

# NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2017/18 ANNUAL STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(April 2017 – March 2018: Final figures)



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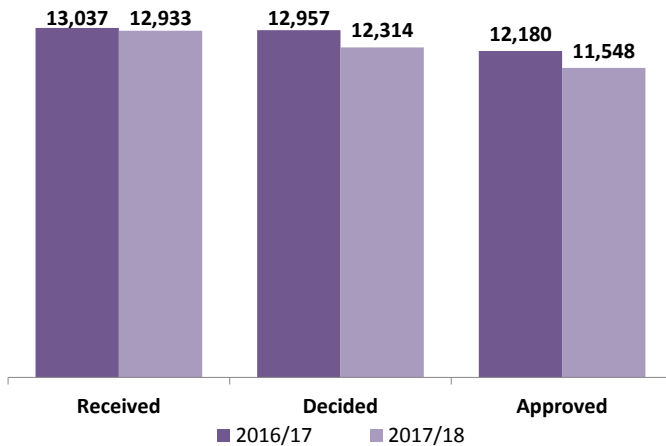
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# NI Planning statistics 2017/18

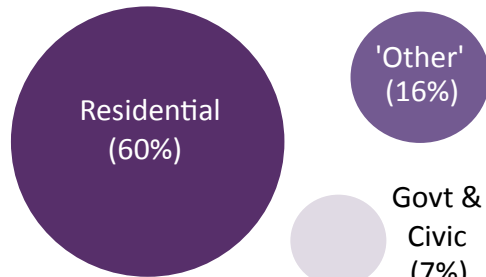
## Overall planning applications



Received down by 1%

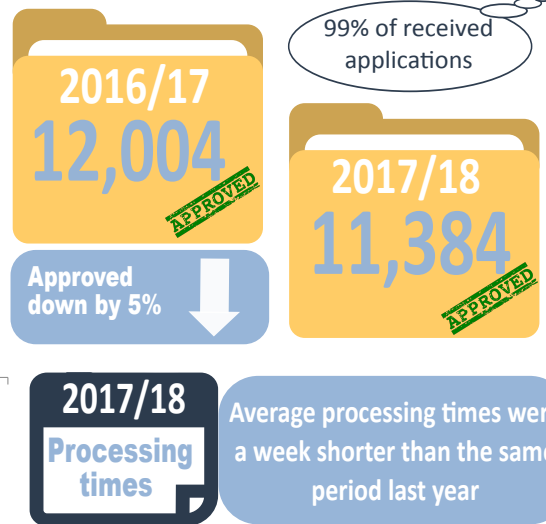
Decided and Approved down by 5%

### 3 largest development types

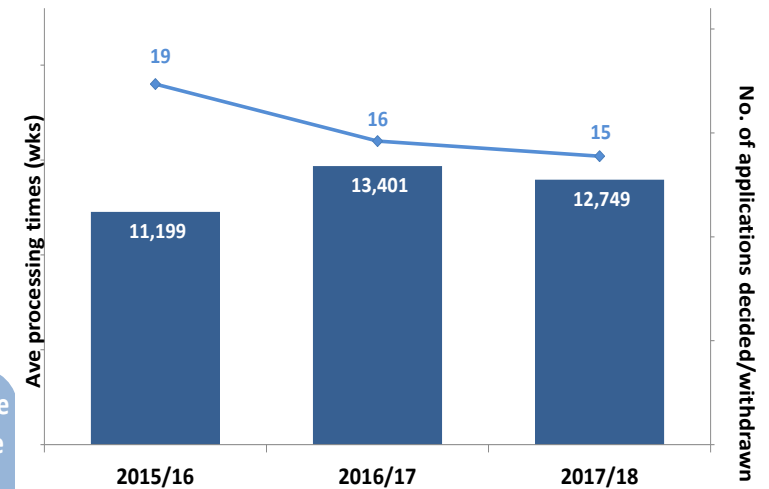


'Other' includes works to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements and listed buildings

## Local planning applications

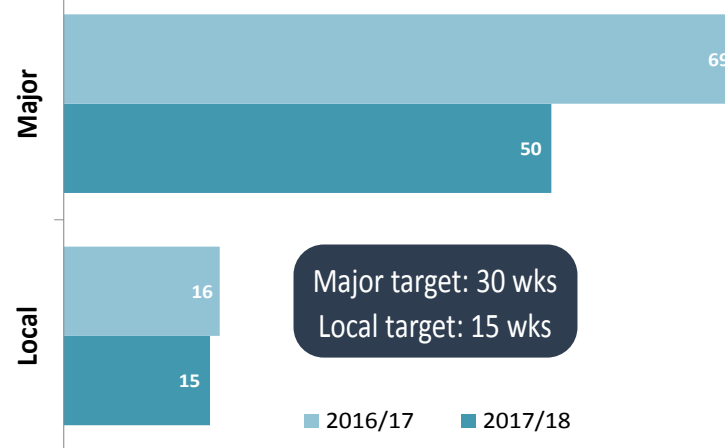


**2017/18 Processing times**  
Average processing times were a week shorter than the same period last year

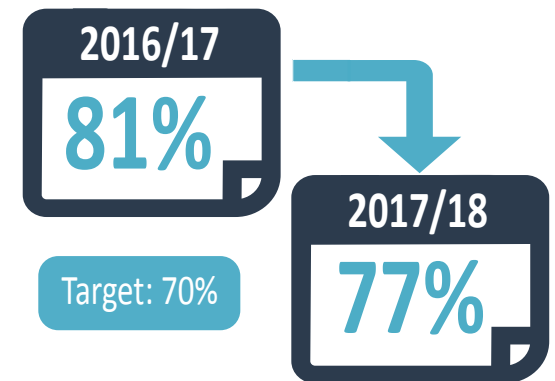


## Planning statutory targets

### Major and Local average processing times (wks)



### % of Enforcement cases concluded in 39 wks



## Key Points

- There were 12,933 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during 2017/18, a decrease of nearly 1% over the previous financial year. This comprised 12,770 local, 161 major and 2 regionally significant development applications.
- In total, 12,314 planning applications were decided, a decrease of 5% over the previous year. This is less than half the peak level of 30,161 decisions recorded in 2005/06 before the economic downturn. The number of planning applications decided has remained fairly stable since 2012/13.
- The average processing time for major applications was just over 50 weeks across all councils; down significantly from the 69 weeks reported for the previous year but still well over the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks. Only one council, Mid and East Antrim, met the processing time target during 2017/18. Processing times decreased from 2016/17 in seven of the eleven councils.
- The number of local planning applications received was 12,770, a decrease of 1% on last year. Four of the eleven councils received more local applications compared to the previous year with Belfast City (1,788), Newry, Mourne and Down (1,562) and Mid Ulster (1,397) receiving most.
- Across councils it took on average just over 15 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal, just missing the target but an improvement of 1 week on the previous year. The shortest average processing time for local applications was less than 10 weeks in Mid and East Antrim, whilst the longest was nearly 22 weeks in Lisburn and Castlereagh. In all, five of the 11 councils achieved the 15 week target.
- The number of enforcement cases opened was 3,304, a decrease of over 3% on the same period last year. Across the councils Belfast City (427), Ards and North Down (410) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (408) opened the largest number of cases during the year.
- Across NI, nearly four in every five (77%) enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks, 7 percentage points above the statutory 70% target but a decline of almost 4 percentage points on 2016/17 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 60% 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 2017/18 from highs of 98% in Mid Ulster and 97% in Derry City and Strabane to a low of 88% in Newry, Mourne and Down.
- The 58 renewable energy applications received was by far the lowest annual figure since 2003/04, representing a 28% decrease in received applications compared with a year earlier. At the end of March 2018 there were 101 live renewable energy applications and nearly three fifths (58%) of these have 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 for Infrastructure, for 2017/18. Note that from the 8th May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of Environment to the new Department for Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental reorganisation.

Whilst the bulletin and accompanying tables report data for 2017/18, 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 2017/18 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 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.

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 2018. This will contain planning data up to 30th June 2018 and will commence the quarterly reporting cycle for 2018/19.

The next annual report covering 2018/19 is planned for release in late June 2019. Development of a planning monitoring framework is ongoing and progress on that framework will be published in July 2019.

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

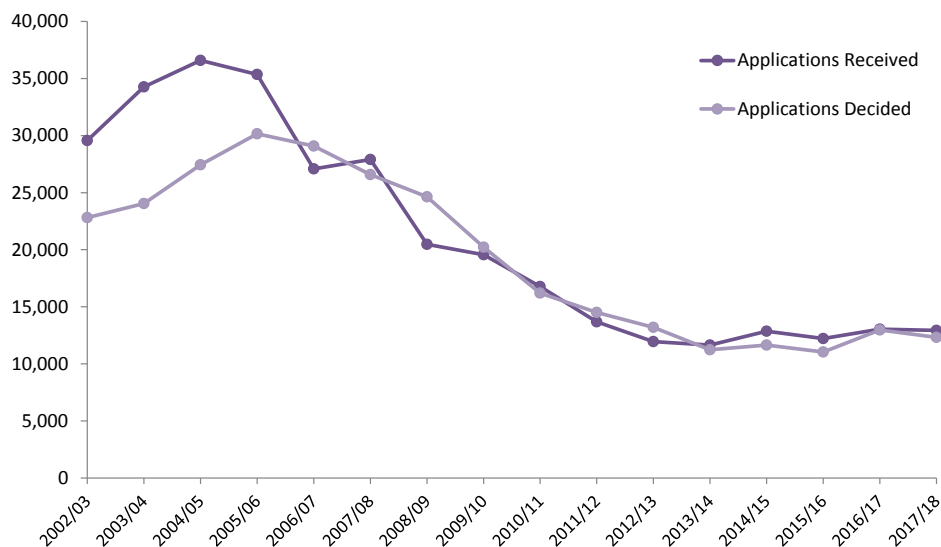
## 1. Overall NI Planning Activity

### 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 seven years with small changes year on year. During 2017/18, **12,933** planning applications were **received**, a decrease of 0.8% on the previous financial year (13,037).

Three quarters of the planning applications received in 2017/18 were for full planning permission (75.9%), similar to the position last year (75.3%).

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, annually from 2002/03 – 2017/18

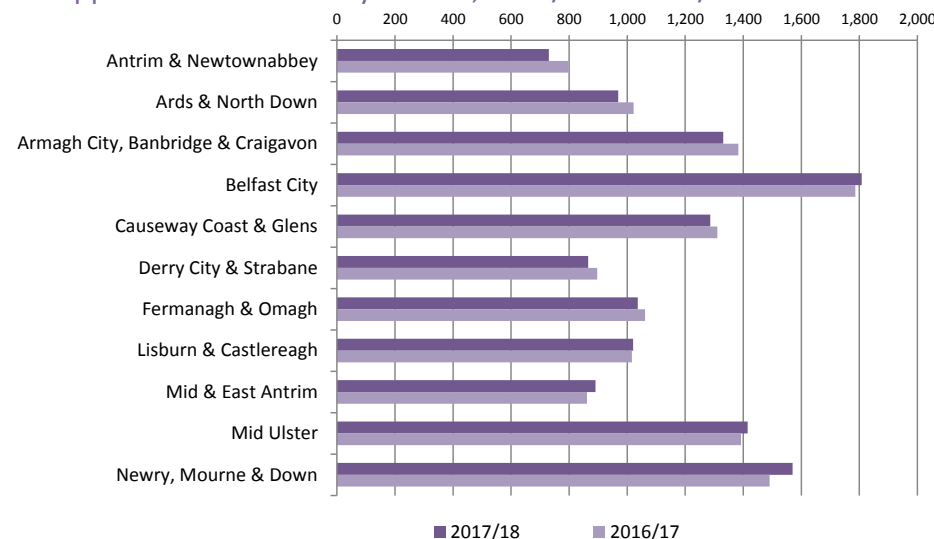


In 2017/18, Belfast City (1,808) received the most planning applications, followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (1,570), Mid Ulster (1,415) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (1,331); between them accounting

for nearly half (47.4%) of all applications received across NI, which was similar to the position a year earlier. The councils receiving the least applications were Antrim and Newtownabbey (730), Derry City and Strabane (866) and Mid and East Antrim (891).

The volume of planning applications received in 2017/18 declined in six of the eleven councils over the year with the largest decrease, in percentage terms, occurring in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-8.5%) and Ards and North Down (-5.2%). Newry, Mourne and Down showed the greatest percentage increase (5.3%).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, 2016/17 & 2017/18





## Applications Decided

During 2017/18 there were **12,314** planning **decisions** issued, representing a decrease of 5.0% over the previous year. This is less than half the peak number of 30,161 decisions issued back in 2005/06. The number of planning applications decided has remained fairly stable since 2012/13.

In 2017/18 just over three quarters of planning decisions (76.5%) were for full planning permission.

Over the course of the year, **625** applications were **withdrawn**, down by 4.9% when compared to the previous year (657). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

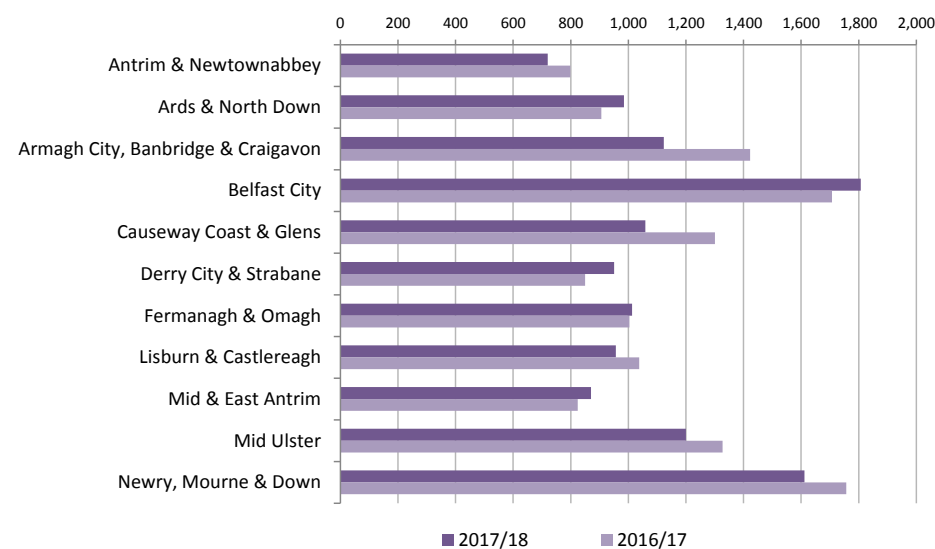
## Applications Decided by Council

The volume of planning decisions issued across councils during 2017/18 varied. Belfast City issued the most planning decisions (1,807), followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (1,612) and Mid Ulster (1,200). Antrim and Newtownabbey issued the lowest number of decisions (720) during the year followed by Mid and East Antrim (870) and Derry City and Strabane (951).

Five of the eleven councils issued more decisions in 2017/18 compared to the previous year with Derry City and Strabane (951) reporting the largest percentage increase in the number of decisions issued (11.9%) followed by Ards and North Down (985: 8.7%).

Six councils issued fewer decisions than the previous year with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (-21.1%) and Causeway Coast and Glens (-18.6%) reporting the largest percentage decreases.

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, 2016/17 & 2017/18



Three of the eleven councils issued more decisions than they received during 2017/18, these were Derry City and Strabane (+9.8%), Newry, Mourne and Down (+2.7%) and Ards and North Down (+1.7%).

[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 2017/18 they processed to decision or withdrawal 440 certificates of lawfulness, 512 non material changes and 669 discharge of conditions. The number of certificates of lawfulness processed decreased by 8.3% while non material changes and discharge of conditions processed increased by 6.9% and 47.0% respectively. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

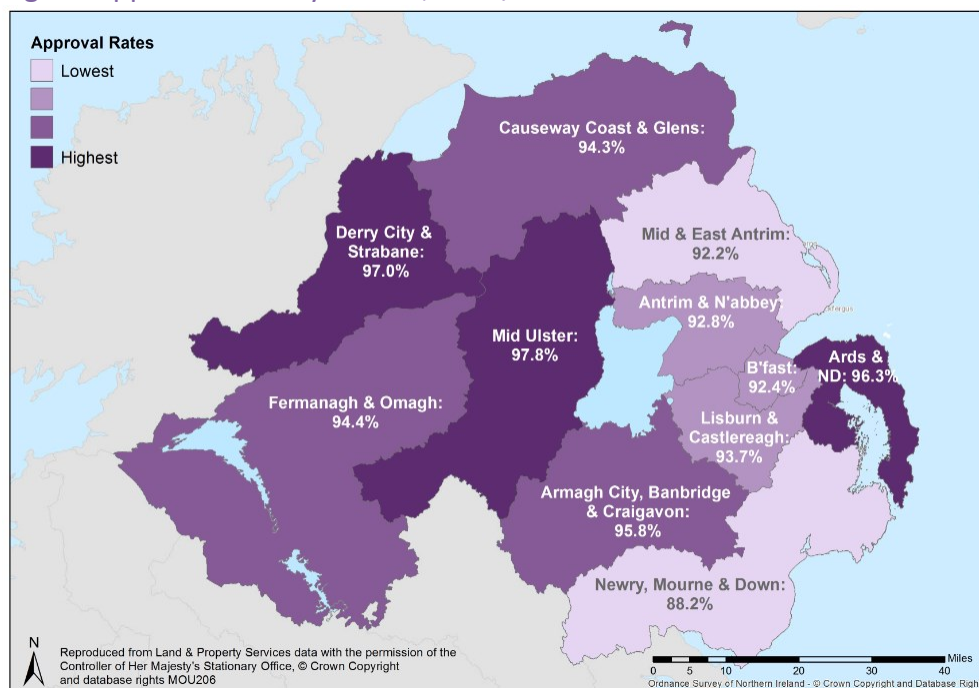


## Approval Rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications for 2017/18 was **93.8%**, which was similar to the rate a year earlier (94.0%).

The overall approval rate for all planning applications has been fairly stable for the last six years ranging from 93.2% to 94.5%.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, 2017/18



Planning approval rates varied across councils during 2017/18 from highs of 97.8% in Mid Ulster and 97.0% in Derry City and Strabane to a low of 88.2% 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 93.8%. Four councils reported an increased approval rate over the year, the largest increases were in Derry City and Strabane and Causeway Coast and

Glens with approval rates increasing by 3.9 percentage points<sup>1</sup> (pp) and 1.3pp respectively. Where approvals rates declined the most notable were in Belfast City (-2.8pp) and Lisburn and Castlereagh and Mid and East Antrim which both had a 1.4pp decrease. [Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

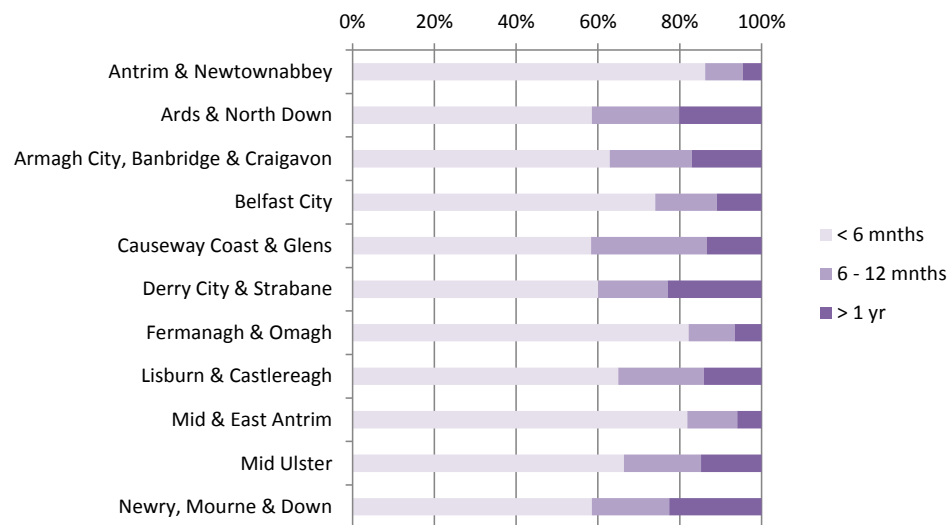
## Live applications

At the end of March 2018, there were **6,745** live applications in the planning system across NI, a decrease of 0.6% over the year from 6,785 at the end of March 2017. Approximately 1 out of every 7 live applications in the planning system at the end of March 2018 was over one year old (1,036: 15.4%); this was down 2.6 percentage points when compared to the end of March 2017 (1,220: 18.0%).

[Refer to Table 1.3](#)

<sup>1</sup> Percentage Point change (pp)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Mar 2018



The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of March 2018 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.5. Antrim and Newtownabbey had the lowest proportion of cases over one year old (4.6%), followed by Mid and East Antrim (5.9%) and Fermanagh and Omagh (6.5%). Derry City and Strabane had the largest proportion of applications in the system for over a year (23.0%) followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (22.6%) and Ards and North Down (20.1%).

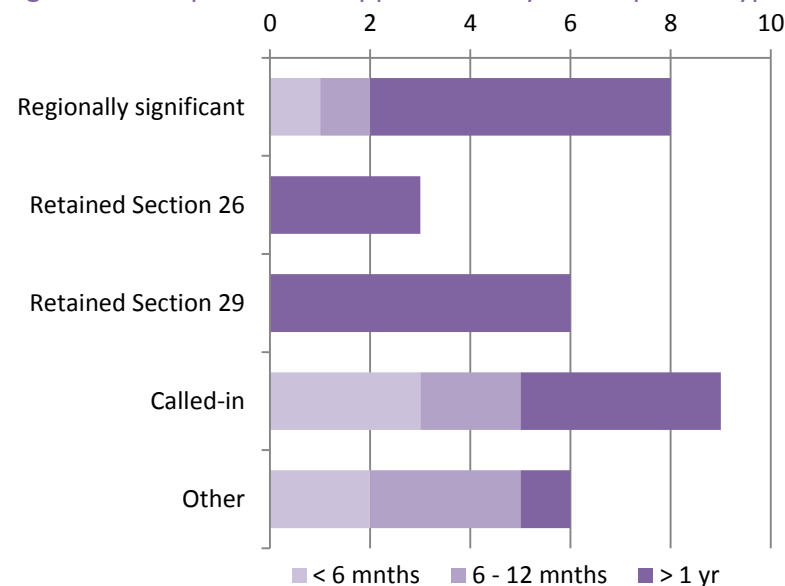
Over the last year, eight of the eleven councils reduced the proportion of live cases that are in the system for over a year, with the greatest changes in Lisburn and Castlereagh (-9.6pp), Belfast City (-4.6pp) and Derry City and Strabane and Newry, Mourne and Down (both -4.5pp). The proportion of applications over a year increased in three councils, with the greatest of these increases in Ards and North Down (4.3pp) and Causeway Coast and Glens (1.9pp).

[Refer to Table 1.4](#)

## 2. Departmental Activity

At the end of March 2018, there were **8** ongoing **regionally significant development (RSD)** applications, **9 called-in**, **9 retained applications** and **6 other applications**<sup>2</sup>. Almost two-thirds (62.5%) of these applications were in the system over a year.

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end Mar 18



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.

[Refer to Table 2.2](#)

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

In 2017/18, the Department received **13** new applications; 2 regionally significant, 5 were called in and 6 other applications. This is 8 less than the previous year (21).

**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 31 March 2018, of the **8** RSD applications that were live in the planning system, four were not subject to Pre-Application Discussions and therefore will not fall under the remit of the target. Of the remaining four applications, one was received during Q3 2017/18 and is still being processed while another had a recommendation during Q4 2017/18 to go to public inquiry. Two of the applications required further environmental information (FEI) which resulted in their targets being extended, one into 2018/19 and the other to Q4 2017/18, of which the target has been missed. Those ongoing 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 **17** applications during 2017/18, four less than a year earlier (21). Five decisions were on **Retained Section 26** (*former article 31*) applications, five on **other**, three each on **called-in** and **Retained Section 29** (*former Non-Article 31*) and one on **Regionally Significant**. Although the regionally significant application had a decision issued during 2017/18, it was processed to Ministerial Recommendation during the previous financial year, within a period of 19 weeks.

There were no applications withdrawn during the year. This compared to five applications withdrawn in the previous year, four retained and one other.

Overall, the average processing time in 2017/18 for those applications processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal was **64.6** weeks, an improvement of almost half from the 125.9 weeks in the previous year. The average processing times for called-in applications during the year increased from 11.0 weeks in the previous year to 38.0 weeks in 2017/18. The processing times for all other applications decreased over the year.

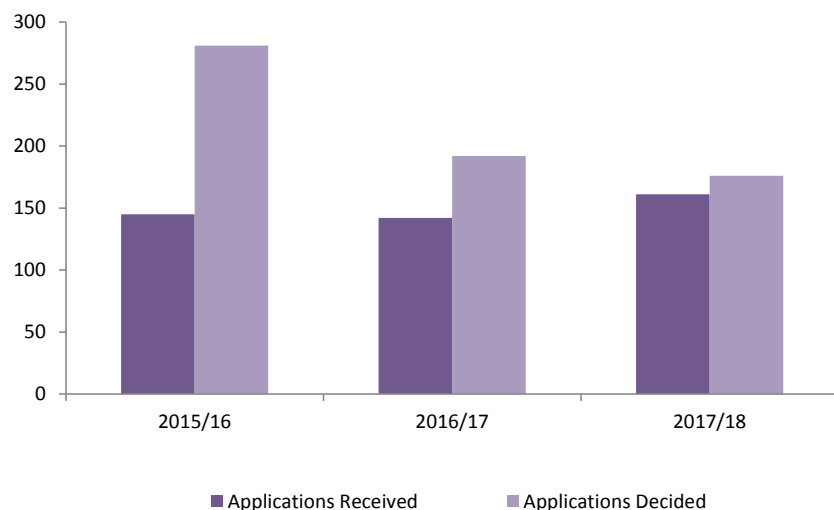
Full details of the average processing times during the year for all of the different application types that were processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal are reported in [Table 2.1](#). Some processing times are not highlighted in this commentary due to the very small numbers of applications 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 2017/18 was **161** which was up slightly from the number received in the previous year (142).

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, 2015/16 - 2017/18



From 1st July 2015, pre-application community consultation became a pre-requisite to a major application. All major applications now go through a minimum 12 week consultation process before being accepted. The impact of this when considering annual levels appears to be minimal.

Of the 161 major applications received in 2017/18, Belfast City (20) received the most followed by Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid Ulster with 18 each. Causeway Coast and Glens reported the largest increase in major applications received compared to the previous year, up from 10 to 18. Belfast City, while still receiving the most in 2017/18, reported the largest decrease, down from 27 in the previous year.

Over the year, **176 major** planning applications were **decided** and **13 withdrawn**. For the third year running the numbers of planning decisions issued for major applications have exceeded the numbers being received. However, the number of decisions issued overall continues to decline, down by 8.3% over the year.

At council level, Belfast City (28), Derry City and Strabane (23) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (18) issued most decisions on major applications. Seven of the eleven councils issued fewer decisions for major applications in 2017/18 when compared to the previous year.

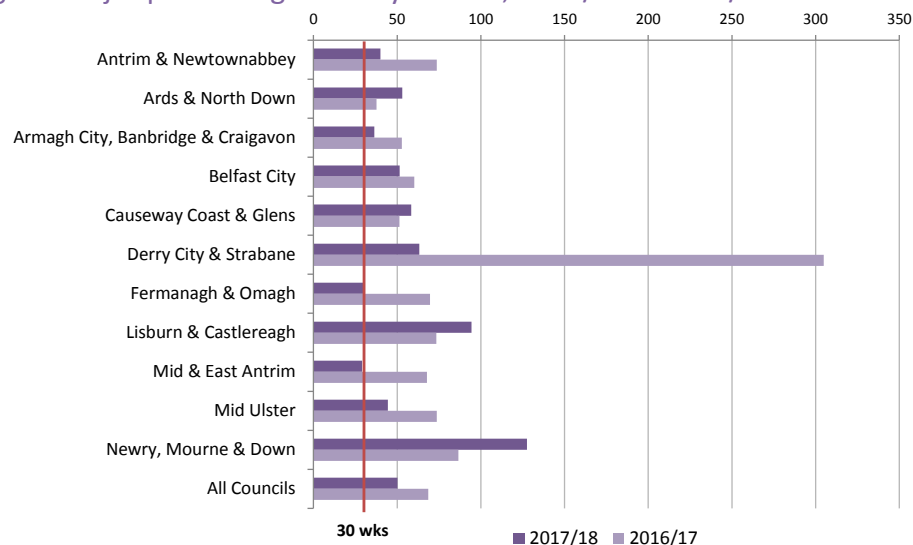
[Refer to Table 3.1](#)

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 2017/18 the **average processing time** to process **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **50.2 weeks** across all councils, down from the 68.6 weeks reported last year. This is still well over statutory processing time target of 30 weeks.

One council met the processing time target during 2017/18, Mid and East Antrim (29.0 weeks: 10 applications). This was followed by Fermanagh and Omagh (30.6 weeks: 15 applications) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (36.4 weeks: 15 applications). Processing times for major applications decreased over the year in seven of the eleven councils. Across councils, Derry City and Strabane reported an improved processing time over the year from 304.8 weeks (where the majority, 73.7%, were legacy) in 2016/17 to 63.2 weeks in 2017/18.

Fig 3.2 Major processing times by council, 2016/17 & 2017/18



Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest processing time of 127.6 weeks for the 15 applications processed followed by Lisburn and Castlereagh (94.4 weeks: 21 applications). During the year over half (53.3%) of the major applications processed by Newry, Mourne and Down 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. Major legacy applications processed were also a large proportion of applications dealt with in Derry City and Strabane (40.7%), Lisburn and Castlereagh (38.1%) and Causeway Coast and Glens (30.0%), with overall processing times of 63.2 weeks, 94.4 weeks and 58.4 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 2017/18 which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (39.8 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (200.8 weeks).

Across Northern Ireland 92.6% of major planning applications decided were approved in 2017/18. This represented an increase over the last year of 1.5pp. In five of the eleven councils 100% of major applications that were decided upon were approved. Causeway Coast and Glens (66.7%) and Fermanagh and Omagh (80.0%) 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 2017/18 was **12,770** representing a decrease of 1.0% from the 12,893 applications received in 2016/17. On average around 3,200 applications were received per quarter during 2017/18.

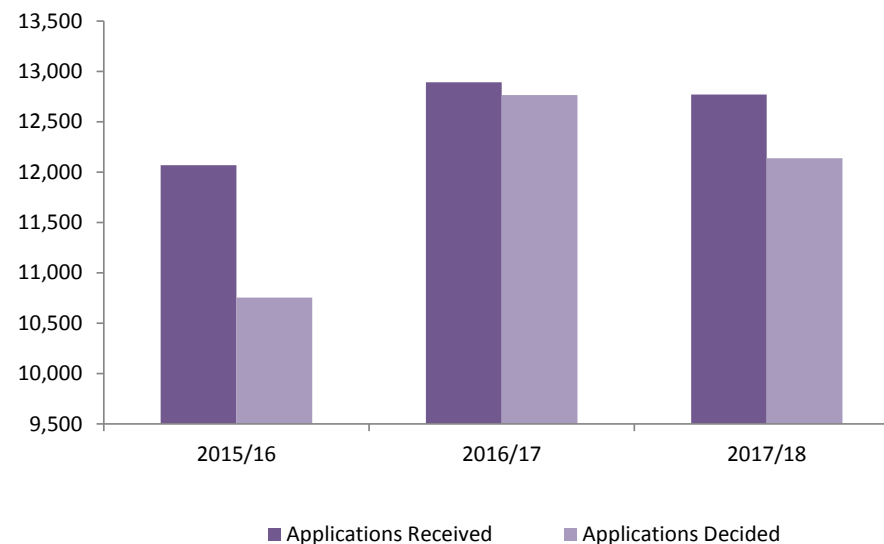
Across councils, Belfast City (1,788), Newry, Mourne and Down (1,562) and Mid Ulster (1,397) received the highest number of local planning applications during 2017/18. These councils also received the highest number of applications in the previous year.

Four of the eleven councils received more local applications in 2017/18 compared to the previous year, with Newry, Mourne and Down showing the greatest increase (+79 applications). The largest decreases over the year were in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-67 applications), Ards and North Down (-51) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (-50).

The number of **local** applications **decided** in 2017/18 was **12,137**, a decrease of 4.9% 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 with a very small difference existing in 2016/17. In 2017/18 the gap has re-emerged. See Fig 4.1.

Fig 4.1 Local applications, annually, 2015/16 – 2017/18



During 2017/18, Belfast City (1,779), Newry, Mourne and Down (1,597) and Mid Ulster (1,189) issued the most local decisions across councils, partly reflecting the high volumes of such applications received in those councils.

Five of the eleven councils issued more decisions on local applications than they did a year earlier. Of these five, Derry City and Strabane increased the proportion of decisions issued on local applications by 11.4% (from 833 to 928 decisions) followed by Ards and North Down increasing by 9.5% (from 894 to 979 decisions). The greatest percentage decreases were shown in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon with a fall of 21.2% (1,406 to 1,108 decisions) and Causeway Coast and Glens (-18.6%: 1,290 to 1,050).

Over the year, there were 612 local applications withdrawn across NI. This represents a decrease of 3.9% on the 637 applications withdrawn in the previous year. The number of applications withdrawn during the year ranged from 89 in Causeway Coast and Glens to 25 in Mid and East Antrim.



Over the year the number of applications withdrawn increased in four of the eleven councils with the greatest increases recorded in Antrim and Newtownabbey (+17), Lisburn and Castlereagh (+16) and Belfast City (+15).

[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 2017/18, the **average processing time** to bring **local** applications to decision or withdrawal was **15.2 weeks** across all councils, an improvement of 1.0 week on the average time taken last year (16.2 weeks).

The shortest average processing time for local applications during 2017/18 was 9.6 weeks in Mid and East Antrim (based on 861 local applications decided and 25 withdrawn) followed by 12.1 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey (based on 705 local applications decided and 39 withdrawn). The longest processing times were 21.6 weeks in Lisburn and Castlereagh (based on 939 local applications decided and 52 withdrawn) and 20.4 weeks in Causeway Coast and Glens (based on 1,050 local applications decided and 89 withdrawn).

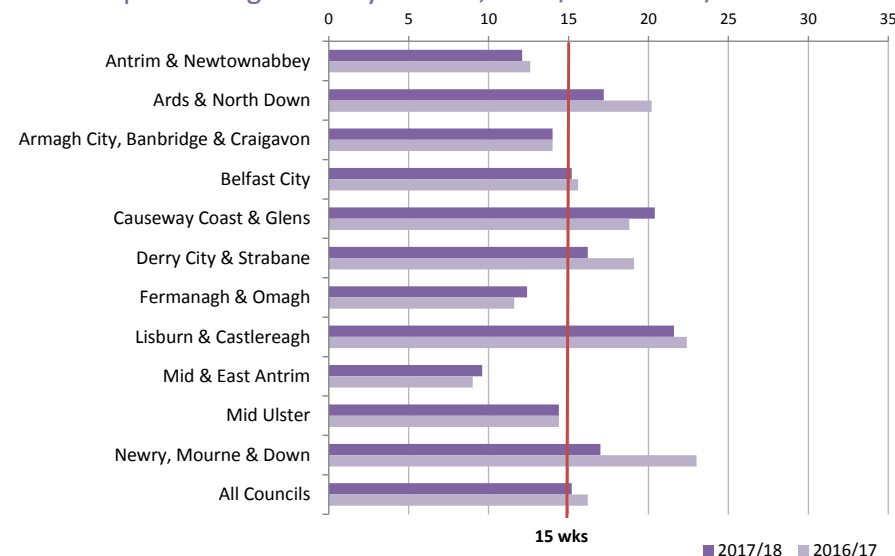
Five of the 11 councils, namely Mid and East Antrim (9.6), Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.1), Fermanagh and Omagh (12.4), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.0) and Mid Ulster (14.4) were within the 15 week statutory target at the end of March 2018.

Six of the eleven councils improved their processing times for local applications during the year when compared with the previous year with no change for two councils. The councils reporting the greatest level of

improvement were Newry, Mourne and Down reducing processing times by 6.0 weeks over the year and Ards and North Down by 3.0 weeks.

[Refer to Table 4.2](#)

Fig 4.2 Local processing times by council, 2016/17 & 2017/18



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 2017/18 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 10 times shorter (15.0 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (155.5 weeks).

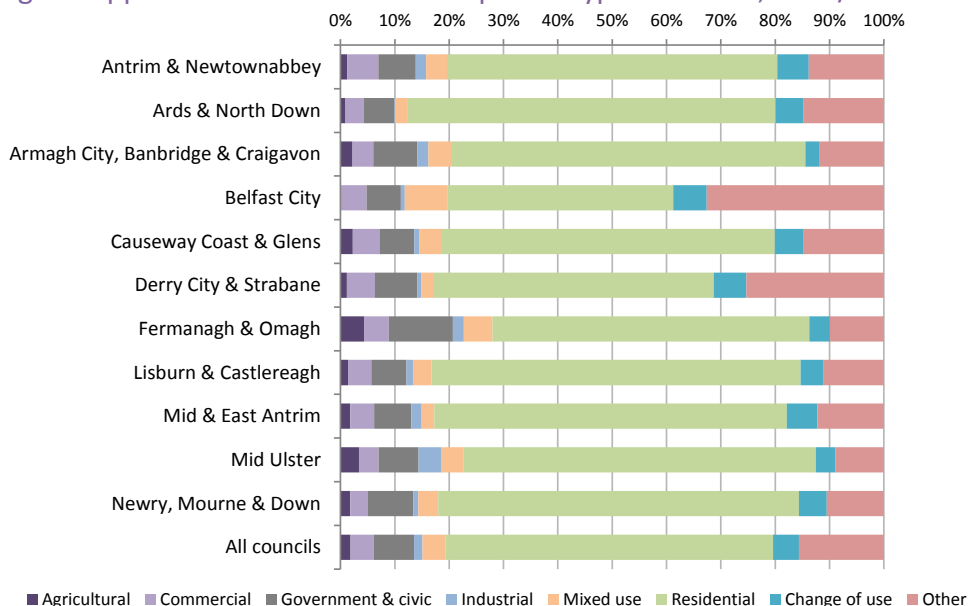
Across Northern Ireland 93.8% of local planning applications decided upon were approved in 2017/18, similar to the rate in 2016/17 (94.0%). Approval rates increased over the year in four of the eleven councils.



## 5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During 2017/18, **residential** applications made up **60.2%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications received, up by 0.4pp over the year from 59.8%. Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, 2017/18



During 2017/18, in Lisburn and Castlereagh, Ards and North Down and Newry, Mourne and Down nearly seven out of every ten applications received (67.9%, 67.7% and 66.4% respectively) were for residential development, compared to just over four in every ten in Belfast City (41.6%).

Belfast City (32.6%) and Derry City and Strabane (25.3%) 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.

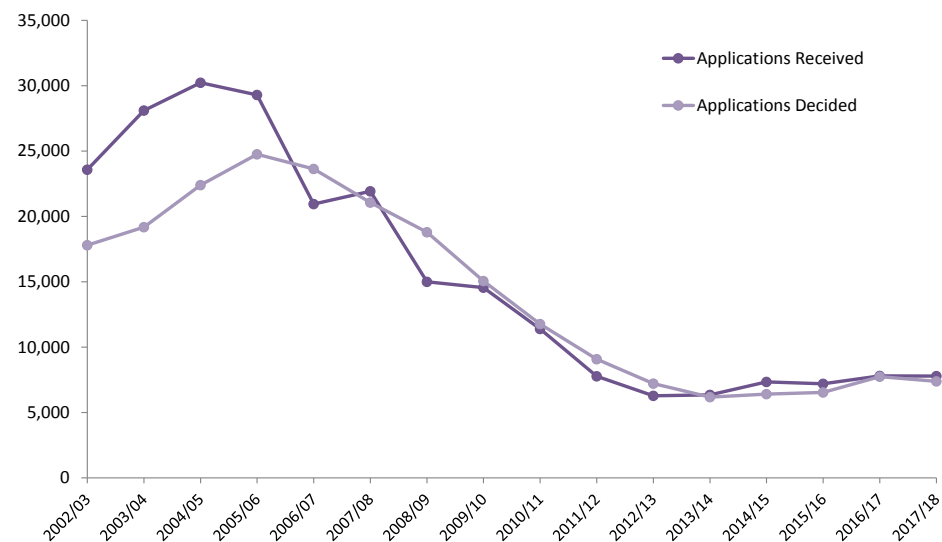
At NI level, the overall number of planning applications decreased by 0.8% over the last year. This decrease was driven by falls in the number of 'Other' applications, down 4.5% (2,117 to 2021), 'Government and Civic' down 8.0% (1,046 to 962) and 'Agricultural' applications down 16.8% (286 to 238). This decrease was slightly offset by a rise of 17.6% in 'Change of Use' applications which rose over the year from 527 to 620.

[Refer to Table 5.1, 5.2](#)

### Residential applications

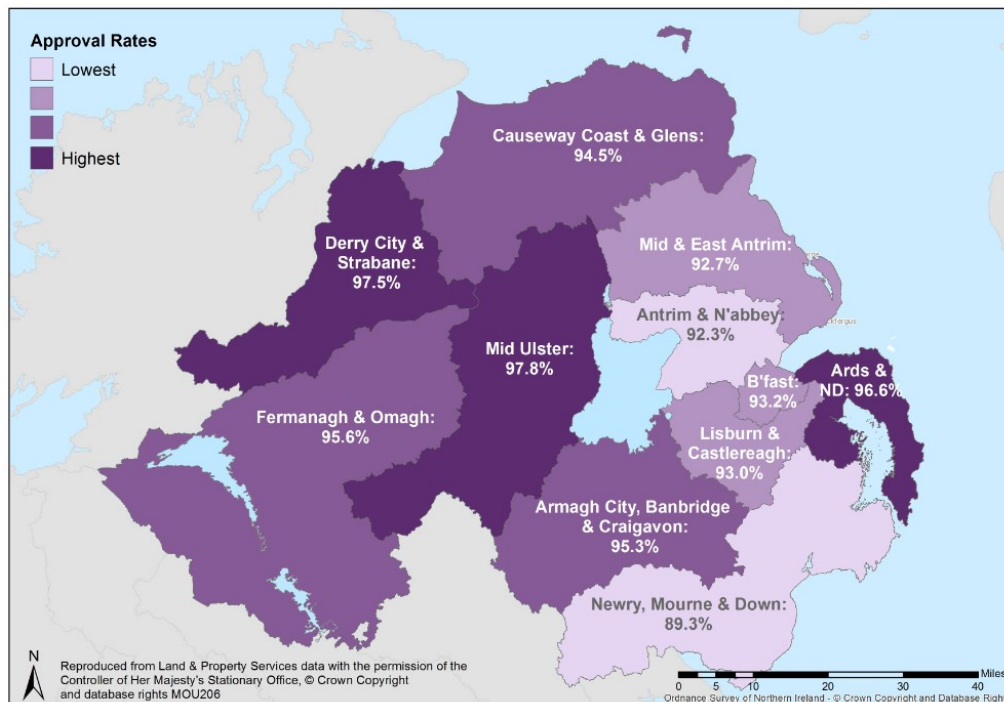
The number of **residential** planning applications **decided** in 2017/18 was **7,382**, a decrease of 4.7% over the year.

Fig 5.2 NI Residential applications, annually from 2002/03 to 2017/18



[Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council, 2017/18



The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for residential planning applications in 2017/18 was **94.1%**, which was similar to the rate in 2016/17 (94.3%). Six of the eleven councils had an approval rate that was higher than the Northern Ireland rate in 2017/18.

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils with highs of 97.8% in Mid Ulster and 97.5% in Derry City and Strabane, down to 89.3% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in five of the eleven councils over the year with Newry, Mourne and Down and Causeway Coast and Glens both reporting the greatest increase of 1.5pp (from 87.8% to 89.3% and 93.0% to 94.5% respectively).

Over the year, there were 325 residential applications withdrawn, eleven more than the previous year (314). This represented an increase of 3.5% 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 2017/18 remained similar to the previous year, increasing slightly from 2,641 to 2,657.

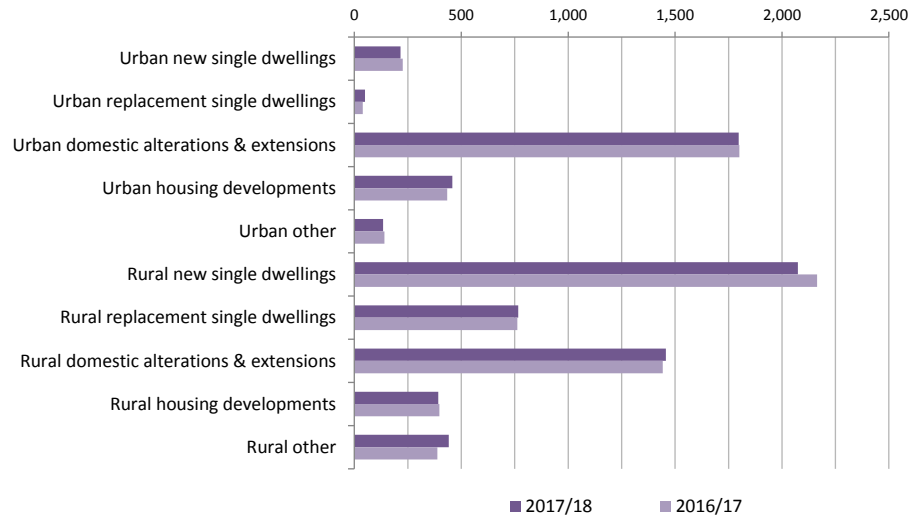
In rural areas within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was a decrease in such applications of 6.5% over the year with the majority of the decrease accounting for applications to carry out domestic alterations and extensions.

In the open countryside, the increase was small at 1.0% over the year. Applications for housing developments increased over the year in the open countryside by 12.6% followed by other applications (11.8%) and domestic alterations and extensions (7.0%).

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 around half (49.7%) of all residential applications received during 2017/18, similar to the position a year earlier (50.9%).

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, 2016/17 & 2017/18



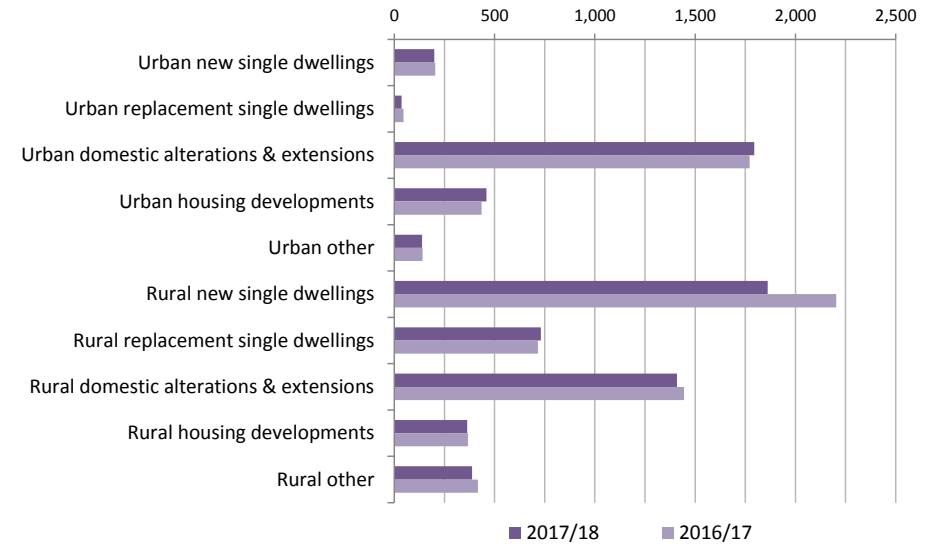
Overall decisions on residential applications decreased over the year by 4.7% (from 7,744 to 7,382), with the greatest decreases in the number of **new single dwellings** (down 14.4% from 2,407 to 2,061) and **other** applications (down 5.6% from 558 to 527).

Slight increases were shown in the overall number of housing development and replacement single dwelling decided applications, increasing by 2.6% and 0.7% respectively.

Approval rates varied across urban and rural areas with housing developments in the open countryside having the lowest approval rates at 81.9%. Domestic alterations and extensions had the highest approval rates in each of the urban, rural and countryside areas with 97.8%, 97.9% and 98.6% respectively.

Processing times were also shortest for domestic alterations and extensions with applications in the open countryside being processed fastest, in 11.2 weeks.

Fig 5.5 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, 2016/17 & 2017/18



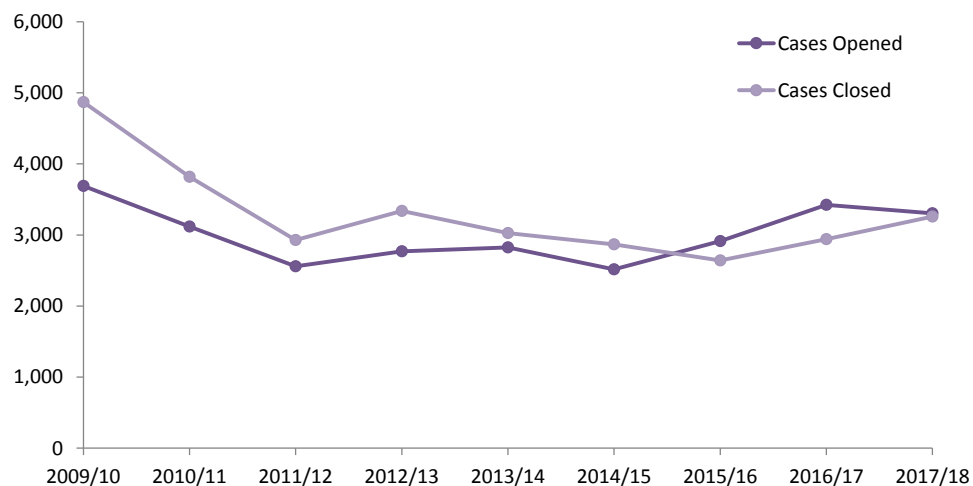
[Refer to Table 5.5](#)

## 6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during 2017/18 was **3,304**, a decrease of 3.5% compared to a year earlier. This is the first decline in the number of enforcement cases opened in any year since 2014/15. The decrease over the year is largely attributable to the decreases in Causeway Coast and Glens (-77 cases), Antrim and Newtownabbey (-32) and Derry City and Strabane (-32).

Across the councils, Belfast City (427), Ards and North Down (410) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (408) opened the largest number of cases in 2017/18, whilst Mid Ulster (175) and Derry City and Strabane (181) opened the least.

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, annually 2009/10 to 2017/18



The number of **enforcement cases closed** during 2017/18 was **3,257**, a 10.7% increase on the number of cases closed in the previous year. This increase is largely the result of increases in Belfast City (+138 cases) and

Ards and North Down (+133). Lisburn and Castlereagh (-60) showed the largest decrease in cases closed.

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 continued. However the gap has narrowed in 2017/18 with 1.4% more cases opened than closed.

Belfast City (553), Ards and North Down (413) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (401) closed the highest number of cases in 2017/18 whilst Derry City and Strabane (180) and Mid Ulster (193) closed the least number of cases.

Of the **3,257** closed cases in 2017/18, the main reason in a third of cases (33.8%) was that no breach had actually occurred while over a quarter (27.7%) cases had been remedied or resolved.

[Refer to Table 6.1](#)

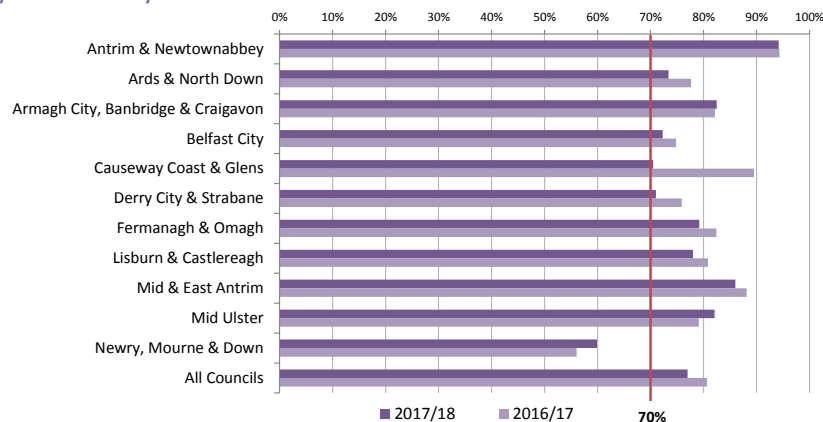
It is a statutory target that 70% of all enforcement cases dealt with by councils are progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.

Across Northern Ireland, **just over three in every four (77.0%)** enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks, 7 percentage points better than the statutory target but 3.7 percentage points lower than the previous year.

Ten of the eleven councils met the target with highs of 94.2% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey followed by Mid and East Antrim (86.0%). Causeway Coast and Glens showed a 19.0pp drop from

89.5% in 2016/17 to 70.5% in 2017/18. Newry, Mourne and Down were the only council not to meet the target, bringing to conclusion 59.9% of enforcement cases within 39 weeks, up from 56.1% on the previous year.

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, 2016/17 & 2017/18



[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

During 2017/18, there were **50 prosecutions** initiated, an increase of almost one quarter (22.0%) from the previous year. Prosecutions dropped significantly between 2012/13 (145) and 2015/16 (23), the lowest point in the series, and while the 2017/18 figure of 50 prosecutions is still considerably lower than the 145 recorded in 2012/13 it is a marked increase on recent annual figures.

During 2017/18 six of the eleven councils initiated prosecutions, with Fermanagh and Omagh (19) initiating the most, followed by Causeway Coast and Glens (9). These two councils accounted for over half (56.0%) of prosecutions initiated during the year.

There were **15 convictions** during 2017/18, a decrease of half on the same period a year earlier (30). This year's count is over four-fifths lower (82.8%) than the series high of 87 convictions recorded in 2009/10.

In 2017/18 Mid Ulster (6) recorded the most convictions, followed by Lisburn and Castlereagh (4).

[Refer to Table 6.3](#)

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of March 2018 was **3,373**, 1.5% more than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **879**, accounting for just over a quarter (26.1%) 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](#)

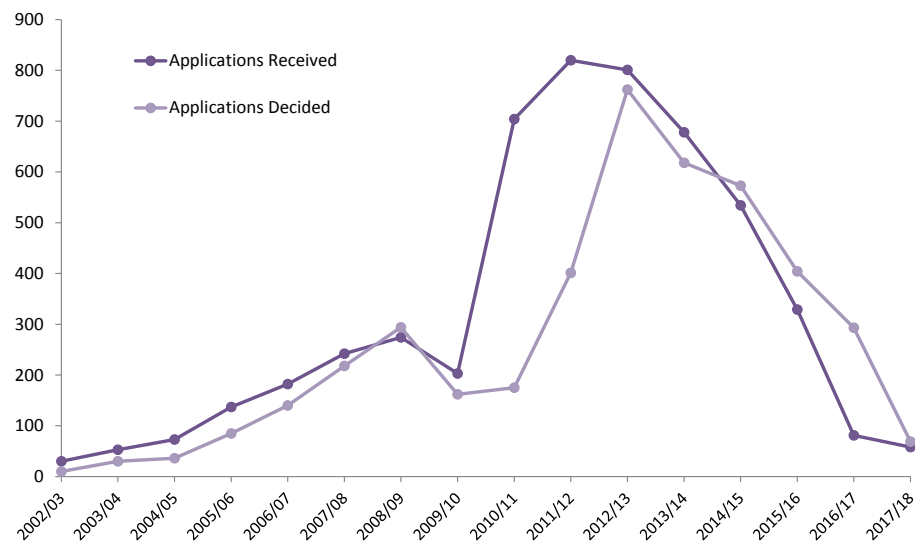
Across the councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the largest number of live cases at the end of March 2018 (877) and also the largest proportion of cases in the system for over 2 years (41.5%). Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of cases (122) with 8.2% of them being in the system for over 2 years. The number of live enforcement cases increased over the year in seven of the eleven councils, with the greatest percentage increases in Newry, Mourne and Down (20.8%) and Fermanagh and Omagh (11.8%). Belfast City (-29.3%) had the greatest percentage decrease in the number of live enforcement cases over the year.

[Refer to Table 6.5](#)

## 7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in 2017/18 was **58**, the lowest annual figure in the series since 2003/04. This represented a **28.4%** decrease in received applications from the same period a year earlier. 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 **92.9%** decrease from peak of 820 to 58 applications in 2017/18) 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 2002/03–2017/18



The number of applications **decided** was **69**, a decrease of 76.5% when compared to the previous year and down by over nine tenths (90.9%)

when compared to the series peak of 762 applications decided in 2012/13. During 2017/18, the average processing time for these applications was 94.4 weeks across NI, an increase of over 32 weeks on last year.

In 2017/18, over half (51.7%) of renewable energy applications were for single wind turbines (30 of 58). In addition, biomass/anaerobic digesters made up 17.2% and wind farms 10.3% of the 58 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, 2016/17 & 2017/18

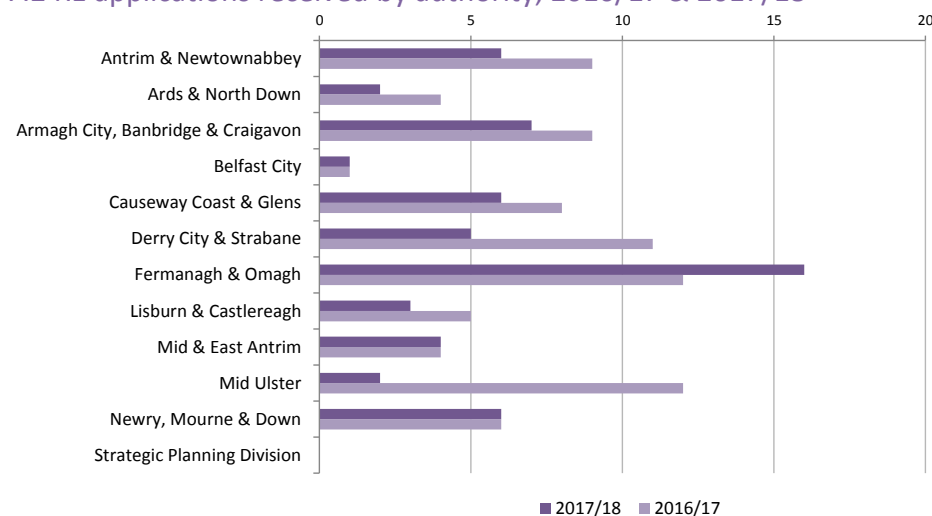
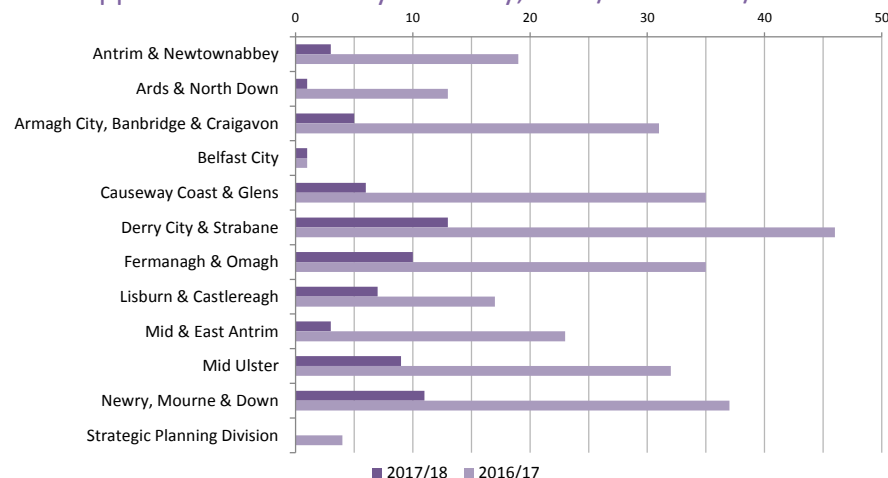


Figure 7.2 shows the spread across councils with Fermanagh and Omagh receiving the most renewable applications (16) followed by Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (7). Fermanagh and Omagh was the only council to receive an increased number of renewable applications compared to 2016/17.



Of the 69 decisions issued in 2017/18, almost three-fifths (41) were for single wind turbines. Derry City and Strabane issued the most decisions (13), followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (11) and Fermanagh and Omagh (10) – see Figure 7.3 for the full breakdown.

Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by authority, 2016/17 & 2017/18

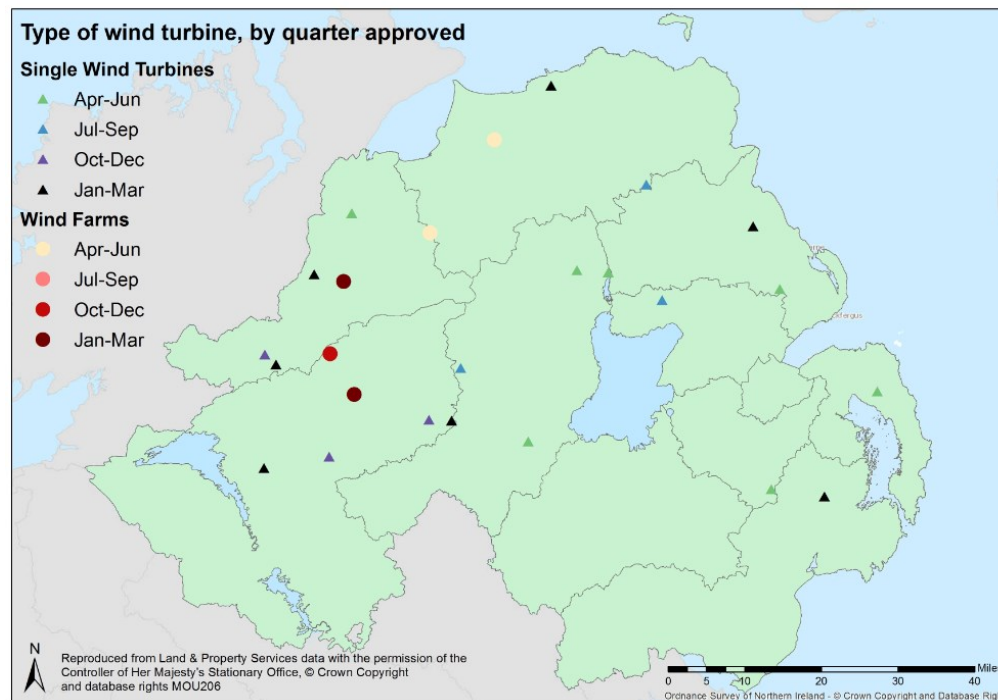


Thirty renewable energy applications were withdrawn during 2017/18, 68 fewer than the same period last year, with Derry City and Strabane (7) recording the most across councils.

At the end of March 2018, there were **101 live renewable energy applications**, with 58.4% being in the planning system for over a year. These largely comprised of 47 single wind turbines, 20 biomass/anaerobic digesters, 17 wind farms, and 10 for hydroelectricity. The number of live renewable energy applications was down by almost three tenths (28.4%) when compared with end of March 2017, with the proportion of applications in the system for over a year also declining by just over 16 percentage points over the same period.

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **62.3%** in **2017/18**, the lowest annual approval rate of the series. Over the last year the approval rate decreased by 1.5 percentage points from 63.8%.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications, 2017/18



[Refer to Table 7.3, 7.4](#)

Interactive maps have been developed for renewable energy planning applications by the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Sharing (NINIS) team. These maps are held on the [\(NINIS\) website](#) and direct links can be found below:

- [Single Wind Turbines](#)
- [Wind Farms](#)
- [Solar Farms](#)



## User Guidance

### Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 were transferred in April 2018 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 2018. Quarterly data for 2017/18 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 by then 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 70<sup>th</sup> 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:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/settlement-2015-documentation>

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 DfC:*

<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.

### Reader Information

This document may be made available in alternative formats, please contact us to discuss your requirements.