

Agreed Position November 2025

The Chamber views planning policy as a critical piece in the city's economic development and would urge the City Council to view it in those terms. Additionally, measures to improve and accelerate the planning system must be incorporated into the City Council and Scottish Government responses to the housing emergency (see 'Housing' Position Paper). Following a series of engagements over the past year with members and policymakers, the Chamber has developed a series of recommendations in this space:

- Streamline planning processes – simplify and accelerate planning systems, and consider better pre-application engagement for large applications, to enable timely delivery of diverse housing options and critical infrastructure. Additionally, policies should be more outcomes-driven, and avoid hard to navigate piecemeal individual policies.
- Accelerate priority applications – introduce expedited planning for large scale projects and infrastructure, and projects that fulfil certain criteria. This would include a commitment to quick reply from internal and external consultees.
- Flexibility to ensure viability – explore ways to ensure the viability of projects, such as introducing additional flexibility around requirements such as affordable housing contributions, Section 75 requirements, etc., if this is going to prevent a project from being taken forward at all. There could be review mechanisms built into this, to ensure that if the market changes in such a way that the viability of the project also changes, then requirements can be reinstated.
- Support skills development – business, skills providers, and local government need to collaborate to ensure a sufficient pipeline of qualified planners. This may include the creation of a graduate apprenticeship, or other more flexible routes to upskill and train people to become planners.

Context

Challenging planning timeframes and processes create real barriers to growth – from housing to windfarms, commercial space to transport infrastructure, planning issues are holding back critical development and deterring investment. There are significant concerns around the capacity of Edinburgh's planning department to handle the volume and size of applications, and issues have been raised by members around the quality and consistency of decision-making, as well as lengthy delays which impact investor confidence whilst prices rise.

Rationale

- In the first half of 2024/25, local development applications in Scotland – which have an 8 week target – took an average of 11.1-11.9 weeks, whilst major development applications (target of 16 weeks) took between 35.2 and 35.5 weeks. The Berwick Bank wind farm has been in the planning process for more than a decade.
- The cost of labour and materials are very high, the rise in interest rates has led to a higher cost of debt, whilst political uncertainty and the current policy environment are also discouraging investment in housing – more flexibility and partnership working are required to ensure viability of the most critical developments.

Key Policy Maker and Stakeholder

- UK Govt. – a number of changes and improvements are being made to the English planning system.
- Scot Govt. – over the past year have been looking at ways to improve the planning system, incl. looking at resourcing and establishing a planning hub.
- BCC – established a Planning Skills Fund that uses private sector donations to train and upskill planners who are committed to working for a Local Authority for at least 2 years

Key Policy Maker and Stakeholder Position

Scottish Govt. - [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\)](#)
City of Edinburgh Council - [City Plan 2030](#)
City of Edinburgh Council - [City Centre Transformation Strategy](#)
City of Edinburgh Council - [City Mobility Plan](#)
City of Edinburgh Council - [West Edinburgh Placemaking Framework and Strategic Masterplan](#)