 There are no environmental impacts.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Cases referred to Planning Committee from Members' Briefing Panel – (October 2023 – March 2024)

REPORT ENDS

Appendix 1
Cases referred to Planning Committee from Members' Briefing Panel – (October 2023 – March 2024)

Address	Ward	No. of objections	Proposal	Recommendation	Committee decision
160-161 Drury Lane, WC2B 5PN	Holborn & Covent Garden	19	2023/2245/P - Demolition of existing fourth floor, replacement of fourth floor and erection of an additional storey to the building, ground floor alterations including new entrances, single storey extension to the rear, reconfiguration and addition of plant.	Grant conditional Planning Permission subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement	Grant conditional Planning Permission subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement (awaiting finalisation of the legal agreement)
Ames House 26 Netherhall Gardens London NW3 5TL	Belsize	15	2023/0207/P -Erection of 3 storey side extension to provide 3 self-contained flats with front cycle and refuse stores, following demolition of existing 2 storey side garage extension and 1-bed flat.	Grant conditional Planning Permission subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement	Grant conditional Planning Permission subject to a Section 106 Legal Agreement