



10 Questions with...

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ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY BOROUGH COUNCIL



MEETING HOUSING NEEDS & DELIVERY

1. Northern Ireland continues to face housing pressures. How is Antrim and Newtownabbey responding to local housing need?

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council continues to be a key location for housing delivery, particularly family homes. Our role in the Planning Department is to enable the delivery of this much-needed housing through the planning system and ensure the right framework is in place to support sustainable growth.

The Council is progressing its new Local Development Plan (LDP), with the first stage of the plan adopted in July 2025 containing one of Northern Ireland's first affordable housing policies. This ensures affordable provision is now an important consideration in live applications, assisting to alleviate the local housing need with Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Interviewer



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2. What are the key barriers to delivery?

While some approved schemes remain undelivered, ANBC generally continues to see strong and consistent housing delivery. The challenge is that the LDP process remains slow in terms of delivery. ANBC are progressing on the second stage of their plan, where sites will be zoned for housing, however the lag between the first stage and second stage of the LDP process acts as a barrier to delivering sustainable homes. The system needs to move much faster if it is to support housing need effectively.

Another key barrier we face is the quality of applications submitted. Proposals may be submitted that often do not meet the standards expected in Northern Ireland's Planning Guidance document "Creating Places", or planning policy itself. We offer premeeting with applicants and engage early to address these matters in order to front load applications and have also introduced a Validation Checklist to assist applicants with what is required for their submission. Better quality submissions will streamline delivery.

Outside of the Council's control, infrastructure constraints remain a major issue across Northern Ireland, particularly wastewater capacity. We work closely with our statutory partner, Northern Ireland Water, to find solutions, and the Council continues to engage with central government in relation to barriers to economic growth.

3. How does the current policy framework in Northern Ireland support or constrain housing growth compared to other UK regions?

Overall, the planning framework is supportive of housing growth and the delivery of homes to meet identified need. The policy landscape in Northern Ireland continues to evolve, with the Department for Infrastructure's Housing Growth Indicators providing an important evidence base for determining housing growth figures, while the Department for Communities' Housing Supply Strategy promotes a broader and more ambitious approach to increasing housing supply and addressing housing need. As Councils seek to reflect these complementary policy considerations within their plans, a pragmatic and flexible approach at examination stage will be important to support sound, sustainable and deliverable outcomes.



ECONOMIC GROWTH & PLACE-MAKING

4. What are the key sectors driving economic growth in Antrim and Newtownabbey, and how is the planning system supporting their expansion?

ANBC priority growth sectors include advanced manufacturing, logistics and distribution, aerospace and defence and health and life sciences.

Planning plays a central role in supporting those sectors through the provision of high-quality employment land in strategic locations. The Borough currently has more than 100ha of employment land available, with additional sites to come forward through the new LDP.

The Borough is at a major advantage, with both Belfast and Larne Harbours within proximity, easily accessible by strategic road infrastructure and the Borough containing Belfast International Airport. This makes ANBC highly attractive for investment.

The Council has worked hard to create a proactive and responsive planning service, with a joined-up approach across planning, economic development, building control, regeneration and wider Council functions helping to accelerate delivery and support inward investment.

5. How important is place-making in attracting investment, and how is the Council balancing growth with creating high-quality, sustainable communities?

Place-making is fundamental to attracting investment. Businesses increasingly prioritise locations that offer quality of life, connectivity and long-term sustainability alongside commercial advantages.

ANBC positions itself as more than simply a business location, offering a wider investment ecosystem combining infrastructure, skills and attractive places to live and work.

The Council's focus on innovation clusters - modern business parks and transport connectivity - supports both inward investment and the retention of skilled workers.

Balancing growth with sustainability requires a plan-led approach rather than reactive development. Alongside clear design standards, the Council continues to invest in public realm improvements, town centres and wider community initiatives to support vibrant and resilient places.

6. To what extent is collaboration (with neighbouring Councils or regional basis) important in delivering strategic development across Northern Ireland?

Collaboration is essential when delivering strategic development, particularly where infrastructure, investment and skills operate beyond individual Council boundaries.

Initiatives such as the Belfast Region City Deal demonstrate how Councils and stakeholders can work collectively to secure funding and support wider economic transformation. Collaboration with organisations such as Invest NI is also critical in accessing investment opportunities and promoting the region globally.

For ANBC, our challenge is balancing local ambition with regional decision-making structures, making ongoing dialogue and partnership working essential.

PLAN-LED SYSTEM & REFORM

7. With Local Development Plans progressing across Northern Ireland, what lessons have been learned so far, and what challenges remain in advancing a plan-led system?

The biggest challenge faced is that the LDP process is simply too slow. There is clear pressure on plans to support housing and economic growth, but the system remains highly complex and time-consuming, with plans prepared by Councils having to go through multiple layers of review by central government and independent examination. Early and continued dialogue with all key stakeholders including Elected Members, the public and Government Departments / consultees has been a key lesson learnt to date.

Going forward reforms are needed to streamline the wider planning and legislative framework alongside a more coordinated approach across key stakeholders to ensure the efficient delivery of sound plans. This will allow the planning system to support the strategic economic, social and environmental objectives of both the Northern Ireland Executive and local Councils.



8. Do you feel the Northern Ireland planning system is agile enough to respond to changing economic and social needs? If not, what reforms would make the biggest difference?

The planning system has improved significantly since powers transferred to local government, but there is still work to do if it is to become fully agile and reach its full potential.

Streamlining legislative and administrative processes will help Councils respond more quickly to investment opportunities and evolving housing needs, and ensure that infrastructure delivery is at pace with Council ambitions.

At ANBC, the focus has been on creating a solutions-led planning service with a strong emphasis on engagement, collaboration and delivery.

"Greater clarity around roles and responsibilities is needed, alongside a more streamlined process."



RESOURCING & SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

9. Resourcing is a common challenge across planning authorities. How is your team managing workload, and what are the greatest pressures within the system?

The Council has invested heavily in supporting and developing its planning team through trainee schemes, student placements and continuous professional development opportunities. We work closely with Queen's University and the University of Ulster with staff being able to avail of post graduate opportunities. Our Council has also developed its own Strategic Leadership Course to ensure our senior planners are equipped to lead and manage teams effectively, driving performance and delivering results.

A strong culture of engagement is also central to our Council's approach, with developers and the public regularly commenting on the accessibility of officers and the proactive nature of the planning service provided. This sits alongside my responsibility to lead performance improvement and organisational change in the Council's Planning Section to ensure structures and processes are working effectively.

Beyond the Council, however, some of the greatest pressures sit elsewhere in the wider system, such as infrastructure constraints and consultee capacity.

FUTURE OF PLANNING

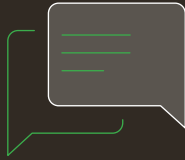
10. Looking ahead, what changes – whether policy, investment, or industry behaviour would most help unlock growth and improve outcomes across ANBC/Ni?

Unlocking growth across NI will require planning reform, infrastructure investment and a stronger collaboration between all parts of the system.

The planning process must become faster, more streamlined and more responsive, while still ensuring high-quality outcomes. LDPs need to progress more efficiently through the system to provide certainty for investment and housing delivery. Issues such as infrastructure also need to be addressed to aid delivery.

Above all, there is a need for a more united approach between central government, Councils, infrastructure providers and stakeholders. Planning does not operate in isolation - it sits alongside economic growth, transport, health, education and place-making, and successful delivery depends on all of those sectors working together.





Nexus 10 Questions With... is a series of interviews with key figures in the development sector, exploring in detail their thoughts on the opportunities for delivering growth on their patch, the challenges they are facing and what the industry can do to help overcome those.



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