

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2015/16 ANNUAL STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(April 2015 – March 2016: Final figures)



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Key Points

- There were 12,220 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during 2015/16, a decrease of 5.0% over the previous financial year. This comprised 12,069 local development, 145 major development and 6 regionally significant development applications.
- During 2015/16, 11,034 planning applications were decided, down 5.3% on the previous year and 63.4% below the peak level of 30,161 recorded in 2005/06 before the economic downturn.
- In 2015/16, the average processing time for major development applications across all councils was 46.4 weeks, over sixteen weeks longer than the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks. Average processing times ranged from 28.2 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey to 70.2 weeks in Fermanagh and Omagh. Antrim and Newtownabbey was the only council to meet the statutory target.
- The number of local planning applications received in NI during 2015/16 was 12,069, an average of just over 3,000 applications each quarter. Belfast City (1,557), Newry, Mourne and Down (1,423) and Mid Ulster (1,371) received the highest number of local planning applications.
- In NI, across councils it took on average 19.4 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal in 2015/16, over four weeks longer than the statutory target. The shortest average processing time was 14.0 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey whilst the longest was 34.8 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down. Three of the 11 councils, namely Antrim and Newtownabbey (14.0), Fermanagh and Omagh (14.4) and Mid and East Antrim (14.4) were within the 15 week target whilst Mid-Ulster was just a little above it at 15.2 weeks.
- The number of enforcement cases opened in Northern Ireland during 2015/16 was 2,914, an increase of 15.8% compared to a year earlier. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any year since 2010/11 when 3,117 cases were opened. Belfast City (406) and Ards and North Down (338) opened the largest number of cases in 2015/16.
- Nine of the eleven councils met the statutory enforcement case target to process 70% of cases to conclusion within 39 weeks of complaint with a high of 85.9% concluded within 39 weeks in Mid and East Antrim followed by Antrim and Newtownabbey (84.2%). Newry, Mourne and Down (54.1%) and Fermanagh and Omagh (63.8%) did not meet the target although the performance of the latter did improve in the second half of the year.
- The overall Northern Ireland approval rate for all planning applications for 2015/16 was 93.7%, an increase of half a percentage point over the year from 93.2% in 2014/15. Over the last four years, the approval rate of planning applications in NI has been fairly stable. Annual planning approval rates varied across councils from highs of 96.7% in both Derry City and Strabane and Mid Ulster down to 90.8% in Newry Mourne and Down.
- In 2015/16, renewable energy applications received fell by 38.6% when compared to the previous year and were down by three fifths when compared to 2011/12. More than 7 out of every 10 renewable energy applications received in 2015/16 were for single wind turbines. Although single wind turbines continue to dominate renewable energy applications, over the last year applications have decreased by a very sizeable 41.8%.

Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for the new district councils, and the former Department of the Environment, during 2015/16. Note that from 8th May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred to the new Department of Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental reorganisation.

Whilst the bulletin and accompanying tables report annual data for 2015/16, the detailed tables will still retain a quarterly breakdown for completeness. Commentary will be mainly focussed, however, on annual changes although, in the absence of historic annual data for councils, reference may instead be made to their more recent quarterly figures. Please note that all quarterly figures for the 2015/16 year are now final and will not be subject to further scheduled revision.

Background

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the '2011 Act') sets out the legislative framework for development management in NI and provides that, from 1 April 2015, councils now largely have responsibility for this planning function. Planning applications for development categorised as being either major development or local development are determined by the councils. Responsibility for planning applications for regionally significant development rests with the Department. In addition, the Department retains responsibility for legacy 'Article 31' applications (i.e. Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991). Furthermore, the Department has the power to 'call in' both major and local development applications from councils, where it so directs, and determine them (see 'User Guidance' for a fuller description of the different planning application types). Responsibility for planning legislation, and for formulating and co-ordinating policy for securing the orderly and consistent development of land, remains with the Department.

Consequently, the responsibility for development management is shared between the 11 new councils and the Department.

The Department will continue to have responsibility for the provision and publication of Official Statistics relating to the overall development management function, including enforcement. The quarterly and annual reports provide the NI headline results split by district council (and the Department where relevant). These data will also provide councils with information on their performance in order to meet their own reporting obligations under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. Note that whilst pre-transfer activity volumes can be mapped historically to the new organisational areas from which the demands arise, it would not be valid to do the same with performance data as the newly established district councils did not exist, nor do they neatly overlap with the old area planning office jurisdictions. This first year, therefore, will be regarded as a base year for the reporting of performance-related data at council level with comparative trend data then building from that point onwards. Note that historic comparisons of performance at NI level are still possible.

Statistics included in this report

This bulletin provides an overall view of planning activity across NI. It provides summary statistical information on council progress across the 3 new statutory targets for major development applications, local development applications and enforcement cases as laid out in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015. It also provides information relating to Departmental performance against quantitative Corporate Business Plan targets.

All of the information underlying the charts and graphs featured in this bulletin are included in accompanying Excel tables (see Appendix 1 for additional 'Definitions' used in these tables). This summary bulletin provides an overview and high level commentary with more details and further analyses available in the Excel tables. Where relevant, some of the

more detailed findings may be referred to in the commentary.

Revisions and changes since Quarter 1 2015/16

(i) Major versus Local Classification - following the publication of the first quarter provisional bulletin in November 2015, a number of planning application classification issues were identified which required further investigation. This led to a number of revisions to the first quarter provisional figures which are reflected in later quarterly bulletins. The validation exercise additionally highlighted some inconsistencies in major and local development classification between the current year and 2014/15 when the new classification hierarchy was first administratively implemented. It was decided, therefore, that 2015/16, when the classification hierarchy was given full legal effect, will be the base year for future comparisons of major and local development activity. As such, back-comparisons at council level with 2014/15 for these application types will not be made in this report.

(ii) 'Discharge of Conditions' - whilst forming part of a council's workload, these are not planning applications per se and hence should be excluded from the assessment of target processing performance. This led to some further revisions from the previously released first quarter results. However, whilst there were some small changes to activity volumes, their exclusion did not materially affect average processing times across the vast majority of councils. See 'User Guidance' for further detail on excluded planning activity. Table 9.1, in the accompanying bulletin tables, provides volumes and processing times for all such 'non-application' workload.

(iii) Legacy versus New Council Activity – in order to provide additional context around council performance, two new analyses have been included in the companion tables. Table 8.1 shows the volume of legacy work which each council inherited on 1st April 2015 and to what extent it has since been reducing, while Table 8.2 splits out processing performance for major and local development into legacy versus new council

applications. These new tables will be retained until the legacy applications become a negligible part of overall council workload.

Future Releases

The next quarterly release is due in September 2016. This will contain planning data up to 30th June 2016 (i.e. for Q1 2016/17) and will return the release of planning statistics to their regular quarterly schedule.

The next annual report covering 2016/17 is planned for release in late June 2017.

See Gov.UK Release Calendar for release dates of future publications – <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>.

1. Overall NI Planning Activity

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, annually from 2002/03 – 2015/16

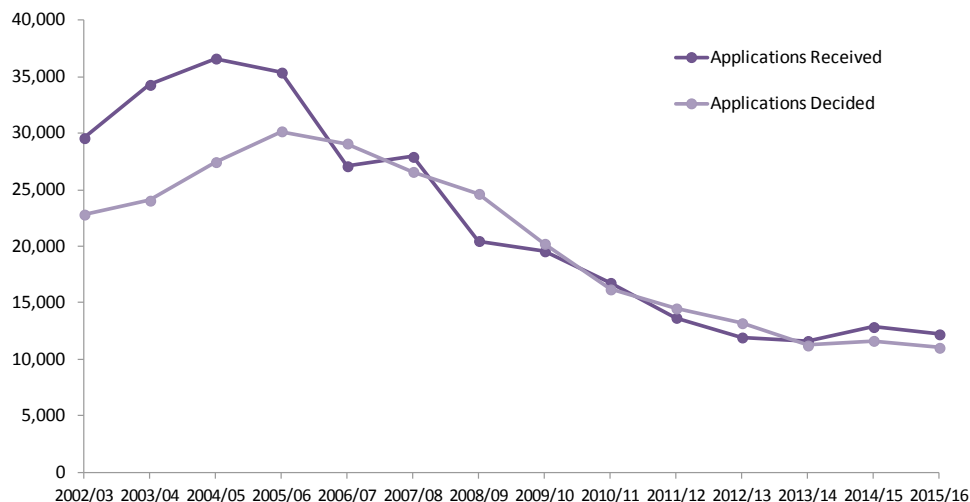


Fig 1.2 Applications received and decided by council, 2015/16



Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in 2015/16 was **12,220**, a decrease of 5.0% on the previous financial year (12,864). Since the peak in 2004/05 (36,593), the number of planning applications being received each year had generally been declining in line with the economic downturn. However, from 2012/13 the volume of applications received each year has largely stabilised.

In 2015/16, Belfast City council received the most (1,592) planning applications, followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (1,443); between them accounting for nearly one quarter (24.8%) of all applications received across NI. The lowest number of applications were received in Antrim and Newtownabbey (722) and Mid and East Antrim (819).

Over the year the volume of planning applications received fell in six of the eleven councils with the largest declines in percentage terms occurring in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-16.4%), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (-15.9%) and Fermanagh and Omagh (-14.0%). Where increases were recorded, the largest of these were in Belfast city (+5.1%), Derry City and Strabane (+4.9%) and Mid Ulster (+4.1%). In Mid and East Antrim and in Causeway Coast and Glens there was no change over the year in the number of planning applications received.

In NI during 2015/16, there were **66.4 planning applications received per 10,000 population**. This is a stark decline when compared to the 214.6 applications per 10,000 population made in 2004/05.

At council level Mid Ulster (96.5) and Causeway Coast and Glens (85.9) received the most planning applications per 10,000 population, whilst, Belfast City (47.3) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (51.6) received the least. The supporting Excel table provides activity per head of population for each new district council.

[Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

Applications Decided

The number of planning **decisions** issued during 2015/16 was **11,034**, a decrease of 5.3% on the previous year (**11,646**), and 63.4% below the peak level of 30,161 in 2005/06.

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning authority out to councils, the level of decisions dropped sharply. However, notably from Q2 2015/16, the number of planning decisions issued has increased quarter on quarter. In Q4 2015/16, the number of decisions exceeded the number of applications received for the first time since Q2 2013/14 although, across the full year, decisions were still 9.7% below the total number of applications received.

The number of planning applications decided across councils in 2015/16 ranged from highs of 1,316 in Belfast City and 1,233 in Mid Ulster to 686 in Antrim and Newtownabbey, partly reflecting the higher volume of applications which they each receive. Mid & East Antrim and Fermanagh and Omagh were the only councils to decide more applications across the course of the year than they received.

Between 2009/10 and 2013/14, the number of applications received and decided each year were very similar, particularly when compared to the early part of the previous decade when many more applications were received annually than decided. Over the last two years, however, the number of applications received each year has returned to being higher than the number decided in the same period.

In 2015/16, 463 applications were withdrawn which represents a decline of 9.9% on the previous year (514). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during 2015/16 they processed to decision or withdrawal 148 discharge of conditions, 418 certificates of lawfulness and 351 non material changes. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

Approval Rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications for 2015/16 was **93.7%**, an increase of half a percentage point over the year from 93.2% in 2014/15. Over the last four years the approval rate of planning applications in NI has been fairly stable.

During the year, planning approval rates varied across councils from a high of 96.7% in both Derry City and Strabane and Mid Ulster to 90.8% in Newry Mourne and Down. Six out of the eleven councils had an approval rate which was lower than the overall NI approval rate of 93.7%.

[Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

Fig 1.3 Approval rates by council, 2015/16

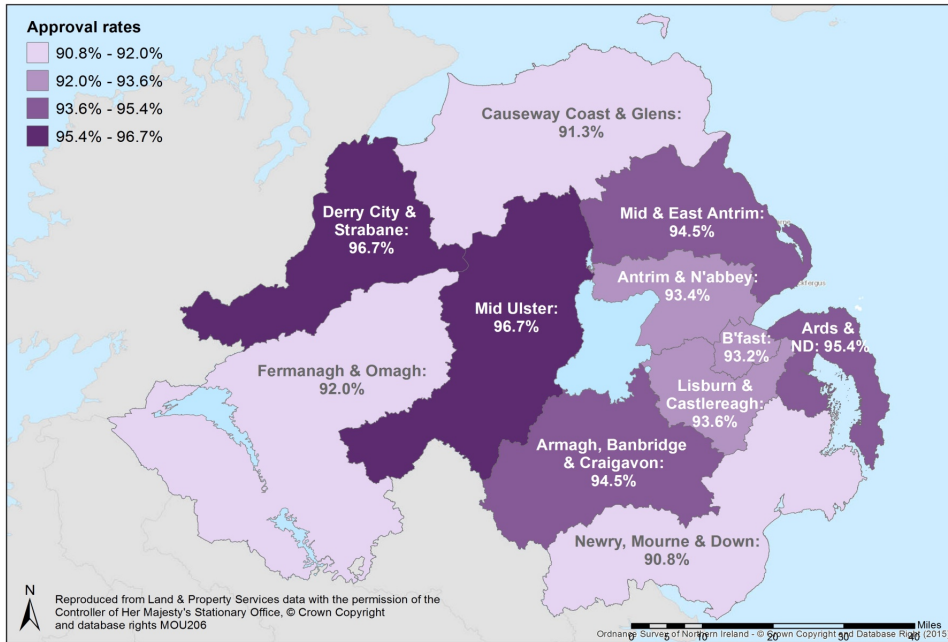
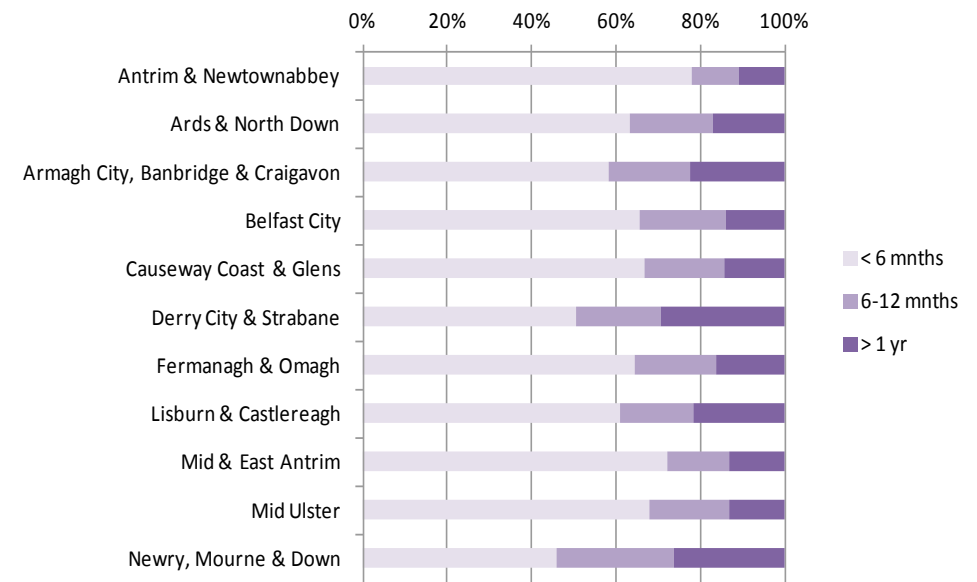


Fig 1.4 Live applications by council at end of Mar 2016



[Refer to Table 1.3](#)

Live applications¹

At NI level, the number of **live applications greater than one year old** at the end of March 2016 was **1,445**. At the end of March 2016, 1 out of every 5 live applications were in the system over one year compared with 1 in 7 at the end of March 2015. This represents an increase in the proportion of cases over one year old from 14.5% of all live applications at the end of March 2015 to 19.6% at the end of March 2016.

The proportion of live applications greater than one year old at the end of March 2016 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.4. Antrim and Newtownabbey had the lowest proportion of cases over one year (11.0%), which equates to nearly 1 in every 9 applications compared to almost 1 in every 3 in Derry City and Strabane (29.2%).

[Refer to Table 1.4](#)

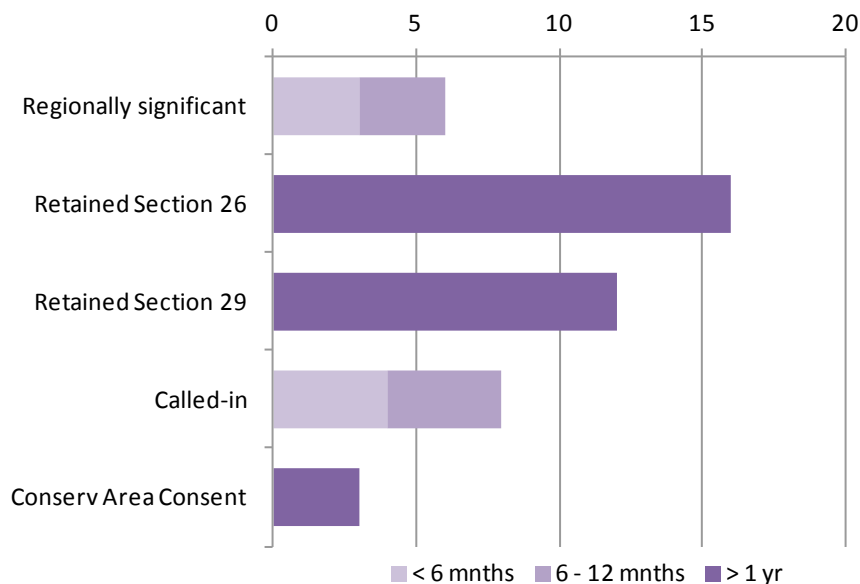
¹ It is important to note that cases currently over one year will have been inherited from the Department.

2. Departmental Activity

At the end of March 2016 there were **6** ongoing **regionally significant development** (RSD) applications, **8** called-in; **3** conservation area consent (i.e. consent to demolish); and **28** retained applications.

[Refer to Table 2.2](#)

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end Mar'16



During 2015/16, the Department received **6** RSD planning applications, **4** of which were for renewable energy proposals.

RSD applications are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or

involve a substantial departure from a local development plan. No RSD applications were decided during the 2015/16.

It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing 50% of Regionally Significant Planning Applications to a Ministerial Recommendation within 30 weeks, subject to pre-application discussions having taken place and meeting the requirements of relevant Environmental Legislation.

During 2015/16, six regionally significant applications were submitted to the Department for determination. At the 31 March all of these applications were live in the planning system. Of these, four were not subject to Pre-Application Discussions and therefore will not fall under the remit of the target. The remaining two cases, taking account of environmental requirements, currently have a target date for decision in 2016/17 and therefore will be assessed in future reports alongside any new applications which may come into scope.

The Department reached decisions on **18** applications during 2015/16. Nine of these decisions were on 'retained section 26' (*former Article 31*). These are major applications being processed by the Department as Article 31 as a decision had not been issued before the 1st April 2015.

Five decisions were reached on 'retained section 29' (former non Article 31) applications during this period. As they were close to determination at 1 April 2015, they were retained for determination as if the Department had called them in under Section 29 of the Planning Act (NI) 2015.

The further **4** decisions were on ‘called-in’² applications – these initially went to councils and the Minister/Department subsequently directed that the applications should fall to the Department for determination.

During 2015/16 the 5 applications were withdrawn, 3 were Retained Section 26 and 2 were Retained Section 29.

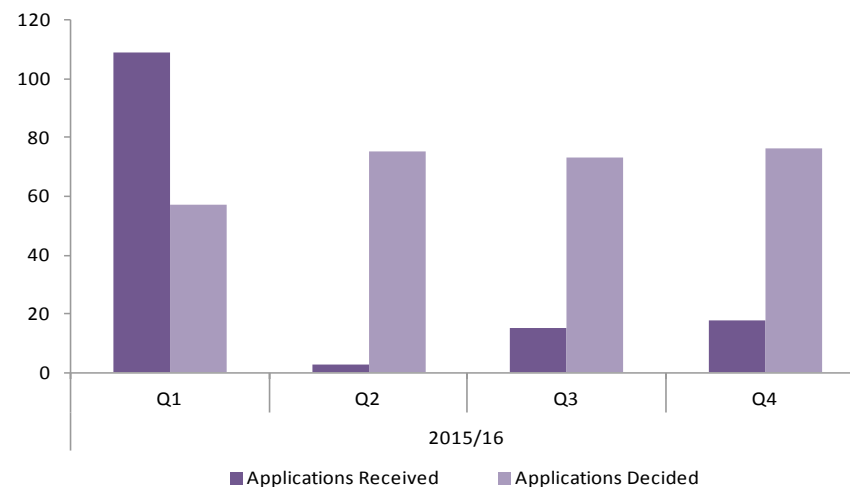
Overall, the average processing time in 2015/16 for those applications which were processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal was **137.2** weeks.

[Refer to Table 2.1](#)

3. Major Development Planning Applications

Major Developments have important economic, social and environmental implications. The majority of major applications are multiple housing, commercial and government and civic types of development. Excluding RSD applications (reported in Section 2), the number of **major** planning applications **received** by councils, during 2015/16 was **145**.

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, quarterly Apr 2015 – Mar 2016^(r)



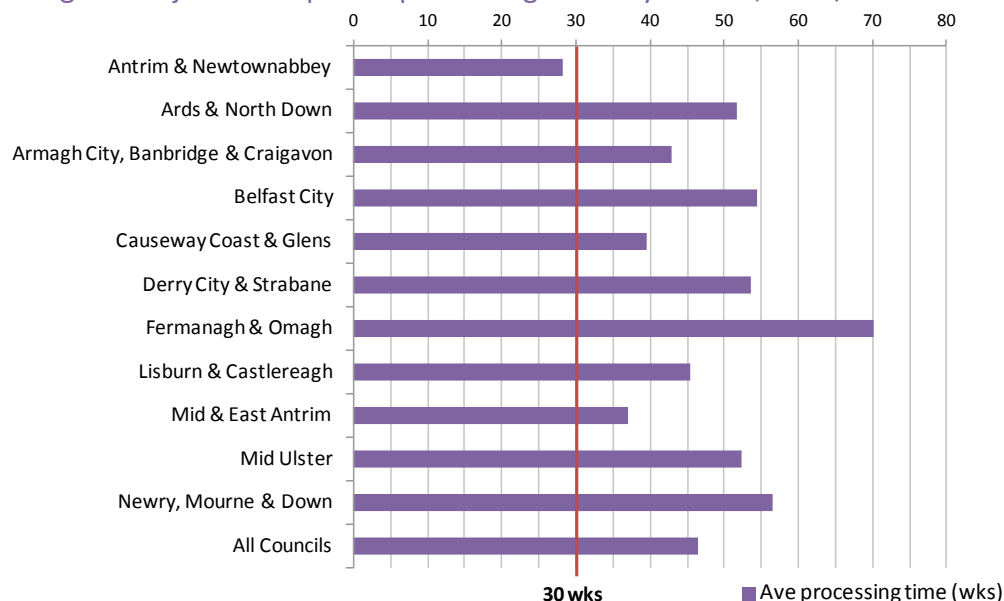
^(r) Following the review of classifications, quarterly figures have been revised and are now final.

From 1st July 2015, pre-application community consultation became a pre-requisite to a major application. This means that major applications will not be accepted until they have gone through the minimum 12 week consultation process and notice has been submitted to the council or Department. This helps explain the very significant drop in major applications when you compare the small numbers received in quarters 2, 3 and 4 against the 109 received in Q1. It may also mean that Q1 was

² Called-in applications are those initially made to councils where the Minister/Department directs that these should fall to the Department for determination.

atypically high with major applications potentially being submitted ahead of the new process coming into effect.

Fig 3.2 Major Development processing times by council, 2015/16



Of the 145 major applications received, Belfast City (35), Newry, Mourne and Down (20) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (16) received the most.

Over the year, **272 major** planning applications were **decided** and **14 withdrawn**.

Belfast City issued most decisions on major applications with 51 followed by Causeway Coast and Glens (35) and Newry, Mourne and Down (29).

It is a statutory target for each council that their major development planning applications will be processed from the date valid to decision issued or withdrawal date within an average of 30 weeks.

During 2015/16, the **average processing time** to process **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **46.4 weeks** across all councils. This is over sixteen weeks longer than the statutory processing time target which is an average of 30 weeks.

[Refer to Table 3.1](#)

The shortest average processing time³ for major applications in 2015/16 was 28.2 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey (based on 20 decided and 1 withdrawn) while the longest was 70.2 weeks in Fermanagh and Omagh (based on 28 decided and 2 withdrawn). Only Antrim and Newtownabbey met the target to process major applications to decision or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks.

[Refer to Table 3.2](#)

A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

It is interesting to note that the average processing time for major applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (28.0 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (53.2 weeks).

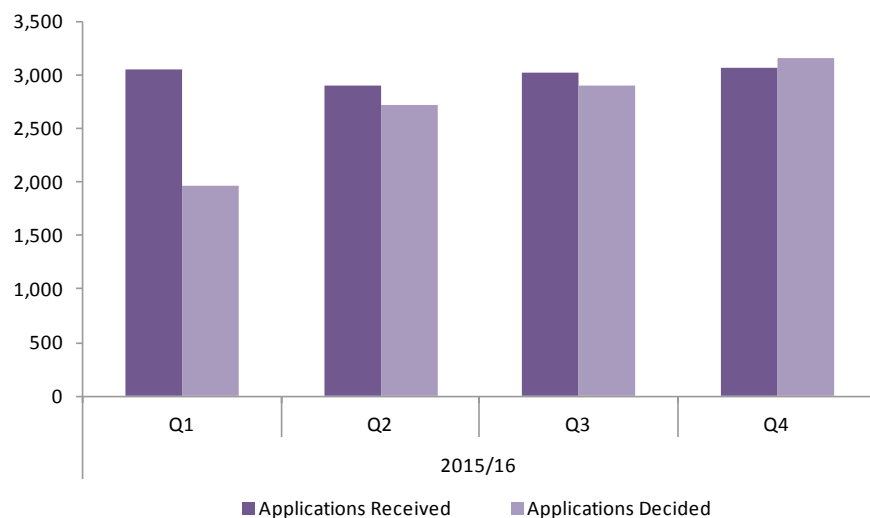
³ **Note**, for some councils the processing times are based on a small number of cases and this should be borne in mind when considering the figures.

4. Local Development Planning Applications

Local Development planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications received and determined by a council. The number of **local** planning applications **received** in NI during 2015/16 was **12,069**, an average of just over 3,000 applications a quarter. The highest number of applications was received in quarter 4 (3,077).

Across councils, Belfast City (1,557), Newry, Mourne and Down (1,423) and Mid Ulster (1,371) received the highest number of local planning applications.

Fig 4.1 Local Development applications, quarterly, Apr 2015 – Mar 2016^(r)



^(r) Following the review of classifications, quarterly figures have been revised and are now final.

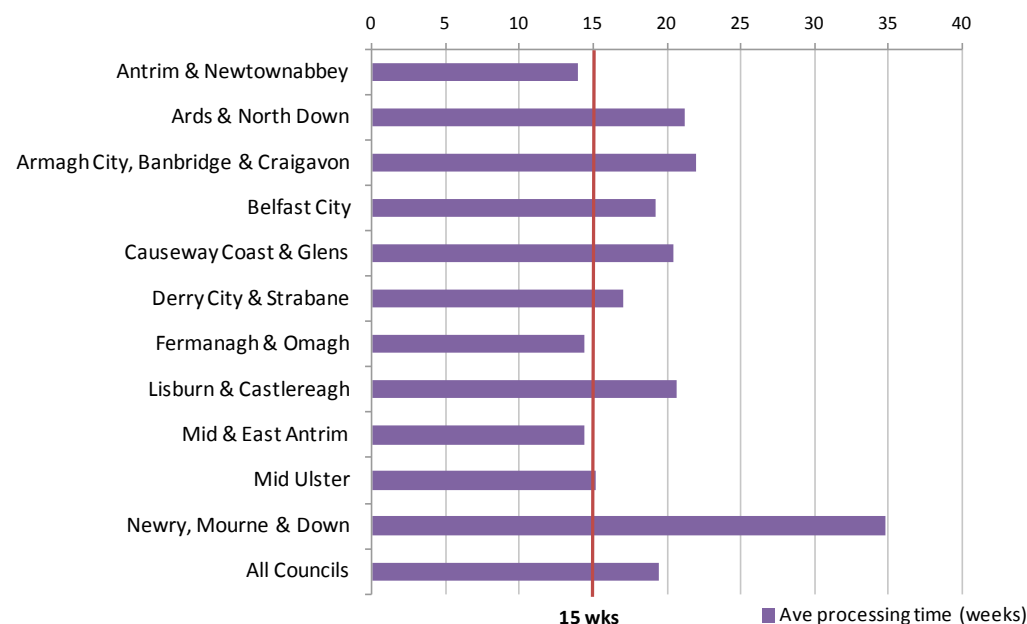
The number of **local** applications **decided** in 2015/16 was **10,753**. In Q4 there were **3,154** applications decided and, as with the applications received, represented the highest quarterly figure for the year.

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils, the number of decisions reached on local planning applications was considerably lower than the number of applications being received. Moving through 2015/16, in each subsequent quarter the number of planning decisions increased whilst the number being received remained fairly static. In Q4, the volume of applications decided exceeded the number of applications being received.

During 2015/16, Belfast City (1,265), Mid Ulster (1,218) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (1,202) issued the most decisions across councils, partly reflecting the higher volumes of applications which they receive.

Over the year there were 444 local applications withdrawn, this ranged from 24 applications withdrawn in Derry City and Strabane to 57 in both Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster.

Fig 4.2 Local Development processing times by council, 2015/16



It is a statutory target for each council that their local development planning applications will be processed from the date valid to decision issued or withdrawal date within an average of 15 weeks.

In 2015/16, the **average processing time** to process **local** applications to decision or withdrawal was **19.4 weeks** across all councils, over four weeks longer than the statutory target.

[Refer to Table 4.1](#)

In 2015/16, the shortest average processing time for local applications was 14.0 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey (based on 666 local applications decided and 34 withdrawn) whilst the longest was 34.8 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down (based on 1,124 local applications decided and 45 withdrawn). Three of the 11 councils, namely Antrim and Newtownabbey (14.0), Fermanagh and Omagh (14.4) and Mid and East Antrim (14.4) were within the 15 week target whilst Mid-Ulster was just a little above it at 15.2 weeks.

[Refer to Table 4.2](#)

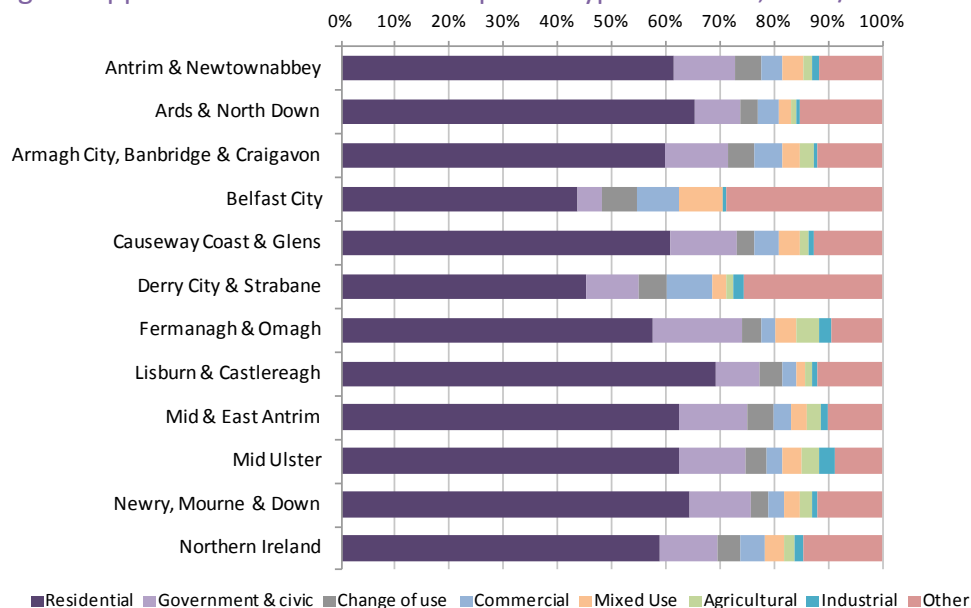
A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

It is interesting to note that the average processing time for local applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (14.4 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (31.4 weeks).

5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received in any year are for residential development and this has continued to be the trend in 2015/16. **Residential** applications received during 2015/16 made up **58.9%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications, this was 1.8 percentage points more than the previous year (57.1%). Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, 2015/16

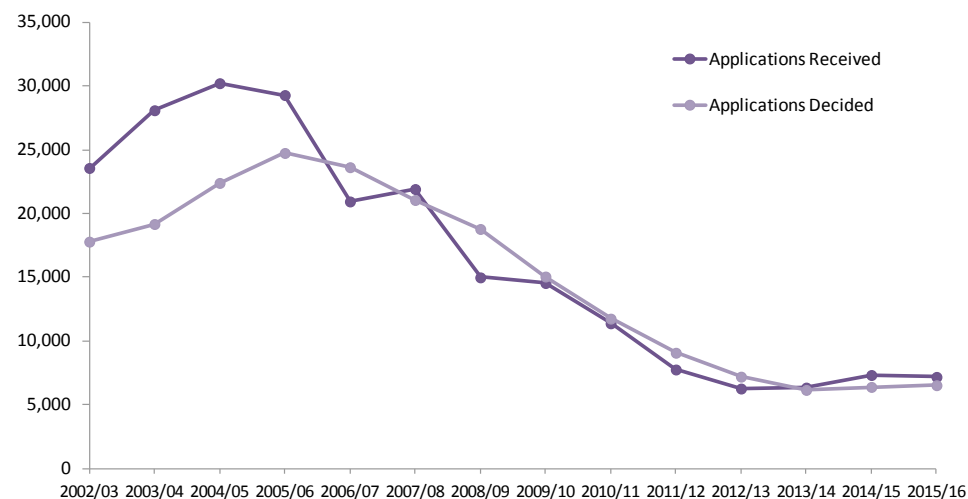


In Lisburn and Castlereagh, nearly seven out of every ten applications (69.2%) were for residential development, compared to just over four in every ten in Belfast City (43.9%) and Derry City and Strabane (45.3%). Both of these councils, however, receives a much higher proportion of applications in the 'Other' (28.8% and 25.5% respectively) category. See

Appendix 1 – 'Definitions' for a description of the types of applications included in these categories.

At NI level, the number of applications fell by 5.0% over the year. This was driven by a decrease of 26.5% in the number of 'Government and Civic' applications received (down from 1,745 to 1,283) and a fall of 15.3% in 'Change of Use' applications (down from 635 to 538). There was however an increase of 35.6% in the number of 'Mixed Use' applications received (up from 331 to 449).

Fig 5.2 NI Residential applications, annually from 2002/03 – 2015/16

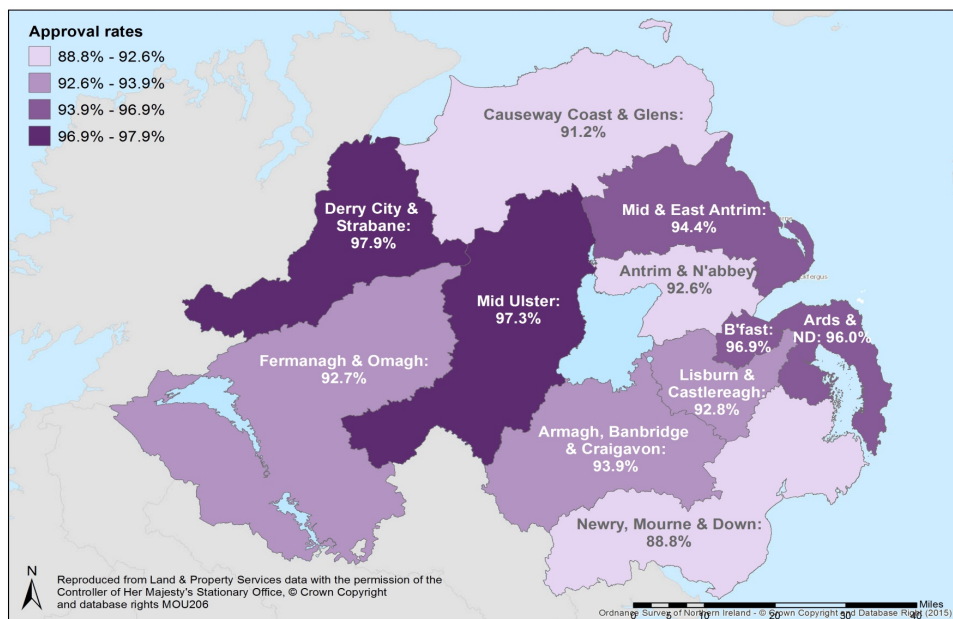


[Refer to Table 5.2](#)

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in total for Northern Ireland in 2015/16 was **7,192**, a decrease of 2.0% compared to the previous year (7,339). Although there was a small decrease over the year in the number of residential applications received, it is still higher than the annual series low of 6,278 recorded in 2012/13. However, the gradually recovering trend since then may now have stalled.

The number of **residential** planning applications **decided** in 2015/16 was **6,541**, a slight increase of 2.1% on the previous year and which may signal a slowing of the increasing trend apparent since the series low in 2012/13. [Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council, 2015/16



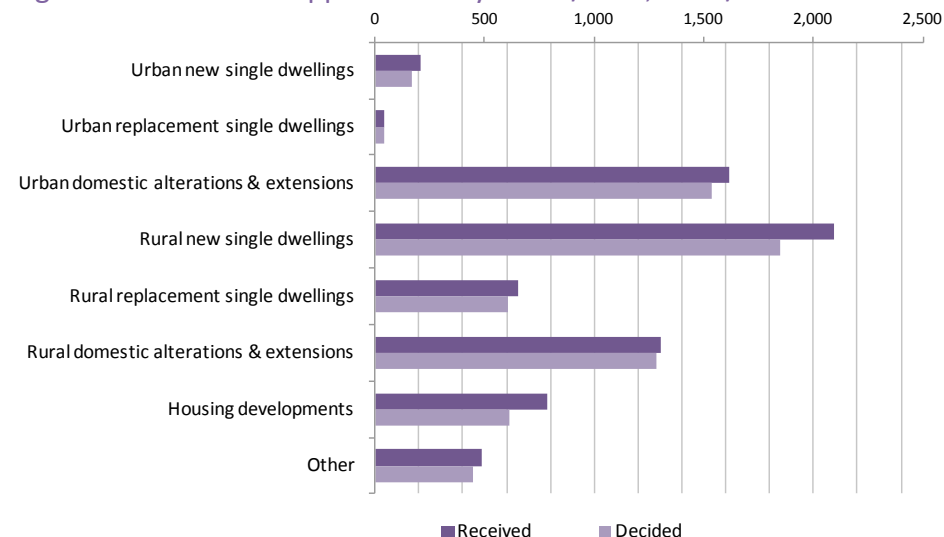
The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for **residential** planning applications in 2015/16 was **93.9%**, a little higher than the previous year (93.3%). Approval rates for residential planning applications in 2015/16 varied across councils with highs of 97.9% in Derry City and Strabane and 97.3% in Mid Ulster down to 88.8% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Over the year there were 214 residential applications withdrawn, this represented a reduction over the year of 11.2%.

[Refer to Table 5.4](#)

Fig 5.4 shows that of the residential applications received new single dwellings in rural areas and alterations/ extensions in urban areas continue to dominate, together making up over half (51.6%) of all residential applications received during 2015/16.

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications by urban/rural, 2015/16



Within the residential applications received the largest decrease over the year was in the number of applications for **rural replacement single dwellings**, down **11.4%** (from 739 to 655 applications). There were a number of smaller decreases recorded i.e. 'other' residential applications (-44) and housing developments (-41).

Decisions on residential applications increased by 2.1% over the year, with **more** applications approved for **rural** and **urban domestic alterations and extensions** (7.9% and 5.9% respectively). [Refer to Table 5.5](#)

Of the 12,220 applications received in 2015/16, over three quarters were for full planning permission (76.7%). Nearly 8 out of every 10 decisions made (78.3%) were for full planning permission. [Refer to Table 5.6](#)

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened and closed, annually, 2009/10–2015/16

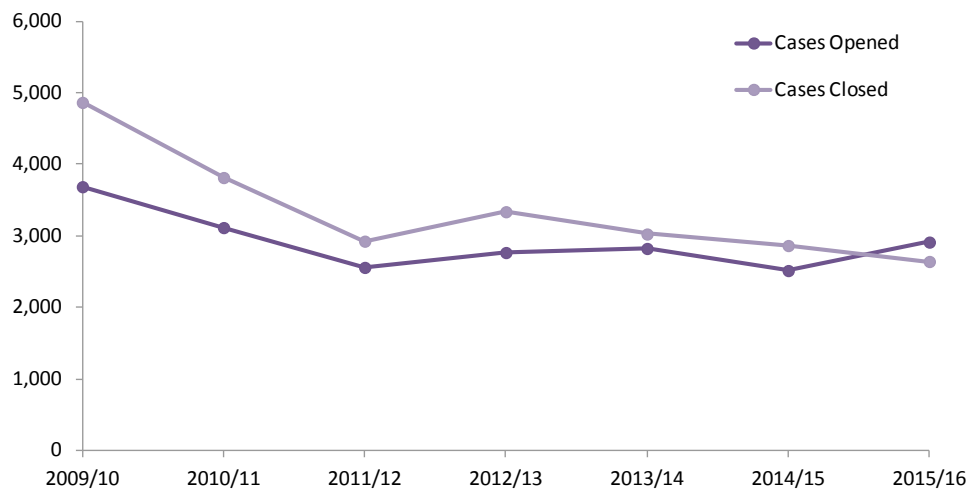
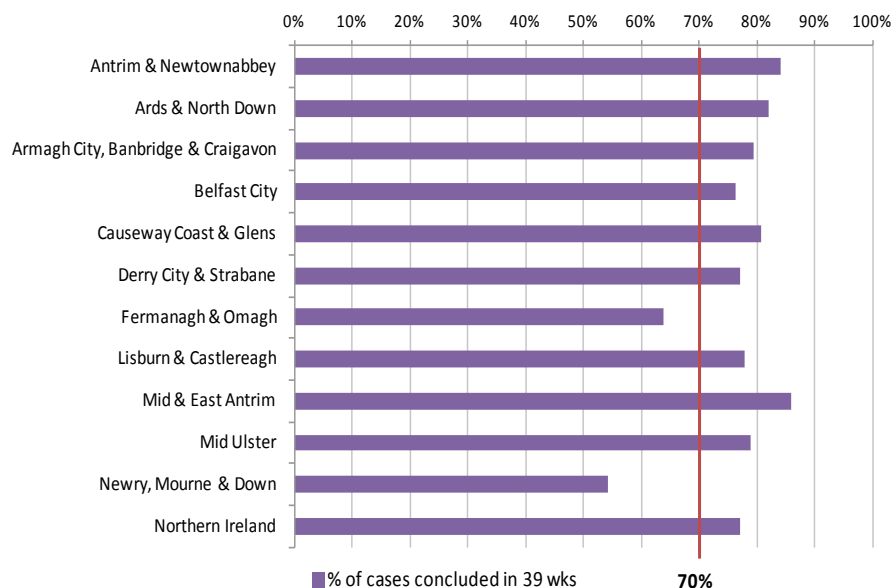


Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, 2015/16



The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during 2015/16 was **2,914**, an increase of 15.8% compared to a year earlier. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any year since 2010/11 when 3,117 cases were opened. Across the councils Belfast City (406) and Ards and North Down (338) opened the largest number of cases in 2015/16.

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during 2015/16 was **2,640**, down 7.9% on the previous year. Over time, the general trend has been for more cases to be closed over a year than opened, however, in 2015/16, the number of cases closed was 274 (or 9.4%) lower than the number opened. Belfast City (336) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (282) closed the highest number of cases.

Of the **2,640** closed cases in 2015/16, the main reason in over a third of cases (34.8%) was that no breach had actually occurred and a further 26.3% cases had been remedied or resolved.

[Refer to Table 6.1](#)

It is a statutory target that 70% of all enforcement cases dealt with by councils are progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.

Across Northern Ireland, 77.2% of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks, over 7 percentage points better than the statutory target.

Nine of the eleven councils met the target with highs of 85.9% concluded within 39 weeks in Mid and East Antrim followed by Antrim and Newtownabbey (84.2%). Newry, Mourne and Down (54.1%) and Fermanagh and Omagh (63.8%) did not meet the target although the performance of the latter did improve in second half of year.

[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

During 2015/16 there were **23 prosecutions** initiated. This is the lowest number of prosecutions in the series so far, dropping from a high of 164 in 2009/10 and down by 12 on the previous year (35). Antrim and Newtownabbey (7) initiated the most prosecutions in the year; there were four councils where no prosecutions were initiated.

Similarly the number of **convictions (18)** in 2015/16 was the lowest in the series, falling from a high of 87 in 2009/10. Causeway Coast and Glens recorded 7 convictions and a further 4 were recorded in Newry, Mourne and Down. Note that some of these will relate to prosecutions initiated prior to 2015/16.

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of March 2016 was **2,845**, 8.7% more than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **765**, accounting for over a quarter (26.9%) of all live cases. This proportion was very similar to that reported at the end of 2014/15 but was still considerably lower than the 37.7% reported at end of 2012/13.

[Refer to Table 6.3, 6.4](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy applications received** in 2015/16 was **329**, the lowest annual figure in the series from 2009/10. The number of applications received annually peaked in 2011/12 with 820 applications received in that year. It is likely that the high levels at this time were driven by the NI Executive's targets for electricity consumption from renewable sources, with a target of 20% to be achieved by 2015, and 40% by 2020. The decline in recent years may be partly due to a reduction in government funding available, as well as a lack of capacity on the power grid to allow for new connections.

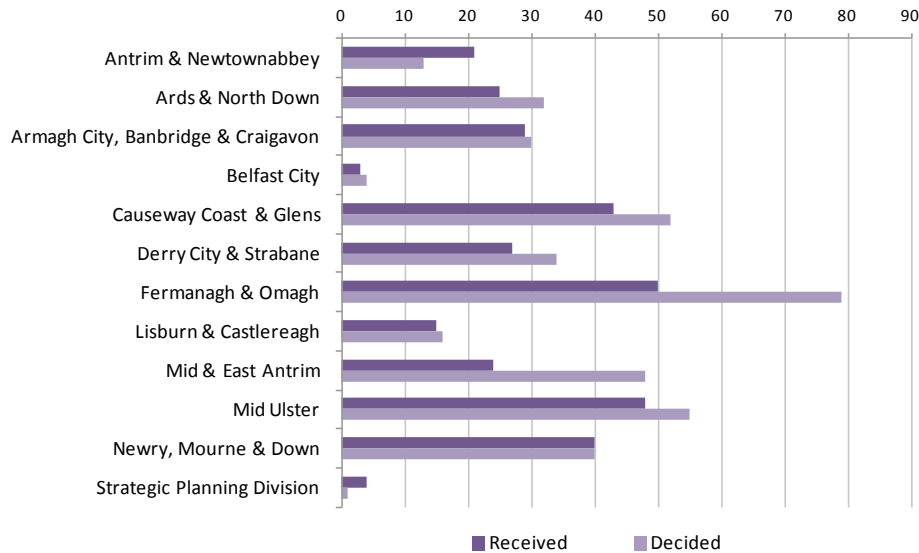
Fig 7.1 Renewable Energy applications, annually from 2002/03 – 2015/16



In 2015/16, renewable energy applications received fell by 38.6% when compared to the previous year and were down by three fifths when compared to 2011/12. The number of applications **decided** was **404**, a decrease of 29.9% when compared to last year. During 2015/16, the average processing time for these applications was 49.4 weeks across NI.

In 2015/16, more than 7 out of every 10 renewable energy applications were for single wind turbines (245 of 329). Although single wind turbines continue to dominate renewable energy applications, over the last year applications have decreased by 41.8% (or 176 fewer applications).

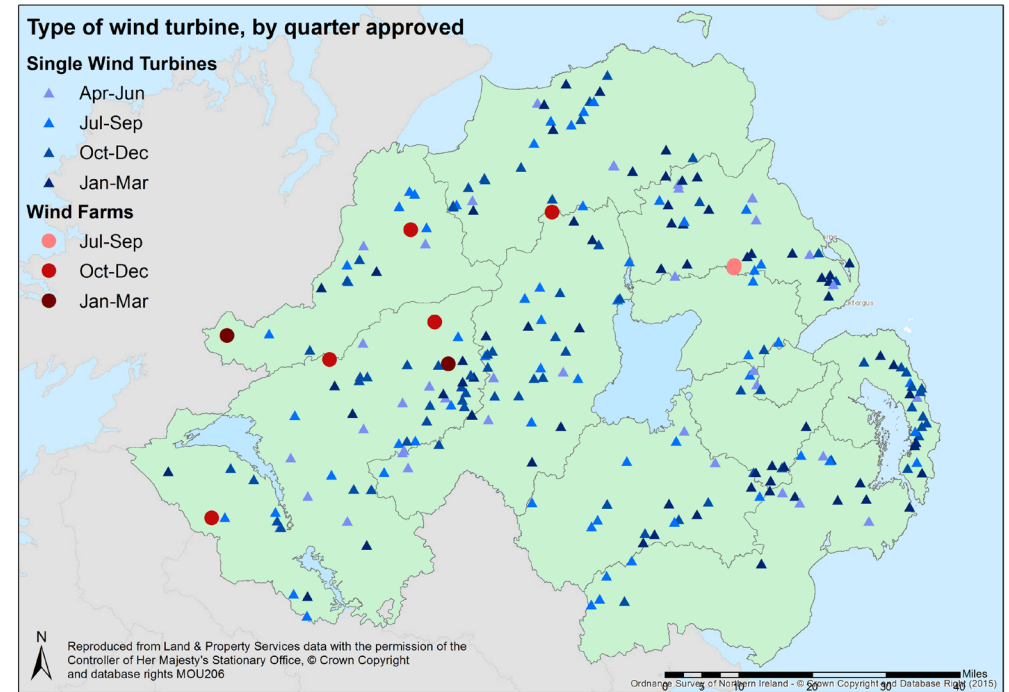
Fig 7.2 RE applications received and decided by council, 2015/16



[Refer to Table 7.1, 7.2](#)

Figures 7.2 and 7.3 show the spread across councils with Fermanagh and Omagh (50), Mid Ulster (48) and Causeway Coast and Glens (43) receiving the most renewable energy applications in 2015/16. Belfast City (3) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (15) received the least.

Fig 7.3 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, 2015/16



At the end of March 2016, there were **448 live renewable energy applications**, mainly comprising 346 single wind turbines, 30 wind farms and 27 for solar energy. The number of live renewable energy applications was down by 31.2% at the end of March 2016 when compared with the same point a year earlier.

[Refer to Table 7.3, 7.4](#)

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **80.4%** in 2015/16, very similar to the rate in 2014/15 (80.6%).

User Guidance

Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016 were transferred in May 2016 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) which involved quality checks and inspection of coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils were provided with their own headline planning statistics before the release of this publication as part of the quality assurance process. On completion of ASRB and council validation, a final extract was taken in June 2016. Please note the quarterly data for 2015/16 are now finalised and will not be subject to further scheduled updates.

Users should be aware that quite a number of structural changes have been made to the Planning Portal and associated processes, in order to comply with new planning legislation and it will inevitably take time for the new validation procedures to become properly embedded. It is considered, however, that these finalised annual figures have now reconciled any data issues that were highlighted during the course of this transitional year.

Regionally Significant / Major / Local Development Applications after 1st April 2014

Note that a new classification hierarchy of development for planning application came into effect on 1st April 2014, on an administrative basis, with the introduction of the following new categories – regionally significant, major and local development. The hierarchy was subsequently placed on a statutory basis in line with the transfer of planning functions to the new district councils on 1st April 2015. It should be noted that there are some differences between the initial administrative hierarchy classifications in place from 1st April 2014 and the final classifications set

out in the Planning (Development Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (S.R.2015 No.71).

Regionally significant developments (RSD) are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or involve a substantial departure from a local development plan. Applications for these development proposals will be submitted to and determined by the Department. However, the thresholds for RSD may mean that applications which may have previously been dealt with by the Department will now be classified as major development and thus determined by the relevant council. Like major applications, RSD proposals will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

Major developments have important economic, social and environmental implications for a council area. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils under the new planning system and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

Local developments will comprise of all other developments (other than permitted development) that do not fall within the classes described for major or for regionally significant developments. They comprise of the vast majority of residential and minor commercial applications to be received and determined by a council.

Departmental activity

Retained Section 26 (former Article 31) applications are Major applications being processed by the Department as Article 31 (under the Planning (NI) Order 1991) and, where a decision had not issued before 1 April 2015,

which will now be determined under Section 26 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011.

Retained Section 29 (former non Article 31) applications are those being dealt with by the Department's Strategic Planning Division which were close to determination at 1 April 2015 and which were retained for determination as if the Department had called them in under Section 29 of the Planning Act (NI) 2015.

Called-in applications are those initially made to councils where the Minister/Department directs that these should fall to the Department for determination.

Appeals

All applicants of a planning application have the right to appeal a decision or the conditions attached to a decision. The statistics reflected in this publication only reflect the original decision and not any subsequent decision on appeal.

Enforcement Activity

Compliance and enforcement are important functions of the planning system. The summary data presented in this report and accompanying Excel tables covers enforcement cases opened, enforcement cases closed, court action taken and the live caseload as at the end of the quarter. Cases may be closed for a variety of reasons:

- case has been remedied or resolved (the breach may have been removed or amended accordingly);
- planning permission has been granted (so no breach has occurred); it would not be expedient to take further action;

- no breach has actually occurred; the breach may be immune from enforcement action (it may be outside the time limit in which to initiate action);
- Or an application has been allowed on appeal or indeed the notice has been quashed.

The time taken to conclude an enforcement case is calculated from the date on which the complaint is received to the earliest date of the following:

- a notice is issued;
- legal proceedings commence;
- a planning application is received;
- the case is closed.

Please note that the number of cases closed is not a sub-set of the number of cases concluded in that period - cases that are concluded in any given period may not be closed until subsequent periods, and cases that are closed in any given period may have been concluded in previous quarters.

The value at 70% is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point at the 70th percentile of the sequence.

Processing Times

The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The average processing time is the median. The median is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point in the middle of the sequence. The median is used because some planning applications can take several years to reach a decision. As a consequence, these extreme cases (outliers) inflate the mean and the result is that the mean may not

be considered as 'typical'. Therefore the median may be taken to better represent the 'average' or 'typical' processing time.

Geographical Classification

The method of classifying the urban and rural marker has been updated to reflect the latest NISRA guidance using the 2015 Settlement limits:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/settlement15-guidance.pdf>

This method is preferred to the previous method as it more accurately considers which of the 8 Settlement bands fall into mainly urban or rural areas. The limitation of the previous method was that all settlement bands were classified as urban. Under the new method it is recognised that smaller settlements are more rural than urban in character and should be distinguished as such.

For the purposes of this report the 2014/15 figures have been revised in line with the new definition in order to provide an annual back comparison. This information is presented in the accompanying Excel tables. However figures broken down by an urban rural split that predates 2014/15 have not been similarly revised and hence cannot be compared to those figures produced using the new definition.

In order to give an indication of the scale of this definitional change, in 2014/15 235 (11%) urban residential applications were reclassified as rural.

The method of classifying the Parliamentary Constituencies is based on the x and y co-ordinates as recorded on the planning application in conjunction with Westminster Parliamentary Constituency boundaries (2008).

Note on Exclusions:

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs), either proposed or existing, have not been included in the Official Statistics bulletin since 2012/13. These are not actually applications for planning permission. A council will issue a CLUD if it is satisfied that a particular development is lawful within the provisions of planning legislation. Examples include proposed extensions, which fall within the provisions of the Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 for permitted development and do not require planning permission, or uses that have become lawful due to the length of time they have been in existence.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

While applications for planning permission and other consents were included in the operational statistics produced prior to transfer, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) were excluded. In the interests of consistency TPOs will also be excluded from the new operational statistics.

Non Material Changes (NMCs)

Applications for a Non Material Change (NMCs) to an existing planning permission are provided for under the 2011 Act, but they are not planning applications. There is no requirement to advertise or consult on NMCs.

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs) are not provided for in planning legislation and councils may adopt different approaches in relation to these, as may the Department.

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs)

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs) are provided for under Section 27 of the 2011 Act, but they are not planning applications. They are essentially advance notices of major/RSD planning applications and detail how a developer proposes to engage with the community. A major/RSD development planning application cannot be submitted without a PAN having been issued, community consultation undertaken and a report prepared and submitted with the application by a developer.

Discharge of Conditions (DCs)

It will be necessary to seek to discharge a condition where planning approval has been granted and a condition has been attached to the decision which requires the further consent, agreement or approval of the council (or the Department).

Further Information

Information and statistics for the other devolved administrations and Republic of Ireland can be found at the following links.

England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-applications-statistics>

Scotland:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning>

Wales:

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/planningstats/development-management-quarterly-survey/?lang=en>

Republic of Ireland:

<http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/construction/>

Building Control (LPS Starts and completions):

<https://www.dfpni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/new-dwelling-statistics>

Housing bulletin DSD:

<https://www.dsdni.gov.uk/topics/dsd-statistics-and-research-housing/housing-statistics>

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-housing-bulletin-october-december-2015>

Appendix 1 – Definitions

The Statistical Categories referred to in Section 5 and Excel Table 5.1 are defined below.

Agricultural

These include agricultural buildings or structures for the storage of slurry and/or manure, agricultural glasshouses, stables and livery yards and infilling of land for agricultural purposes.

Commercial

These include food supermarkets and superstores, non food retailing, major retail developments exceeding 1000 sq m, alterations, extensions and improvements to buildings used for retailing, retail warehouses, clubs, post offices, factory outlets, petrol stations, offices, purpose built office developments, restaurants, car parking, and motor vehicle display, hire, repair or sale.

Government and Civic

These include police stations, coastguard stations, civic amenity sites, recycling centres, schools and colleges, hospitals, clinics, other medical establishments including surgeries and dental practices, 'Hard infrastructure' facilities such as roads, water mains, water treatment works, trunk sewers, waste water treatment works and natural gas pipelines. Also includes recreational facilities, including indoor and outdoor sports facilities, and swimming pools and renewable energy applications, including wind turbines, wind farms, solar panels, biomass burners, hydroelectric schemes etc. Note that this category also includes non public sector applications related to the above topics.

Industrial and Manufacturing

These include factories, warehousing, light and general industrial floor space, quarries, sand and gravel extraction and fuel depots.

Mixed Development

These include applications for mixed development incorporating a number of development types such as residential, retailing, offices, community and leisure.

Residential

These include housing developments (incorporating a mixture of house types and apartments), purpose built apartment developments, sheltered housing schemes, single dwellings including dwellings on farms, holiday chalets, caravans and mobile homes, alteration, extension or improvement of existing dwellings, residential homes or nursing homes, hotels or motels.

Change of Use

These include applications for a change in the use of land or buildings including changes to residential, retailing, offices, community or leisure uses.

Other types of application

All other types of applications not mentioned above are put into the 'Other' category but mainly comprise 'Works to Facilitate Persons Who Are Disabled', 'Advertisements', and 'Listed Buildings'.

The application types referred to in Excel Table 5.6 are defined below.

Outline permission

An application for outline planning permission can be used to ascertain whether a proposed development is acceptable in principle. This usually means that detailed drawings are not needed. However, the council or, as the case may be, the Department, may, in certain circumstances, require the submission of additional information or insist that an application for full planning permission be submitted.

Full permission

An application for full planning permission requires the submission of all details of the proposal. This type of application would be appropriate, for example, if the erection of new buildings is proposed and / or if a change of use of land or buildings is proposed.

Approval of Reserved Matters

If outline planning permission is granted, then a subsequent application and approval relating to the siting, design, external appearance, means of access and landscaping details, known as 'reserved matters', will be required before building work can commence. The reserved matters application must be consistent with the outline planning permission and take into account any conditions that have been attached to it. If the development proposal changes, then it may be necessary to submit a new planning application.

Consent to Display an Advertisement

Advertisement consent is normally required to display an advertisement, particularly large signs and illuminated adverts.

Listed Building Consent

Works that would affect the character of a listed building need listed building consent. This includes work to the internal or external fabric of the building or any demolition. It should be noted that the requirement for Listed Building Consent is in addition to any requirement for planning permission for works to a listed building.

Conservation Area Consent

Works that would entail the full or partial demolition of a non-listed building in a conservation area need conservation area consent. It should be noted that the requirement for Conservation Area Consent may be in addition to any requirement for planning permission.

Hazardous Substances Consent

The Planning (Hazardous Substances) (No2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 are concerned with the storage and use of hazardous substances which could, in quantities at or above specified limits, present a risk. Hazardous Substances Consent ensures that hazardous substances can be kept or used in significant amounts only after the council or, as the case may be, the Department has had the opportunity to assess the degree of risk arising to persons in the surrounding area and to the environment.

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