



Planning and Development
in Townsville

2020 Year in Review

Planning Services Team



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Reviewing and amending the Townsville City Plan, Local Government Infrastructure Plan and infrastructure planning for the city

Inspecting and protecting council's infrastructure assets when affected by development, and assessing plumbing works

Planning Services Team

Assessing development applications and design and siting concurrence agency applications

Providing planning and development advice to the community

Planning Services Team in 2020

At the beginning of 2020, Townsville was continuing with recovery efforts in the aftermath of the 2019 flood event. While causing significant damage to many homes and businesses, the event also provided stimulus to a sluggish residential construction industry. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions in early 2020 also had an impact on the property and development sector due to the uncertainty in the economy.

The Planning Services Team, like many others in the community, introduced changed working arrangements at this time and accelerated the shift that has been occurring over a number of years to working electronically. These changes also contributed to a renewed focus on delivering excellent customer service, and the Team released a set of Customer Service Commitments in the latter half of the year (see Attachment A). These commitments are published on Council's website, and provide a set of assessment timeframes that deliver faster decisions on development applications than is required under the *Planning Act 2016*. Commentary is provided in this report on the Team's performance against these customer service commitments for 2020.

As reported in the Townsville Community Profiles webpage on COVID-19 impacts, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions led to a forecasted retraction of the Gross Regional Product by 2.9% from the 2019 September quarter to 2020 September quarter, and a retraction of local resident employment by 4.5%. The construction industry output (sales) dropped by 10% from the 2019 September quarter to the 2020 September quarter.

One of the City's biggest employers, employing about 8.6% (FTE) of the employed population, the construction industry was one of the top three industries that experienced significant increases in unemployment (without the JobKeeper Scheme).

Despite these challenges, the Townsville region saw a significant increase in development activity in late 2020 due to the government incentives introduced, which are outlined further in this report.

Major developments in 2020

Despite these challenges, the city was fortunate to have a number of major development projects be completed or commence in 2020.

The much anticipated **Queensland Country Bank Stadium** was completed in February 2020. The stadium hosted a number of events before COVID-19 restrictions unfortunately saw further events cancelled. However, it gave Townsville and the broader North Queensland community the opportunity to celebrate the opening and look forward to future events.

Adjacent to and complementing the stadium is the **Cowboys Community, Training and High Performance Centre**, constructed in 2020 and opening in early 2021. This centre will provide sports medical and allied health services, multi-sport high performance training spaces (including Townsville Fire), and community spaces.

A major milestone for the city was the gazettal of a major Townsville City Plan amendment for the new **Lansdown Eco-Industrial Precinct** in Calcium. It will become Northern Australia's first environmentally sustainable, advanced manufacturing, processing and technology estate powered by locally-generated renewable energy, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the North Queensland economy. The site will also be the home of DriveIT NQ, a motor-sport facility.

The city also saw major expansions to **health care services and educational establishments**, including the expansion to the Mater Private Hospital and expansion of Tec-NQ providing senior school and trade education.



Support for the development industry

All levels of government were quick to react to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and public health restrictions by introducing policies to combat a retraction of the local and national economy. In addition to the Australian Government's JobSeeker and JobKeeper policies aimed at supporting businesses and individuals, a number of policies, detailed below, were introduced or continued to specifically support the development and construction industries. The rapid introduction of concessions to support the development industry assisted heavily in supporting the broader economy.

Australian Government HomeBuilder Grants - \$25,000

The Australian Government introduced the HomeBuilder Grant in June 2020 to stimulate residential construction in response to the economic downturn caused by COVID-19. Eligible applicants would receive grants of \$25,000 towards the construction of a new home and substantial renovations of existing homes.

The impact of this policy has been seen in the increased demand for residential land as the community took advantage of the grant. Residential lot releases for quarters 3 and 4 of 2020 show significant increases. This is especially noticeable in quarter 4, with 341 residential lots released compared to 65 in 2019. Reports from the building industry point towards heavy demand for new home construction.

With an initial expiry date of the end of December 2020, the federal government announced an extension to the HomeBuilder Grant to 31 March 2021, albeit at a reduced grant of \$15,000. Furthermore, the cut-off of the submission date for grant applications has been extended to 14 April 2021. As demand for residential land is expected to reduce in line with the availability of the grant, the grant extension is expected to have a softening effect on the slowdown of residential land demands.

The construction industry will continue to have residual work for some months into 2021, assisting the local economy and promoting resilience in employment levels.

Queensland Government First Home Owner's Grant - \$20,000, and Regional Home Building Boost Grant - \$5,000

The Queensland Government continued to provide grants for an individual's first home subject to conditions. This grant, in conjunction with the Australian Government's HomeBuilder Grant, has been a great motivator for people to take the first step towards home ownership.

The regional home building boost grant is a state government initiative to help home owners in regional Queensland purchase or construct a brand-new house, unit or townhouse by providing a \$5,000 grant.

Coronavirus Local Jobs Policy

Introduced with Council's Budget and Operational Plan 2020/2021, and as a further commitment to help the community recover from the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19, the Coronavirus Local Jobs Policy committed to reductions of infrastructure charges for those developments that could prove ongoing and sustainable jobs growth and a meaningful positive economic impact on the city.

Creation of new jobs has a multiplier effect across the local economy. Investment in the creation of new jobs that are likely to be sustained is one of the most cost effective measures Council can take to support the local economy.

This policy has been taken up by industries including manufacturing (new to Townsville), an educational establishment and food and drink outlets. These have potentially added 200 new jobs to the city.

Waiver of Development Application Fees

As an early response to the COVID-19 restriction impacts, Council introduced a 50% waiver of application fees to encourage the lodgement of development applications by 30 June 2020. This waiver complemented the introduction of the Australian Government's HomeBuilder grant.

Eligibility conditions of the waiver focussed on applicants utilising local businesses to keep jobs and project spending within the local Townsville economy and led to 76 applicants being successful for the fee waiver.

First Home Buyers Incentive

Introduced in Council's Budget and Operational Plan 2020/2021, first home buyers acquiring their first home from 1 July 2020 are eligible for a \$1000 rebate from general rates levied on the property after the date of acquisition. The rebate ends the earlier of 30 June 2021 or at the time the budget allocation is fully allocated.

This policy was approved to provide an added boost to first home buyers, whether it be for an existing property or the construction of a new home with a value of less than \$450,000.

In terms of supporting the local development industry, this concession adds an additional incentive for the purchase of a vacant lot and the construction of a new home. To the end of December, 104 applications have been received for consideration.



Alignment to the Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024

A prosperous city

The underpinnings of a prosperous city are linked to a strong economy with sustainable growth and support for local jobs and business. A prosperous city provides a sense of security and stability for the community.

The role of Planning Services is integral in supporting a strong local economy. The planning scheme has been designed to be risk tolerant and allows prescribed development in identified zones to be undertaken without requiring a development approval. Additionally, ongoing reviews of the planning scheme take place to ensure that levels of assessment are appropriate, and an ongoing focus on making the approval process easier encourages development and in turn supports the local employment.

A clean and green city

A clean and green city strives to create a sustainable future by the protection, maintenance, and enhancement of our unique, natural, and built environment.

Ongoing studies such as the Marine Plant Management Program Review and the Bushfire Hazard Studies all support our local natural environment and its management and preservation.

The team is focused on ensuring that developments include sufficient open space provisions, e.g. built parkland, and preserve the natural environment.

A smarter, faster, better council

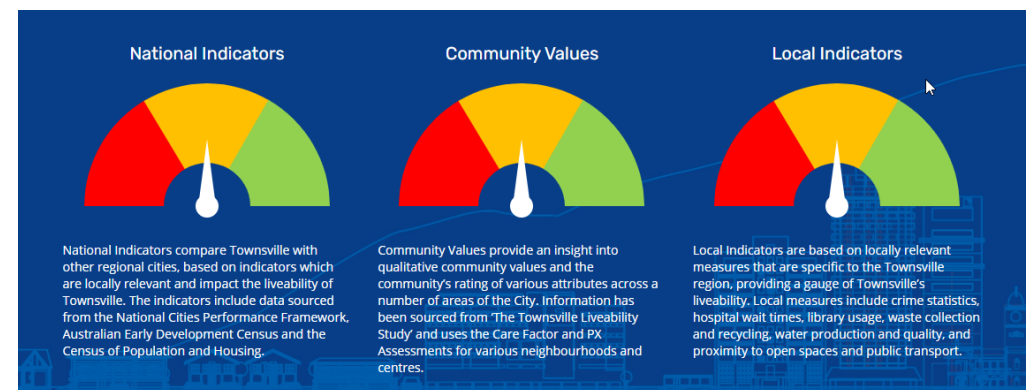
The council displays the reputation of being easy to work with and gains community trust by being transparent and managing resources well.

Planning Services provides customer-focused services in responding to enquiries and assessing applications. The Planning Services Customer Commitment demonstrates our commitment to assessing applications in a timely manner in order to assist the development industry.

A city for people

The underpinnings of a city designed for the community is all about how “liveable” the city is. A combination of a number of factors make a city a place an individual contributes to and where plans for the future are made.

Planning Services has a focus on creating and sustaining a liveable city. Studies such as the Liveability study provide baseline data about the priorities and values of local residents that will help direct the future of the city.



Land Use and Urban Design Unit

2020 achievements

- » **Lansdown Major Amendment:** The major amendment was adopted by Council on 26 May 2020. The amendment created the Lansdown high impact industry and motor sport facility precincts at Calcium.
- » **Development Manual Planning Scheme Policy Annual Review 2020:** The annual review was completed in November 2020. In addition, the Cairns Townsville Mackay Water Alliance Design and Construction Code (CTM Code) was adopted and the Development manual PSP was aligned with the code.
- » **3D Modelling of Townsville's Priority Infill Areas:** This state government-funded project was completed in June 2020 and involved the development of a 3D model of the Townsville CBD and surrounds.
- » **Magnetic Island Trails Vision Plan:** The Vision Plan was completed in February 2020, in collaboration with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.
- » **Street Art Program:** Street art works were commissioned on Stanley Street and Sturt Street and were completed in May 2020.
- » **Liveability Study 2020:** This Year 2 study was undertaken in partnership with Future Cities and was completed in October 2020.
- » **Townsville Integrated Transport Plan:** Public notification of the plan was completed in December 2020.

2021 priorities

- » Townsville City Plan Review
- » Magnetic Island Trails Implementation Plan
- » Marine Plant Management Program Review
- » Bushfire Hazard Study
- » Townsville Urban Design Guideline
- » Greener Townsville Strategy



Infrastructure Planning Unit

The Infrastructure Planning Unit has an important role in the forward planning of the City's infrastructure and undertakes projects and studies related to the performance and suitability of planned infrastructure. These projects and studies help secure the future of the City by helping to ensure that infrastructure needs are sufficient for future demand, and consider adaptation strategies to meet changing environmental influences.

Of note the Infrastructure Planning Unit has completed the following in 2020:

- » A land supply and demand review that has confirmed the Townsville LGA has a land supply supporting residential growth well in excess of 25 years demand.
- » The Road Network Planning Status review, which models the current road network performance and projected demand as at 2026, 2031, and 2036.
- » The Pathway and Cycleway Planning model, which is a demand model and planning tool to prioritise active transport infrastructure projects. New standards of service and effectiveness have been developed for shared pathways and cycling infrastructure.



2021 priorities

The Infrastructure Planning Unit continues into 2021 with a broad range of projects ongoing from 2020 or planned:

- » Local Government Infrastructure Plan Review (LGIP 2022)
- » Townsville Integrated Transport Plan
- » CBD Car Parking Strategy
- » Townsville Floodplain Management Strategy
- » Townsville Floodplain Resilience Program
- » Regional Stormwater Quality Treatment Strategy
- » Coastal Change Adaption Strategy
- » Integrated Water Supply Strategy
- » Water Supply Distribution Planning
- » Sewerage Supply Distribution Planning
- » Declared Service Area Review.

Development Assessment, Infrastructure Assessment, and Assets and Hydraulics Units

2020 was a year of rapid change for the Development Assessment, Infrastructure Assessment, and Assets and Hydraulic Units. The year saw an increase in the volume of applications assessed, reflecting the measures put in place by all levels of government to support the local and broader Australian economies affected by the COVID-19 restrictions.

In response to the heightened demand, the Planning Services Customer Service Commitment, published in late 2020, set out a series of commitments to the development industry and the general public in regard to the way we engage with them, and assessment timeframes for development applications and associated processes.

Engagement

The Planning Services Customer Service Commitment encourages increased engagement with the applicant, for example, to avoid formal information requests where possible, and to issue conditional approvals where appropriate.

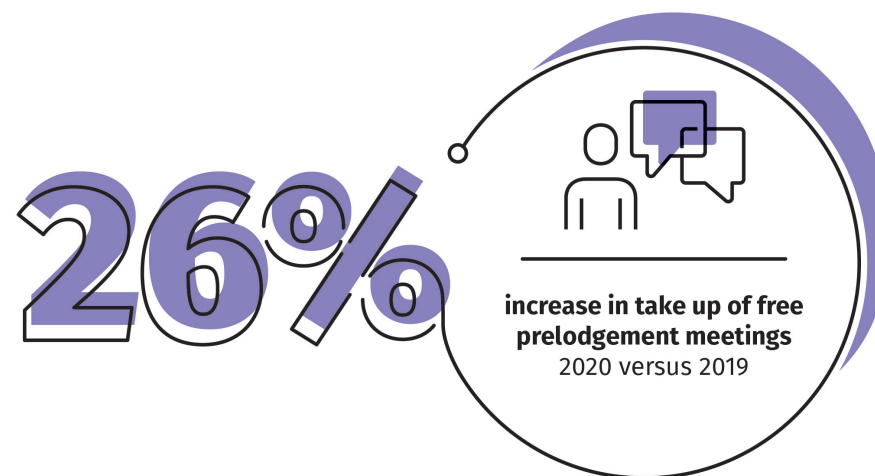
To support greater engagement with applicants, the Unit continues to advocate the use of free pre-lodgement meetings. These meetings provide technical advice to the applicant and assist in the lodgement of properly made applications. This can in turn reduce the assessment time and can reduce the incidence of information requests and negotiated decisions.

In total, 250 pre-lodgement meetings were requested in 2020 to discuss proposed developments. Additional to these meetings, a further 1690 planning enquiry requests were received by phone and email.

Timeframes

Planning Services is committed to providing a high level of service and to assessing planning applications within timeframes less than those prescribed by legislation. In terms of benefits to the applicant, reduced assessment periods allow development to commence earlier, and in turn reduces the development's financial holding costs.

With this aim, the team worked hard in 2020 to introduce efficiencies into the internal assessment process to reduce assessment timeframes, such as a faster file allocation process for applications and direct contact with the applicant to discuss properly made and information requests rather than issuing letters.



2021 priorities

During 2021, Planning Services will continue to move forward and capitalise on the efficiencies introduced in 2020. Reviewing our processes will continue to be business as usual for the unit.

Planning Services will be particularly focusing on:

- » reviewing the ePlanning platform in order to modernise the public interface for improved ease of use
- » reviewing publicly available planning-based information
- » continuing engagement with external stakeholders as per the Customer Service Commitment
- » reviewing and formalising the infrastructure agreements process
- » preparing a performance-based training programme for current and new staff
- » reviewing data to better understand the assessment environment, relative to external influencing factors.

Development Assessment Customer Service Commitments

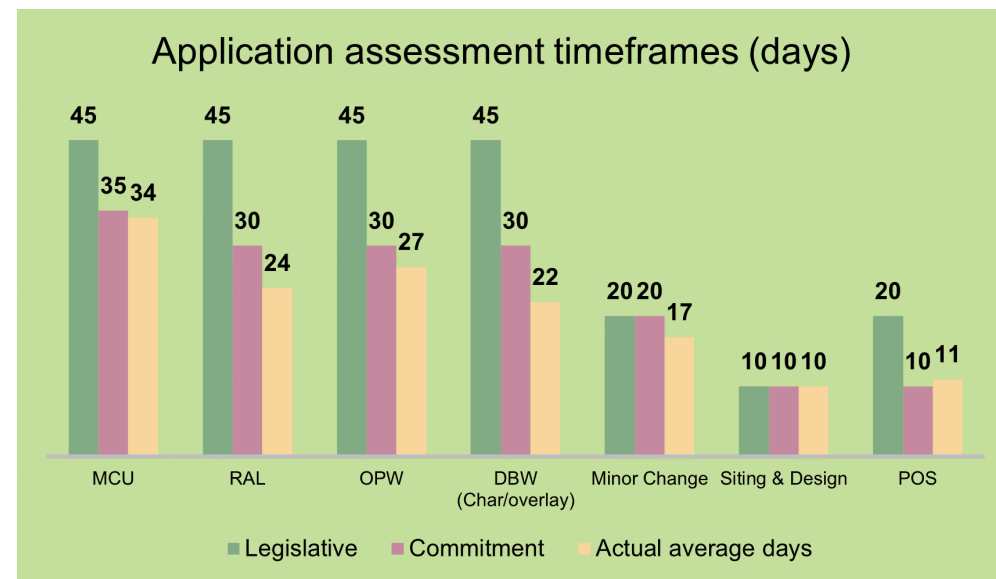
This graph provides information on the average assessment timeframes for a number of the planning applications associated with the Planning Services Customer Service Commitment.

For applications, the average assessment times is calculated in business days from the lodgement of application to the decision date, less any days waiting for responses from the applicant for action notices, requests for information, and responses from referral agencies.

The legislative timeframes show the maximum time allowed (green shading), the customer service commitment, which is our promise to the industry on timeframes that we strive to achieve (red shading), and the actual average days is our performance (yellow shading).

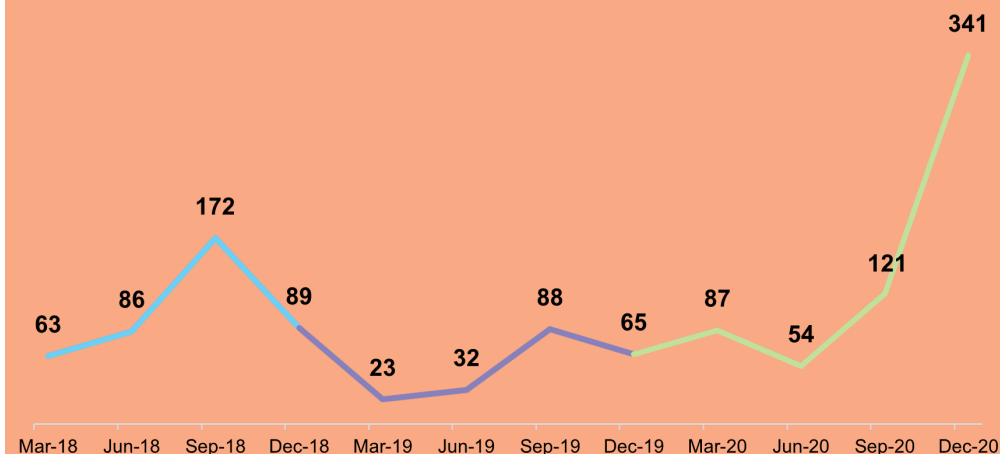
Application assessment timeframes for planning applications are well below legislative requirements. Customer Service Commitment assessment timeframes have been achieved despite the pressures of a significantly increased volume of applications.

The accelerated Plan Right assessment initiative continues to attract lodgements from accredited consultants for the assessment of material change of use applications, reconfigurations of a lot, and plan of surveys approvals.

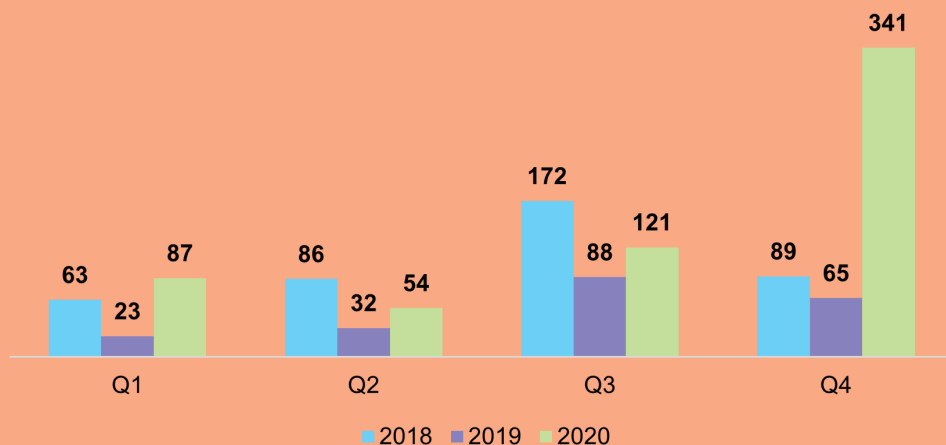


Approval of release of new residential lots

New residential lots approved 2018-2020



New residential lots released by quarter



190%



increase in residential
lots released
2020 versus 2019

The residential lots growth has been buoyed by the introduction of grants and concessions provided by all three levels of government during the 2020 year.

These grants and concessions support the local development and construction industry with flow on effects to the broader local economy.

The results clearly show the effect of the grants and concessions with a striking increase in the number of residential lots released in quarter 3 and 4.

The federal government Home Builder Grant has been the significant influence on these results.

A recent announcement has confirmed an extension to the grant to 31 March 2021.

2020

603 lots released

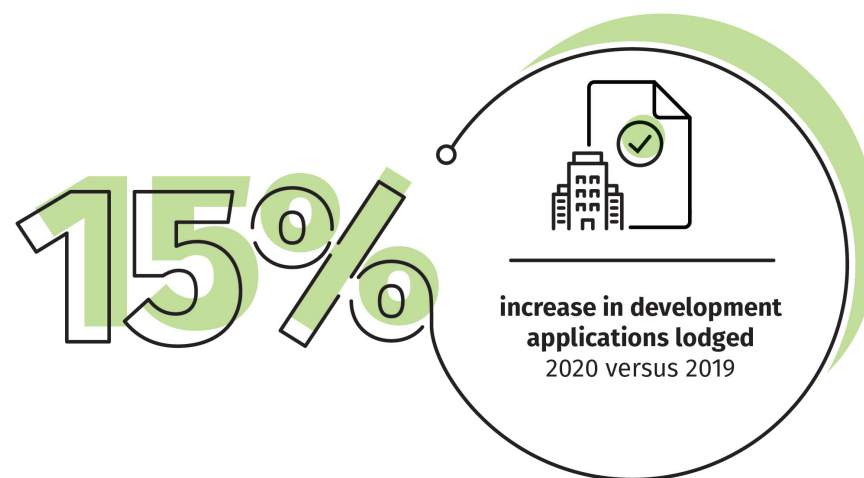
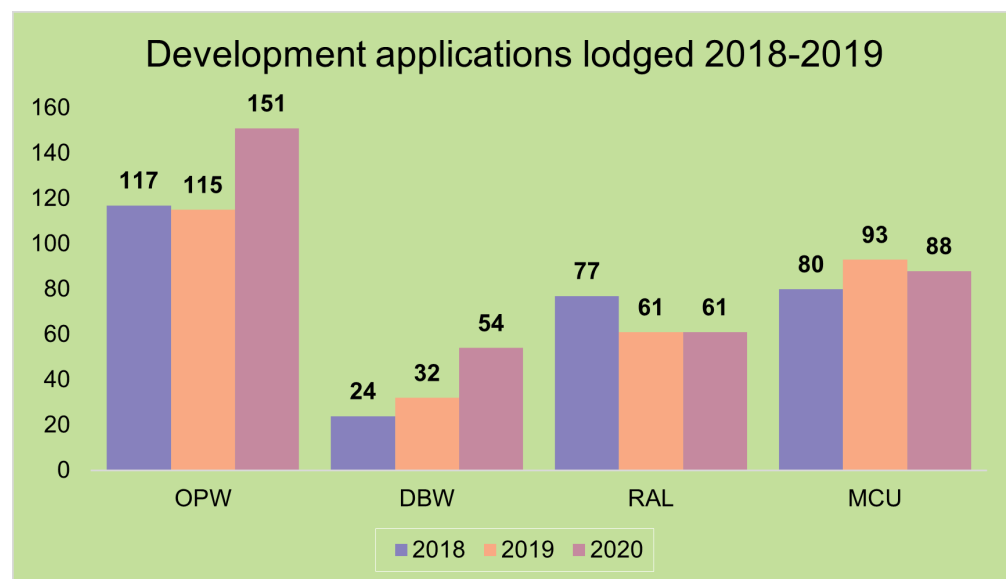
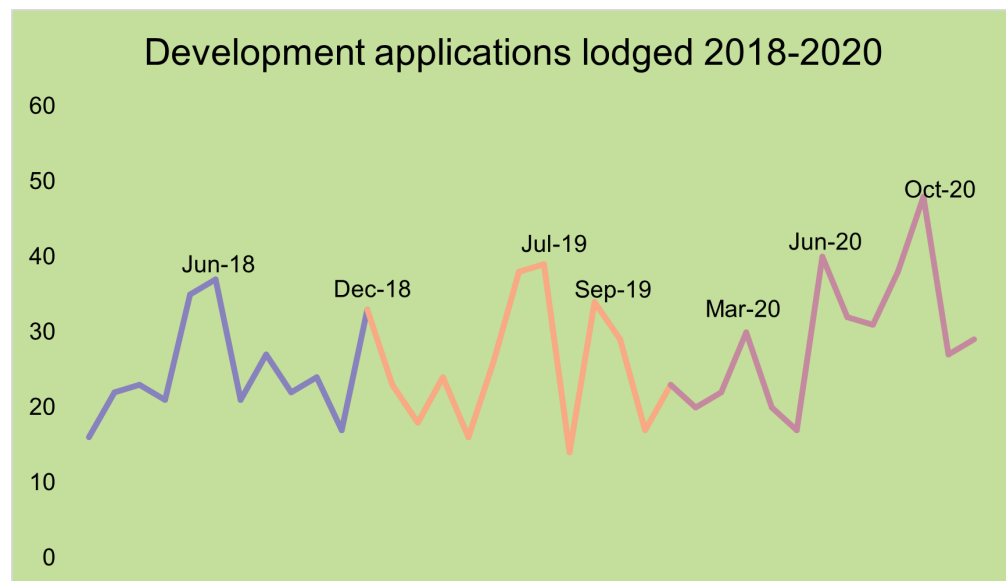
2019

208 lots released

2018

410 lots released

Development applications lodged



These graphs show the lodgement of the following application types:

- » material change of use (MCU)
- » reconfiguration of a lot (RAL)
- » operational works (OPW)
- » development building works (DBW).

October 2020 saw strong growth in the number of applications lodged. A large proportion of these applications are operational works applications associated with reconfiguring a lot approvals to meet demand for land associated with the HomeBuilder Grant.

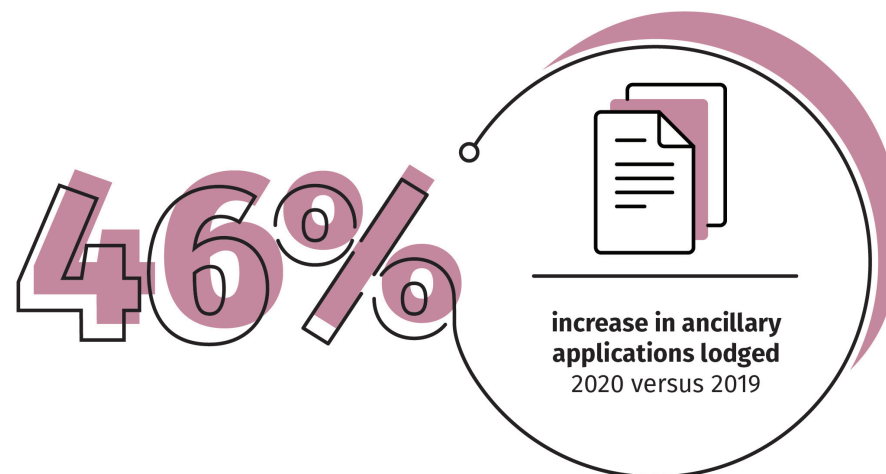
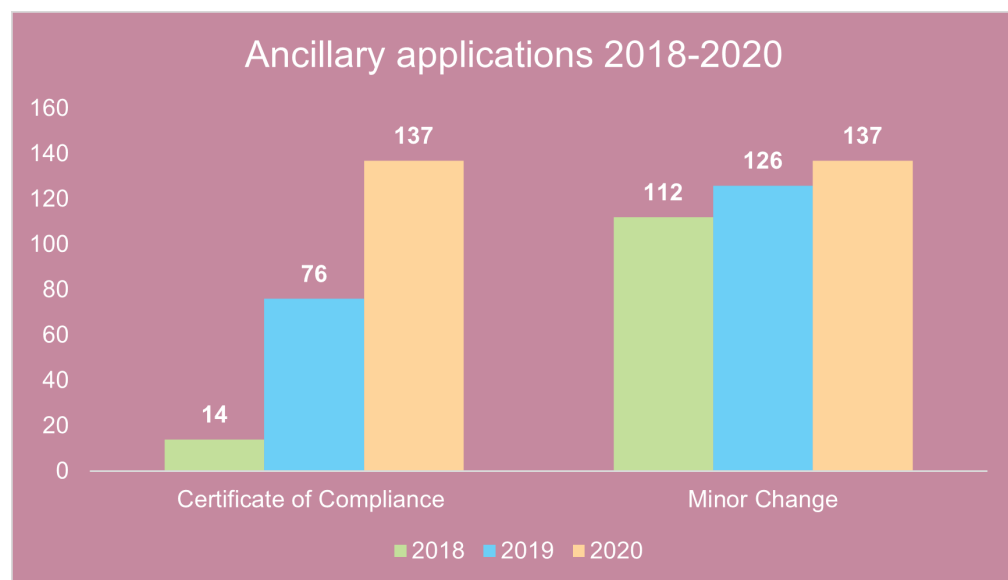
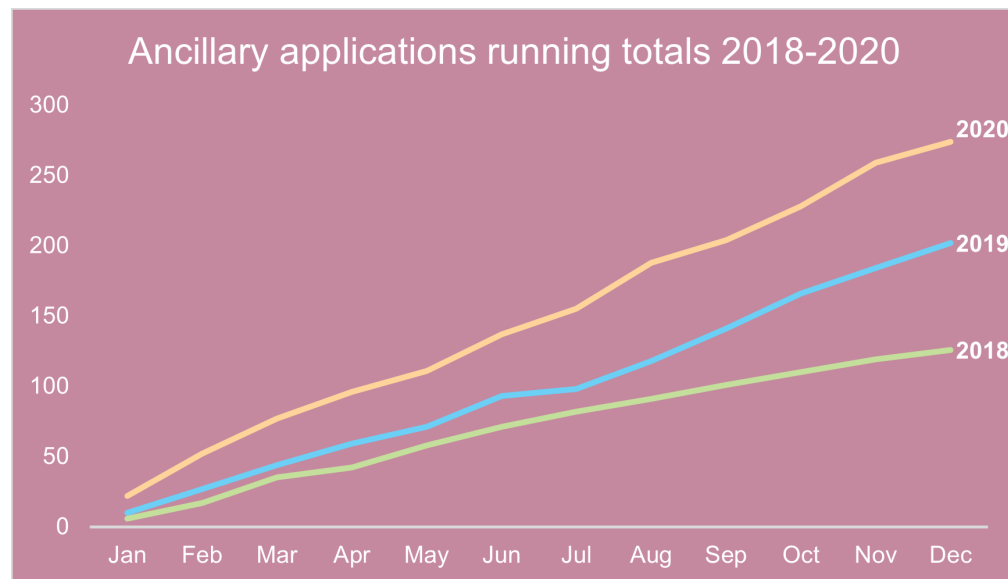
November and December saw a change back to normal application lodgement volumes, reflecting that the window of time before the then expiry of the HomeBuilder grant would not have been sufficient to receive an approval and commence works.

Overall, the volume of applications lodged increased by 15% from 2019 and 27% from 2018.

Development applications lodged

2020	354
2019	301
2018	298

Minor changes and compliance certificate applications



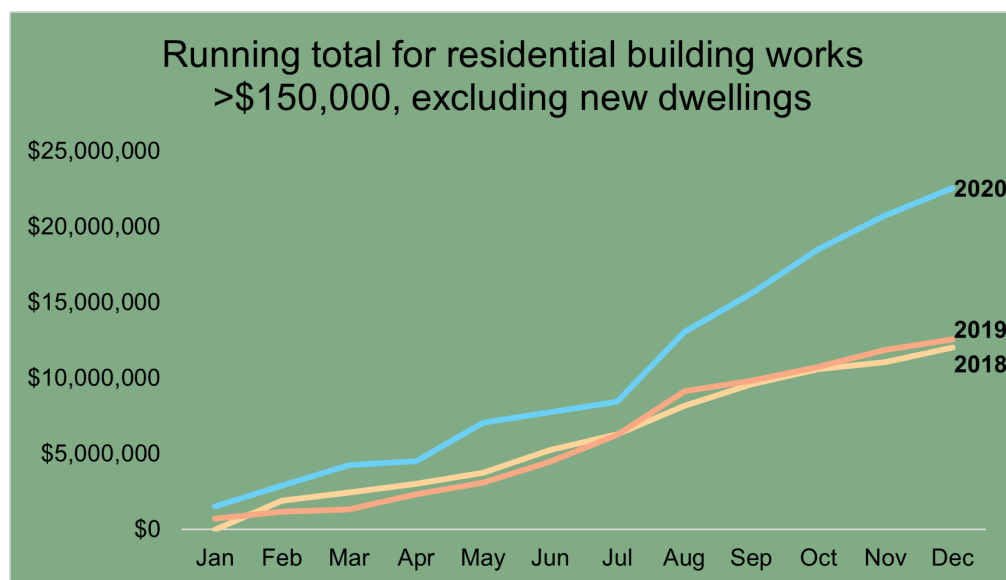
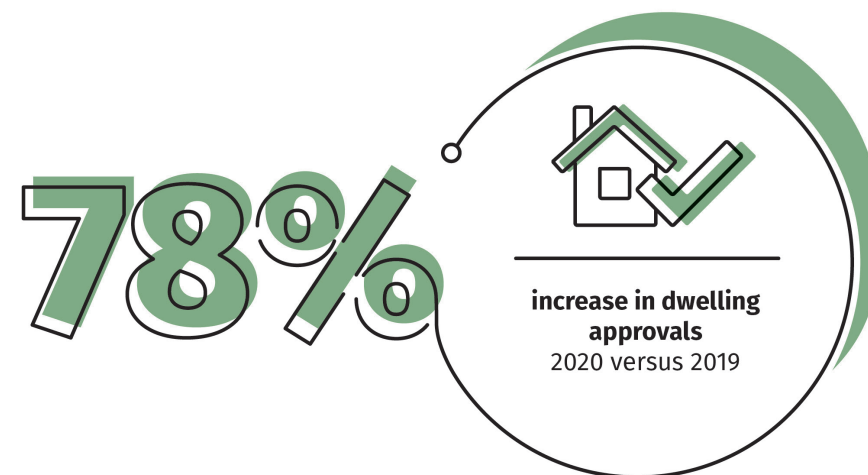
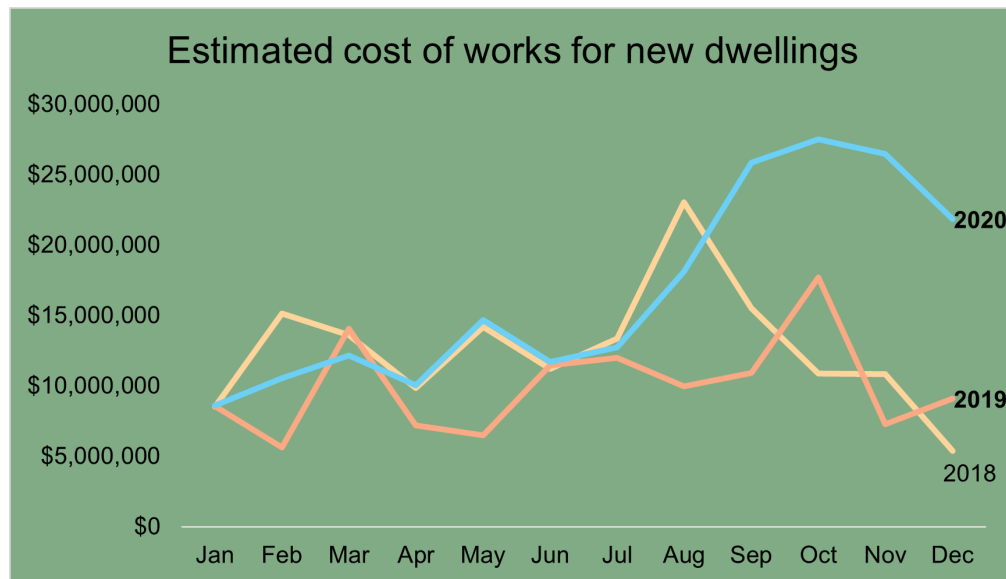
These graphs show ancillary applications associated with existing development approvals. These include requests for minor changes and extension to the currency period, and applications for compliance with approval conditions.

In terms of lodgement volume, the number of compliance applications was higher than requests for minor changes. This is a direct reflection on the requirement for the completion of compliance checks associated with reconfiguring of a lot approvals, in order to allow land to be released for sale.

Ancillary applications lodged

2020	274
2019	202
2018	126

Building approvals - dwelling approvals and renovations

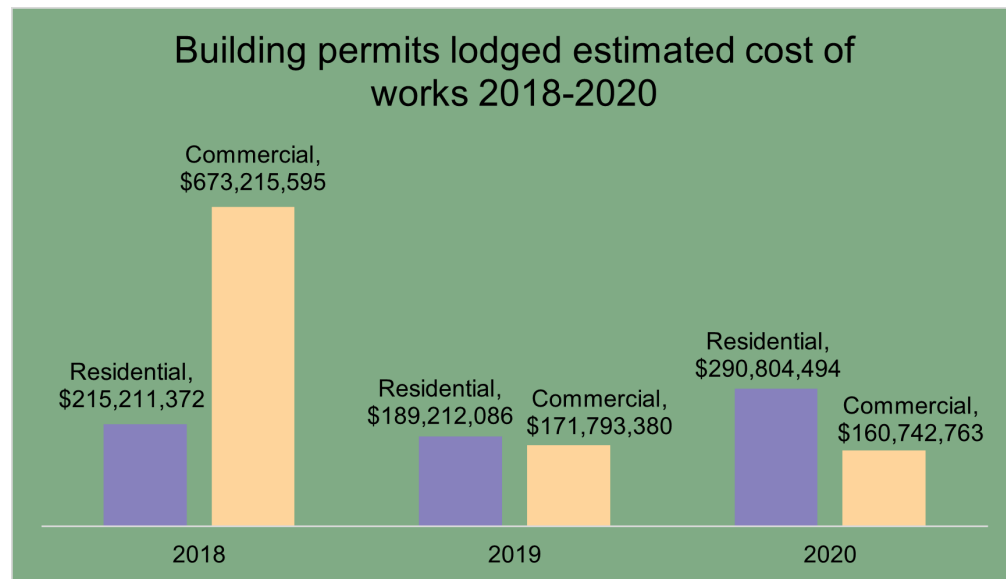


The residential building approvals lodged with Council by building certifiers show an increase compared to the previous two years, reflecting the impact of the HomeBuilder and other grants.

The graph to the upper left shows the estimated cost of works for new dwellings (and works associated with the same approval, such as swimming pools).

The graph to the lower left shows the possible impact that the HomeBuilder grant had on major renovation works. The figures include all residential works that had an estimated cost of works over \$150,000, excluding new dwellings. This includes works such as alterations, additions, swimming pools, sheds and carports.

Building approvals - residential and commercial



The graph on the left shows a breakdown in the estimated cost of works for residential and commercial.

Residential information includes new dwellings, alterations and additions, and pools and spas. Commercial includes commercial works and units (multiple dwellings).

As information is not required to be given to Council for state government works, this information only includes a proportion of state government works.

Note that the 2018 commercial information includes two very large commercial projects, including the North Queensland Stadium works, that had a combined estimated cost of works of nearly \$500 million.

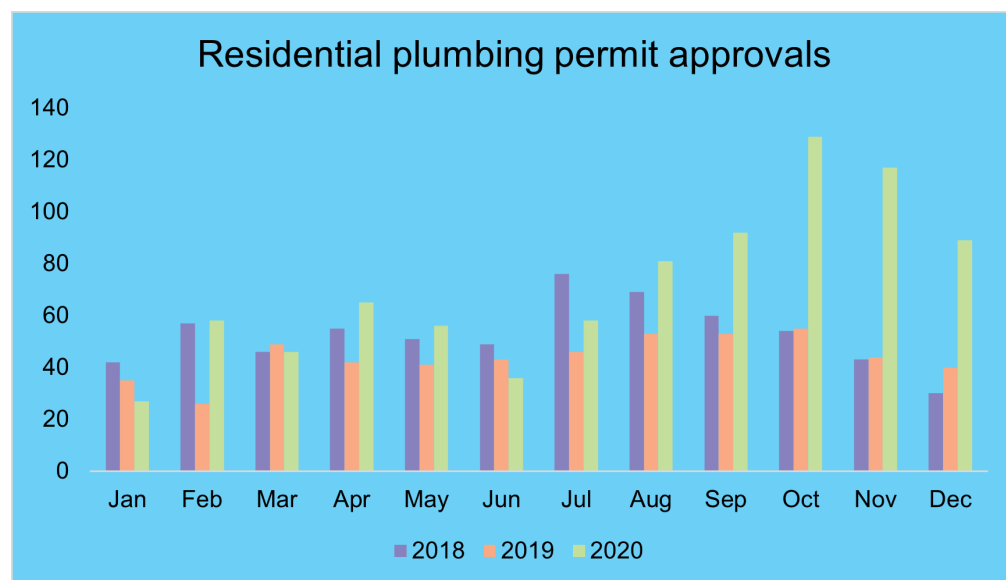
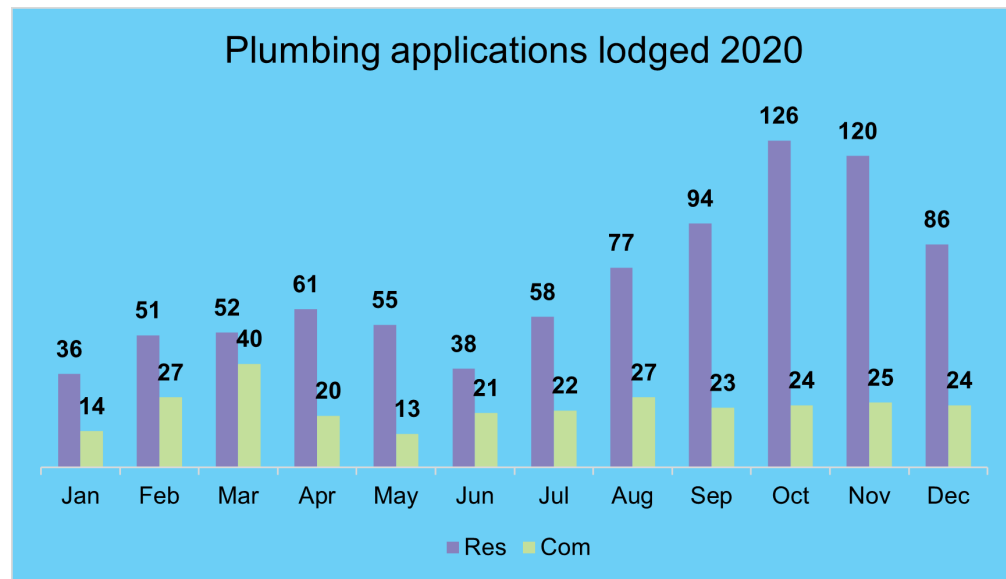
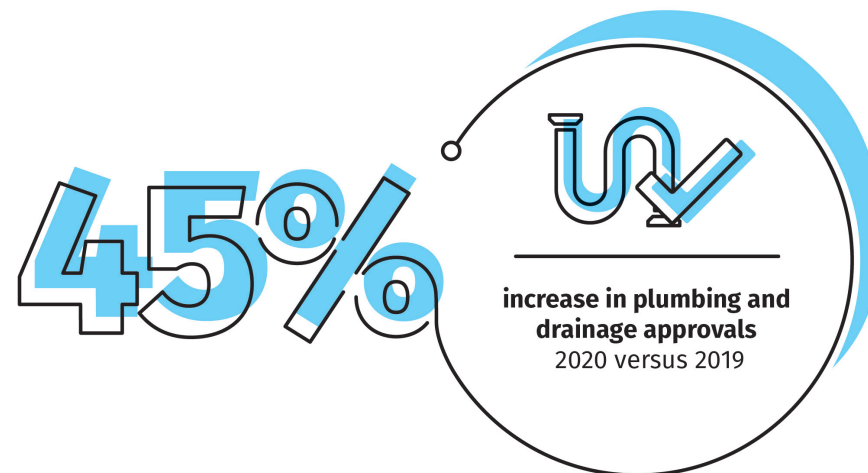
Refer to the glossary for further notes on the data.

Popular suburbs in 2020

	Lodgements	Est. cost of works
2020	3611	\$451,547,257
2019	3171	\$361,005,467
2018	2765	\$888,426,967

Lodgements	Cost of works	New dwellings
» Kirwan	» Bohle Plains	» Burdell
» Burdell	» Burdell	» Bohle Plains
» Bohle Plains	» Douglas	» Jensen
» Kelso	» Garbutt	» Julago
» Jensen	» Jensen	» Mount Low

Plumbing permit approvals



In line with the residential building approval figures, the number of residential plumbing applications also rose in line with the availability of grants and approvals of new dwellings.

The graph on the upper left shows the number of residential and commercial applications for 2020. Nearly three-quarters of residential plumbing applications were Fast track applications, with a legislated assessment timeframe of two days.

The graph to the lower left shows the number of residential plumbing approvals for 2018 to 2020. This includes approvals for both sewerred and non-sewerred properties.

Glossary

Building approvals

Building approval data is not created or approved by Council. Council is responsible under the *Building Act 1975* to act as a repository for building approval records. When planned work requires a building permit, the developer engages a private building certifier, who then assesses the work as required. These private certifiers are required under the Building Act to provide copies of certain records to the local government, such as decision notices and final certificates.

Information for state and federal government work is not required to be given to Council. This should be taken into consideration when analysing the information (the estimated value of works may not include developments such as new schools, hospital upgrades or defence works).

DBW – Development building work

Assessment of proposed building works on lots that are located in zones such as Character Residential Zone or where the property is encumbered by an overlay such as Coastal Environment

MCU – Material change of use

Required when a material change of use of premises is proposed, e.g. starting a new use, re-establishing a use that has been abandoned or changing the intensity or scale of the use.

OPW – Operational work

In the context of day-to-day business, operational works commonly includes infrastructure works associated with development being sewerage, water, roads, and stormwater. Operational works may also include excavating or filling, clearing vegetation, road works, advertising devices.

PlanRight applications

PlanRight applications are those identified application types that are assessed by approved external consultants. Once lodged, council issues the decision notice via an accelerated process.

Plumbing applications and approvals

Only permit work is approved by Council (state government legislation also categorises notifiable work, minor work and unregulated work). Permit work is a type of plumbing and drainage work that requires a licensed person to perform. The figures include both sewerer and non-sewerer properties.

POS – Plan of survey

POS lodgements are associated with the approval of a plan of survey. This allows newly created lot/s to be registered and introduced to the market for sale.

Properly made

An application must be deemed properly made to allow assessment to proceed. Legislation prescribes the minimum requirements for an application to be properly made, such as correct documentation and payment of fees.

RAL – Reconfiguring a lot

The subdivision, amalgamation, and realignment/rearrangement of lot boundaries, creating and easement and agreements for community titles schemes (CMS).

