

# NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

## ANNUAL STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(April 2018 - March 2019: Final figures)



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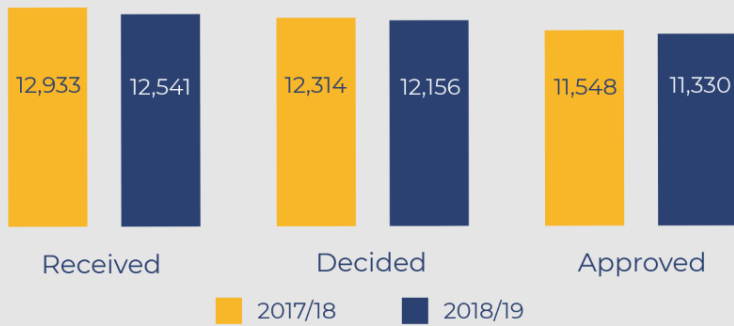
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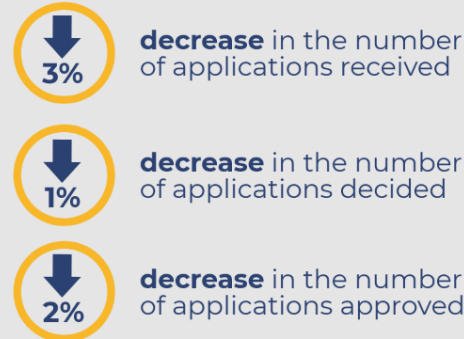
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## Overall planning applications

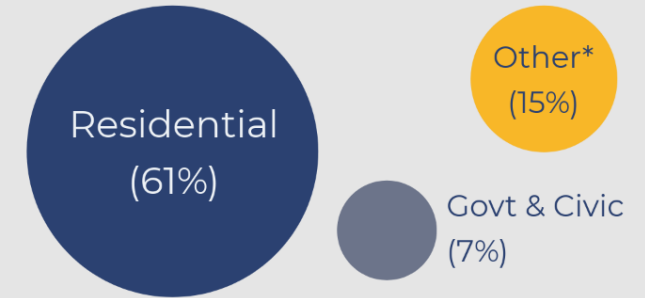
### Applications received/decided/approved



### Comparing 2018/19 with 2017/18:



### 3 largest development types (received)

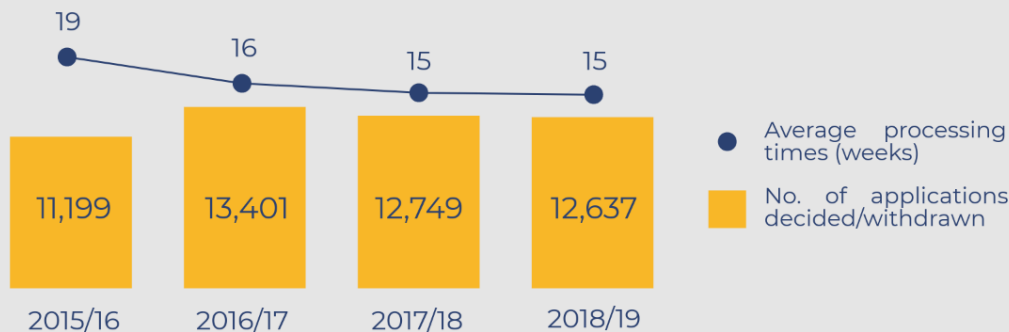


\*Other includes work to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements and listed buildings

## Local planning applications

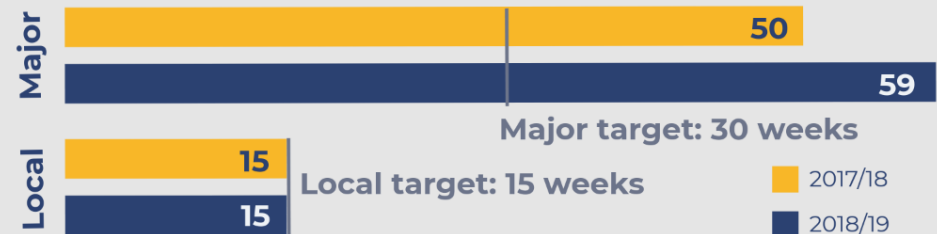


**99%**  
of all applications received in 2018/19 were local planning applications

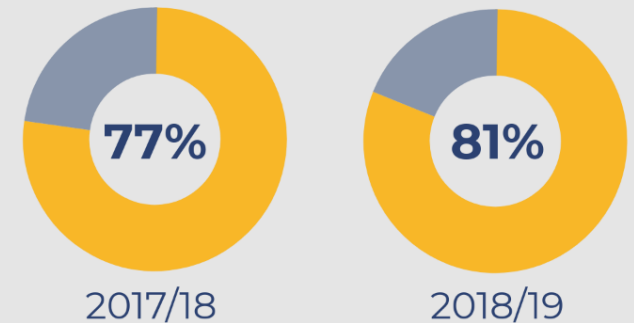


## Planning statutory targets

### Major & local average processing times (weeks)



**% of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks (target: 70%)**



## Key Points

- There were 12,541 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during 2018/19, a three percent decrease from the previous financial year. This comprised 12,404 local and 137 major applications.
- During 2018/19, 12,156 planning applications were decided, a decrease of over one percent from the previous financial year.
- In 2018/19 it took, on average, 14.8 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal. This was within the 15 week target and represented an improvement of 0.4 weeks from the previous financial year. Individually, five of the 11 councils met the 15 week target in 2018/19.
- The average processing time for major applications was 59 weeks across all councils in 2018/19, almost double the 30 week target and an increase of almost nine weeks from the previous financial year. Individually, three councils met the 30 week target in 2018/19.
- Across NI, four in every five (81%) enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks in 2018/19; 11 percentage points higher than the statutory target of 70% and four percentage points higher than the rate for the previous financial year. Individually, nine of the 11 councils met the target in 2018/19.

## Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for councils and the Department for Infrastructure for 2018/19. Note that from the 8th May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of Environment to the Department for Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental re-organisation.

Whilst the bulletin and accompanying tables report data for 2018/19, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous years. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the year. Please note that figures presented for 2018/19 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 three 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 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 2019. This will contain planning data up to 30th June 2019 and will commence the quarterly reporting cycle for 2019/20. The next annual report covering 2019/20 is planned for release in late June / July 2020.

Development of a planning monitoring framework is ongoing and the current intention is that progress on this will be published in September 2019. The format for this publication is still under development.

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

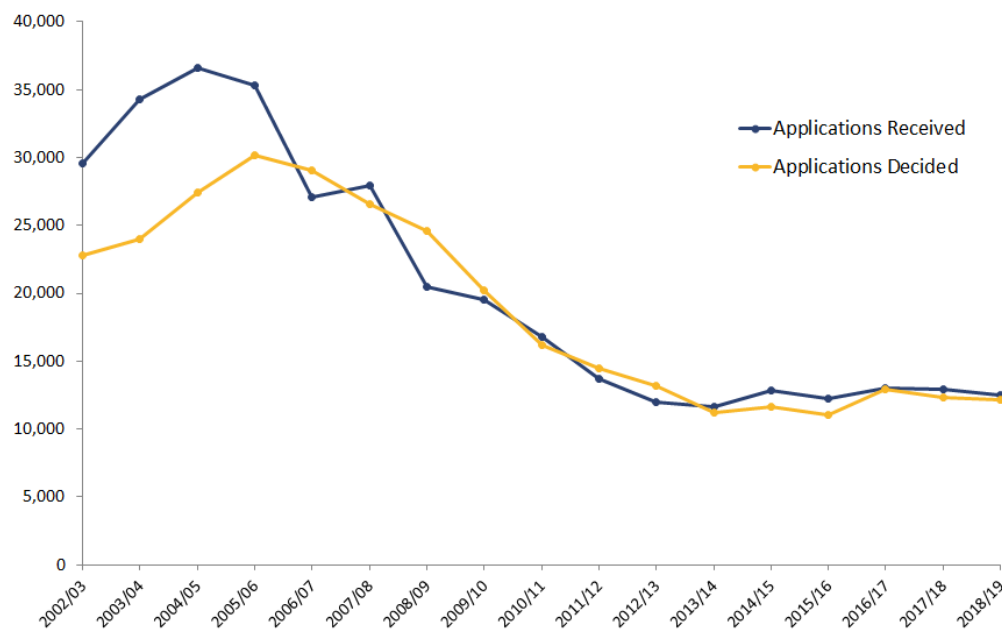
# 1. Overall NI Planning Activity

## Applications Received

The number of planning applications received annually generally declined between its peak in 2004/05 and 2013/14, when it reached its lowest level of the series. Figure 1.1 shows that the number of applications received has been fairly stable for the last eight years, with small changes year-on-year. During 2018/19, **12,541** planning applications were **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department; a 3.0% decrease on the previous financial year (12,933).

Three-quarters of the planning applications received in 2018/19 were for full planning permission (75.4%); similar to the position last year (75.9%).

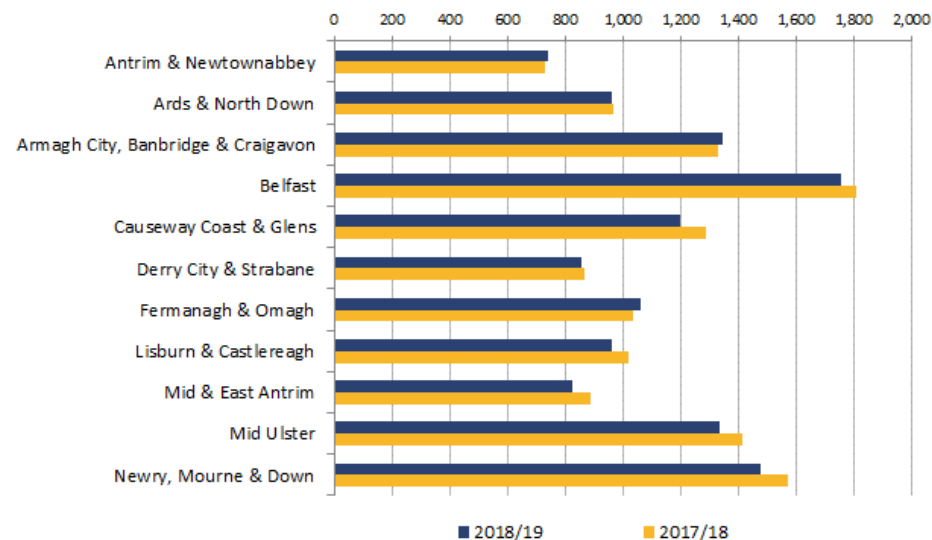
Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, annually, 2002/03 – 2018/19



In 2018/19, the number of planning applications received varied across councils, ranging from 1,756 in Belfast (accounting for 14.0% of all applications received across NI), to 744 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (5.9% of all applications received).

The volume of planning applications received in 2018/19 decreased in eight of the 11 councils, when compared with 2017/18. The largest decrease in percentage terms occurred in Mid and East Antrim (-7.4%). Fermanagh and Omagh (2.7%) recorded the largest increase over the year.

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, 2017/18 & 2018/19



[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)



## Applications Decided

During 2018/19 there were **12,156** planning **decisions** issued, representing a decrease of 1.3% from 2017/18 (12,314). This is a decrease of almost three-fifths (59.7%) from 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 2018/19, just over three quarters of planning decisions (76.6%) were for full planning permission; similar to the proportion in 2017/18 (76.5%).

Over the course of the year, **629** applications were **withdrawn**; similar to the number withdrawn in 2017/18 (625). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

## Applications Decided by Council

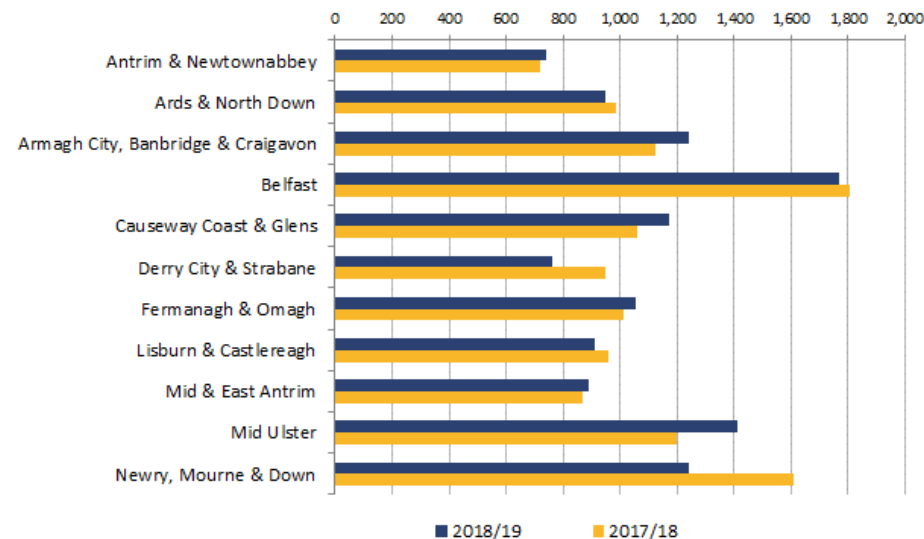
Across councils the number of decisions issued in 2018/19 ranged from 1,767 in Belfast (accounting for 14.5% of all decisions across NI), to 743 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (6.1% of all decisions).

Although the volume of planning decisions issued across Northern Ireland decreased in 2018/19 compared with 2017/18, six of the 11 councils reported an increase over the same period. The greatest increase in percentage terms occurred in Mid Ulster (17.8%). Five councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest occurring in Newry, Mourne and Down (-23.0%).

Three of the 11 councils issued more decisions than they received in 2018/19: Mid and East Antrim (+7.8%); Mid Ulster (+5.7%); and Belfast (+0.6%).

[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2.](#)

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, 2017/18 & 2018/19



In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during 2018/19, they processed to decision or withdrawal: 692 discharge of conditions; 615 certificates of lawfulness; and 537 non-material changes. In each case, the 2018/19 figure represented an increase from 2017/18. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

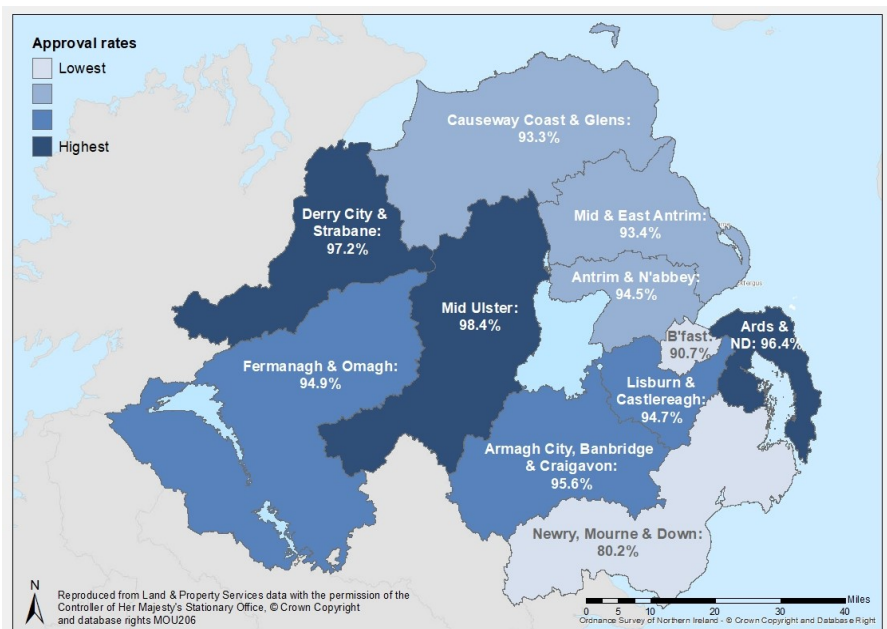
## Approval Rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications was **93.2%** in 2018/19; similar to the rate in 2017/18 (93.8%). Since 2012/13, the overall approval rate for planning applications has remained fairly stable; ranging from 93.2% to 94.5%.

Approval rates varied across councils during 2018/19, from a high of 98.4% in Mid Ulster to a low of 80.2% in Newry, Mourne and Down.



Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, 2018/19



Seven of the 11 councils reported an increased approval rate over the year, with the increase greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey (up 1.7 percentage points to 94.5%). Four councils reported a decreased approval rate when compared with 2017/18, with Newry, Mourne and Down reporting the greatest decrease (down 8.0 percentage points to 80.2%).

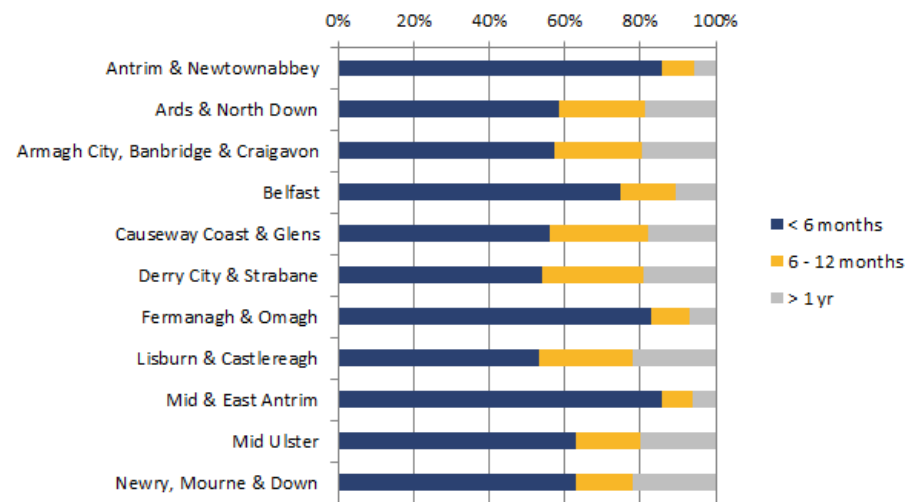
[Refer to Table 1.2.](#)

### Live applications

There were **6,454** live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of March 2019; a decrease of 4.3% from 6,745 at the end of March 2018. Over one-sixth of all live applications in the planning system at the end of March 2019 were over one year old (1,144; 17.7%); an increase of

2.4 percentage points from the proportion reported for the end of March 2018 (1,036; 15.4%). [Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Mar 2019



As Figure 1.5 shows, the proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of March 2019 varies across councils, ranging from 22.0% in Lisburn and Castlereagh to 5.8% in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Compared with the same point last year, four councils reduced the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year, with the greatest decrease occurring in Derry City and Strabane (down 3.8 percentage points to 19.1%). The proportion of live cases in the system for over a year increased in six councils, with Lisburn and Castlereagh (up 7.9 percentage points to 22.0%) reporting the greatest increase. In Mid and East Antrim 5.9% of live cases were in the system for over a year at the end of March 2019; the same proportion as reported for the end of March 2018.

[Refer to Table 1.4.](#)

## 2. Departmental Activity

In 2018/19, the Department **received 14** new applications; **four called-in** and **10 other**<sup>1</sup> applications. This is one more than was received in 2017/18 (13).

The Department reached **decisions** on **six** applications during 2018/19; 11 fewer than in 2017/18 (17). **Three** decisions were made on **retained applications, two** on **called-in** applications, and **one** on **other** applications. There were **no** Departmental applications **withdrawn** during **2018/19**, which is the same as the previous year.

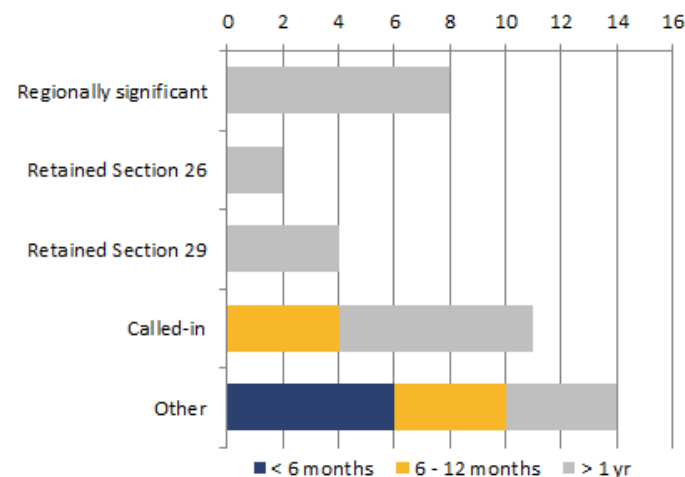
Overall, the average processing time for those applications processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal was 260.9 weeks in 2018/19. This compares with 64.6 weeks in 2017/18. When considering these processing times, it is important to bear in mind the low number of Departmental applications processed in both years; six in 2018/19 and 17 in 2017/18.

At the end of March 2019, there were: **eight** ongoing **regionally significant development** (RSD) applications; **11 called-in**; **six retained applications** and **14 other applications**. Just under two-thirds of these applications (25 of 39) were in the system over a year (Figure 2.1). [Refer to Tables 2.1, 2.2.](#)

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.

<sup>1</sup> 'Other' applications include Conservation Area Consents, Variation of Conditions and Reserved Matters

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end of Mar 2019



**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.**

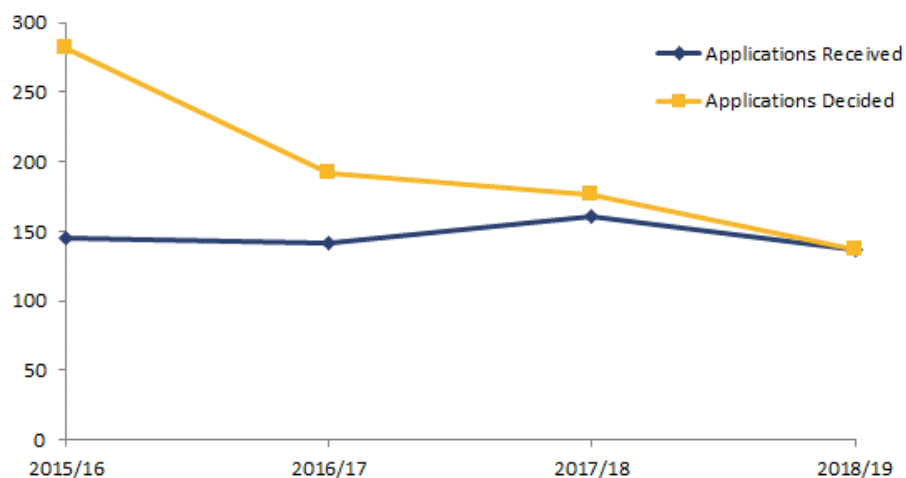
At 31 March 2019, of the **eight** RSD applications currently live in the planning system, four were not subject to Pre-Application Discussions and therefore fell outside the remit of the target. Of the remaining four applications, one had a recommendation during Q4 2017/18 to go to public inquiry where the target was met. The target dates for the other three applications were missed. These are all ongoing applications and will continue to be assessed in future reports up until the point of decision or withdrawal, alongside any new applications which may come into scope.

### 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 2018/19 was **137**; a decrease of 14.9% from 2017/18 (161).

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, annually, 2015/16 - 2018/19



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 requirement should be borne in mind when considering the longer term trend in major applications received.

The number of major applications received across the councils ranged from 30 in Belfast to five in Ards and North Down. Belfast also reported the

largest increase in major applications received, compared with the previous year; up 10 to 30. The largest decrease in major applications received compared with 2017/18 was in Derry City and Strabane; down 10 applications to six received in 2018/19.

During 2018/19, **137 major** planning applications were **decided**; coincidentally the same as the number received during the year and a decrease of 22.2% from the number decided in 2017/18 (176). This is also the lowest number of major applications decided in any year since the transfer of planning powers.

**Eleven major** applications were withdrawn during 2018/19; down slightly from the figure reported for 2017/18 (13).

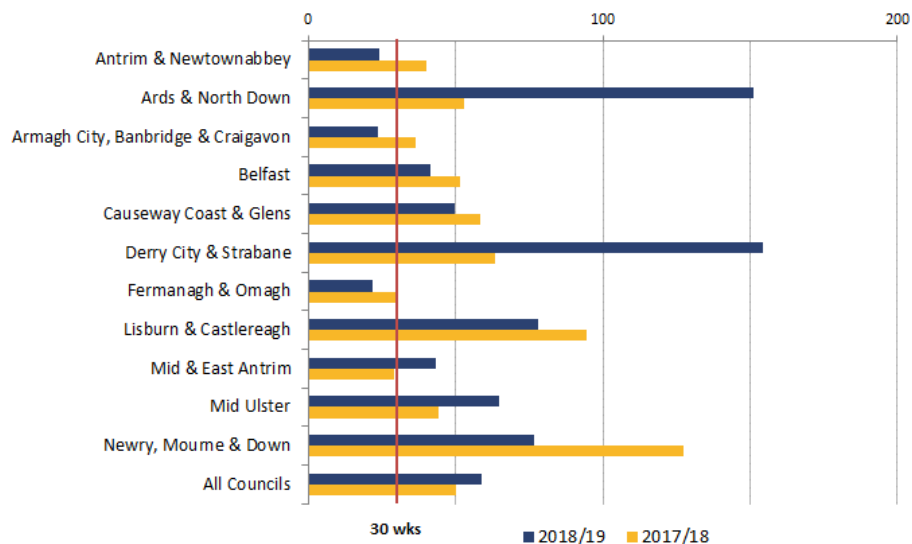
At council level, the number of major applications decided in 2018/19 ranged from 21 in Belfast to six in Ards and North Down. Seven of the 11 councils issued fewer decisions on major applications in 2018/19 when compared with 2017/18.

[Refer to Tables 3.1, 3.2.](#)

**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 2018/19, the **average processing time** to bring **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **59.0 weeks** across all councils; an increase of 8.8 weeks from the 50.2 weeks reported for 2017/18. This is almost double the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks.

Fig 3.2 Major Development average processing times by council, 2017/18 & 2018/19



Across the councils in 2018/19, average processing times were highest in Derry City and Strabane (154.2 weeks; 18 applications) and Ards and North Down (151.0; eight applications). During the year, half of major applications processed in both these councils were legacy cases (i.e. those applications received prior to transition of planning powers); the highest proportions across all councils. As these applications have been in the system for a considerable amount of time, this will have contributed to the high average processing time reported.

In 2018/19, the average processing time for major applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received on or after 1 April 2015) is considerably shorter (41.4 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (i.e. received before 1 April 2015; 228.4 weeks), but still outside the statutory target of 30 weeks. Legacy cases accounted for over one-fifth (21.0%) of all major applications processed across councils in 2018/19.

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

Three councils met the statutory target of 30 weeks in 2018/19: Fermanagh and Omagh (22.0 weeks); Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (23.6 weeks); and Antrim and Newtownabbey (24.2 weeks).

Despite the overall increase in average processing times across all councils, individually seven councils reported decreases in 2018/19 compared with 2017/18 (Figure 3.2).

[Refer to Table 3.2.](#)

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate for major applications** was **92.7%** in 2018/19; similar to the rate for 2017/18 (92.6%). In five of the 11 councils, 100% of major applications that were decided upon were approved: Ards and North Down; Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Belfast; Fermanagh and Omagh; and Mid and East Antrim. The approval rate for major applications was lowest in Derry City and Strabane (83.3%).

## 4. Local Development Planning Applications

**Local Development** planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications received and determined by a council. The number of **local** planning applications **received** in NI during 2018/19 was **12,404**; a decrease of 2.9% from the 12,770 applications received during 2017/18.

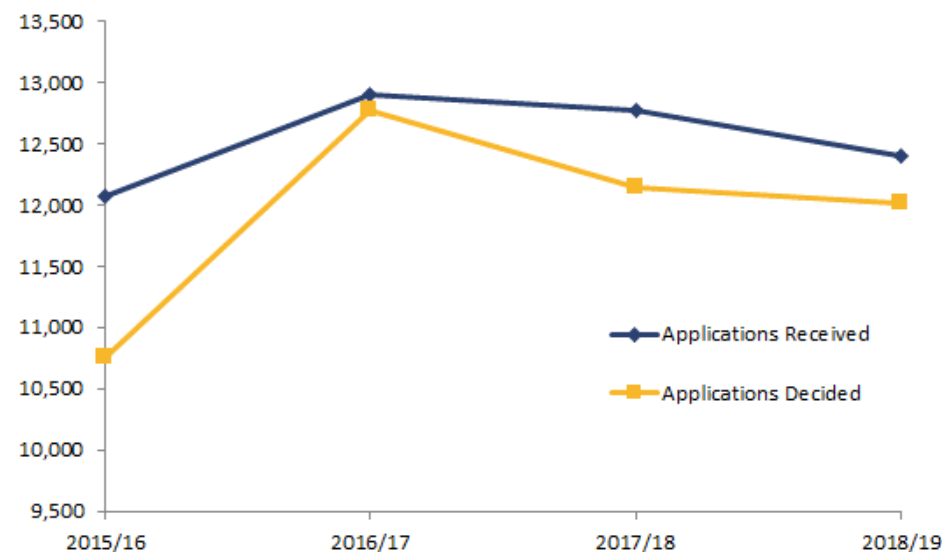
Across councils the number of local applications received during 2018/19 varied, ranging from 1,726 in Belfast to 732 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Four councils reported an increase in the number of local applications received in 2018/19 compared with the previous year. In percentage terms, Fermanagh and Omagh (3.2%) recorded the largest increase. Seven councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest, in percentage terms, occurring in Causeway Coast and Glens (-6.9%).

The number of **local** applications **decided** in 2018/19 was **12,019**; a decrease of 1.0% when compared with 2017/18 (12,137).

In 2015/16 the number of local planning applications received was considerably higher than the number decided. This was in large part due to the gap between the number received and decided during the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils. In 2016/17 the gap between the numbers received and decided narrowed considerably, before widening again in 2017/18. In 2018/19 the number of applications received remained higher than the number decided. (Figure 4.1).

Fig 4.1 Local Development applications, annually, 2015/16 - 2018/19



During 2018/19, the number of local planning decisions issued ranged from 1,746 in Belfast to 729 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Although the volume of local planning decisions issued across NI decreased over the year, six councils reported an increase over the same period. The greatest increase in percentage terms, occurred in Mid Ulster (17.5%). Five councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest occurring in Newry, Mourne and Down (-22.7%).

In 2018/19, 618 local applications were withdrawn in NI; a small increase (1.0%) from 612 in 2017/18. Across councils the number of local applications withdrawn in 2018/19 ranged from 104 in Belfast to 22 in Mid and East Antrim.

[Refer to Tables 4.1, 4.2.](#)

**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 2018/19, the **average processing time** to bring **local** applications to decision or withdrawal was **14.8 weeks** across all councils, meeting the statutory target of 15 weeks. This represented an improvement of 0.4 weeks compared with 2017/18 (15.2 weeks).

Across the councils, average processing times for local applications ranged from 7.8 weeks in Mid and East Antrim to 21.6 weeks in Causeway Coast and Glens.

Five of the 11 councils met the 15 week target in 2018/19: Mid and East Antrim (7.8 weeks); Fermanagh and Omagh (12.2 weeks); Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.4 weeks); Derry City and Strabane (14.1 weeks); and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.6 weeks).

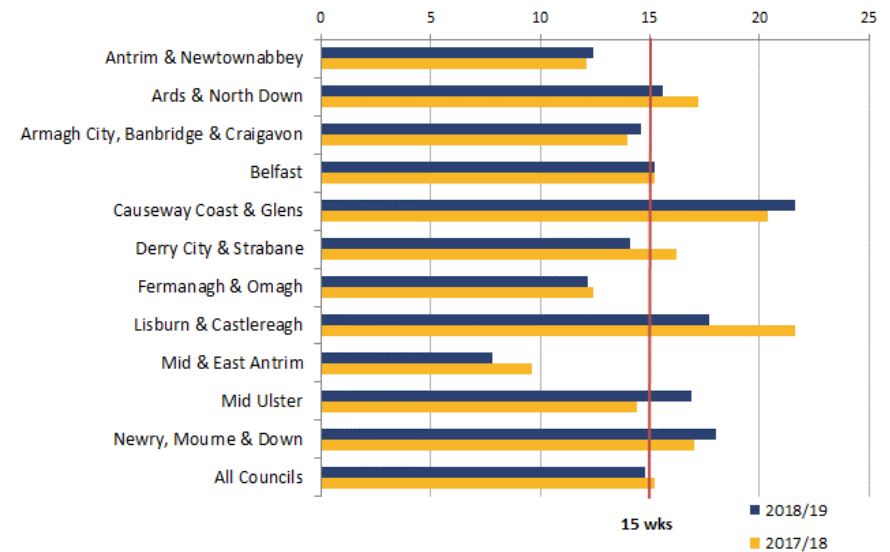
Five of the 11 councils reduced their average processing times for local applications during 2018/19 compared with 2017/18. The improvement was greatest in Lisburn and Castlereagh (down 3.9 weeks, from 21.6 to 17.7 weeks).

Over the same period, average processing times for local applications increased in five councils. Despite this, two of these councils still met the 15 week target in 2018/19.

Processing times remained unchanged in Belfast at 15.2 weeks (Figure 4.2).

[Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local Development average processing times by council, 2017/18 & 2018/19



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 2018/19, the average processing time for local applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received on or after 1 April 2015) is considerably shorter (14.8 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (i.e. received before 1 April 2015; 213.8 weeks). Legacy cases accounted for only 0.5% of all local applications processed across councils in 2018/19; 68 out of 12,636 applications.

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for **local** applications was **93.2%** in 2018/19; similar to the rate in 2017/18 (93.8%). Across councils, approval rates for local applications in 2018/19 ranged from 98.5% in Mid Ulster to 80.2% in Newry, Mourne and Down.



## 5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During 2018/19, **residential** applications accounted for **61.0%** of all planning applications received in NI; an increase of 0.8 percentage points from 2017/18 (60.2%).

Residential was the most common application type in all councils in 2018/19. The proportion of all applications received that were residential ranged from 68.4% in Newry, Mourne and Down to 42.5% in Belfast.

Belfast (30.9%) and Derry City and Strabane (21.4%) received a higher proportion of applications categorised as 'other' in 2018/19, compared with the other councils. See Appendix 1 – 'Definitions' for a description of the types of applications included in this category.

At NI level, the overall number of planning applications decreased by 3.0% between 2017/18 and 2018/19. This overall decrease was largely driven by decreases in the number of residential (down 1.8% from 7,790 to 7,649), 'other' (down 4.3%; from 2,021 to 1,935), mixed use (down 13.3%; from 549 to 476) and government and civic (down 7.4%; from 962 to 891) applications.

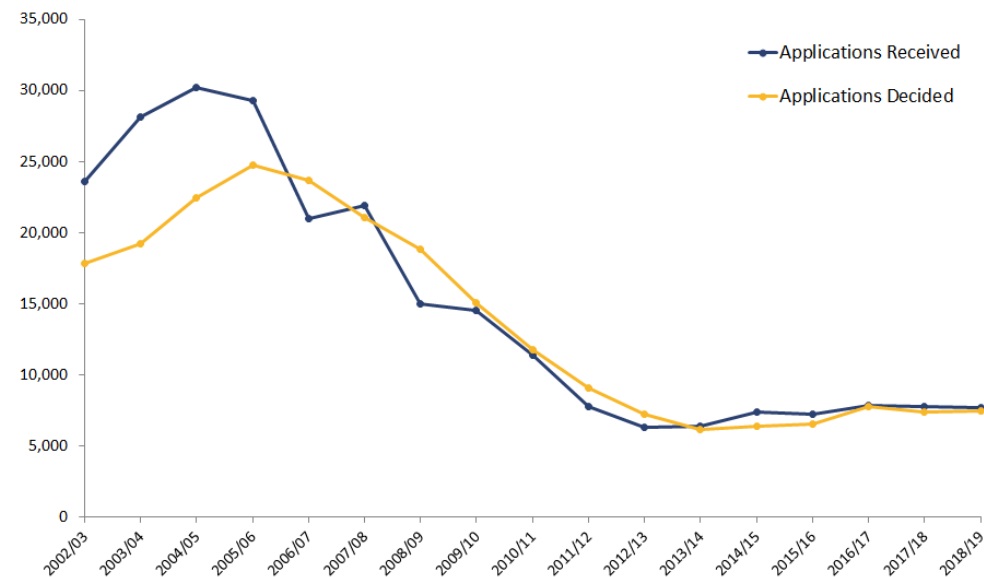
[Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.](#)

### Residential applications

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in NI during 2018/19 was **7,649**; a decrease of 1.8% from 2017/18 (7,790).

During 2018/19, **7,470 residential** planning applications were **decided** in NI; an increase of 1.2% from 2017/18 (7,382).

Fig 5.1 NI Residential applications, annually, 2002/03 - 2018/19



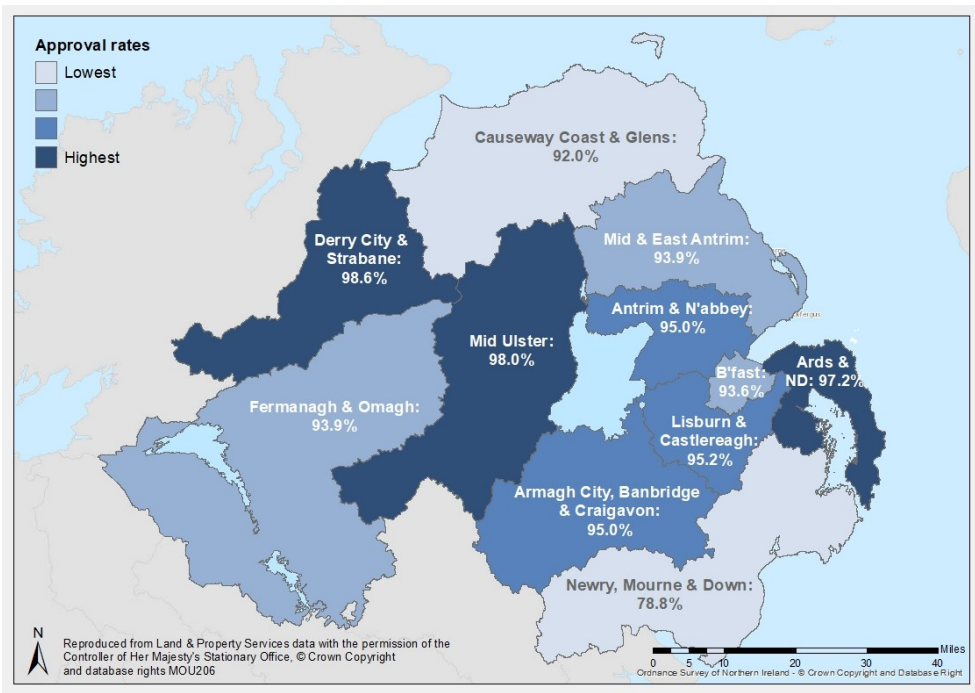
[Refer to Table 5.3.](#)



The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for residential planning applications was **93.4%** in 2018/19; down by 0.7 percentage points on 2017/18 (94.1%).

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in 2018/19, ranging from 98.6% in Derry City and Strabane to 78.8% in Newry, Mourne and Down (Figure 5.2).

Fig 5.2 Residential approval rates by council, 2018/19



Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in seven of the 11 councils between 2017/18 and 2018/19. The largest increase was in Antrim and Newtownabbey (up from 92.3% to 95.0%).

Approval rates declined in four councils over the year, most notably in Newry, Mourne and Down (down from 89.3% to 78.8%).

During 2018/19, 322 residential applications were withdrawn across NI, similar to the number withdrawn in the previous year (325).

[Refer to Table 5.4.](#)

### Residential applications – Urban, Rural and Open Countryside

Across urban areas (*settlements greater than 5,000 population*), the number of residential applications received in 2018/19 was 2,631; a small decrease from 2017/18 (-1.0%; from 2,657).

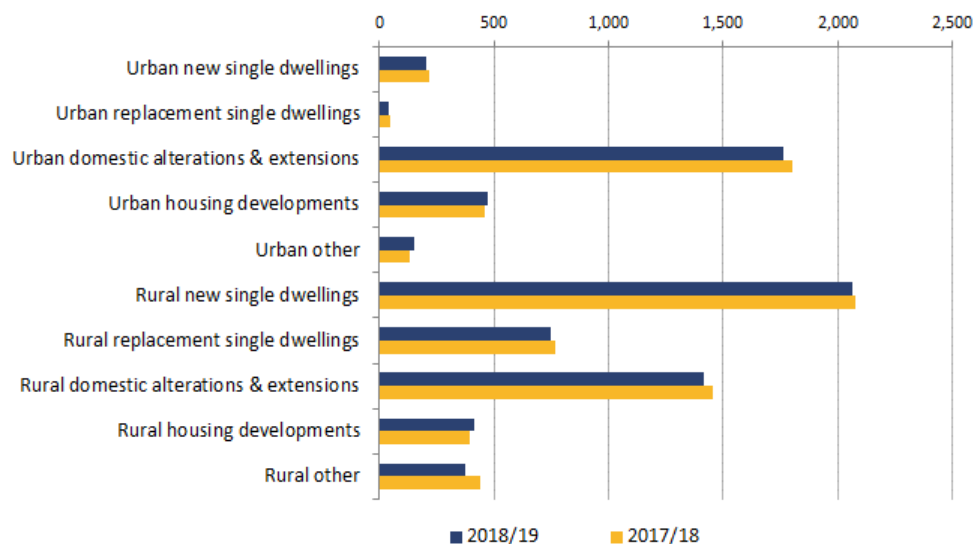
In rural areas, within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was an increase (4.3%) in the number of residential applications received in 2018/19 (953), compared with 2017/18 (914).

In the open countryside, the number of residential applications received in 2018/19 (4,065) decreased by 3.7% over the year (from 4,219).

## Residential applications – Urban and Rural

Figure 5.3 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications received in 2017/18 and 2018/19. 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.

Fig 5.3 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, 2017/18 & 2018/19

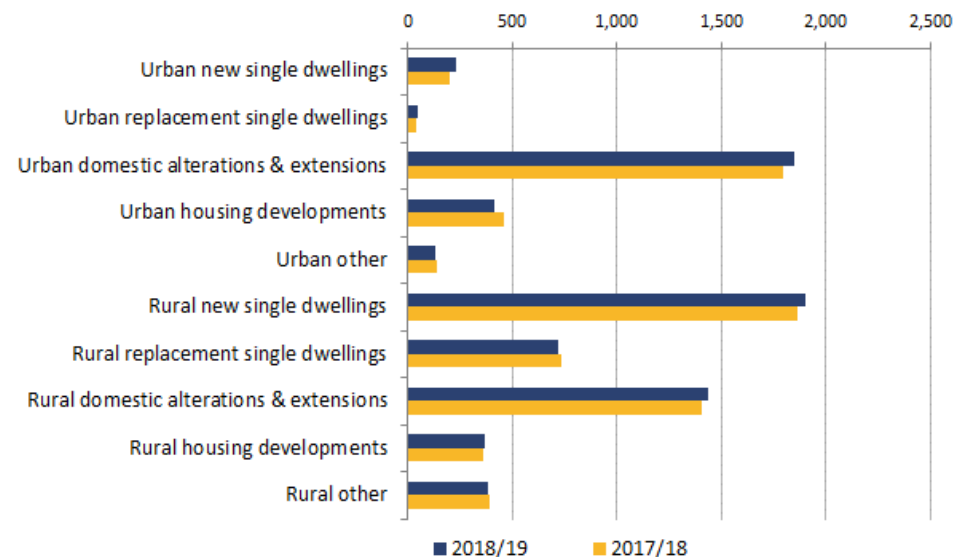


New single dwellings in rural areas (2,065) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (1,760) continue to dominate, together accounting for half of (50.0%) of all residential applications received during 2018/19; similar to the position in 2017/18 (49.7%).

The decrease over the year in the number of residential applications received (-1.8%) was driven in large part by decreases in the number of applications received for: 'other' rural applications (down 14.9%; from 442

to 376); and domestic alterations and extensions in rural (down 3.0%; from 1,457 to 1,414) and urban (down 2.1%; from 1,798 to 1,760) areas.

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, 2017/18 & 2018/19



The increase over the year in the number of residential applications decided (1.2%) was driven in large part by increases in the number of applications decided for: domestic alterations and extensions in both urban (up 2.9%; from 1,795 to 1,847) and rural (up 1.8%; from 1,409 to 1,435) areas; and new single dwellings in both rural (up 2.2%; from 1,862 to 1,903) and urban (up 15.1%; from 199 to 229) areas. The overall increase was offset by a decrease in the number of decisions made on urban housing developments over the year (down 10.4%; from 460 to 412).

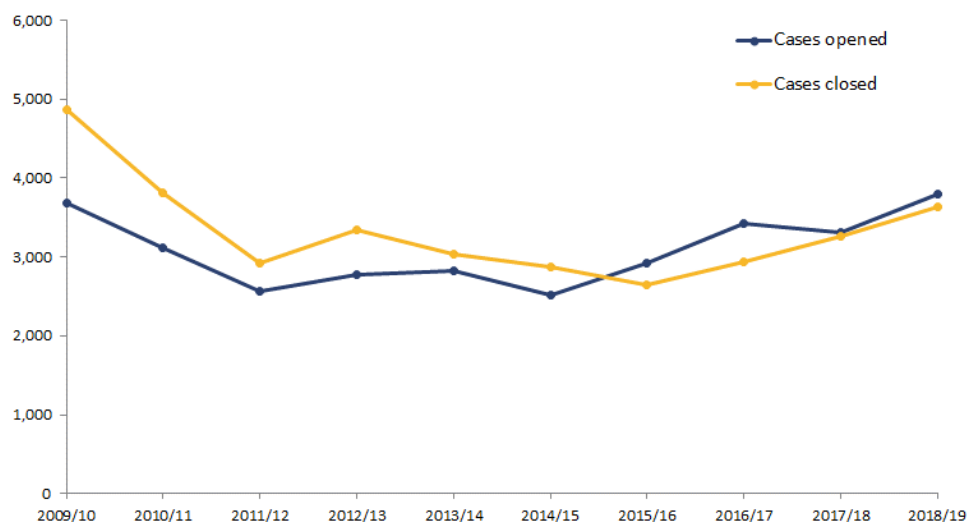
[Refer to Table 5.5.](#)

## 6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during 2018/19 was **3,796**; an increase of 14.9% compared with 2017/18 (3,304) and the largest number recorded annually across the time series presented in Figure 6.1 (from 2009/10).

Across the councils, the number of enforcement cases opened in 2018/19 ranged from 590 in Belfast to 164 in Derry City and Strabane. Eight of the 11 councils reported increases in the volume of enforcement cases opened in 2018/19 compared with the previous year. The increase was greatest, in percentage terms, in Belfast (38.2%).

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, annually, 2009/10 - 2018/19



The number of **enforcement cases closed** during 2018/19 was **3,630**; an increase of 11.5% from 2017/18 (3,257), which continues the upward trend in the number cases closed from 2015/16.

The number of cases closed varied across councils in 2018/19, ranging from 583 in Belfast to 178 in Mid Ulster. Eight of the 11 councils reported increases in the volume of enforcement cases closed in 2018/19 compared with the previous year. This increase was greatest, in percentage terms, in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (48.1%).

For the first six years of the time series presented in Figure 6.1, more cases were closed than opened across NI. The opposite has been true since 2015/16 and in 2018/19 there were 4.6% more enforcement cases opened than closed in NI.

The most common reasons for enforcement cases closing in 2018/19, were that no breach had actually occurred (30.9%) or that the cases had been remedied or resolved (29.6%). Together these accounted for just over three-fifths (2,194; 60.4%) of the 3,630 cases closed during 2018/19.

[Refer to Tables 6.1, 6.2.](#)

**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.**

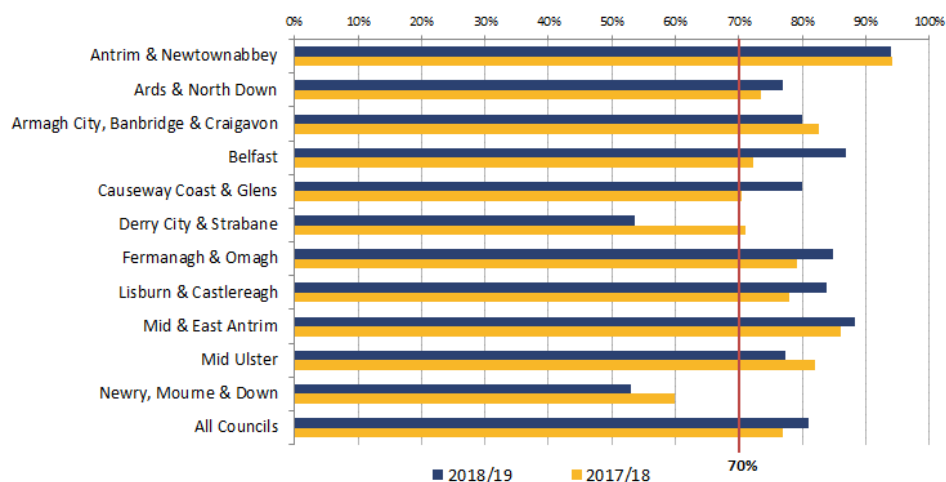
Across Northern Ireland, **just over four in every five (81.0%)** enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks in 2018/19; 11.0 percentage points higher than the statutory target and 4.0 percentage points higher than the rate for 2017/18 (77.0%).

Nine of the 11 councils met the target in 2018/19, with a high of 94.0% recorded in Antrim and Newtownabbey. Six councils improved the proportion of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks compared with the previous year, most notably in Belfast (up 14.5 percentage points).

The target was not met in Newry, Mourne and Down (52.9%) and Derry City and Strabane (53.6%). These councils also recorded the largest decreases in the proportion of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks between 2017/18 and 2018/19; down 7.0 and 17.4 percentage points respectively.

[Refer to Table 6.2.](#)

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, 2017/18 & 2018/19



During 2018/19, there were **89 prosecutions** initiated across NI; a considerable increase from 50 in 2017/18 and the highest annual figure since 2012/13, when 145 prosecutions were recorded. Six of the 11 councils initiated prosecutions in 2018/19, with Antrim and Newtownabbey and Fermanagh and Omagh initiating the most (24 each).

There were **24 convictions** across NI during 2018/19, an increase from 15 in 2017/18. Seven councils recorded convictions during the year, with Antrim and Newtownabbey (seven) recording the most.

[Refer to Tables 6.1 and 6.3.](#)

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of March 2019 was **3,544**, an increase of 5.1% from the same point the previous year (3,373). The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **1,084** at the end of March 2019, accounting for 30.6% of all live cases. This represents the highest year-end proportion of live cases over two years old reported since the end of March 2013.

[Refer to Table 6.4.](#)

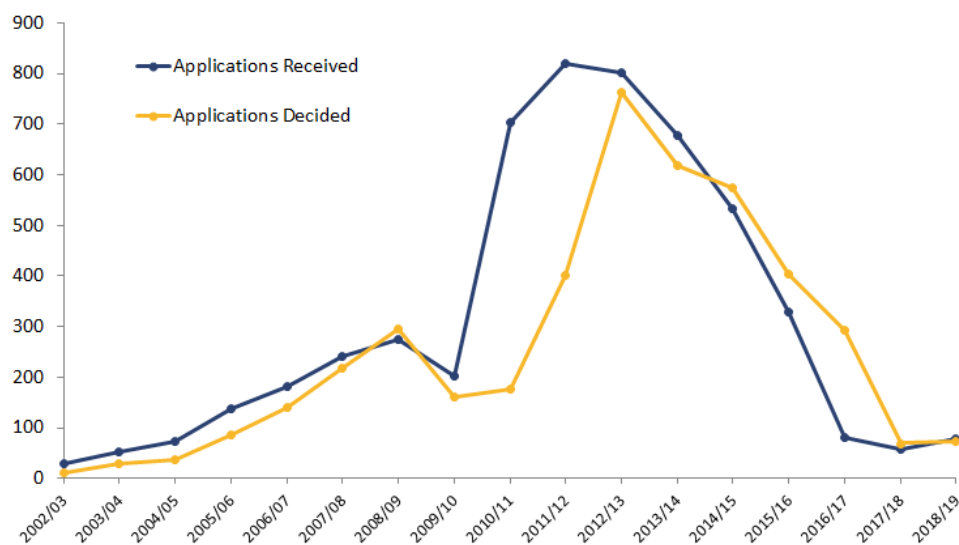
Across the councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest number of live cases at the end of March 2019 (1,111), with over two-fifths of these (45.5%) in the system for over 2 years; the highest proportion across all councils. Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of live cases (112) at this point; 15.2% of these were in the system for over 2 years. Although the overall number of live enforcement cases increased between the end of March 2018 and 2019, the number decreased in seven of the 11 councils. The overall increase over this period was largely driven by a large increase in the number of live enforcement cases in Newry Mourne and Down (26.7%; up by 234 enforcements).

[Refer to Table 6.5.](#)

## 7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in 2018/19 was **78**; an increase from 58 in 2017/18. The number of applications received annually peaked in 2011/12 at 820. It is likely that the high levels at this time were driven by the NI Executive's targets for electricity consumption from renewable sources, with a target of 20% to be achieved by 2015, and 40% by 2020. The sharp decline in recent years (a **90.5%** decrease from 820 in 2011/12 to 78 applications in 2018/19) 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, 2002/03 - 2018/19



The number of renewable energy applications **decided** during 2018/19 was **73**; a small increase from 69 in 2017/18, but a 90.4% decrease from the series peak of 762 applications decided in 2012/13.

During 2018/19, the average processing time for these applications was 46.6 weeks across NI; less than half the corresponding figure for 2017/18 (94.4 weeks).

Single wind turbines continue to be the most common renewable energy application, accounting for almost two-thirds (50 out of 78) of those received during 2018/19. Over half (39 out of 73) of renewable energy decisions issued in 2018/19 were for single wind turbines.

[Refer to Tables 7.1, 7.2.](#)

Figure 7.2 shows the distribution of received renewable energy applications across the different planning authorities, with Fermanagh and Omagh (21) receiving the most in 2018/19. Seven planning authorities received an increased amount of applications in 2018/19, compared with the previous year; this increase was greatest in Mid and East Antrim (up from 4 to 13).

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by authority, 2017/18 & 2018/19

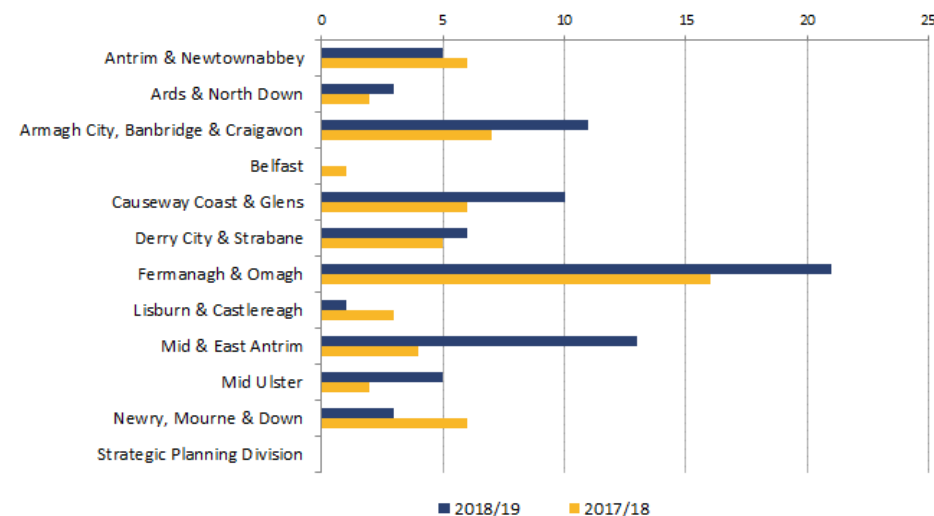
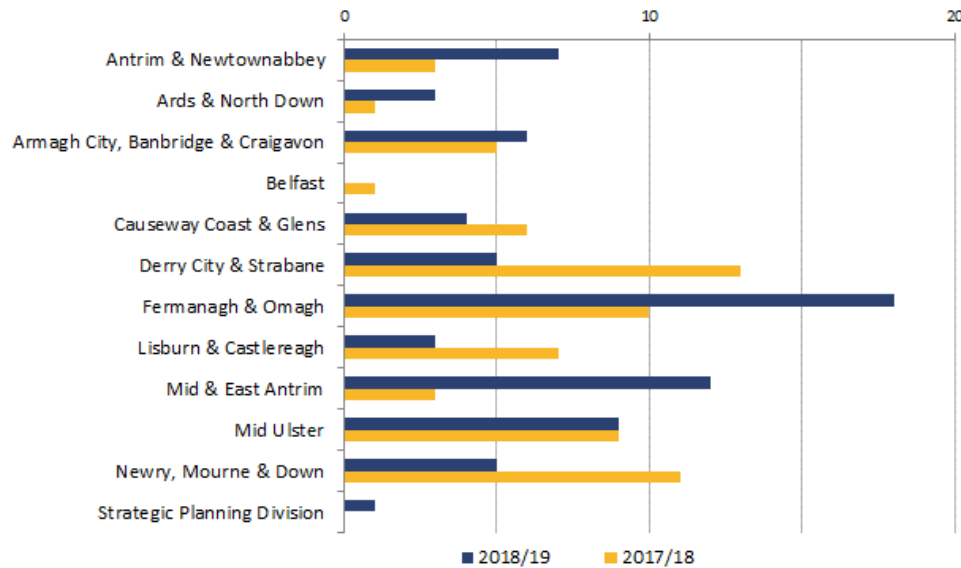


Figure 7.3 shows that the number of renewable energy planning decisions issued across planning authorities in 2018/19 was highest in Fermanagh and Omagh (18). Mid and East Antrim recorded the largest increase in decisions issued between 2017/18 and 2018/19 (nine).

Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by authority, 2017/18 & 2018/19

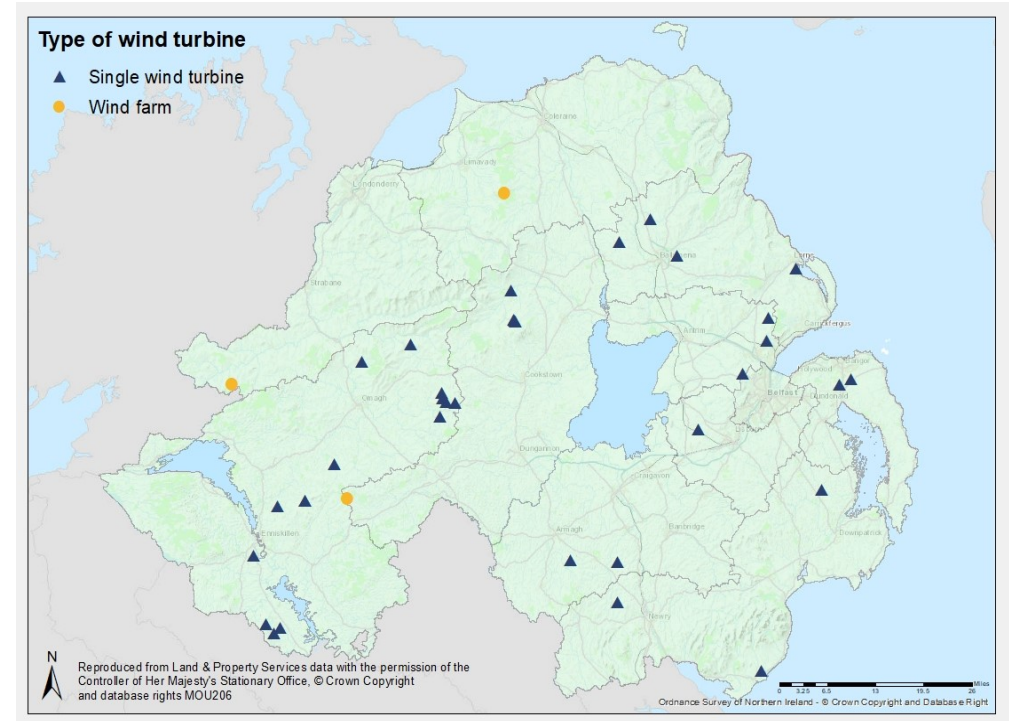


Twelve renewable energy applications were withdrawn during 2018/19: a decrease from 30 in 2017/18.

At the end of March 2019, there were **93 live renewable energy applications**. The majority of these (58.1%) were for single wind turbines. Of these 93 live applications, just over two-fifths (40.9%) were in the planning system for over a year; a decrease of 17.6 percentage points from the same point in 2018.

The **NI approval rate** for renewable energy applications was **90.4%** in 2018/19; an increase of 28.1 percentage points from 2017/18 (62.3%).

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, 2018/19



[Refer to Tables 7.3, 7.4.](#)



## User Guidance

### Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 were transferred in April 2019 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) which involved quality checks and inspection of coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils were provided with their own headline planning statistics before the release of this publication as part of the quality assurance process. On completion of ASRB and council validation, a final extract was taken in May 2019. Quarterly data for 2018/19 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. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils under the new planning system and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

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

### Departmental activity

*Retained Section 26 (former Article 31) applications* are Major applications being processed by the Department as Article 31 (under the Planning (NI) Order 1991) and, where a decision had not issued before 1 April 2015, which will now be determined under Section 26 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011.



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

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

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) can inflate the mean to the extent 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/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/settlement-15-guidance.pdf>.

This method is preferred to the previous method as it more accurately considers which of the eight 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:*

<https://gov.wales/planning-services-performance>

*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, Department for Communities:*

<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; and ‘hard infrastructure’ facilities such as roads, water mains, water treatment works, trunk sewers, waste water treatment works and natural gas pipelines. This 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; and 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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