



news letter

NEW PORTAL

The development of the new Regional Planning IT System for Northern Ireland (aka the Planning Portal) is nearing completion and is due to be launched this autumn.

Transition Arrangements

As part of the switchover to the new portal, a period of read only access to the system is required to facilitate the migration of a large amount of data from the current system. This means that updates to the current portal will stop approx. 3 weeks ahead of system launch and the majority of staff, as well as consultees, will have read only access from that point forward. The only exception will be for regional property certificates which will continue to be processed on the current system until work queues are cleared.

Arrangements will be put in place to try to deal with business as usual but as the Councils, Department and Consultees will have restricted capacity to process cases, some delays may occur for both new and existing cases in the system at that time.

The current Public Access website will remain available throughout the transitional period to allow citizens to continue to view applications but online comments will be disabled. Instead citizens can submit their representations to the Council / Department via e-mail or by post.

Similarly, the Councils and Department will continue to accept new planning applications during the transition period but copies of the submitted forms and plans will not be made available online until the new Planning Portal is launched. These applications will continue to be checked by staff offline in preparation for being uploaded and will be advertised, neighbour notified and consultations issued once the new Planning Portal is up and running.

User Acceptance Testing (UAT)

User Acceptance Testing of the System has commenced and will continue into October. Staff from both the Councils and DfI are undertaking the UAT which is testing the system to identify any bugs or issues that need to be addressed before it is launched.



Preparing for change

Work continues on preparing for change and each Planning Authority is developing their own local change plan to take account of the impact of the switchover to the new Planning Portal on their business processes. This work is critical in ensuring that each is prepared and that there will be sufficient resources in place to deal with new work processes as well as any challenges that may arise following the system launch.

CONSULTATIONS

In preparation for the switchover, all consultees should try to close out as many consultations as possible on the current system by October so that there are fewer open cases to transfer. Consultees can continue to liaise with the relevant Planning Authority should they have queries about particular cases or to request extensions to deadlines during the transition stage.

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planning portal newsletter

DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

It is important for all users and key stakeholders to maximise the potential digital opportunities that the new Planning Portal will provide. Whilst change can often be seen as a daunting prospect, the roll out of the new IT system is a positive change that will help improve the planning process and promote the provision of Planning Services that align closely with the modern digital agenda. It is worth highlighting that some of the key benefits of the new system include:

- An Integrated front and back-office that streamlines administrative processes and improves validation and workflows, thereby enabling better management of caseloads for officers at all levels.
- New online application process that removes the need for paper-based

transactions and processes, and provide a fully digital solution.

- Paperless applications that remove the need for costly printing, particularly for larger or more complex developments, and a reduction in bulky office or off-site storage. This not only helps to reduce costs but also reduces paper waste.
- A modern digital interface that provides an enhanced customer experience aimed at an improved user satisfaction.

The change to the new Planning Portal will undoubtedly be a challenge for us all in adapting to a fully digital solution but it is critical that we harness and promote the benefits of this new way of working which will realise efficiencies and help to reduce costs over the coming years.

TRAINING

A training plan covering the various types of users and all apps and modules within the new Planning Portal has been developed in conjunction with the Authorities and TerraQuest, the company commissioned to deliver and support the new system. Training will be delivered via a 'Train the Trainer' approach and nominees have been identified across the Planning Authorities to take on the Local Trainer roles. They are currently being trained and a number of support materials, such as user guides and demo videos, have been prepared to help aid the delivery of the end user training to their colleagues locally. The roll out of training to staff will run right through to system launch. Invites for this will issue locally from the Local Trainers.

Demonstrations of the system for consultees and customers will also be made available before the system goes live.

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