



Planning Appeals
Commission

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PAC Ref: COVID-19 Response
Measures (Remote Hearings)

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BY EMAIL

Dear Maura

PACWAC COVID-19 TEMPORARY RESPONSE MEASURES – REMOTE HEARINGS

This letter is to update you regarding the PACWAC approach during the current COVID-19 situation. Our office officially reopened on 11th May with social distancing measures in place. On reopening the office our initial focus has been on dealing with new appeals and correspondence submitted during the office closure as well as other essential administrative matters. As of Monday 1 June we have been writing to parties to set out revised arrangements for the submission of evidence on cases that are before us. This will ensure that all casework will start to move forward again.

As advised previously the elements of our casework which are due to progress with an oral hearing are providing the greatest challenge. We have been actively exploring alternatives to hearings in person since the government restrictions came into place. Our sponsor body is the Department of Justice and we have called on their technical knowledge to help take this forward. The product Zoom cannot be used at this point in time for oral hearings. WebEx, the NICS video conferencing model, is currently being tested against the required governance standards including a data protection impact assessment. This will hopefully be available to us in the near future. You may already be aware we are testing Sightlink which is currently in use in the courts for remote hearings.

We conducted an engagement event on 1 June alongside the Northern Ireland Planning Bar Association, the Royal Town Planning Institute (also representing the RSUA), and three local councils. Andree McNee attended on behalf of your Council. The engagement group was very useful as it enabled us to discuss our thought process and take on board the views of representatives across the board. Council input was very useful as you like ourselves are having to embrace new technologies and remote meetings. I attach for your information a copy of the agenda and key points of discussion. If you have anything additional you would like us to consider we would welcome your input. Further guidance is being developed in respect of remote hearings and will be available in due course.

We hope to hold our initial remote hearings in the next four to six weeks and are currently seeking confirmation that the appellant who requested the hearing is content to move forward via remote

hearing. Instead of writing to Councils on an individual appeal basis I would ask that you confirm if you are content that your Council is willing to participate remotely in appeal hearings once this can be facilitated.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "AKells". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Andrea Kells
Chief Commissioner