PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES

Planning Applications Statistics, 2022/23: Annual and Quarterly (October 2022 to March 2023)

Contents

Key Points

Local Development Applications

The number of local development applications decided in 2022/23 (24,723) was relatively low, being the lowest other than in 2020/21 which was affected by the pandemic. The number in 2018/19 was 27,374. The percentage decided in two months fell from 75 per cent in 2018/19 to a low of 60 per cent in 2022/23.

Major Development Applications

In 2022/23 there were 260 applications for major developments continuing the downward trend since 2018/19 when there were 324. The average decision time for applications without processing agreement was 39.5 weeks. This was lower than the two previous years, but higher than the pre-pandemic year of 2019/20 (33.5 weeks).

Introduction

This publication presents summary statistics on planning decision-making and timescales for 2018/19 to 2022/23. It is based on data collected by the Scottish Government from planning authorities. A set of annual tables and charts is also produced.

A set of yearend tables containing quarterly data for quarters 3 and 4 of 2022/23 are published alongside the annual tables. A summary of the yearend results is reported as an Annex to this publication.

An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

These statistics are designated as Official Statistics in accordance with the Statistics and Service Registration Act 2007. They have been produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Further information on Official Statistics is published by the UK Statistics Authority.

1. Scottish Government Policy Context

It is important that planning applications are handled and determined efficiently to support certainty and confidence in the planning system. The planning application statistics provide information on the number of planning applications determined by planning authorities (includes: types of application; the average time taken to determine applications; number of applications approved; and enforcement activity) and for Local Review Bodies and Scottish Ministers. The statutory 2 month target for deciding local applications are also reported.

The key objective of the planning applications statistics is to allow Scottish Government and planning authorities to monitor the performance of planning system with regards to the volume of applications submitted and timeliness of deciding those applications.

These statistics form part of the wider Planning Performance Framework (Go to Planning Performance Framework – Heads Of Planning Scotland web page). Planning application statistics are not the sole indicator of how the planning system or authorities are performing. Planning applications can be complex and require specialist input, therefore timescales can be affected by a number of factors and it is important to note that delays are not just the responsibility of the authority. Authorities are also encouraged to work with applicants in order to make applications acceptable in planning terms rather than just refusing them at the outset, which can sometimes extend determination timescales.

Everyone involved in planning has a role to play in the effective delivery of the planning service. The Planning Performance Framework offers a balanced measurement of the overall quality of each planning service and is used to promote continuous improvement. The Framework captures key elements of a high-performing planning service and comprises a mix of qualitative and quantitative performance measures which show the variety of work that takes place in authorities, their cross-cutting role and the places that are created through planning and decision-making.
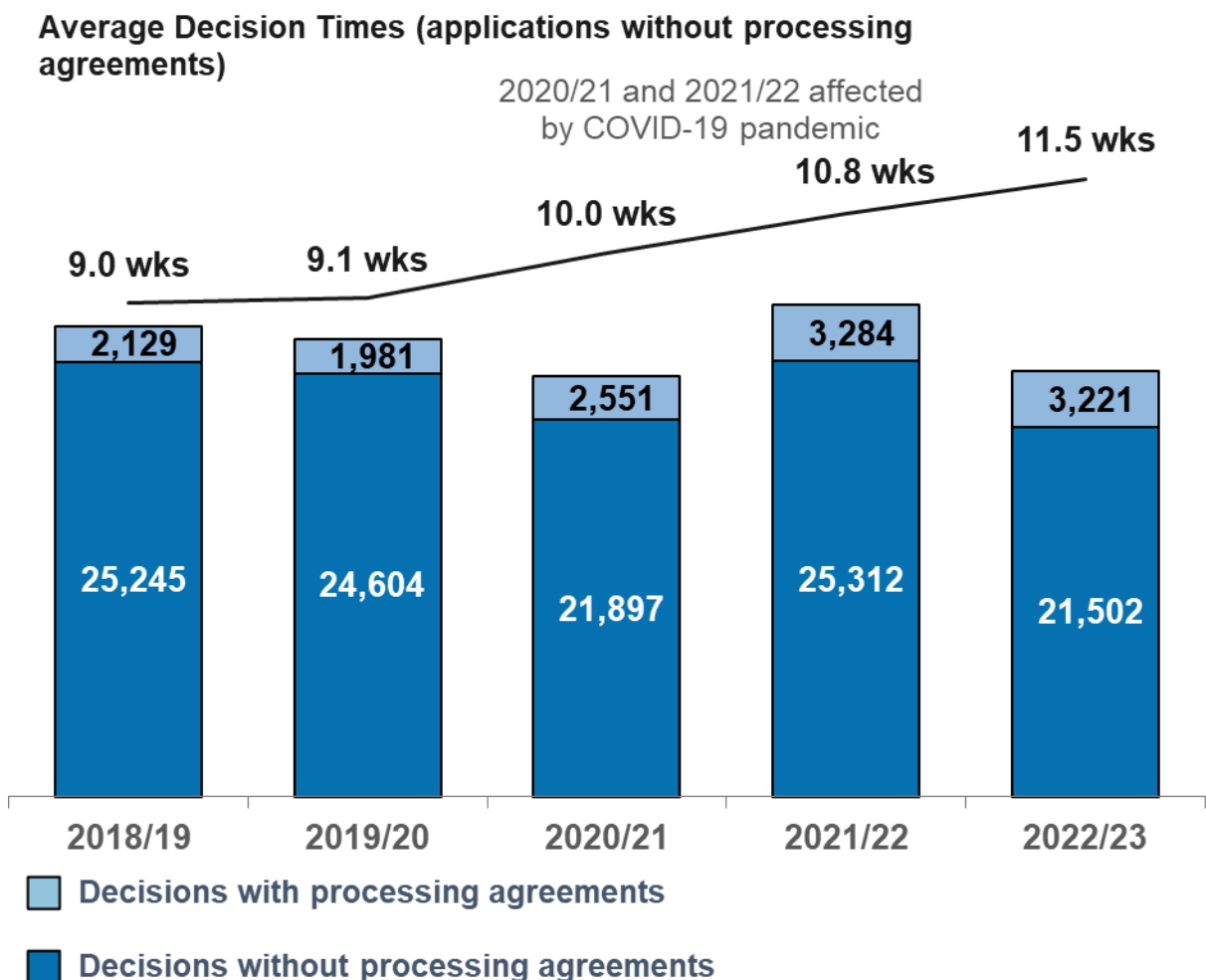
2. Local Developments

Local developments include applications for changes to houses and smaller developments for new housing. They also include applications covering areas of development such as minerals, business & industry, waste management, electricity generation, freshwater fish farming, marine finfish farming, marine shellfish farming, telecommunications, Approval of Matters Specified in Conditions (AMSCs) and other developments.

Some authorities use processing agreements where the developer and the authority agree on timescales for decisions. When an application is subject to a processing agreement it is not included in average decision time calculations.

2.1. All Local Developments

Figure 1: All Local Developments

Average Decision Times (applications without processing agreements)

2020/21 and 2021/22 affected by COVID-19 pandemic

9.0 wks   9.1 wks   10.0 wks   10.8 wks   11.5 wks

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Decisions with processing agreements	2,129	1,981	2,551	3,284	3,221
Decisions without processing agreements	25,245	24,604	21,897	25,312	21,502

☐ Decisions with processing agreements

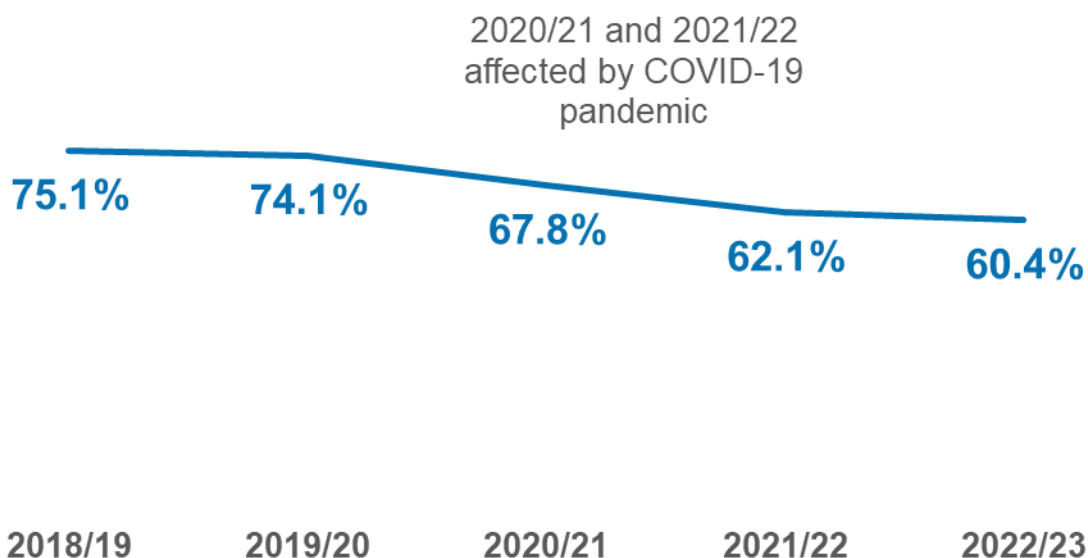☐ Decisions without processing agreements

There were 24,723 local development applications decided in 2022/23. Numbers in fell in 2020/21 at the beginning of pandemic restrictions and in 2021/22 numbers seem to have been boosted as those restrictions began to be lifted. The number has fallen in 2022/23 to the lowest number other than the pandemic year of 2020/21. The average decision time for applications without processing agreements increased during 2020/21 and 2021/22. This has increased again in 2022/23 to 11.5 weeks despite the number of applications falling. In 2019/20, before the pandemic, the average time was 9.1 weeks.

Statutory time period for local applications

Under planning regulations, authorities should determine applications for local developments within two months of the validation date. This is the date when the last piece of information on the content is received. More information is available in the planning circular on development management procedures.
View Planning circular 3/2022: development management procedures - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Figure 2: All Local Developments: Percentage under two months

2020/21 and 2021/22 affected by COVID-19 pandemic

75.1%   74.1%   67.8%   62.1%   60.4%

2018/19   2019/20   2020/21   2021/22   2022/23

The percentage decided within two months continued to fall to 60% in 2022/23. This is lower than before the pandemic when around 74% were decided within two months. Where these applications were from householders making changes to their properties, the percentage was higher at 72%.

Figure 3: Applications for Local Developments with processing agreements

Percentage processed within
agreed timescales

76.6%   79.6%   74.4%   74.8%   71.2%

3,284   3,221

2,551

2020/21 and 2021/22
affected by COVID-19
pandemic

2,129   1,981

Local Applications with Processing

2018/19   2019/20   2020/21   2021/22   2022/23
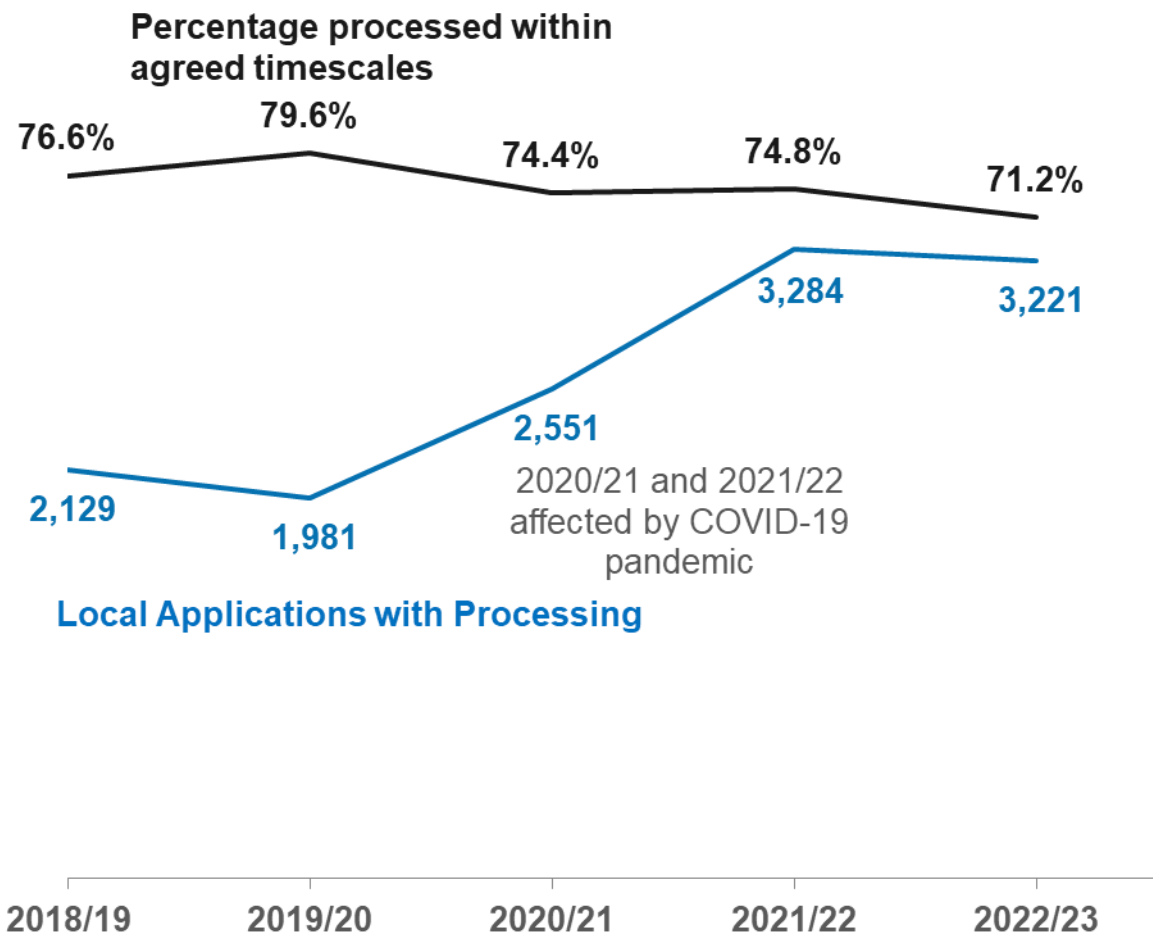
In 2022/23, there were 3,221 local development applications with processing agreements. Agreed timescales were met for 71% of applications. The use of processing agreements by planning authorities for local applications increased during the pandemic. This has remained higher than the years prior.

2.2. Local Housing Developments

Local housing developments are those that have less than 50 dwellings and a site area that is less than 2 hectares.

Figure 4: Local Housing Developments

Average Decision Times (applications without processing agreements)

12.3 wks | 12.4 wks | 14.2 wks | 15.7 wks | 17.2 wks

2020/21 and 2021/22 affected by COVID-19 pandemic

Year	Decisions with processing agreements	Decisions without processing agreements
2018/19	660	4,648
2019/20	639	4,123
2020/21	696	3,476
2021/22	727	3,881
2022/23	752	3,442

☐ Decisions with processing agreements

■ Decisions without processing agreements

There is a downward trend in local housing applications, numbering 4,194 in 2022/23, compared to 5,308 in 2018/19. Average decision times for those without processing agreements have increased by 4.8 weeks since 2019/20 and only 39% were decided within two months, compared to 56% in 2019/20.

Figure 5: Local Housing Developments: Percentage under two months

2020/21 and 2021/22
affected by COVID-19
pandemic

56.7%   55.8%   49.5%   41.8%   39.5%

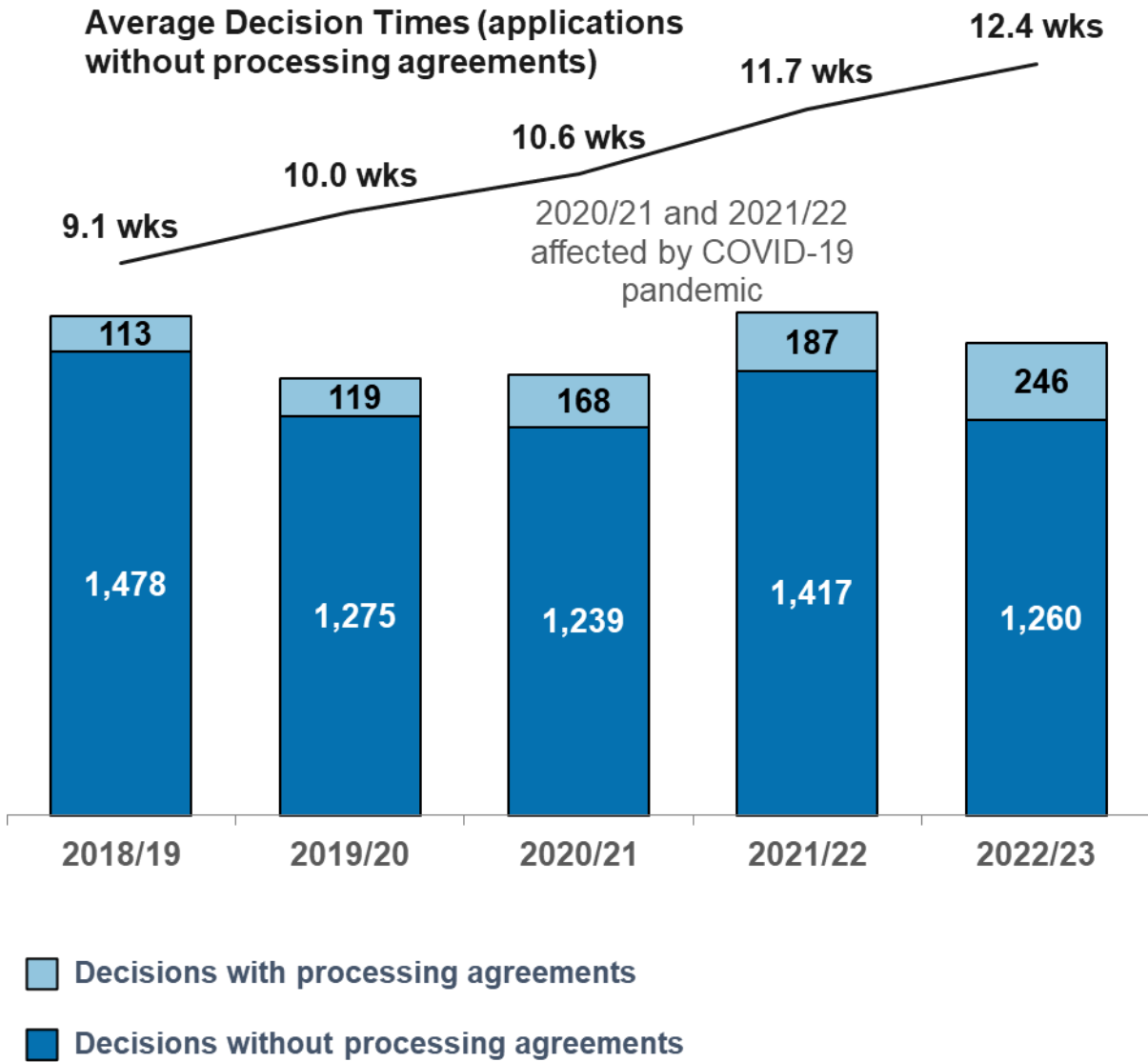2018/19   2019/20   2020/21   2021/22   2022/23
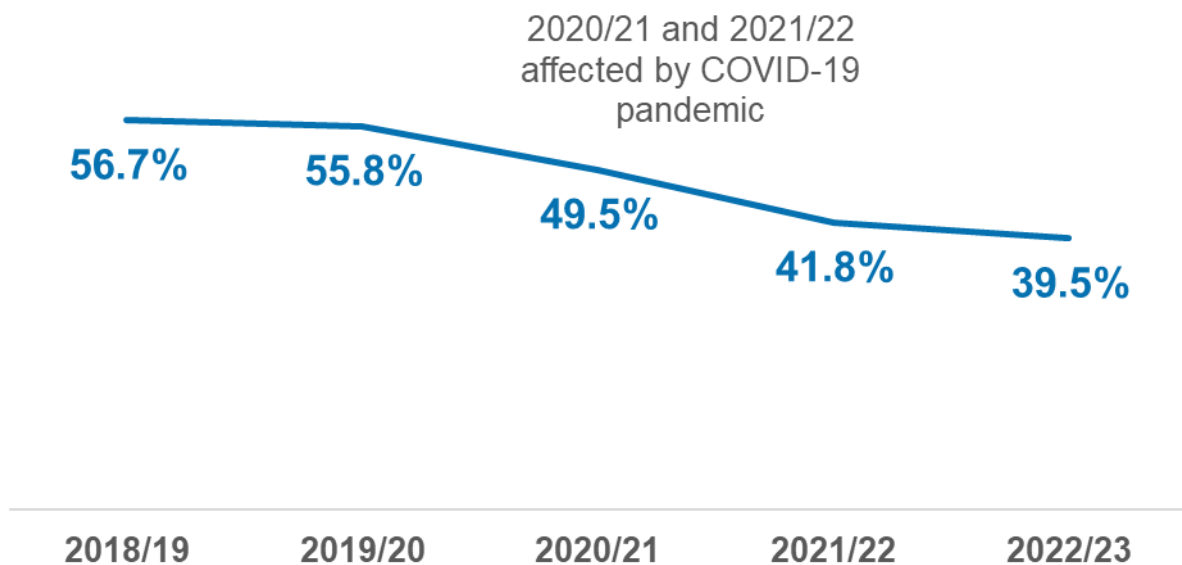
There can be some long decision times for local housing developments. Very long decision times affect the average (mean). The middle value (median) of decision times was lower than the average (17.2 wks) at 10.1 weeks.

752 local housing applications with processing agreements were determined. Two-thirds (66%) of these met timescales agreed between developers and local authorities.

2.3.   Local Business and Industry Developments

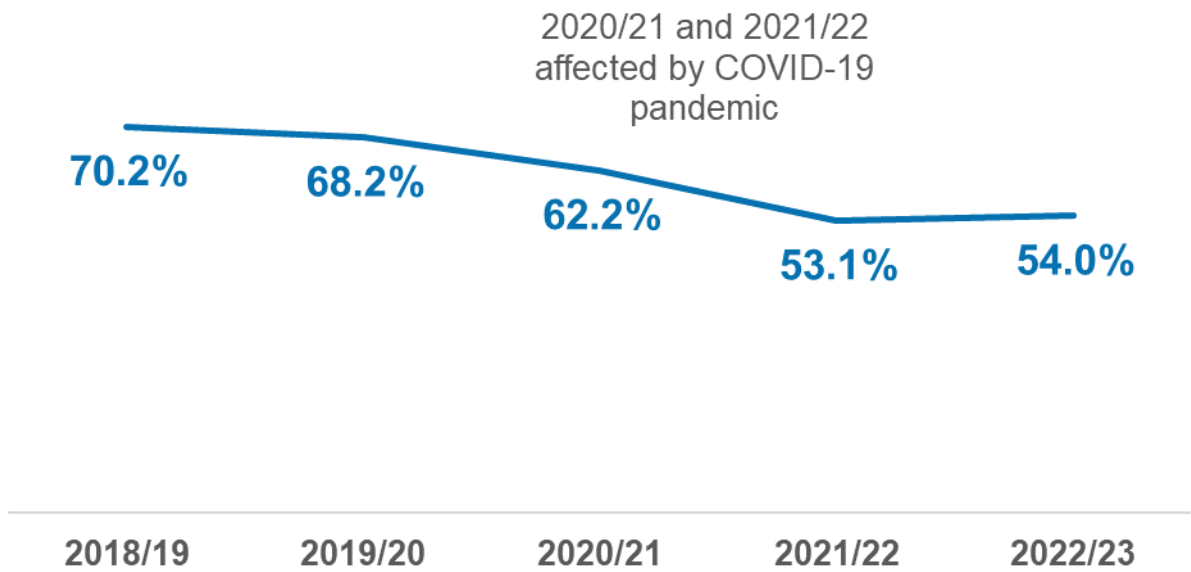Business and Industry developments include construction of a building or structure for any of the following: use as an office, for research and development of products or processes, for any industrial process or for use for storage or as a distribution centre. To be classed as local, the gross floor space must not be more than 10,000 square metres and the site area must be less than 2 hectares.

Figure 6: Local Business and Industry Developments: Number of decisions

Average Decision Times (applications without processing agreements)

9.1 wks   10.0 wks   10.6 wks   11.7 wks   12.4 wks

2020/21 and 2021/22 affected by COVID-19 pandemic

Year	Decisions with processing agreements	Decisions without processing agreements
2018/19	113	1,478
2019/20	119	1,275
2020/21	168	1,239
2021/22	187	1,417
2022/23	246	1,260

☐ Decisions with processing agreements

■ Decisions without processing agreements

The number of local business and industry applications was 1,506 in 2022/23, slightly higher than 1,394 in the pre-pandemic year 2019/20. Average decision times for those applications not subject to processing agreements have been rising since 2018/19 from 9.1 weeks to 12.4 weeks in 2022/23. The percentage decided within two months has fallen since 2018/19 and was 54% in 2022/23.

Figure 7: Local Business and Industry Developments: Percentage under two months

2020/21 and 2021/22 affected by COVID-19 pandemic

70.2%   68.2%   62.2%   53.1%   54.0%

2018/19   2019/20   2020/21   2021/22   2022/23

246 local business and industry applications with processing agreements were determined. Almost three quarters (73%) of these met agreed timescales that had been set between developers and local authorities.

2.4. Local Applications by Development Type

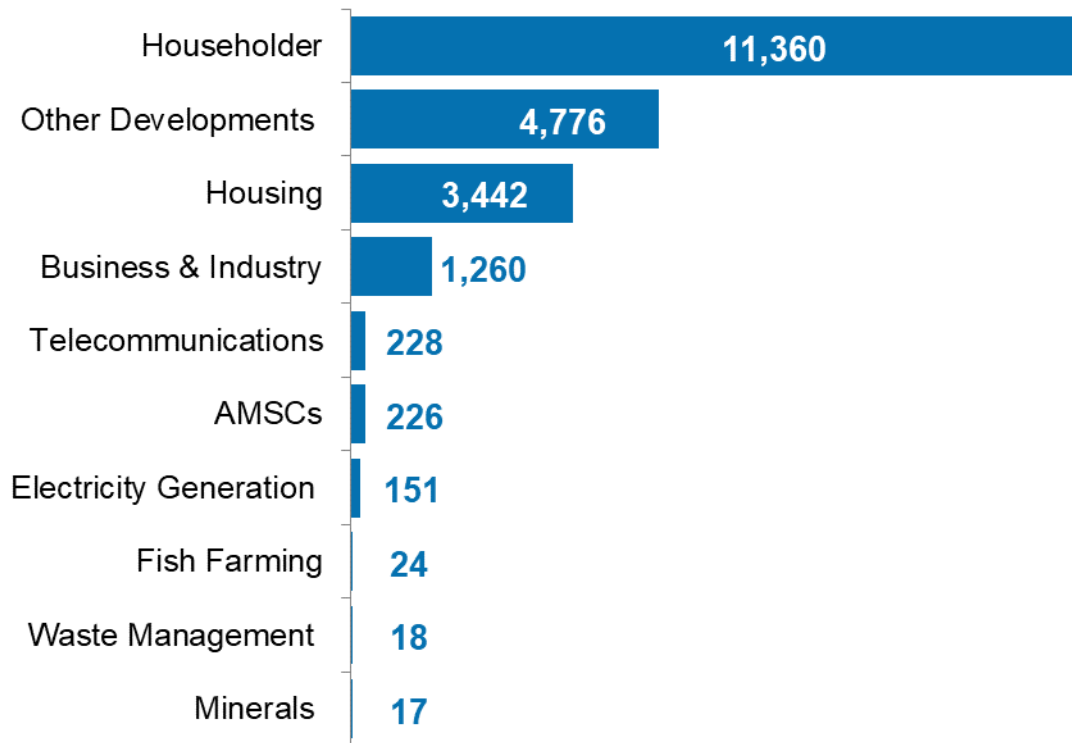**Figure 8: Local Developments Without Processing Agreements by Development Type**

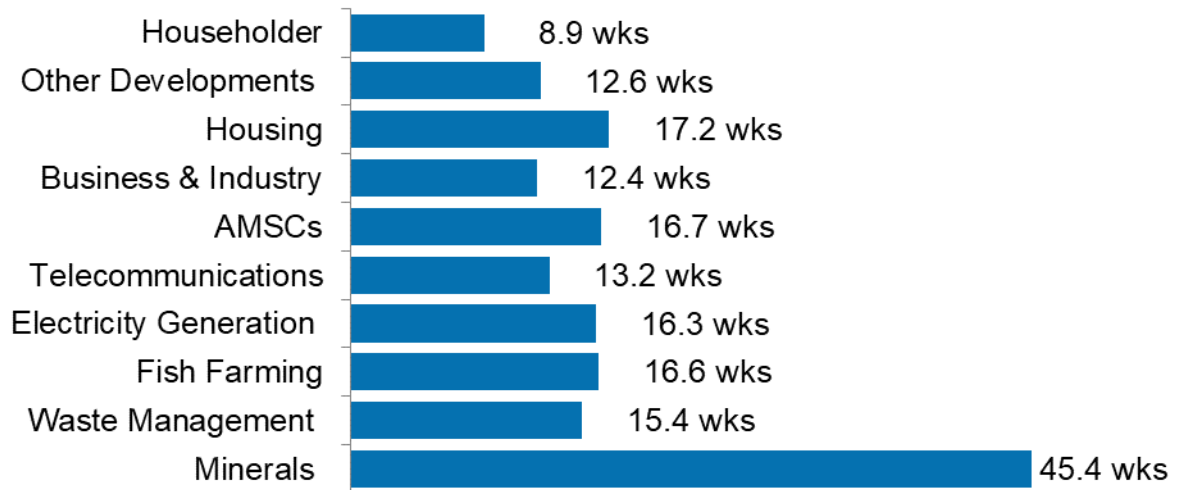| Development Type	Value
Householder	11,360
Other Developments	4,776
Housing	3,442
Business & Industry	1,260
Telecommunications	228
AMSCs	226
Electricity Generation	151
Fish Farming	24
Waste Management	18
Minerals	17

Figure 9: Local Developments Without Processing Agreements by Development Type: Average decision time (weeks)

Development Type	Average decision time
Householder	8.9 wks
Other Developments	12.6 wks
Housing	17.2 wks
Business & Industry	12.4 wks
AMSCs	16.7 wks
Telecommunications	13.2 wks
Electricity Generation	16.3 wks
Fish Farming	16.6 wks
Waste Management	15.4 wks
Minerals	45.4 wks

Average decision time for applications without processing agreements 11.5 weeks

More than half (53%) of all local applications without processing agreements were from householders making changes to their properties. These applications had the shortest average decision time of 8.9 weeks.
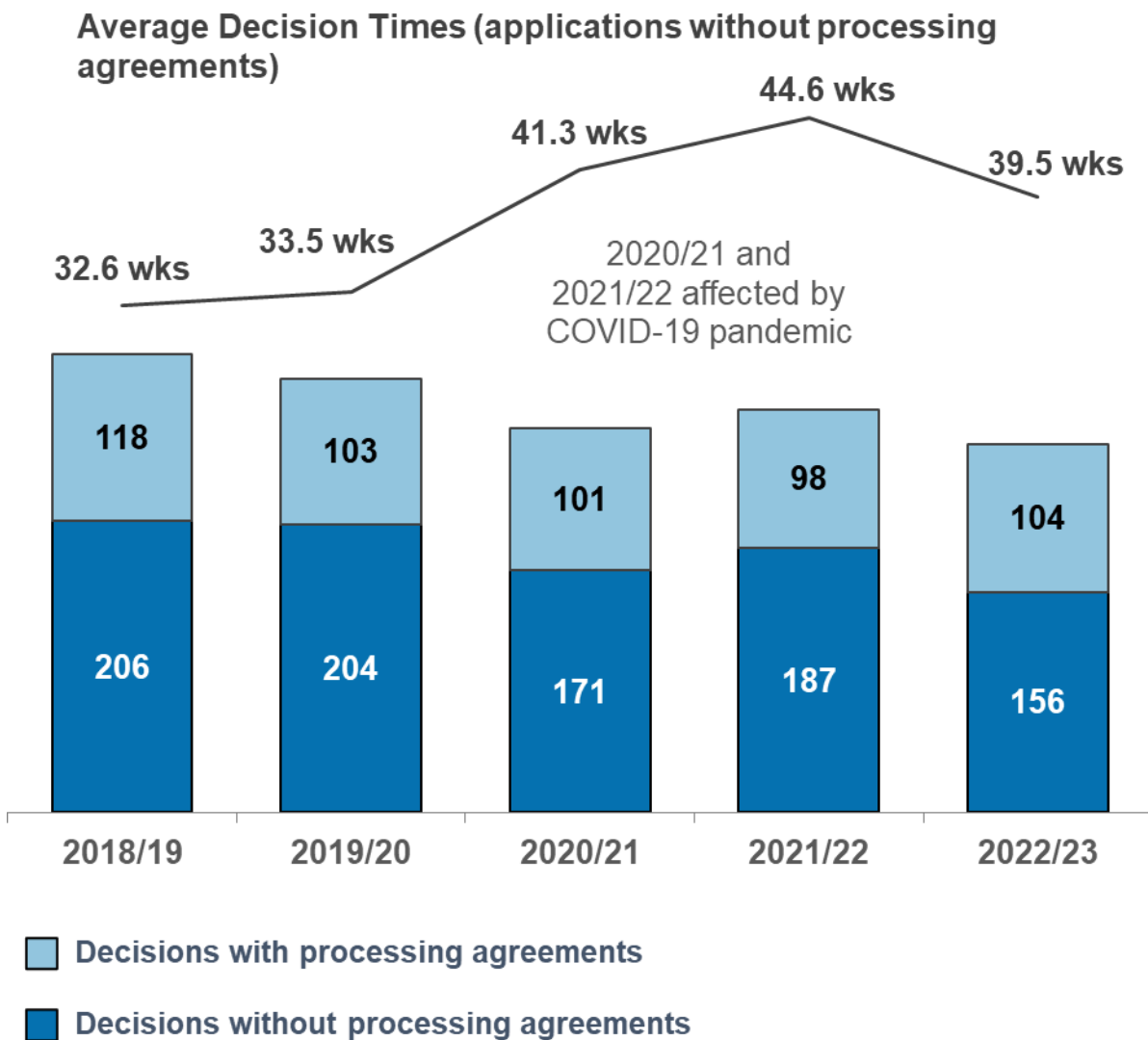
3. Major Developments

Major developments include applications for developments of housing (50 or more homes or large sites where the main use is for housing), as well as other applications covering areas of development such as minerals, business & industry, waste management, electricity generation, freshwater fish farming, marine finfish farming, marine shellfish farming and other developments.

Classification between local and major developments depends on the particular development type. For example, housing developments are classed as major when the application is for 50 or more dwellings or for a site that exceeds two hectares, whereas electricity generation is classed as major when the capacity of the generating station is or exceeds 20 megawatts.
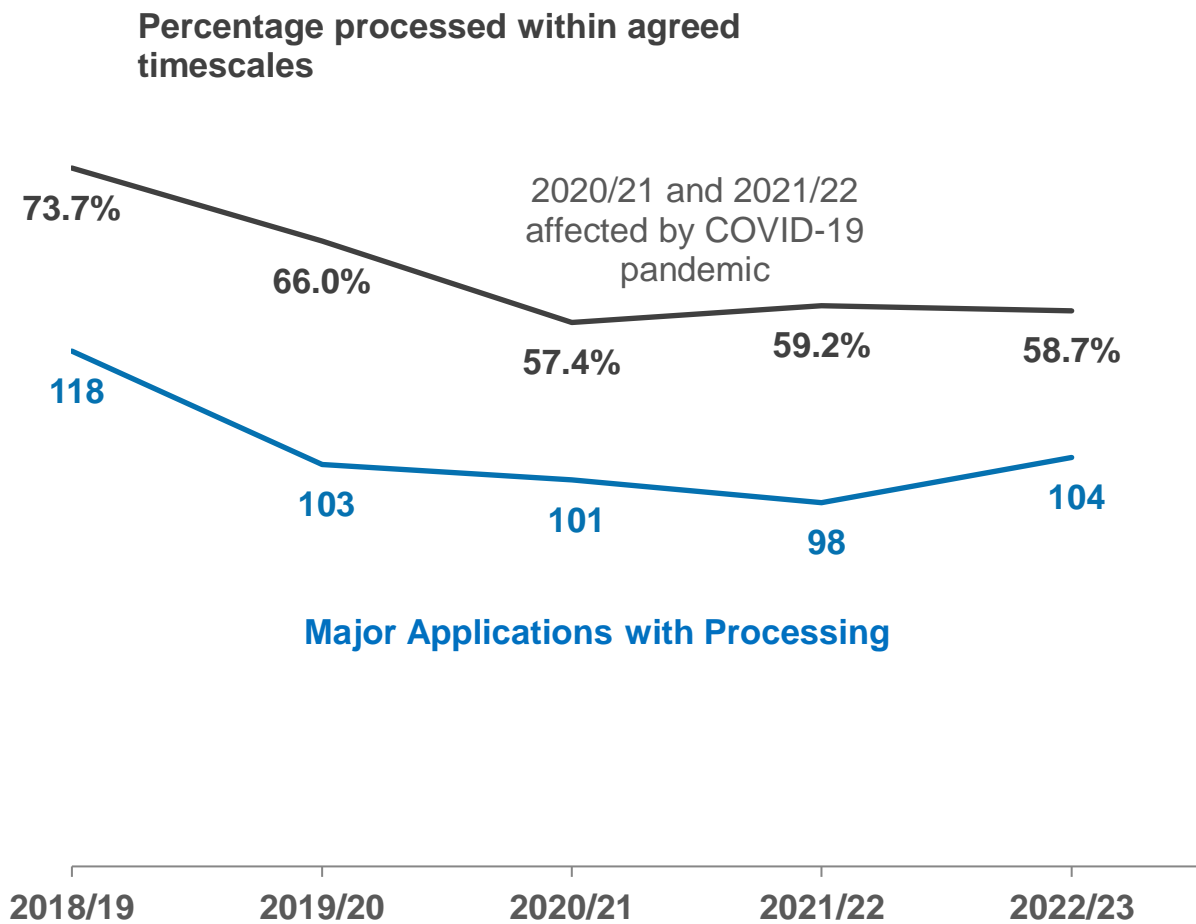
3.1. All Major Developments

Figure 10: All Major Developments

Average Decision Times (applications without processing agreements)

44.6 wks

41.3 wks

39.5 wks

33.5 wks

32.6 wks

2020/21 and
2021/22 affected by
COVID-19 pandemic

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Decisions with processing agreements	118	103	101	98	104
Decisions without processing agreements	206	204	171	187	156

■ Decisions with processing agreements

■ Decisions without processing agreements

There were 260 major development applications determined in 2022/23. There is a downward trend in numbers of major applications from 324 in 2018/19. Those not subject to processing agreements had an average decision time of 39.5 weeks. This is lower than the two previous years affected by pandemic-related pressures.

It is common for major applications to take a long time to be decided. This will depend on the details of the development. Very long decision times affect the average (mean). The middle value (median) of decision times for major applications was much lower than the average (39.5 wks) at 23.7 weeks.

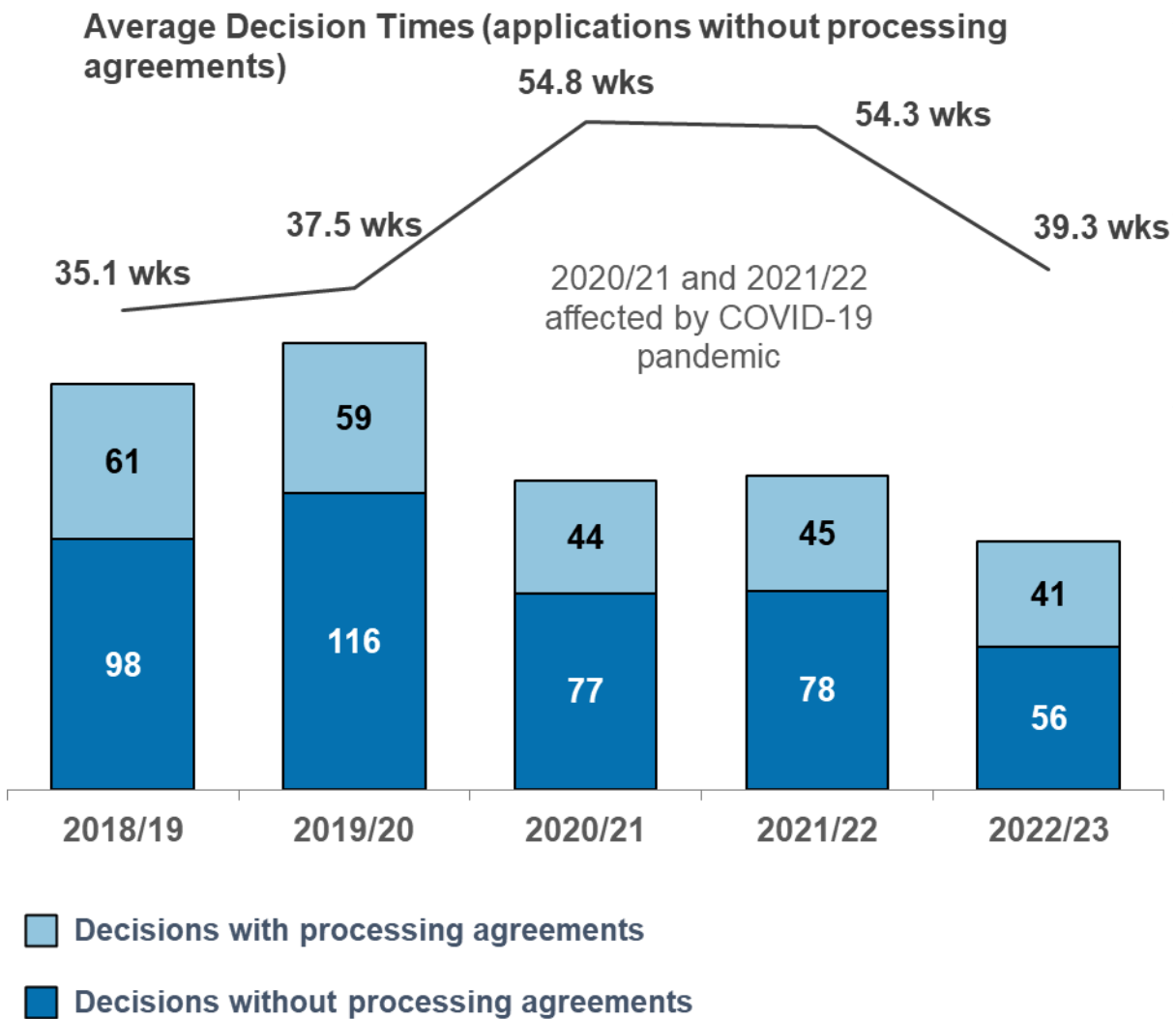**Figure 11: Applications for Major Developments with processing agreements**

Percentage processed within agreed timescales

73.7%

66.0%

2020/21 and 2021/22 affected by COVID-19 pandemic

57.4%

59.2%

58.7%

118

103

101

98

104

Major Applications with Processing

2018/19   2019/20   2020/21   2021/22   2022/23

In 2022/23 there were 104 major development applications with processing agreements, 59% of these met agreed timescales that had been set between developers and local authorities. Processing agreements are more likely to be used for major development applications than for local applications.

3.2. Major Housing Developments

Major housing developments are those with 50 or more dwellings or with a site area of 2 hectares or more where the main use is for housing.

**Figure 12: Major Housing Developments**

Average Decision Times (applications without processing agreements)

54.8 wks

54.3 wks

37.5 wks

35.1 wks

39.3 wks

2020/21 and 2021/22 affected by COVID-19 pandemic

2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
61	59	44	45	41
98	116	77	78	56

☐ Decisions with processing agreements

■ Decisions without processing agreements

There were 97 major housing development applications determined in 2022/23, the lowest number of the period. Applications have fallen by 45% since 2019/20. Those not subject to processing agreements had an average decision time of 39.3 weeks. Average times had risen markedly during 2020/21 and 2021/22, but this is only slightly higher than the pre-pandemic times.

There were 41 major housing development applications with processing agreements, almost two-thirds (63%) of these met agreed timescales that had been set between developers and local authorities.

3.3.   Major Business and Industry Developments

These include construction of a building or structure for any of the following: use as an office, for research and development of products or processes, for any industrial process or for use for storage or as a distribution centre. To be classed as major the gross floor space must exceed 10,000 square metres or the site must exceed 2 hectares.

Figure 13: Major Business and Industry Developments

Average Decision Times (applications without processing agreements)
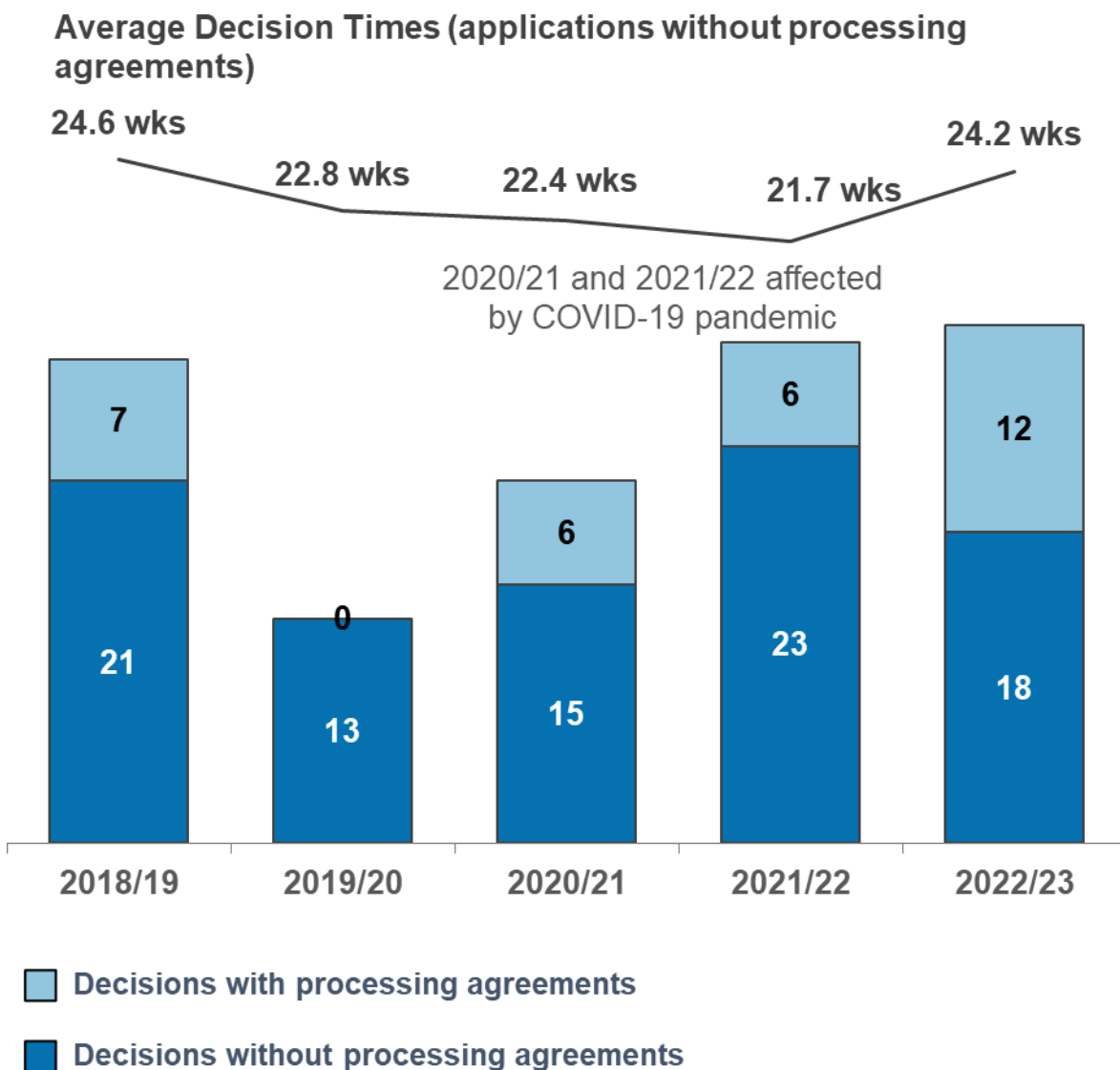
There were 30 major business and industry development applications determined in 2022/23. Those not subject to processing agreements had an average decision time of 24.2 weeks. Average decision times for these applications have been fairly steady since 2018/19.

There were 12 major business and industry development applications with processing agreements and half of these met agreed timescales that had been set between developers and local authorities.

3.4. Major Applications by Development Type

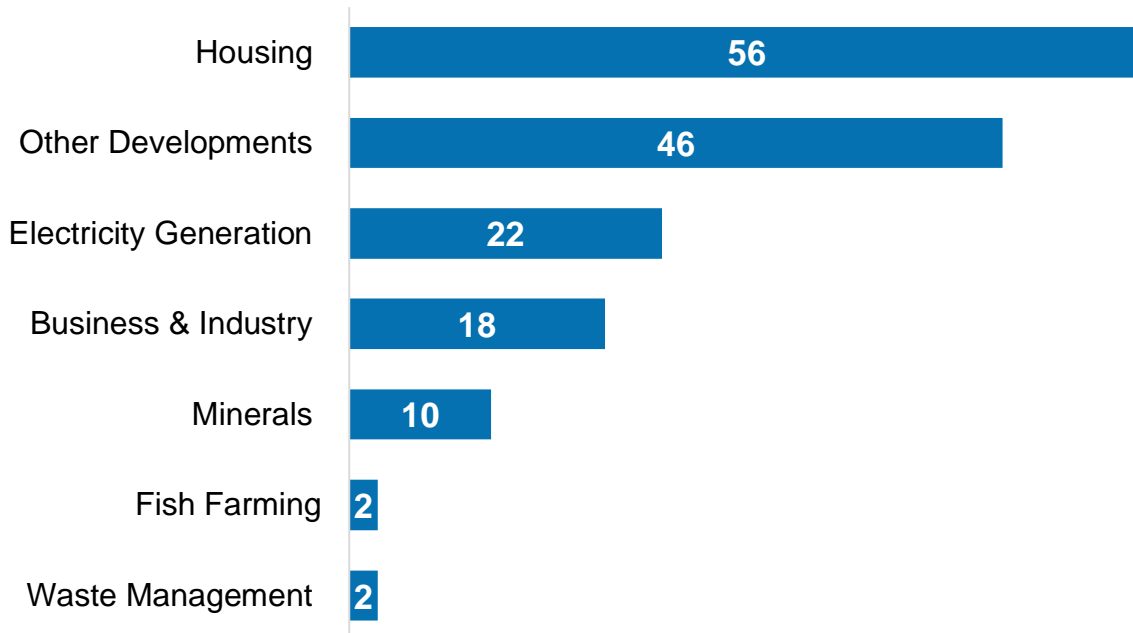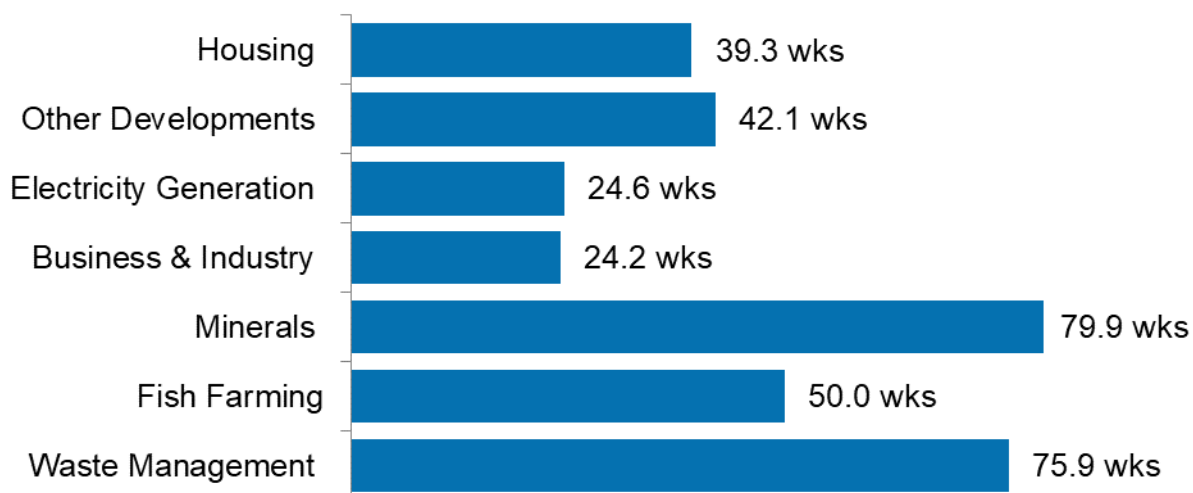**Figure 14: Major Developments Without Processing Agreements by Development Type: Number of decisions**

Figure 15: Major Developments Without Processing Agreements by Development Type: Average decision time (weeks)

Average decision time for applications without processing agreements 39.5 weeks

The shortest average decision time of 24.2 weeks was for business and industry developments (12% of all major developments without processing agreements). The longest average decision time was for minerals applications (79.9 weeks)

4.   Delegation and Approval Rates

Schemes of Delegation identify who makes the decision on different types of planning application, whether it be an appointed officer or elected members. This also influences the route for any subsequent appeal. These schemes are required by legislation and are available on the websites of each planning authority. The delegation rate measures the proportion of planning decisions that are made by appointed officers.

The delegation rate for 2022/23 was 96.4%. This rate has been fairly constant over the last four years.

The overall rate of approval of applications was 93.5%. The approval rate has been around 94% for many years.

5.   Appeals, Local Reviews and Enforcement

If an applicant does not agree with the decision of a planning authority then they can ask for a review or appeal of the decision. They can also ask for a review or appeal if the authority doesn't make a decision within the time period set by law.

If the application was decided by a planning officer on behalf of the authority, then the decision is reviewed by the Local Review Body. Local Review Bodies have three or more elected members from the planning authority. They review decisions on planning applications for certain types of development taken by officers. Requests for review must be made within 3 months of the decision. Reviews can only be requested where planning permission has been refused or where there are conditions on a consent.

If the application was decided by councillors, then the appeal is made to Scottish Ministers.

Local Review Bodies dealt with 516 cases in 2022/23. The original decision was upheld in almost two-thirds of cases (64%). There were 277 appeals to Scottish Ministers in 2022/23 with 46% having the original decision upheld.

Enforcement action can be carried out when developments happen without permission. This can also be done when conditions have not been followed. Authorities have powers to serve notices asking for more information about a development. Authorities can stop a development happening without permission or not following conditions. The Authority can also issue a fixed penalty or refer to the Procurator Fiscal.

In 2022/23 there were 5,432 enforcement cases. There were 597 notices served. One report was made to the Procurator Fiscal. There were no prosecutions.

6. Stopping the Clock

Stopping the clock is used where there has been a lengthy delay caused by the applicant or external consultees, outwith the planning authority's control. This helps produce more accurate performance statistics that would otherwise have been skewed by extreme cases of delay outwith the planning authority's control.

For 2022/23 there were 2,239 applications where the clock was stopped. The average amount of time stopped was 13.7 weeks.
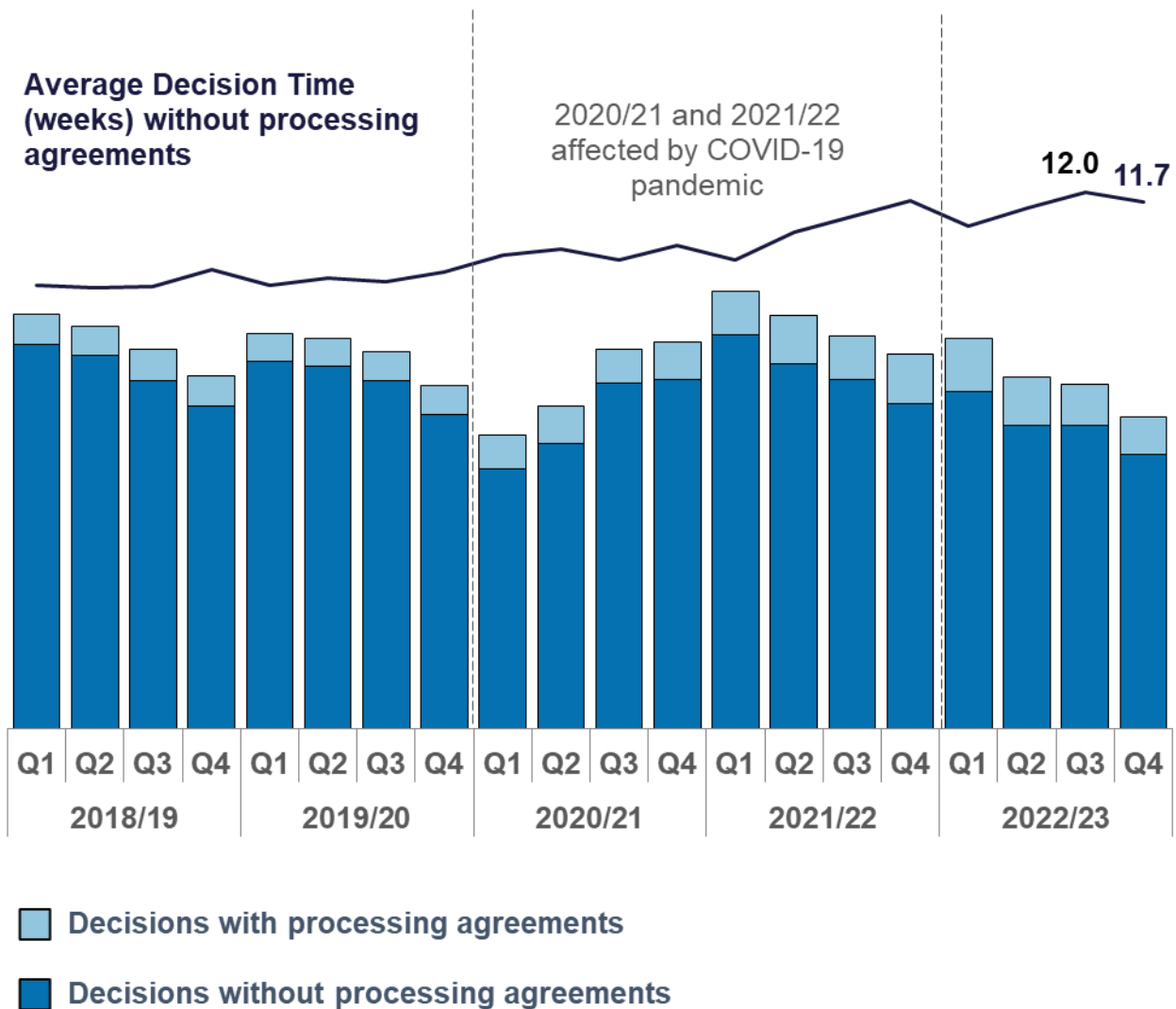
Local development decisions (not subject to processing agreements) involved a clock-stop in nine per cent of cases. The average clock-stop time was 13.7 weeks. Major development decisions (not subject to processing agreements) involved a clock-stop in a quarter of cases. The average clock-stop time was 48.5 weeks.

Annex A – Yearend 2022/23 Key Findings

1. Local Developments

1.1. All Local Developments

Chart 16: Quarterly Applications for Local Developments

There were 11,607 decisions on local developments in the last two quarters of 2022/23. This was the lowest yearend figure in this period. The average decision time for applications not subject to processing agreements remained higher than pre-pandemic times at 12.0 weeks in Q3 and 11.7 weeks in Q4.
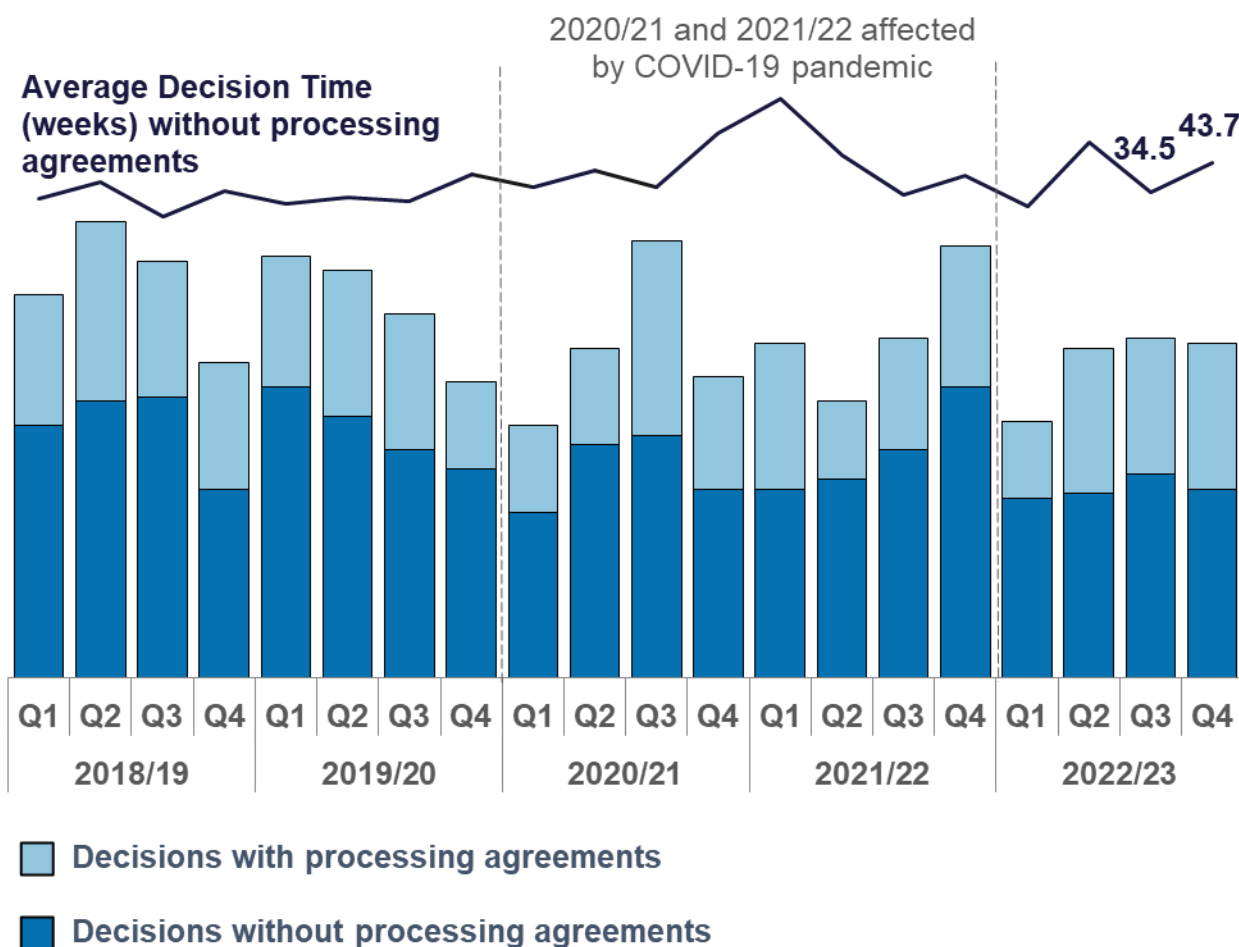
In quarter three there were 741 local development applications with processing agreements, with 60% meeting agreed timescales that had been set between developers and local authorities. In quarter four there were 679 with three-quarters (76%) meeting the agreed timescales. Some authorities continued to use more processing agreements for local applications than had been used in the past.

1.2. Local Housing Developments

There were 1,659 local housing developments not subject to processing agreements decided during the last two quarters of 2022/23. This was a low figure for the yearend period. The average decision time remained higher than pre-pandemic times at 17.3 weeks in Q3 and 19.3 weeks in Q4. The percentage of decisions made in less than two months was 41% in Q3 and fell to a low of 35% in Q4. Almost two thirds of 358 applications with processing agreements met agreed timescales.

2. Applications for Major Developments

2.1. All Major Developments

There were 139 decisions on major developments in the last two quarters of 2022/23. The average decision times for the 81 applications not subject to processing agreements were only slightly higher than pre-pandemic times at 34.5 weeks in Q3 and 43.7 weeks in Q4.

In quarter three there were 28 major development applications with processing agreements over half (57%) met agreed timescales that had been set between developers and local authorities. In quarter four there were 30, less than half (47%) meeting the agreed timescales.

2.2.   Major Housing Developments

There were 24 major housing developments not subject to processing agreements decided during the last two quarters of 2022/23. The average decision times were 35.9 weeks in Q3 and 53.4 weeks in Q4. There were 23 applications with processing agreements and timescales were met for 55% in Q3 and 50% in Q4.

Glossary

Categories of Planning Applications

For planning applications, developments are put into one of five categories: local, major, other, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and national. This publication covers the first four as national developments are dealt with by Scottish Ministers.

Local developments include applications for changes to individual houses, smaller developments of less than 50 homes, less than 2 hectares and less than 20 megawatts.   Major developments include applications for 50 or more homes, greater than 2 hectares or more than 20 megawatts.

The full range of applications can include changes to properties, new builds, minerals, business & industry, waste management, electricity generation, freshwater fish farming, marine finfish farming, marine shellfish farming, telecommunications, Approval of Matters Specified in Conditions, Prior Notifications and other developments. The classification of all development types can be found in the planning series circular [Go to Hierarchy of Developments web page](#).

Stopping the Clock

In some cases it is appropriate to remove a length of time from the total decision time. "Stopping the clock" is used where there has been a lengthy delay caused by the applicant or external consultees. This is not under the planning authority's control and the authority cannot progress with an application.

Legacy Cases

On 3rd August 2009 changes were made to the statutory development management system and handling of planning applications. A few legacy cases from before then remain. They can have a large effect on average decision times so they are not included in the main analysis. They are reported separately in tables in the supporting spreadsheet file. In 2022/23 just one legacy case was decided.

Data and Methodology

Details for all categories of development are available in the tables in the supporting spreadsheet file for this publication. All files for the publication can be found on our web page. View Scottish Government planning statistics webpage.

Information on quality assurance, revisions policy, uses of the data and historic publications can also be found on our web page. View the Scottish Government planning statistics web page.

Uses of the Statistics

The statistics allow Scottish Government and the planning authorities to monitor the numbers of planning applications and time taken to decide them. More uses are listed on our web pages. View Scottish Government planning statistics web page.

Small Numbers of Major Applications

Typically there are only a small number of decisions made for major developments each quarter and therefore average decision times are likely to vary greatly.

Calculation of Decision Times

The average decision time in weeks is calculated in days from the date of validation (the date when the final piece of information for an application is received) to the date the decision is issued. The average weeks are then calculated by dividing the number of days by seven. Some planning authorities use processing agreements where the developer and the planning authority agree on timescales for decisions. These are not included in average decision times.

Tell us what you think

We are always interested to hear from our users about how our statistics are used, and how they can be improved.

Feedback survey

We'd appreciate it if you would complete our short feedback survey on this publication.

Enquiries

For enquiries about this publication please contact:

Planning Statistics
Communities Analysis Division
E-mail: planstats@gov.scot
Telephone: 0131 244 0439

For general enquiries about Scottish Government statistics please contact:

Office of the Chief Statistician
e-mail: statistics.enquiries@gov.scot

Join our mailing list

If you would like to receive notification about statistical publications, or find out about consultations on our statistics please join the ScotStat mailing list.

Future publications

Details of future publications can be found on our forthcoming publications page.