

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2016/17 ANNUAL STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(April 2016 – March 2017: Final figures)

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Key Points in 2016/17:

- There were 13,037 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI), an increase of 7% over the previous financial year and the highest number recorded in any year since 2011/12. This comprised 12,893 local, 142 major and 2 regionally significant development applications.
- In total, 12,957 planning applications were decided, a marked increase of 17% over the previous year. This is still less than half (43%) the peak level of 30,161 decisions recorded in 2005/06 before the economic downturn.
- The average processing time for major applications was 69 weeks across all councils; up significantly from the 46 weeks reported for the previous year and well over twice the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks. No council met the major processing time target during 2016/17 with processing times increasing over the year in nine of the eleven councils.
- The number of local planning applications received was 12,893, an increase of just under 7% on last year. Ten of the eleven councils received more local applications compared to the previous year with Belfast City (1,759), Newry, Mourne and Down (1,483) and Mid Ulster (1,392) receiving most.
- Across councils, it took on average over 16 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal, 1 week over target but an improvement of just over 3 weeks on the previous year. The shortest average processing time for local applications was 9 weeks in Mid and East Antrim, whilst the longest was 23 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down, although this was still a sizeable improvement of nearly 12 weeks on their 2015/16 performance. In all, five of the 11 councils achieved the 15 week target.
- The number of enforcement cases opened was 3,423, an increase of 17% on the same period last year. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any year since the start of the reported series in 2009/10 when 3,689 cases were opened. Across the councils, Antrim and Newtownabbey (440) and Belfast City (417) opened the largest number of cases during the year.
- Across NI, just over four in every five (81%) enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks, nearly 11 percentage points above the statutory 70% target and an improvement of over 3 percentage points on 2015/16 performance. Ten of the eleven councils met the target with a high of 94% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey. Newry, Mourne and Down concluded 56% of cases within the target time.
- The NI approval rate for all planning applications was 94%, similar to the rate a year earlier. Approval rates varied across councils in 2016/17 from highs of 98% in Mid Ulster and 97% in Ards and North Down to a low of 88% in Newry, Mourne and Down.
- The 81 renewable energy applications received was by far the lowest annual figure since 2004/05, representing a 75% decrease in received applications compared with a year earlier, the biggest annual drop in the entire series. At the end of March 2017, there were 141 live renewable energy applications of which nearly three quarters (74%) of these had been in the planning system for over a year.

Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for district councils, and the Department of Infrastructure, for 2016/17. Note that from the 8th May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of Environment to the new Department of Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental reorganisation.

Whilst the bulletin and accompanying tables report data for 2016/17, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous years. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the year. Please note that quarterly figures for the 2016/17 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 district councils did not then exist in their current form, nor do they neatly overlap with the old area planning office jurisdictions.

The first year of data under the new organisational areas was 2015/16, therefore, 2015/16 is regarded as the base year for reporting of performance-related data at council level with comparative trend data building from that point onwards. Whilst historic comparisons of performance at NI level can still be made, it is important to be aware that there have been a number of significant recent changes to the Planning system which will have had an impact. Where relevant these have been highlighted throughout the report.

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 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 2015/16 provisional figures which are reflected in later quarterly bulletins. The validation exercise additionally highlighted some inconsistencies in major and local development classification between the 2015/16 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, would be the base year for future comparisons of major and local development activity. As such, back-comparisons at council level for these application types are not possible.

(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 2015/16 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 additional 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 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 2017. This will contain planning data up to 30th June 2017 (i.e. for Q1 2017/18). Consideration is being given to the inclusion of new Planning Performance Framework indicators within this release.

The next annual report covering 2017/18 is planned for release in late June 2018.

See [Gov.UK Release Calendar](#) for release dates of future publications.

1. Overall NI Planning Activity

Applications Received

The number of planning applications received annually has generally been on the decline from its peak in 2004/05 up until 2013/14 when it reached its lowest level of the series. The series shows that the number of applications received has been fairly stable for the last six years with small changes year on year. During 2016/17, **13,037** planning applications were **received**, an increase of 6.7% on the previous financial year (12,220), and the highest number recorded in any year since 2011/12.

Three quarters of the planning applications received in 2016/17 were for full planning permission (75.3%), similar to the position last year (76.7%).

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, annually from 2002/03 – 2016/17



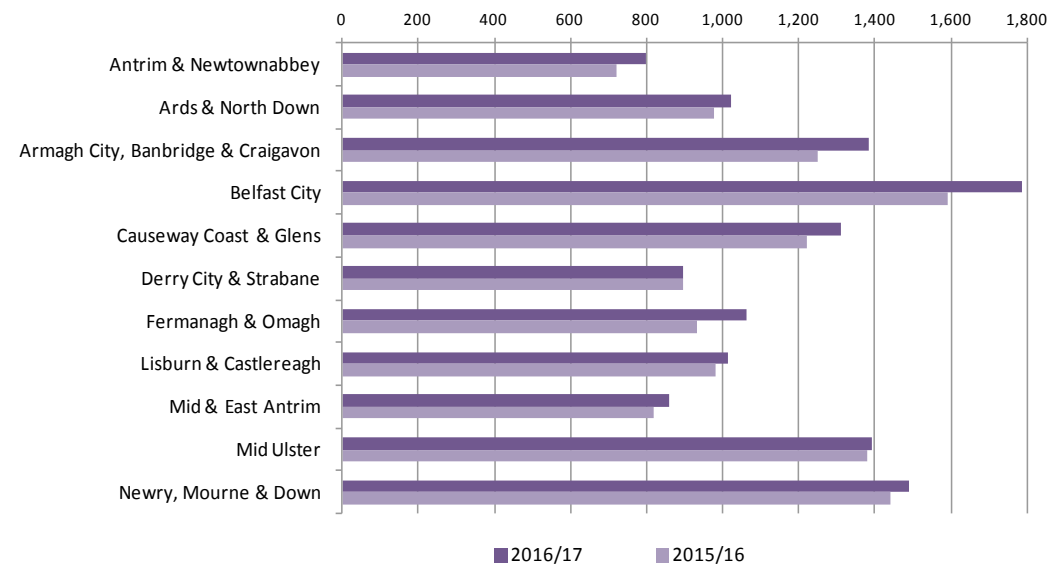
Across NI in 2016/17, there were 70.4 planning applications received per 10,000 population, up from 66.4 in 2015/16. The number of planning

applications received per 10,000 population in recent years is well below the series peak of 214.6 recorded in 2004/05.

In 2016/17, Belfast City (1,786) received the most planning applications, followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (1,491), Mid Ulster (1,392) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (1,383); between them accounting for nearly half (46.4%) of all applications received across NI, which was the same the position a year earlier. The councils receiving the least applications were Antrim and Newtownabbey (798) and Mid and East Antrim (861), again the same order as the previous year.

The volume of planning applications received in 2016/17 increased in ten of the eleven councils over the year with the largest increases, in percentage terms, occurring in Fermanagh and Omagh (13.9%) and Belfast City (12.2%). There was no change recorded in Derry City and Strabane.

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, 2015/16 & 2016/17



At council level, Mid Ulster (96.7), Fermanagh and Omagh (92.1) and Causeway Coast and Glens (91.6) received the most planning applications per 10,000 population, whilst Belfast City (52.7) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (56.8) received the least. The supporting Excel table provides activity per head of population for each district council.

[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

Applications Decided

The number of planning decisions issued annually had plateaued between 2013/14 and 2015/16 following a period of sustained decline from 2005/06. During 2016/17, however, there were **12,957** planning decisions issued, representing a marked increase of 17.4% over the previous year. This is still less than half the peak number of 30,161 decisions issued back in 2005/06.

In 2016/17, just over three quarters of planning decisions (76.9%) were for full planning permission.

Over the course of the year, **657** applications were **withdrawn**, over two fifths more (41.9%) when compared to the previous year (463). This represented the highest number of applications withdrawn in any year since 2011/12. Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

Applications Decided by Council

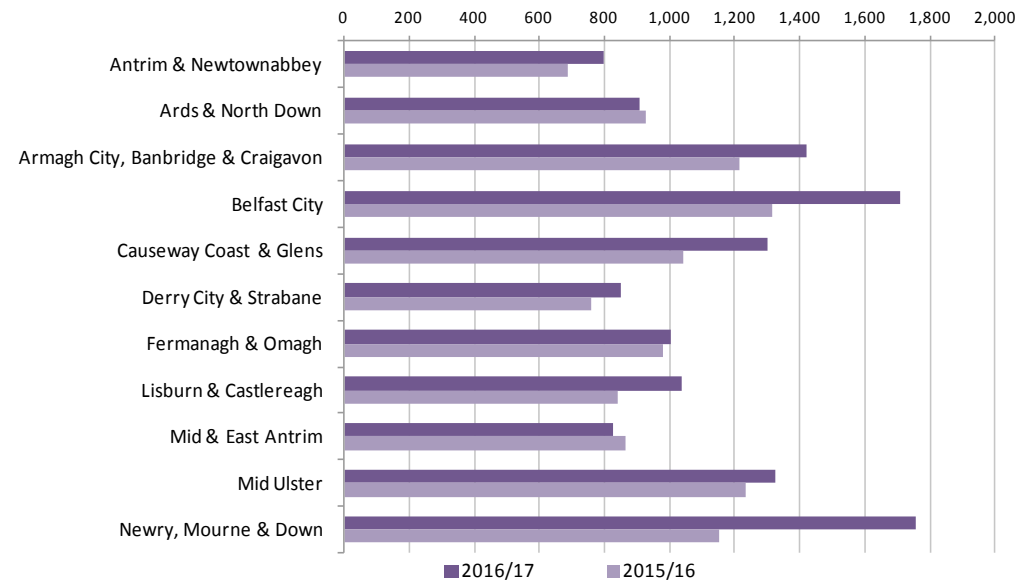
The volume of planning decisions issued across councils during 2016/17 varied. Newry, Mourne and Down issued the most planning decisions (1,757), followed by Belfast City (1,707) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (1,423).

Over the last year Newry, Mourne and Down (1,757) reported the largest percentage increase in the number of decisions issued (52.4%) followed by Belfast City (1,707: 29.7%).

Antrim and Newtownabbey issued the lowest number of decisions (799) during the year followed by Mid and East Antrim (824) and Derry City and Strabane (850).

Nine of the eleven councils issued more decisions in 2016/17 compared to the previous year.

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, 2015/16 & 2016/17



Four of the eleven councils issued more decisions than they received during 2016/17, these were Newry, Mourne and Down (17.8% more), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (2.9% more), Lisburn and Castlereagh (2.2% more) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (0.1% more).

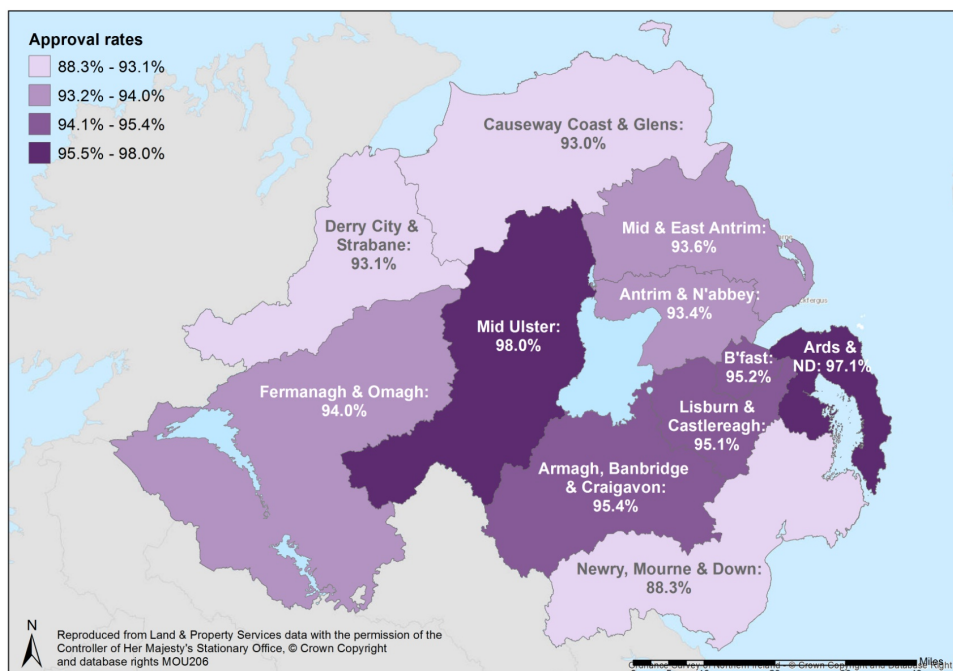
[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during 2016/17 they processed to decision or withdrawal 480 certificates of lawfulness, 479 non material changes and 455 discharge of conditions. Over the year the numbers processed in all of these areas increased with the most significant increase in the number of discharge of conditions increasing three-fold from 148 to 455. 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 2016/17 was **94.0%**, which was similar to the rate a year earlier (93.7%). The overall approval rate for all planning applications has been fairly stable for the last five years ranging from 93.2% to 94.5%.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, 2016/17



Planning approval rates varied across councils during 2016/17 from highs of 98.0% in Mid Ulster and 97.1% in Ards and North Down to a low of 88.3% in Newry, Mourne and Down. Five out of the eleven councils had an approval rate which was lower than the overall NI approval rate of 94.0%. Seven councils reported an increased approval rate over the year, the largest increases were in Belfast City and Fermanagh and Omagh with approval rates increasing by 2.0 percentage points¹ (pp). Where approvals rates declined, the most notable were in Derry City and Strabane (-3.7pp) and Newry, Mourne and Down (-2.5 pp).

[Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

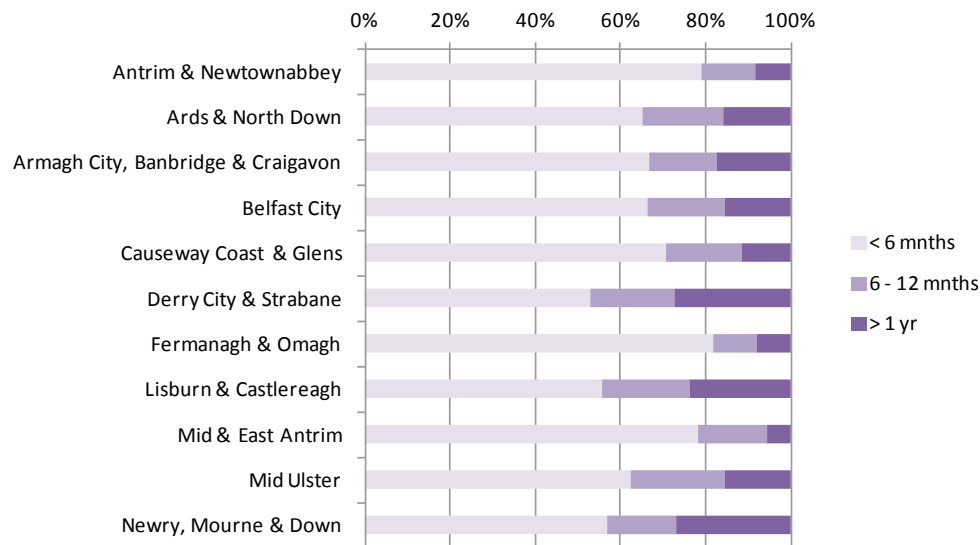
Live applications

At the end of March 2017, there were **6,785** live applications in the planning system across NI, a decrease of 7.9% over the year from 7,366 at the end of March 2016. Nearly 1 out of every 5 live applications in the planning system at the end of March 2017 was over one year old (1,220: 18.0%); this was down 1.6 percentage points when compared to the end of March 2016 (1,445: 19.6%).

[Refer to Table 1.3](#)

¹ Percentage Point change (pp)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Mar 2017



The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of March 2017 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.5. Mid and East Antrim had the lowest proportion of cases over one year old (5.7%), followed by Fermanagh and Omagh (8.1%) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (8.2%). Derry City and Strabane had the largest proportion of applications in the system for over a year (27.5%) followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (27.0%) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (23.7%).

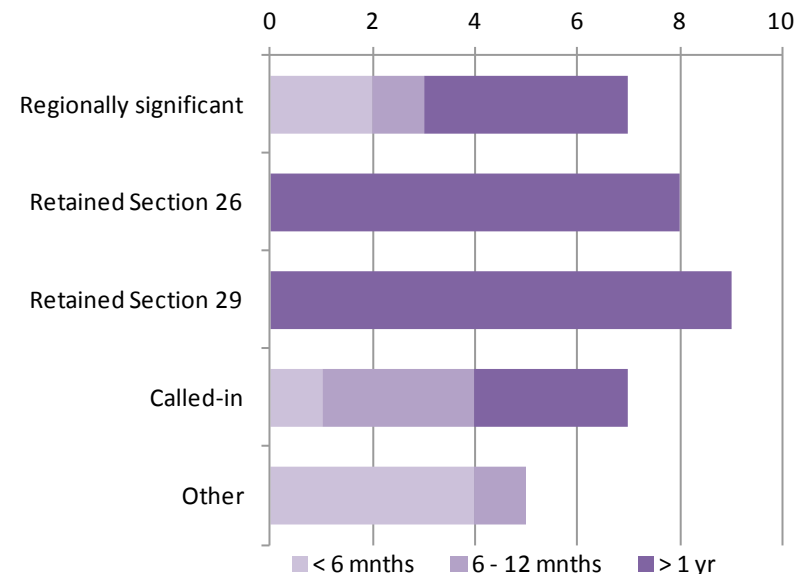
Over the last year, seven of the eleven councils reduced the proportion of live cases that are in the system for over a year, with the greatest changes in Fermanagh and Omagh (8.3pp), Mid and East Antrim (7.4pp) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (5.1pp). The proportion of applications over a year increased in four councils, with the greatest of these increases in Mid Ulster (+2.4pp) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (2.2pp).

[Refer to Table 1.4](#)

2. Departmental Activity

At the end of March 2017, there were **7 ongoing regionally significant development (RSD) applications, 7 called-in; 17 retained applications and 5 other applications**². Two-thirds of these applications were in the system over a year.

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end Mar 17



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.

² 'Other' applications include Conservation Area Consents, Variation of Conditions and Reserved Matters.

[Refer to Table 2.2](#)

In 2016/17, the Department received **21** new applications; 2 regionally significant, 13 were called in and 6 other applications. This is 7 more than the previous year.

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.

At the 30 March 2017, of the **7** RSD applications that were live in the planning system, three were not subject to Pre-Application Discussions and therefore will not fall under the remit of the target. Of the remaining four applications, one exceeded the target, reaching a Ministerial Recommendation within 19 weeks. One was received towards the end of reporting period and is still being processed while the other two, due to the requirement for further environmental information (FEI), have had targets dates in 2016/17 extended to 2017/18. These will be assessed in future reports once they have been decided or withdrawn, alongside any new applications which may come into scope.

The Department reached **decisions** on **21** applications during 2016/17, three more than a year earlier (18). Ten decisions were on **called-in** applications, six were on **Retained Section 26** (*former Article 31*) applications, three on **other** and one each on **Regionally Significant** and **Retained Section 29** (*former Non-Article 31*) applications. Note that the RSD application was not subject to Pre-Application Discussions and therefore did not fall under the remit of the target.

Five applications were withdrawn during the year, four retained and one other. There were five retained applications withdrawn in the previous year.

Overall, the average processing time in 2016/17 for those applications processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal was **125.9** weeks, down slightly from the 137.2 weeks in the previous year. The average processing times for called-in applications during the year was 11.0 weeks, down from 17.8 weeks in the previous year. The processing times for Retained Section 26 applications increased over the year from 192.7 weeks to 354.9 weeks.

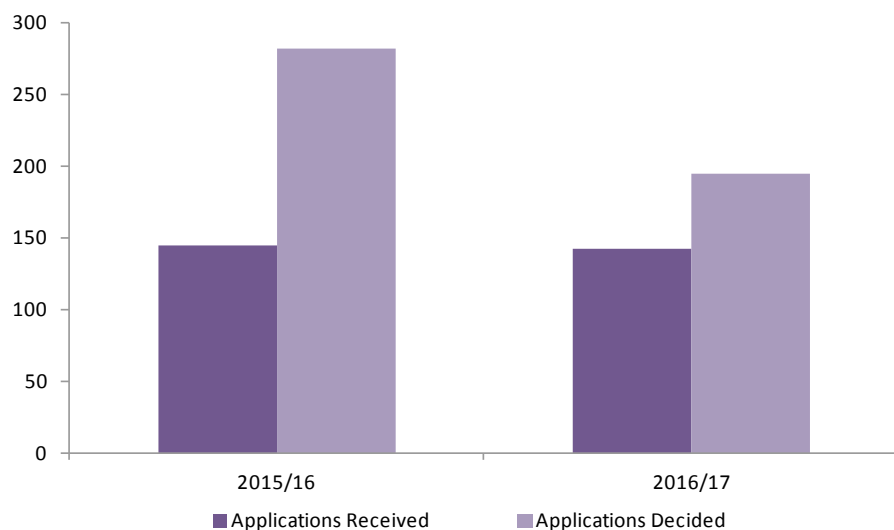
Full details of the average processing times during the year for all of the different application types that were processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal are reported in [Table 2.1](#). Some processing times are not highlighted in this commentary due to the very small numbers of applications on which the times are based.

NOTE: In Section 2, processing times for 'Called-In' applications are calculated from the date the application was called in by the Department. This method is only used in Section 2 of the report in order to show Departmental processing performance. All other processing times reported in the publication are based on the date the application is made valid.

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. The number of **major** planning applications **received** in NI during 2016/17 was **142** which was similar to the number received in the previous year (145).

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, 2015/16 & 2016/17



Of the 142 major applications received in 2016/17, Belfast City (27) and Derry City and Strabane (18) received the most. Derry City and Strabane reported the largest increase in major applications received compared to the previous year, up threefold from 6 to 18. Newry, Mourne and Down on the other hand reported the largest decrease from 20 received in 2015/16 down to 8 in the current year.

Over the year, **192 major** planning applications were **decided** and **19 withdrawn**. For the second year running the numbers of planning decisions issued for major applications have exceeded the numbers being received. However, the number of decisions issued overall was down markedly, by approaching one third (31.7), over the year.

At council level, Belfast City (36), Newry, Mourne and Down (26) and Fermanagh and Omagh (22) issued most decisions on major applications. Nine of the eleven councils issued fewer decisions for major applications in 2016/17 when compared to the previous year.

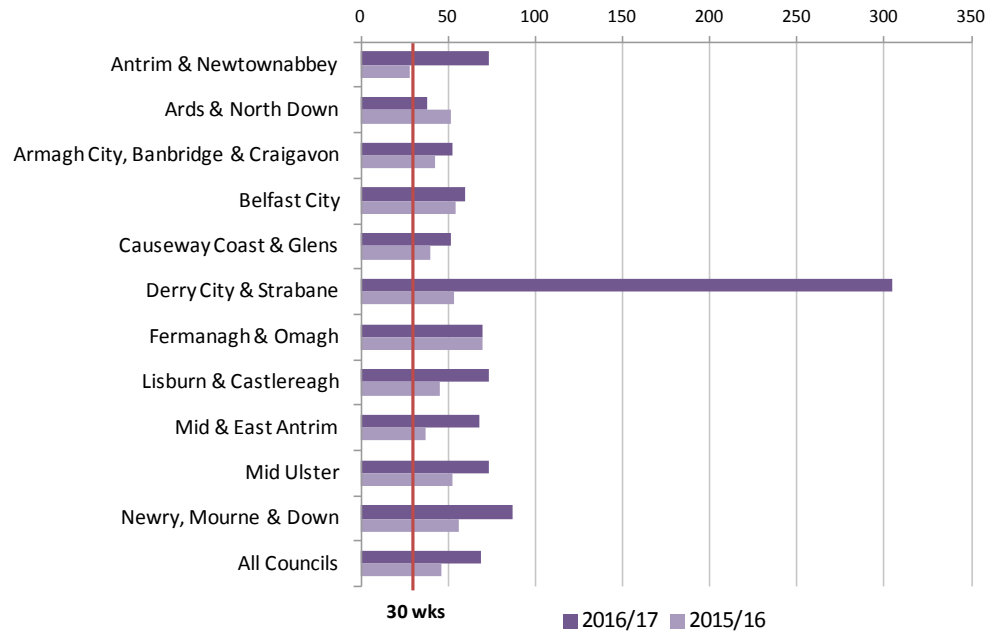
[Refer to Table 3.1](#)

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.

Figure 3.2 provides annual processing times for major applications. During 2016/17 the **average processing time** to process **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **68.6 weeks** across all councils, up significantly from the 46.2 weeks reported last year. This is over double the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks.

No council met the processing time target during 2016/17. Processing times for major applications increased over the year in nine of the eleven councils. Across councils, Ards and North Down reported an improved processing time over the year from 51.6 weeks in 2015/16 to 37.6 weeks in 2016/17, which was the lowest of any council. This was followed by Causeway Coast and Glens (51.4 weeks: 15 applications) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (52.8 weeks: 18 applications).

Fig 3.2 Major processing times by council, 2015/16 & 2016/17



Derry City and Strabane had by far the highest processing time of 304.8 weeks for the 19 applications which they processed followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (86.6 weeks: 27 applications). During the year nearly three quarters (73.7%) of the major applications processed by Derry City and Strabane were legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) that had been in the system for a considerable amount of time. This council processed the highest proportion of legacy cases during this time and this has resulted in the lengthy average processing time reported. Over half of major applications processed in Antrim and Newtownabbey (61.5%), Lisburn and Castlereagh (60.0%) and Newry, Mourne and Down (51.9%) were legacy cases, with overall processing times of 73.6 weeks, 73.4 weeks and 86.6 weeks respectively.

[Refer to Table 3.2](#)

A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

The average processing time for major applications in 2016/17, which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015), is significantly shorter (39.2 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (114.7 weeks).

Across Northern Ireland, 91.1% of major planning applications decided were approved in 2016/17. This represented an increase over the last year of 4.3pp. In five of the eleven councils, 100% of major applications that were decided were approved. Antrim and Newtownabbey (77.8%) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (78.6%) had the lowest approval rates for major applications.

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 in 2016/17 was **12,893** representing an increase of 6.8% from the 12,069 applications received in 2015/16. On average just over 3,200 applications were received per quarter during 2016/17.

Across councils, Belfast City (1,759), Newry, Mourne and Down (1,483) and Mid Ulster (1,380) received the highest number of local planning applications during 2016/17. These councils also received the highest number of applications in the previous year.

Ten of the eleven councils received more local applications in 2016/17 compared to the previous year. The overall increase over the year is largely attributable to the increases in Belfast City (+202 applications), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (+132) and Fermanagh and Omagh (+131) alongside other smaller increases. The three councils mentioned accounted for nearly three fifths of the increase reported in local applications (57.3%).

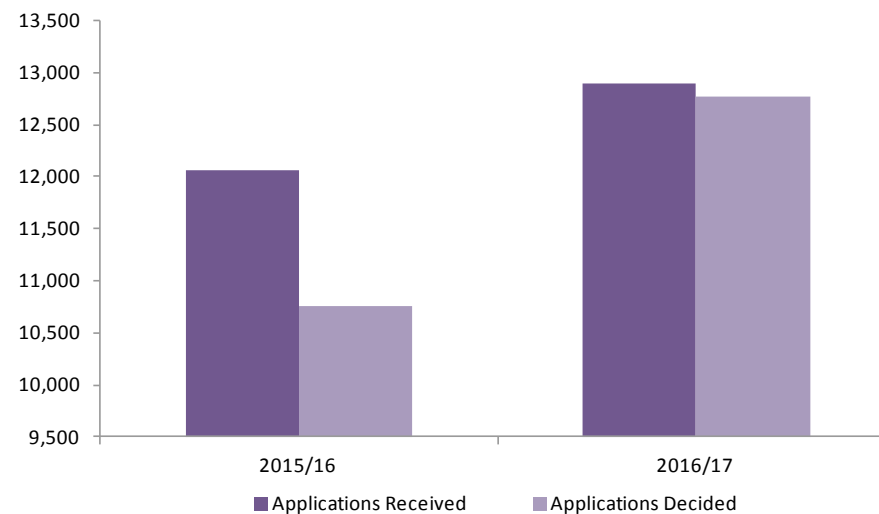
The number of **local** applications **decided** in 2016/17 was **12,764**, a notable increase of 18.7% when compared to a year earlier.

In 2015/16, the number of planning applications received was higher than the number being decided. This was very apparent during the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils. Moving through 2015/16, the number of applications decided each year increased considerably narrowing the gap significantly between the numbers received and the numbers decided.

In Q4 2015/16, the number of applications decided exceeded the number received for the first time in the series and this continued to be the situation in the first two quarters of 2016/17. By the end of 2016/17,

however, the numbers of local applications received was still slightly higher than the number being decided although the gap was much reduced compared to the previous year. See Fig 4.1.

Fig 4.1 Local applications, annually, 2015/16 – 2016/17



During 2016/17, Newry, Mourne and Down (1,731), Belfast City (1,671) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (1,406) issued the most local decisions across councils, partly reflecting the high volumes of such applications received.

Nine of the eleven councils issued more decisions on local applications than they did a year earlier. Of these nine, Newry, Mourne and Down increased the number of decisions issued on local applications by 54.0% (from 1,124 to 1,731 decisions), next was Belfast City increasing by 32.1% (from 1,265 to 1,671 decisions) and then Causeway Coast and Glens who were up by 28.1% (from 1,007 to 1,290 decisions).

Over the year, there were 637 local applications withdrawn across NI. This represents a significant increase of 42.8% on the 446 applications withdrawn in the previous year. The number of applications withdrawn

during the year ranged from 117 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 22 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Over the year the number of applications withdrawn increased in seven of the eleven councils with the greatest increases recorded in Newry, Mourne and Down (+72), Causeway Coast and Glens (+46) and Derry City and Strabane (+41).

[Refer to Table 4.1](#)

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.

During 2016/17, the **average processing time** to bring local applications to decision or withdrawal was **16.2 weeks** across all councils, an improvement of 3.2 weeks on the average time taken last year (19.4 weeks).

The shortest average processing time for local applications during 2016/17 was 9.0 weeks in Mid and East Antrim (based on 814 local applications decided and 29 withdrawn) followed by 11.6 weeks in Fermanagh and Omagh (based on 982 local applications decided and 52 withdrawn). The longest processing times were 23.0 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down (based on 1,731 local applications decided and 117 withdrawn) and 22.4 weeks in Lisburn and Castlereagh (based on 1,024 local applications decided and 36 withdrawn).

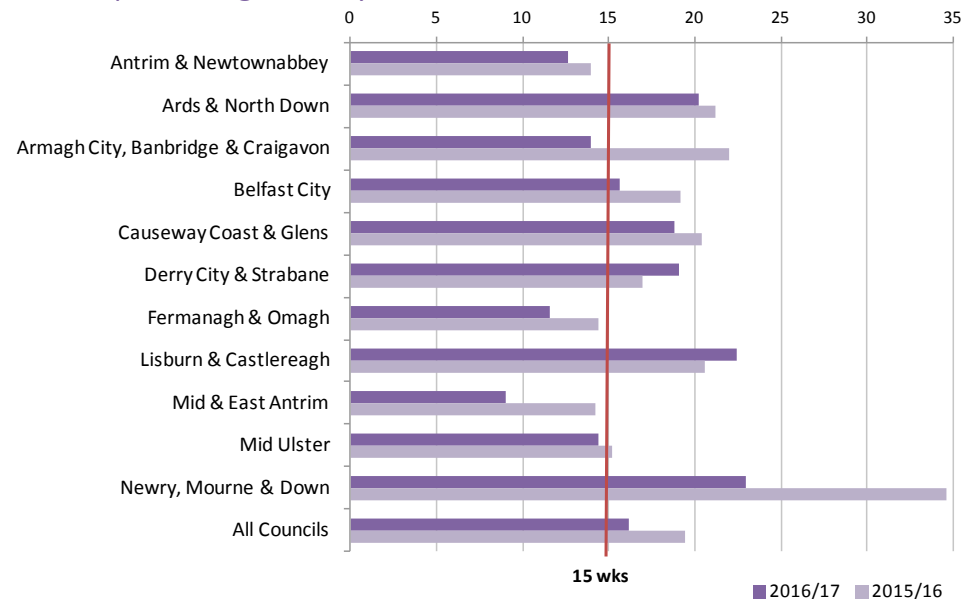
Five of the 11 councils, namely Mid and East Antrim (9.0), Fermanagh and Omagh (11.6), Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.6), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.0) and Mid Ulster (14.4) were within the 15 week statutory target at the end of March 2017.

Notably, nine of the eleven councils improved their processing times for local applications during the year when compared with the previous year.

The councils reporting the greatest level of improvement were Newry, Mourne and Down reducing processing times by a considerable 11.6 weeks over the year and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon by 8.0 weeks.

[Refer to Table 4.2](#)

Fig 4.2 Local processing times by council, 2015/16 & 2016/17



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](#).

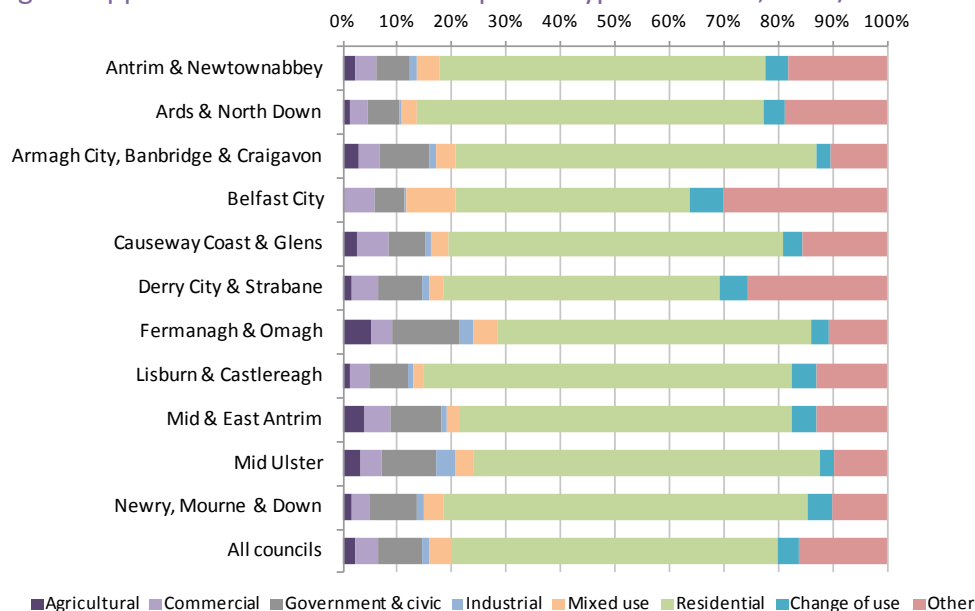
During 2016/17 it is interesting to note that processing time for local applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is over 6 times shorter (15.0 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (93.4 weeks).

Across Northern Ireland 94.0% of local planning applications decided upon were approved in 2016/17, similar to the rate in 2015/16 (93.9%). Approval rates improved over the year in seven of the eleven councils.

5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During 2016/17, **residential** applications made up **59.8%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications received, up by 0.9pp over the year from 58.9%. Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, 2016/17



During 2016/17, in Lisburn and Castlereagh, Newry, Mourne and Down and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon nearly seven out of every ten applications received (67.8%, 66.9% and 66.3% respectively) were for residential development, compared to just over four in every ten in Belfast City (43.2%).

Belfast City (30.2%) and Derry City and Strabane (25.8%) receive a much higher proportion of applications in the 'Other' category. See Appendix 1 –

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

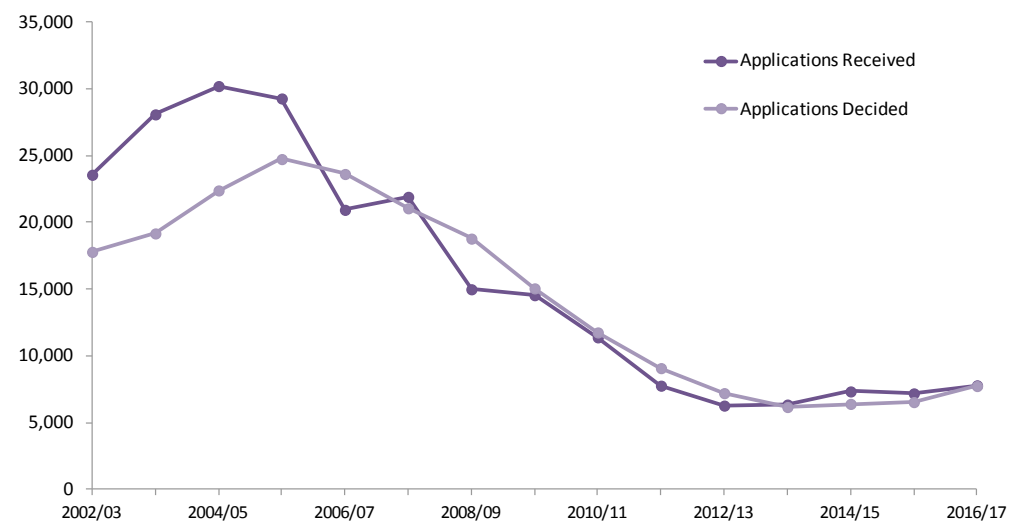
At NI level, the overall number of planning applications increased by 6.7% in over the last year. This increase was driven by increases of 8.4% in the number of 'Residential' applications received (up from 7,192 to 7,795) and 17.2% in 'Other' (up from 1,806 to 2,117). This increase was slightly offset by a fall of 18.5% in 'Government and Civic' applications which fell over the year from 1,283 to 1,046.

[Refer to Table 5.1, 5.2](#)

Residential applications

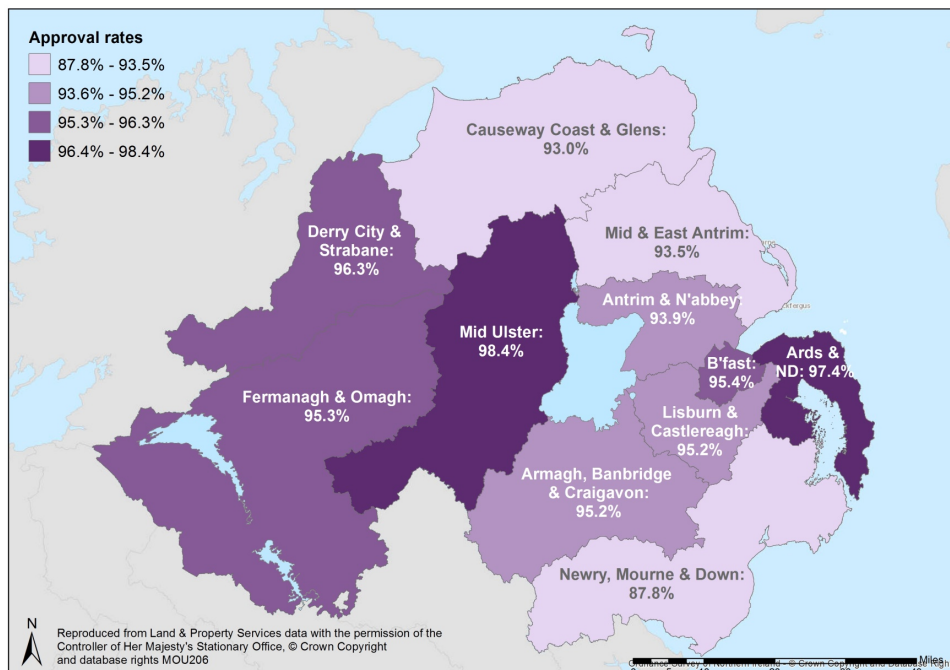
The number of **residential** planning applications **decided** in 2016/17 was **7,744**, a substantial increase of 18.4% over the year.

Fig 5.2 NI Residential applications, annually from 2002/03 to 2016/17



[Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council, 2016/17



The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for residential planning applications in 2016/17 was **94.3%**, which was similar to the rate in 2015/16 (93.9%). Seven of the eleven councils had an approval rate that was higher than the Northern Ireland rate in 2016/17.

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils with highs of 98.4% in Mid Ulster and 97.4% in Ards and North Down, down to 87.8% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in seven of the eleven councils over the year with Fermanagh and Omagh reporting the greatest increase of 2.6pp (from 92.7% to 95.3%) followed by Lisburn and Castlereagh (up 2.4pp from 92.8% to 95.2%).

Over the year, there were 314 residential applications withdrawn, one hundred more than the previous year (214). This represented an increase of 46.7% over the year.

[Refer to Table 5.4](#)

Across urban areas (*in settlements greater than 5,000 population*), the number of residential applications received in 2016/17 increased by 9.4% over the year, with the majority (80.2%) of this increase driven by applications for domestic alterations and extensions.

In rural areas within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was a larger increase in such applications of 15.2% over the year with again the majority (55.8%) of the increase accounted for applications to carry out domestic alterations and extensions.

In the open countryside, the increase was smallest at 6.3% over the year. Applications for replacement single dwellings increased over the year in the open countryside by 16.6% followed by applications for housing developments (9.7%) and domestic alterations and extensions (7.7%).

Fig 5.4 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications received. Urban is based on areas with settlements greater than 5,000 population while rural is a combination of settlements below 5,000 population and open countryside.

New single dwellings in rural areas and alterations/extensions in urban areas continue to dominate, together making up just over half (50.9%) of all residential applications received during 2016/17, similar to the position a year earlier (51.6%).

The increase over the year in the number of residential applications received (+8.4%) was driven by the increases in the number of **domestic alterations and extensions**, up 10.9% from 2,923 to 3,243 applications, an

increase of 14.6% in replacement single dwelling applications (up from 699 to 801) and an increase of 3.9% for new single dwelling applications (up from 2,301 to 2,390).

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, 2016/17

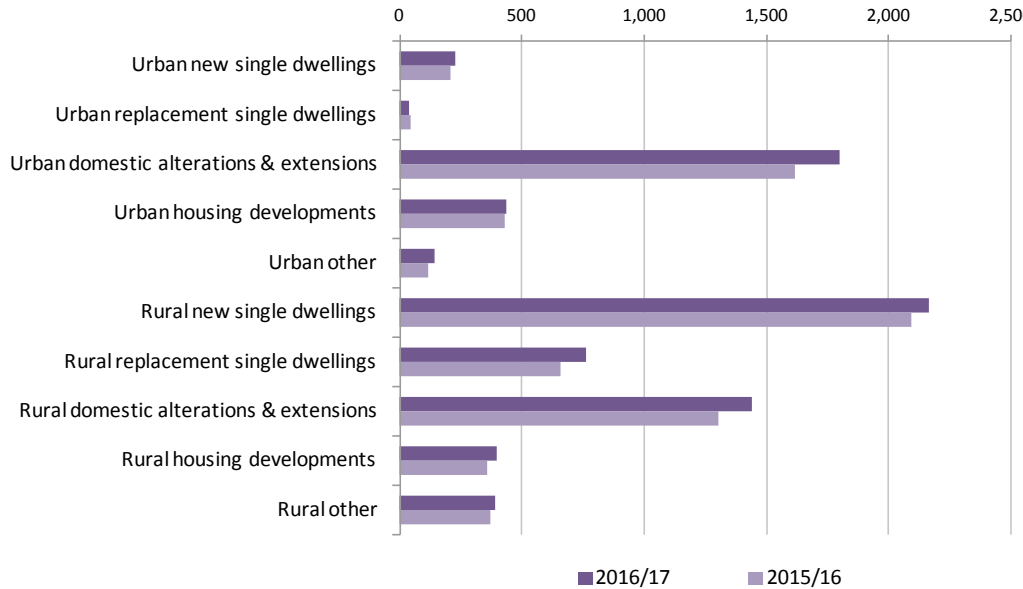
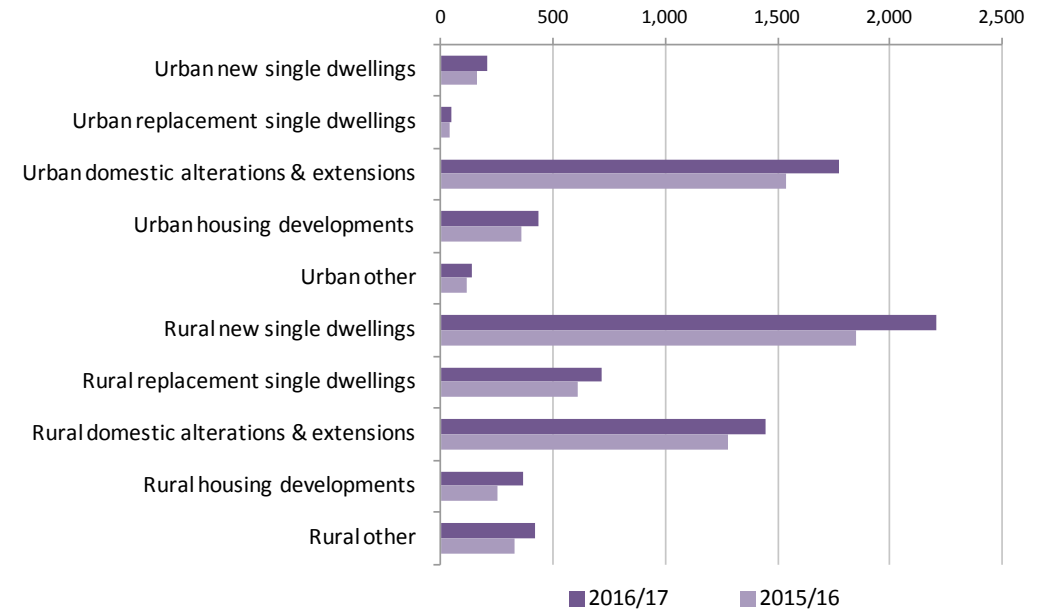


Fig 5.5 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, 2016/17



[Refer to Table 5.5](#)

Decisions on residential applications increased significantly over the year by 18.4% (from 6,541 to 7,744), with the greatest increases in the number of **new single dwellings** (up 19.7% from 2,011 to 2,407) and **domestic alterations and extensions** (up 14.0% from 2,820 to 3,215).

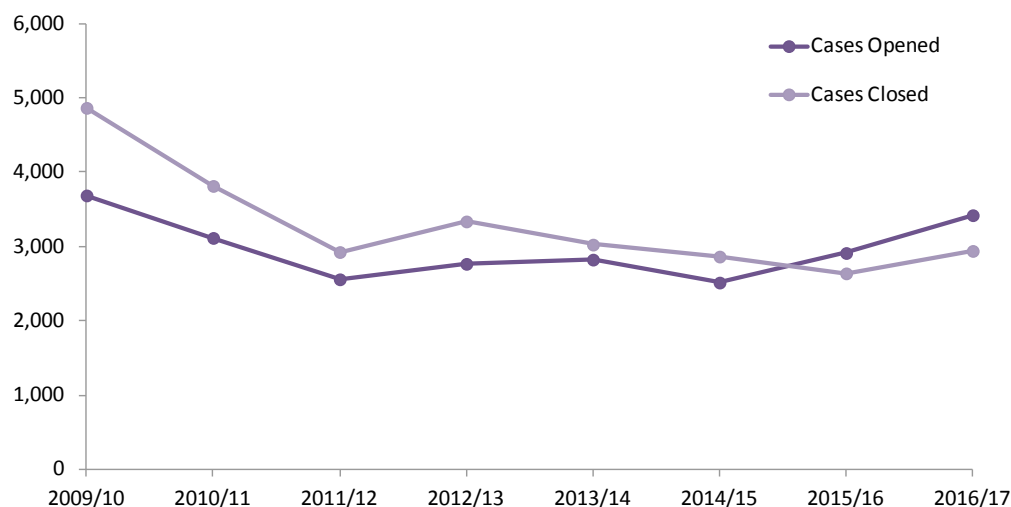
The majority of the increase in new single dwelling decided applications (90.2%) was in rural areas (open countryside accounting for 84.8% and settlements below 5,000 population accounting for 5.3%). Nearly three fifths of the applications for domestic alterations and extensions were in urban areas with settlements greater than 5,000 population (59.0%) and the remainder split equally across settlements below 5,000 population (20.5%) and open countryside (20.5%).

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during 2016/17 was **3,423**, an increase of 17.5% compared to a year earlier. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any year since the start of the reported series in 2009/10 when 3,689 cases were opened. The increase over the year is largely attributable to the increases in Antrim and Newtownabbey (+166 cases), Newry, Mourne and Down (+136) and Causeway Coast and Glens (+112). These three councils accounted for over four fifths of the increase reported (81.3%).

Across the councils, Antrim and Newtownabbey (440) and Belfast City (417) opened the largest number of cases in 2016/17, whilst Mid Ulster (188) and Mid and East Antrim (209) opened the least amount of cases.

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, annually 2009/10 to 2016/17



The number of **enforcement cases closed** during 2016/17 was **2,942**, an 11.4% increase on the number of cases closed in the previous year. This

increase is largely the result of increases in Antrim and Newtownabbey (+135 cases), Belfast City (+79) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (+78). These three councils accounted for 96.7% of the increase.

For the majority of the reported series, the general trend has been for more cases to be closed than opened in a year. However, in 2015/16 the number of cases closed was lower than the number opened for the first time in the series and this has continued in 2016/17, with 16.3% more cases opened than closed.

Antrim and Newtownabbey (417) and Belfast City (415) closed the highest number of cases in 2016/17 whilst Derry City and Strabane (170) and Mid and East Antrim (188) closed the least number of cases.

Of the **2,942** closed cases in 2016/17, the main reason in a third of cases (33.2%) was that no breach had actually occurred while just over a quarter (26.4%) of cases had been remedied or resolved.

[Refer to Table 6.1](#)

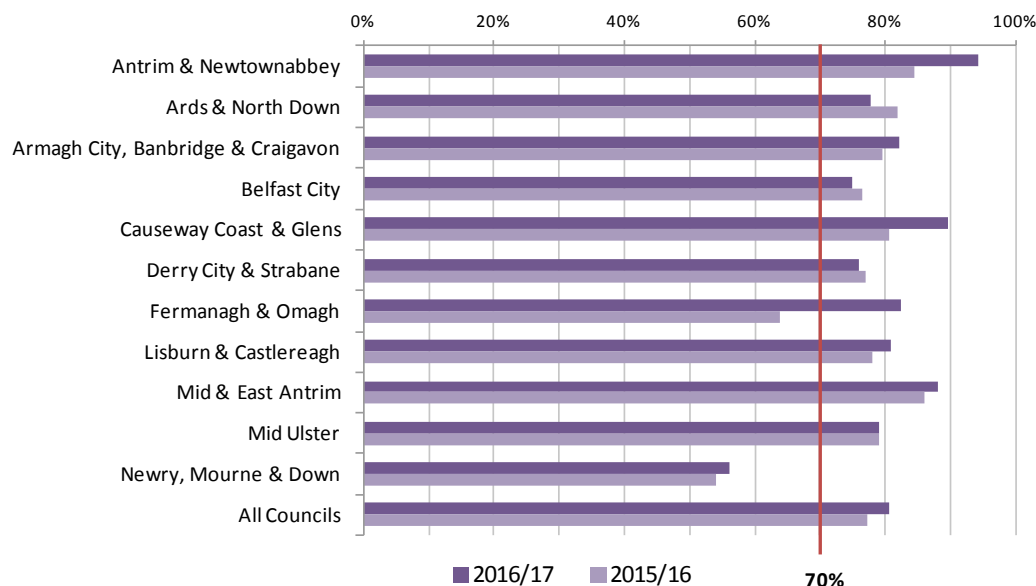
It is a statutory target that **70% of all enforcement cases dealt with by councils are progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.**

Across Northern Ireland, **just over four in every five (80.7%)** enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks, nearly 11 percentage points better than the statutory target and 3.5 percentage points higher than the previous year.

Ten of the eleven councils met the target with highs of 94.3% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey followed by Causeway Coast and Glens (89.5%) and Mid and East Antrim (88.1%). Fermanagh and Omagh notably concluded 82.4% of cases within 39 weeks, a significant increase of 18.6 percentage points from the previous year's figure of

63.8%. Newry, Mourne and Down were the only council not to meet the target, bringing to conclusion 56.1% of enforcement within 39 weeks, which was up slightly on the previous year (54.1%).

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, 2015/16 & 2016/17



[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

During 2016/17, there were **41 prosecutions** initiated, an increase of almost four fifths (78.3%) from the previous year. Prosecutions dropped significantly between 2012/13 (145) and 2015/16 (23) and while the 2016/17 figure of 41 prosecutions is still considerably lower than the 145 recorded in 2012/13 it is a marked increase on last year's figure.

During 2016/17, eight of the eleven councils initiated prosecutions, with Fermanagh and Omagh (13) initiating the most, followed by Mid Ulster

(10). These two councils accounted for over half (56.1%) of prosecutions initiated during the year.

There were **30 convictions** during 2016/17, an increase of two thirds on the same period a year earlier (18). However, this year's count is almost two thirds lower (65.5%) than the series high of 87 convictions recorded in 2009/10. In 2016/17, Lisburn and Castlereagh and Mid Ulster recorded the most convictions (6), closely followed by Causeway Coast and Glens and Newry, Mourne and Down (5).

[Refer to Table 6.3](#)

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of March 2017 was **3,323**, 16.8% more than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **849**, accounting for just over a quarter (25.5%) of all live cases. The proportion of live enforcement cases in the planning system for more than two years has remained relatively static since 2014/15.

[Refer to Table 6.4](#)

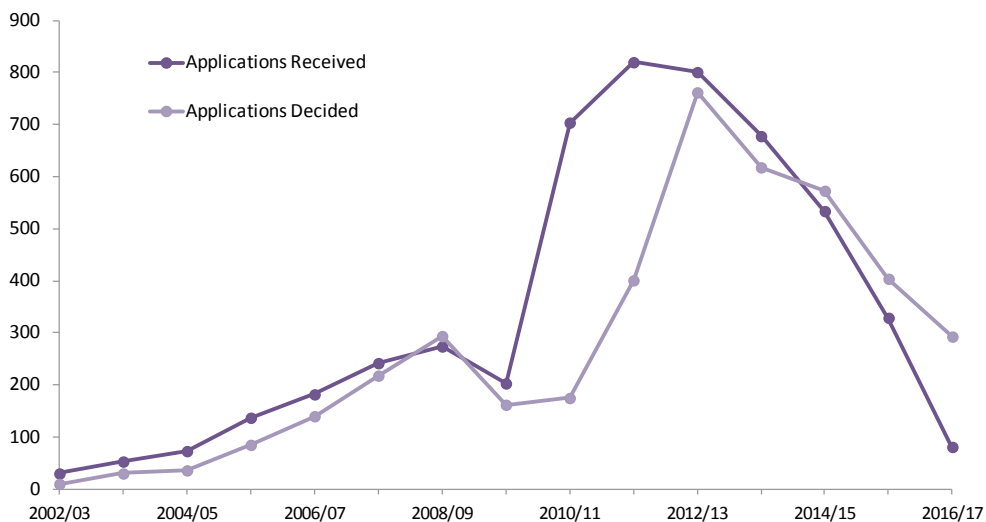
Across the councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the largest number of live cases at the end of March 2017 (726) and also the largest proportion of cases in the system for over 2 years (41.3%). Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of cases (121) with 11.6% of them being in the system for over 2 years. The number of live enforcement cases increased over the year in nine of the eleven councils, with the greatest percentage increases in Causeway Coast and Glens (55.2%) and Ards and North Down (39.6%).

[Refer to Table 6.5](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in 2016/17 was **81**, the lowest annual figure in the series since 2004/05. This represented a **75.4%** decrease in received applications from the same period a year earlier, the biggest annual drop in the entire series. 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. This continuing sharp decline in recent years (a **90.1%** decrease from peak of 820 to 81 applications in 2016/17) 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 2006/07–2016/17



The number of applications **decided** was **293**, a decrease of 27.5% when compared to the previous year and down by over three fifths (61.5%)

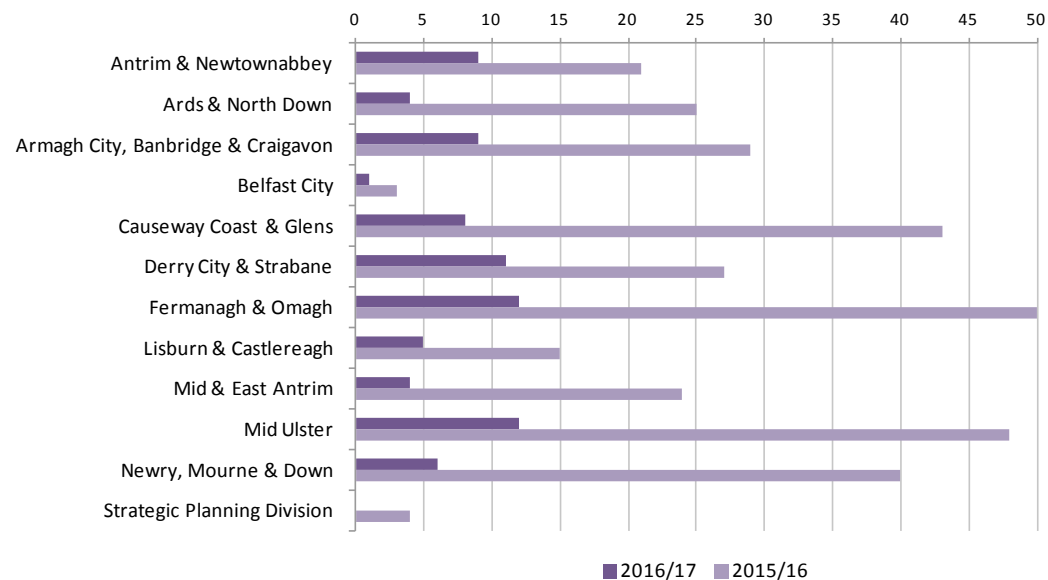
when compared to the series peak of 762 applications decided in 2012/13. During 2016/17, the average processing time for these applications was 62.2 weeks across NI and an increase of nearly 13 weeks on last year.

In 2016/17, more than 4 out of every 10 (43.2%) renewable energy applications were for single wind turbines (35 of 81). In addition, biomass/anaerobic digesters made up 27.2% and solar panels 22.2% of the 81 applications. Although single wind turbines still make up the majority of renewable energy applications, it is a much reduced proportion compared with previous years.

[Refer to Table 7.1, 7.2](#)

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by authority, 2015/16 & 2016/17

Figure 7.2 shows the spread across councils, with Fermanagh and Omagh

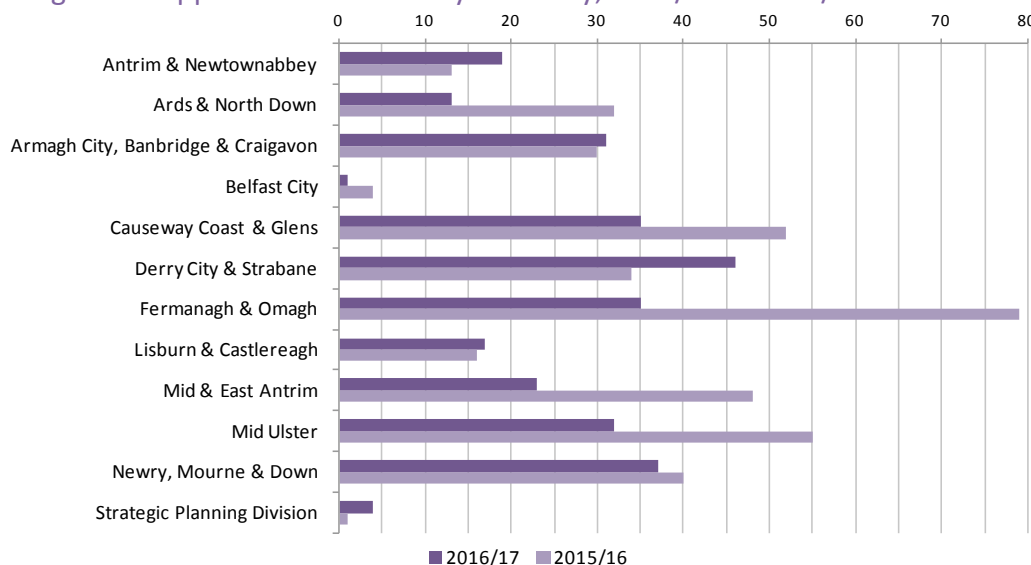


and Mid Ulster receiving the most renewable applications (12) closely followed by Derry City and Strabane (11). These figures are down

considerably on last year, when Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster also received the most applications (50 and 48 respectively).

Of the 293 decisions issued in 2016/17, three quarters (221) were for single wind turbines. Derry City and Strabane issued the most decisions (46), followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (37), Causeway Coast and Glens and Fermanagh and Omagh (both 35) – see Figure 7.3 for the full breakdown.

Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by authority, 2015/16 & 2016/17



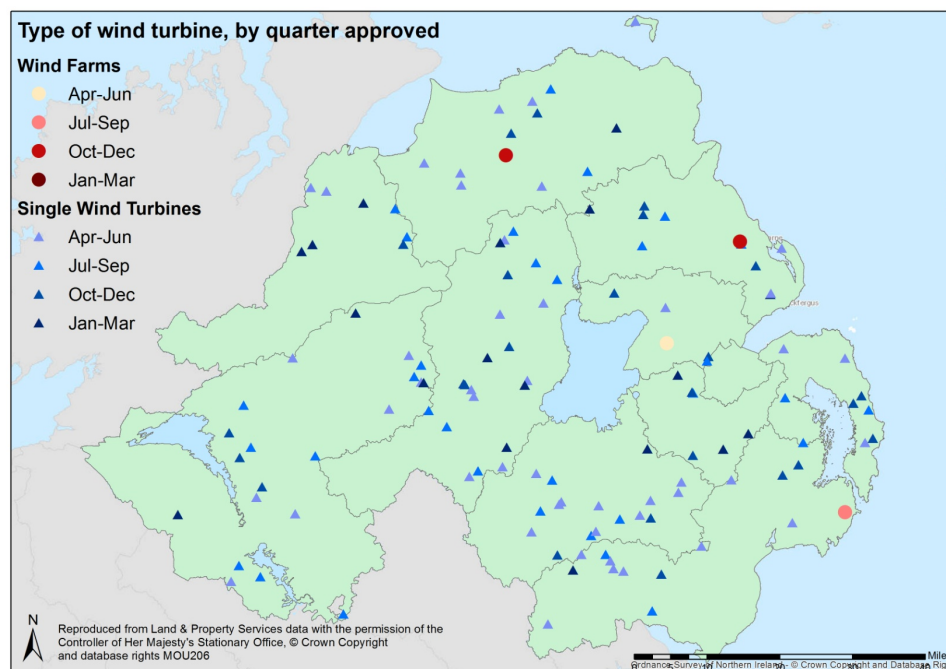
Ninety eight renewable energy applications were withdrawn during 2016/17, 25 fewer than the same period last year, with Newry, Mourne and Down (19) recording the most withdrawals across councils.

At the end of March 2017, there were **141 live renewable energy applications**, with just under three quarters of these (74.5%) being in the planning system for over a year. These largely comprised of 84 single wind turbines, 19 biomass/anaerobic digesters, 17 wind farms, and 13 for hydroelectricity. The number of live renewable energy applications was

down by almost three tenths (29.9%) when compared with end of December 2016, although the proportion of applications in the system for over a year has risen slightly by just under 3 percentage points over the same period.

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **63.8% in 2016/17**, the lowest annual approval rate of the series. Over the last year, the approval rate decreased by 16.6 percentage points from 80.4%, which is the biggest annual drop in the entire series.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications, 2016/17



[Refer to Table 7.3, 7.4](#)

Work is currently underway to develop interactive maps for renewable energy planning applications. The maps will be held on the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Sharing ([NINIS website](#)) and a direct link to them will be included in future reports.

User Guidance

Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 were transferred in May 2017 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 at the end of May 2017. Quarterly data for 2016/17 are now finalised and will not be subject to further scheduled revision.

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 these to become properly embedded.

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.

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 the Department. The impact of this requirement initially distorted the quarterly activity pattern in 2015/16, where numbers received were high in Q1 which could have been a push to get applications into the system ahead of the requirement, followed then by reduced numbers in Q2 and, to a lesser extent, in Q3 and Q4.

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.

It should be noted that in Section 2 of this report, processing times for 'Called-In' applications are calculated from the date the application was called in by the Department. This method is only used in Section 2 of the report in order to show Departmental processing performance. All other processing times reported in the publication are based on the date the application is made valid.

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 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. Presently the mid-point of the application polygon is used to assign urban and rural bandings.

From Q2 2016/17, an additional split has been provided reporting separately rural settlements with populations of less than 5,000 people. In addition to that 'housing developments' and 'other' residential applications have been included within the urban and rural breakdowns.

If users want to compare this information with information published before 2015/16 the 'housing developments' and 'other' residential applications should be excluded first; the next step to obtain a

comparative figure would be to add 'Urban settlements' (>=5,000 people) and 'Rural settlements' (<5,000 people) together.

From 2015/16 the Urban/Rural data reported in this bulletin is based on the recommended NISRA definition. To obtain rural figures in line with the NISRA definition users should add 'Rural Settlements' and 'Countryside' together.

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.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/new-dwelling-statistics>

Housing bulletin DSD:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing-statistics>

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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