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Department for
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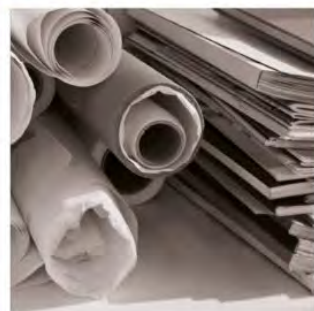
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National Statistics status

National Statistics status means that the statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). It is the Department for Infrastructure's responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics were designated as National Statistics in December 2020, following a full assessment of compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

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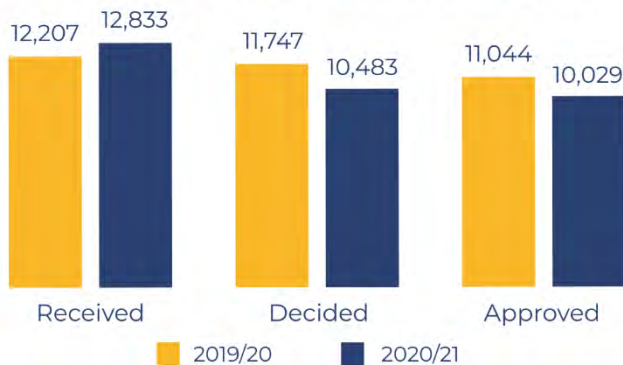
Key points

- **Planning activity and processing performance in 2020/21 were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. This should be borne in mind and caution should be taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.**
- During 2020/21, 12,833 planning applications were received in Northern Ireland (NI); a 5% increase from the previous financial year. This comprised 12,709 local, 123 major and one regionally significant application.
- A total of 10,483 planning applications were decided during 2020/21; a decrease of over one-tenth from the previous financial year. Decisions were issued on 10,357 local, 123 major and three regionally significant applications during 2020/21.
- The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during 2020/21 was 17.8 weeks across all councils. This exceeds the 15 week target and represents an increase of 3.8 weeks from the previous financial year. Three of the 11 councils met the 15 week target in 2020/21.
- The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during 2020/21 was 61.4 weeks across all councils. This represents an increase of 8.6 weeks compared with the previous financial year and is more than double the 30 week target. None of the 11 councils met the 30 week target in 2020/21.
- Across councils 69.9% of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during 2020/21. This falls just outside the statutory target of 70% and represents a considerable decrease from the rate reported 2019/20 (81.4%). Individually, six of the 11 councils met the target in 2020/21.

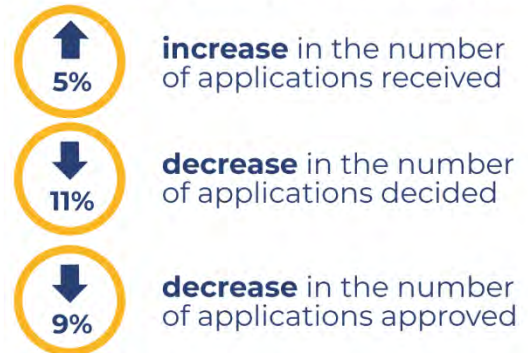
Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: Planning activity and processing performance during 2020/21 were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. This should be borne in mind when interpreting these figures.

Overall planning applications

Applications received, decided & approved



Comparing 2020/21 with 2019/20:

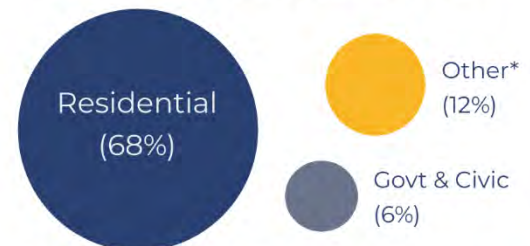


Applications received 2020/21

A total of 12,833 planning applications were received during 2020/21:



3 largest development types



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

Planning statutory targets 2020/21

Average processing times (weeks) - major



Councils within major target



Average processing times (weeks) - local



Councils within local target



% of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks



Councils within enforcement target



Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Annual Statistical Bulletin 2020/21

Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for councils and the Department for Infrastructure for 2020/21. Note that from 8 May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of the Environment to the Department for Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental re-organisation.

Whilst the bulletin and [accompanying Excel tables](#) report data for 2020/21, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous periods. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes since 2019/20, as well as changes within 2020/21. Please note that figures for 2020/21 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 largely have responsibility for this planning function.

Planning applications for development categorised as being either major development or local development are largely 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. 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 12 planning authorities).

The Department continues to have responsibility for the provision and publication of 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 were a number of significant 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 a quantitative corporate business plan target.

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 detail and further analysis 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 Excel 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 Excel tables. [Table 8.1](#) shows the volume of legacy work which each council inherited on 1 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 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 2021. This will contain provisional planning data up to 30 June 2021 and will commence the quarterly reporting cycle for 2021/22. The next annual report covering 2021/22 is planned for release in July 2022. See [GOV.UK Release Calendar](#) and [upcoming statistical releases](#) on the Department's website for future publication dates.

National Statistics designation

Between November 2019 and March 2020, the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics underwent an assessment by the Office for Statistics Regulation. A [report](#) detailing the findings of this assessment was published in May 2020.

The assessment report identified four requirements which, once met, enabled the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics to be designated as new National Statistics. Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) has published [an action plan](#), detailing how and by when these requirements were met. This includes a forward work plan which outlines scheduled work and further developments over the coming years, and this will be updated on an ongoing basis.

In [December 2020](#), the UK Statistics Authority Regulatory Committee confirmed National Statistics designation for the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics. This designation means that the statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

New Northern Ireland regional planning IT system

The Department and 10 councils have been working collaboratively on the configuration of a new Regional Planning IT System with an external provider. It is anticipated that the new system will be phased into operation in 2022. Relevant updates on the development of this new system and any potential impacts on statistical reporting will be included within future NI Planning Statistics publications. However, at this stage of the project it is too early to include any further information on potential impacts to NI Planning Statistics.

Alongside this one council has chosen to move forward independently and develop their own system. ASRB have held initial discussions with this council and will continue to engage to try and ensure that this system continues to meet the existing requirements of the NI Planning Statistics. Again, it is too early to include any further information on potential impacts to NI Planning Statistics but any relevant updates will be included within future publications.

Planning Monitoring Framework

The [Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework 2019/20](#) was published in December 2020. The next edition of this report, with data for 2020/21, is due to be published in autumn/winter 2021.

Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

This bulletin and the accompanying [Excel tables](#) present data for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic commenced on 12 March 2020 with the start of the delay phase, before lockdown was applied on 23 March 2020. Although lockdown was gradually eased from May 2020, certain restrictions remained in place over the summer. Varying levels of restrictions continued to be in place between September 2020 and March 2021.

Planning activity and processing performance in 2020/21 were impacted by these restrictions. The volume of planning applications received and processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn), and enforcement cases opened, closed and concluded, were lowest during the first quarter of the year, before increasing in subsequent quarters. Overall, the number of applications received exceeded the total recorded for the previous year. However, despite increases in the latter three quarters, the number of applications processed and enforcement activity for the year as a whole were at much lower levels compared with 2019/20.

Overall processing performance for 2020/21 was impacted considerably by the restrictions and therefore caution should be taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.

The ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic will continue to be assessed in future Northern Ireland Planning Statistics reports.

The data for this report were collected while staff in planning authorities had restricted access to their offices. Although this presented initial challenges in collecting and verifying data, there are no concerns that the quality of data presented in this report have been adversely affected.



Chapter 1: Overall Northern Ireland planning activity

Chapter 1: Overall NI planning activity

Planning activity and processing performance in 2020/21 were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The volume of planning applications received and processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn), and enforcement cases opened, closed and concluded, were lowest during the first quarter of the year, before increasing in subsequent quarters. Overall, the number of applications received exceeded the total recorded for the previous year. However, despite increases in the latter three quarters, the number of applications processed and enforcement activity for the year as a whole were at much lower levels compared with 2019/20.

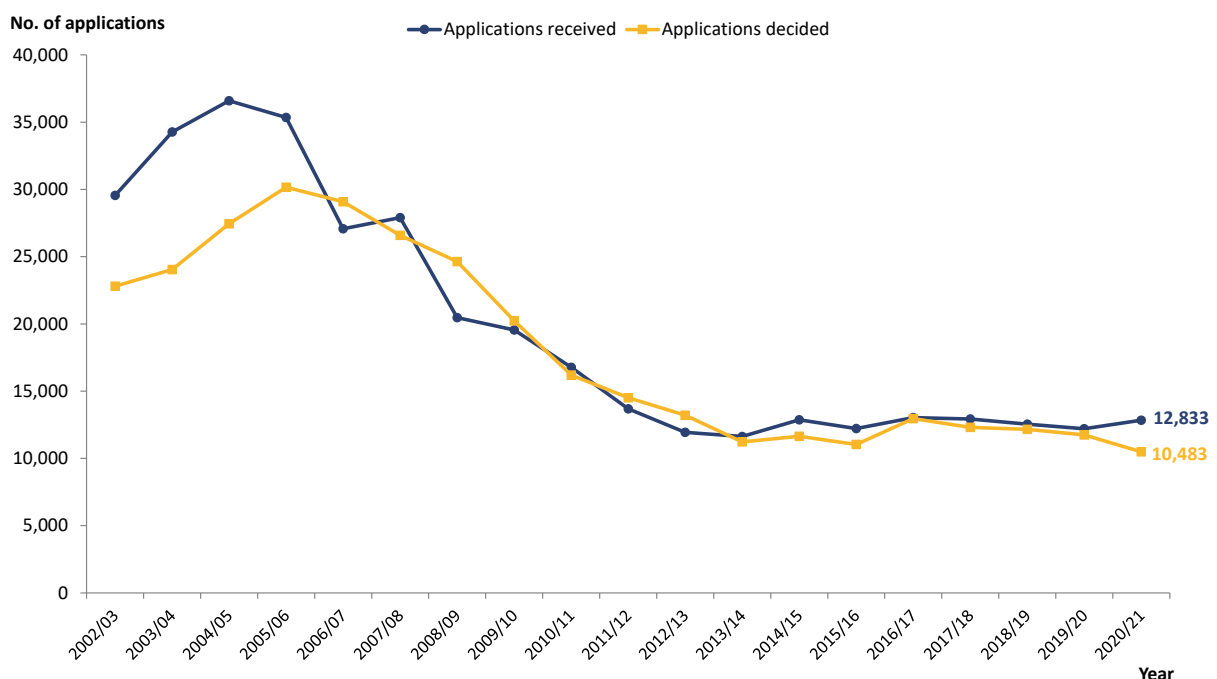
Overall processing performance in 2020/21 was also impacted considerably by the restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic and therefore caution should be taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.

Applications received

During 2020/21, **12,833** planning applications were **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department; an increase of 5.1% from the previous financial year (12,207).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of applications received was 2,309. This was the lowest number received in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. During the following three quarters there were consecutive increases in the number of applications received, with the 3,672 received in Q4 2020/21 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q1 2011/12. [Refer to Table 1.1.](#)

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, annually, 2002/03 to 2020/21



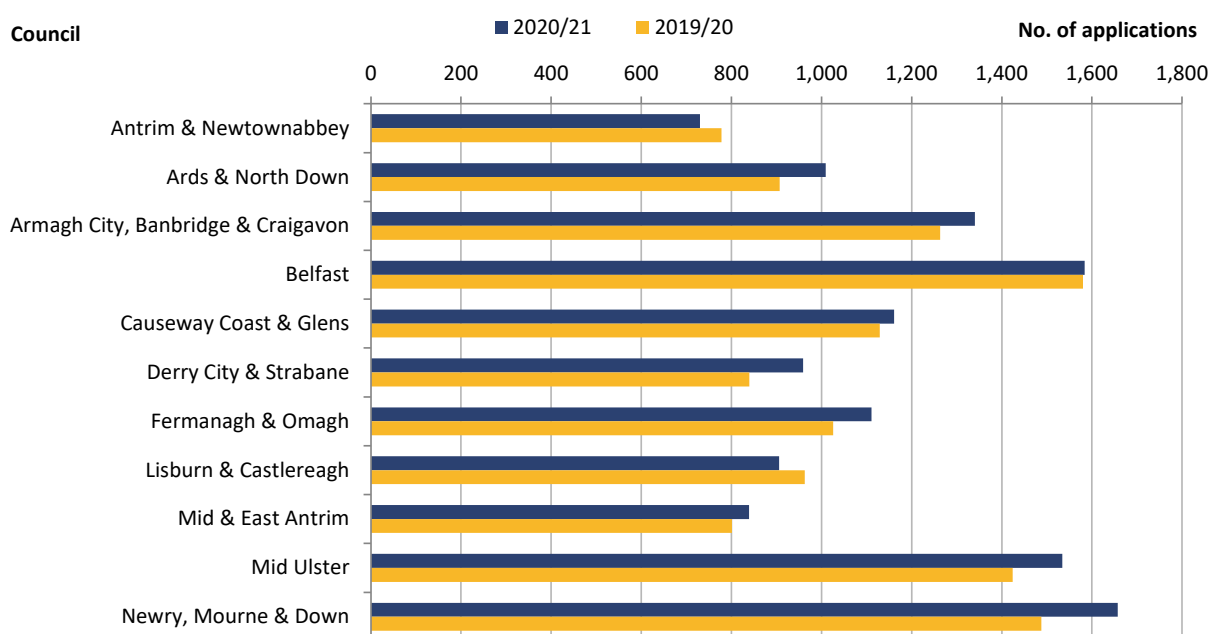
Approximately three-quarters of applications received in 2020/21 were for full planning permission (75.9%); a small increase from the proportion reported for 2019/20 (75.3%).

During 2020/21, the number of planning applications received varied across councils, ranging from 1,657 in Newry, Mourne and Down (accounting for 12.9% of all applications received across NI) to 730 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (5.7% of all applications received).

Reflecting the overall increase in the number of applications received in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 (5.1%), nine of the 11 councils reported an increase over the year. The largest increase, in percentage terms, was in Derry City and Strabane (14.2%). Over the same period, the volume of planning applications received decreased in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-6.2%), and Lisburn and Castlereagh (-5.9%) ([Figure 1.2](#)).

[Referto Tables 1.1, 1.2, 5.6.](#)

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, 2019/20 and 2020/21



Applications decided

The number of planning **decisions issued** during 2020/21 was **10,483**; a decrease of 10.8% from 2019/20 (11,747), and the lowest number recorded for any year since the series began in 2002/03 ([Figure 1.1](#)).

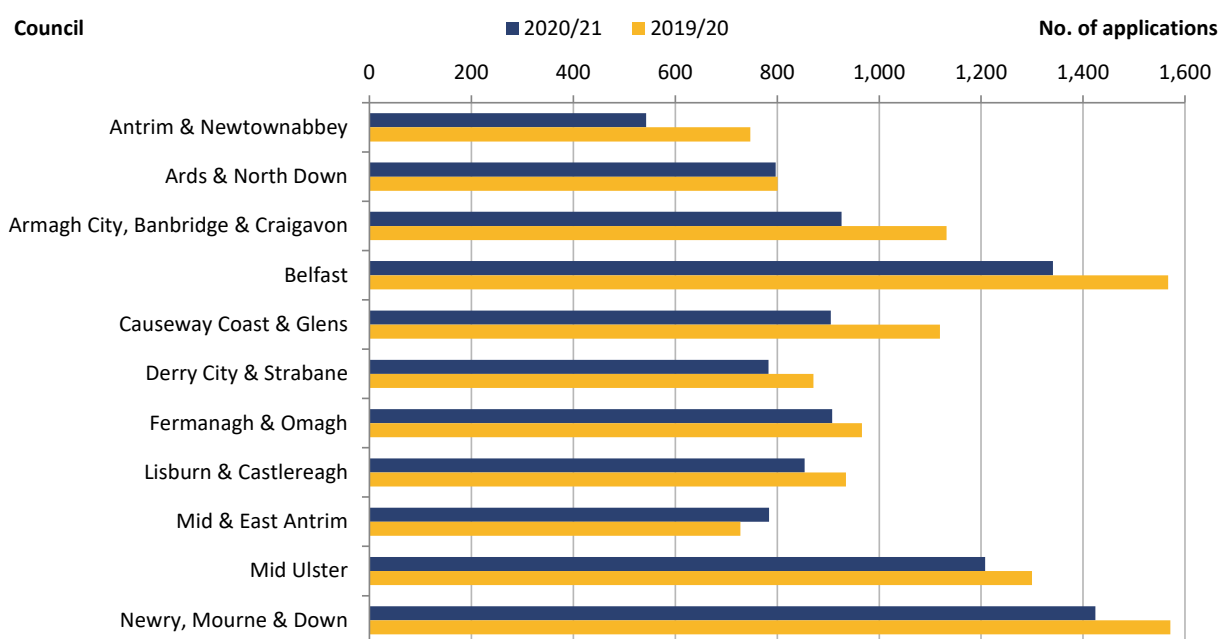
During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of applications decided was 1,811. This was the lowest number decided in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. During the following three quarters, however, there were consecutive increases in the number of applications decided, with the 3,252 decided in Q4 2020/21 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q1 2017/18. [Referto Table 1.1.](#)

Over three-quarters of applications decided in 2020/21 (76.6%) were for full planning permission; the same as the proportion recorded for the previous financial year.

Across councils the number of decisions issued during 2020/21 ranged from 1,424 in Newry, Mourne and Down (accounting for 13.6% of all decisions across NI) to 543 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (5.2% of all decisions).

Reflecting the overall decrease in the number of applications decided in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 (-10.8%), 10 of the 11 councils reported decreases over the year. The largest decrease, in percentage terms, was in Antrim and Newtownabbey, where the number of applications decided fell by over one-quarter (down 27.3%, from 747 to 543). Over the same period, the volume of planning applications decided increased in Mid and East Antrim (up 7.7%, from 728 to 784) ([Figure 1.3](#)).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, 2019/20 and 2020/21



The number of applications received exceeded the number of decisions issued in each of the 11 councils during 2020/21.

Over the course of the year, **504** applications were **withdrawn** across NI; a decrease of 9.0% from the number withdrawn in 2019/20 (554).

Overall, the number of applications processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) in 2020/21 was 10,987; a decrease of 10.7% from 2019/20 (12,301), and the lowest number recorded for any year since the series began in 2002/03.

[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2, 5.6.](#)

In addition to processing applications, planning authorities deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during 2020/21 they processed to decision or withdrawal: 924 certificates of lawfulness; 780 discharge of conditions; 403 non-material

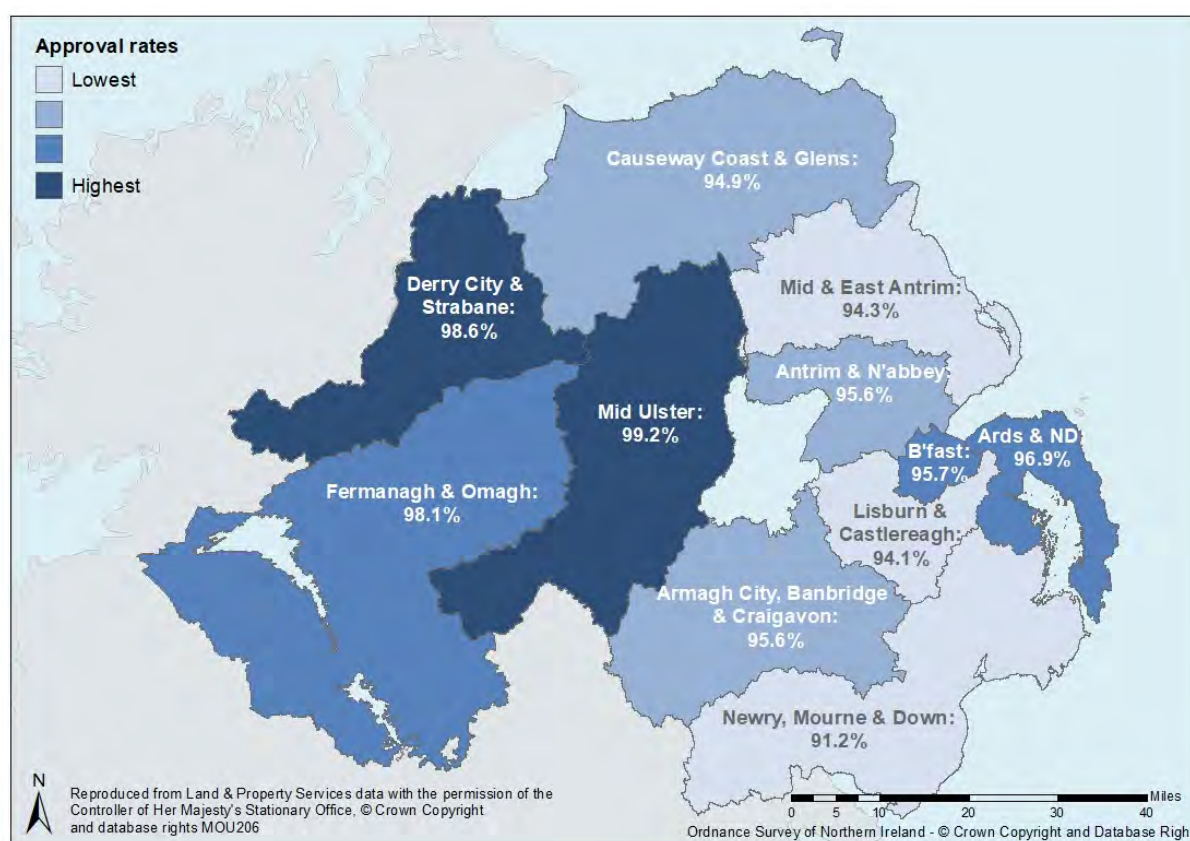
changes; and 318 tree preservation orders. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

Approval rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications was **95.7%** in 2020/21; an increase from the rate reported for 2019/20 (94.0%) and the highest approval rate reported for any year since the series began in 2002/03. [Refer to Table 1.1](#).

Approval rates varied across councils during 2020/21, from 99.2% in Mid Ulster to 91.2% in Newry, Mourne and Down ([Figure 1.4](#)). These rates are dependent on many factors and care should be taken in making any comparisons.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, 2020/21



Ten councils reported an increased approval rate when compared with 2019/20, with the largest increase occurring in Fermanagh and Omagh (up from 95.3% to 98.1%). Approval rates declined slightly in Ards and North Down over the year (down from 97.1% to 96.9%). [Refer to Table 1.2](#).

Live applications

There were 8,221 live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of March 2021; an increase of 29.5% from 6,350 at the end of March 2020, and the highest end-of-year live count since March 2012.

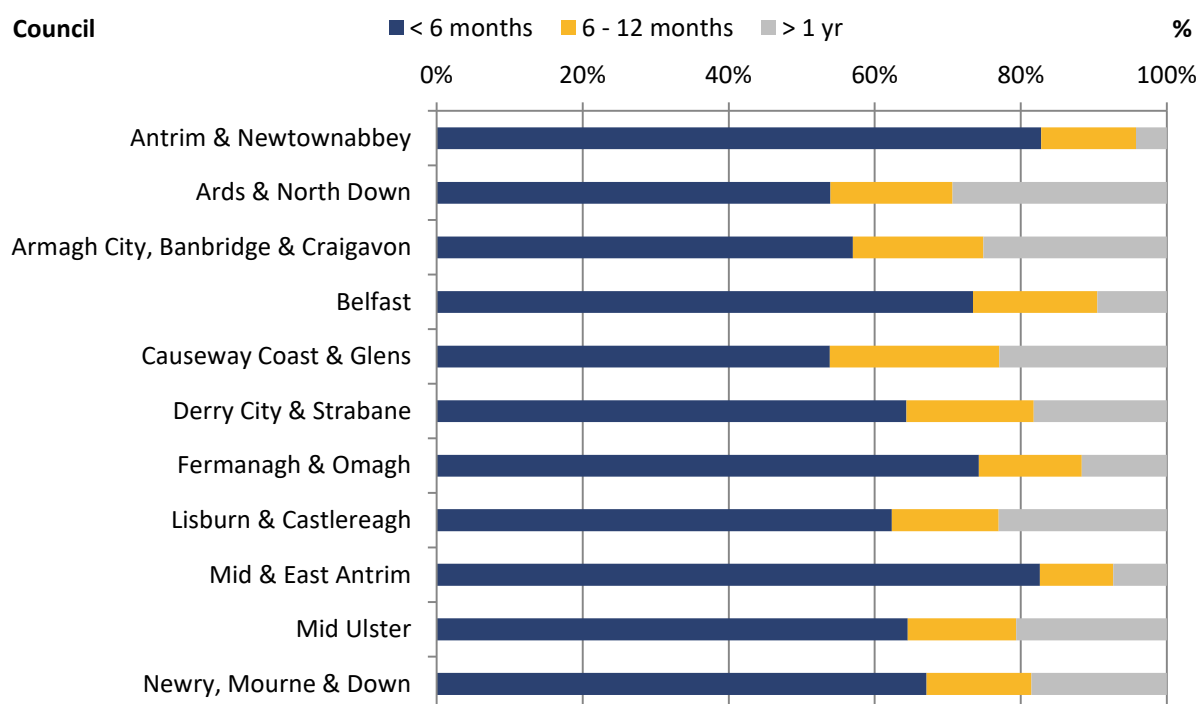
An increase in the live count is due to fewer applications being processed, i.e. decided or withdrawn, compared with applications received over a given period. The increase in the live count over the year suggests that the coronavirus pandemic and resulting restrictions have had a greater impact on the ability of planning authorities to process applications.

Just under one-fifth of all live applications in the planning system at the end of March 2021 were over one year old (19.5%); a decrease from the proportion reported for the end of March 2020 (20.5%).

[Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

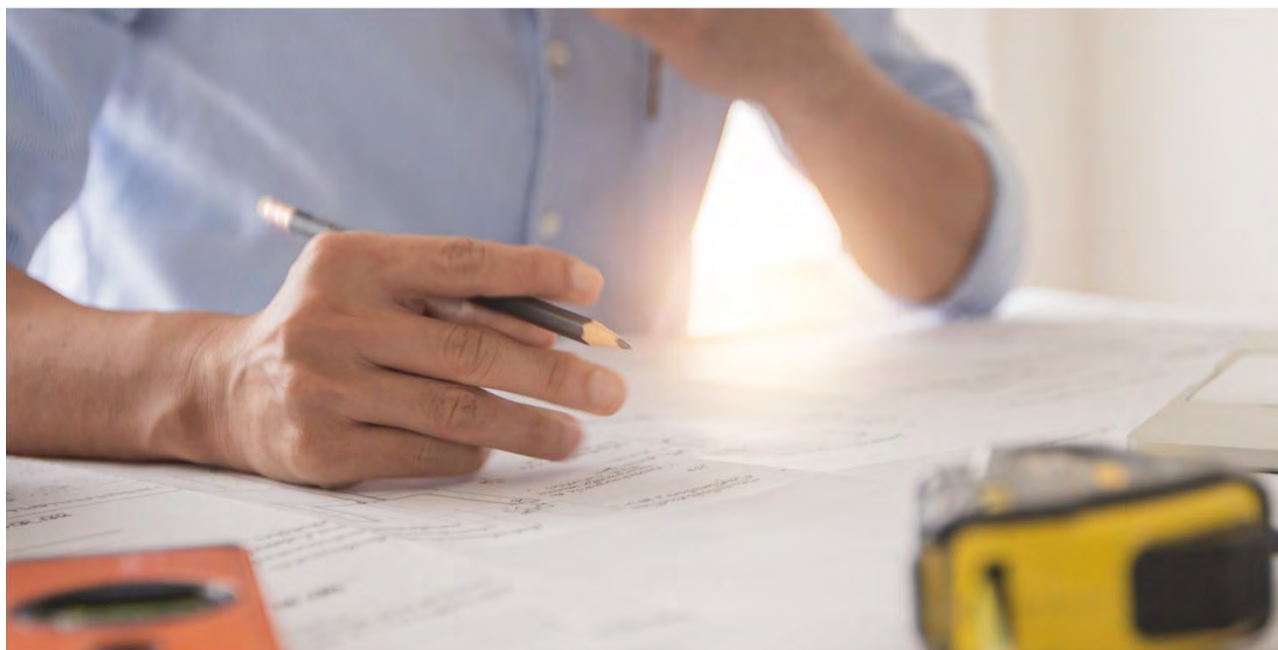
The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of March 2021 varied across councils, ranging from 29.3% in Ards and North Down to 4.2% in Antrim and Newtownabbey ([Figure 1.5](#)).

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council and length of time in the planning system at end of March 2021



Comparing the end of March 2021 with the same point a year earlier, the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year decreased for five councils, with the decrease greatest in Derry City and Strabane (down from 26.2% to 18.2%). This proportion increased in five councils over the same period, with the largest increase occurring in Ards and North Down (up from 25.2% to 29.3%). In Mid and East Antrim, 7.3% of live cases were in the system for over a year at the end of March 2021; the same proportion as reported for the end of March 2020.

[Refer to Table 1.4.](#)



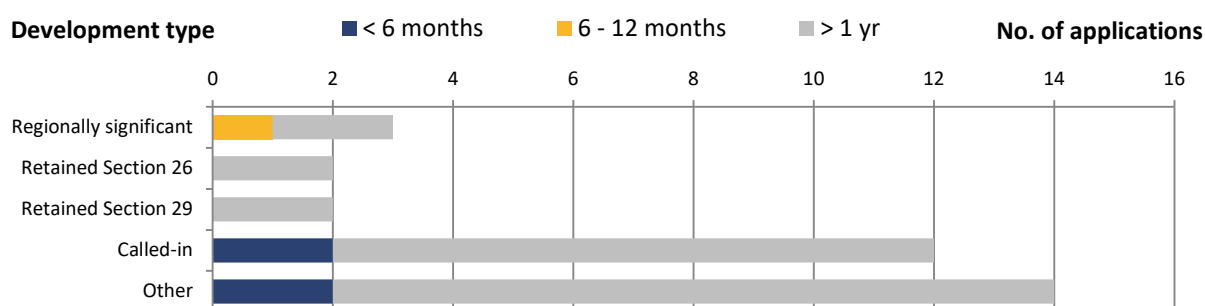
Chapter 2: Departmental activity

Chapter 2: Departmental activity

In 2020/21 the Department **received five** applications; one regionally significant development (RSD), two called-in and two other¹ applications. This compares with 11 received during 2019/20. The Department issued **decisions on 10** applications during 2020/21; three RSD, two retained Section 26, two called-in and three other applications. This matches the number of decisions issued by the Department during the previous year. In addition, **three** applications were **withdrawn** during the most recent year, compared with two during 2019/20. All three withdrawn in 2020/21 were called-in applications.

At the end of March 2021 there were 33 live Departmental applications: **three** ongoing RSD applications; **four retained** applications; **12 called-in** applications; and **14 other** applications. The vast majority of these applications (28 out of 33) were in the planning system for over a year ([Figure 2.1](#)). [Refer to Tables 2.1, 2.2.](#)

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type and length of time in the planning system at end of March 2021



Departmental target

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.



It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing regionally significant planning applications from date valid to a ministerial recommendation or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks.

Of three RSD applications live on the planning system at the end of March 2021, one had already been progressed to ministerial recommendation prior to 2020/21. The 30 week period for recommendation / withdrawal has been exceeded for the two remaining applications. Progress on these applications, and any new RSD applications received, will continue to be assessed in future reports.

¹ 'Other' applications include Conservation Area Consents, Variation of Conditions and Reserved Matters.



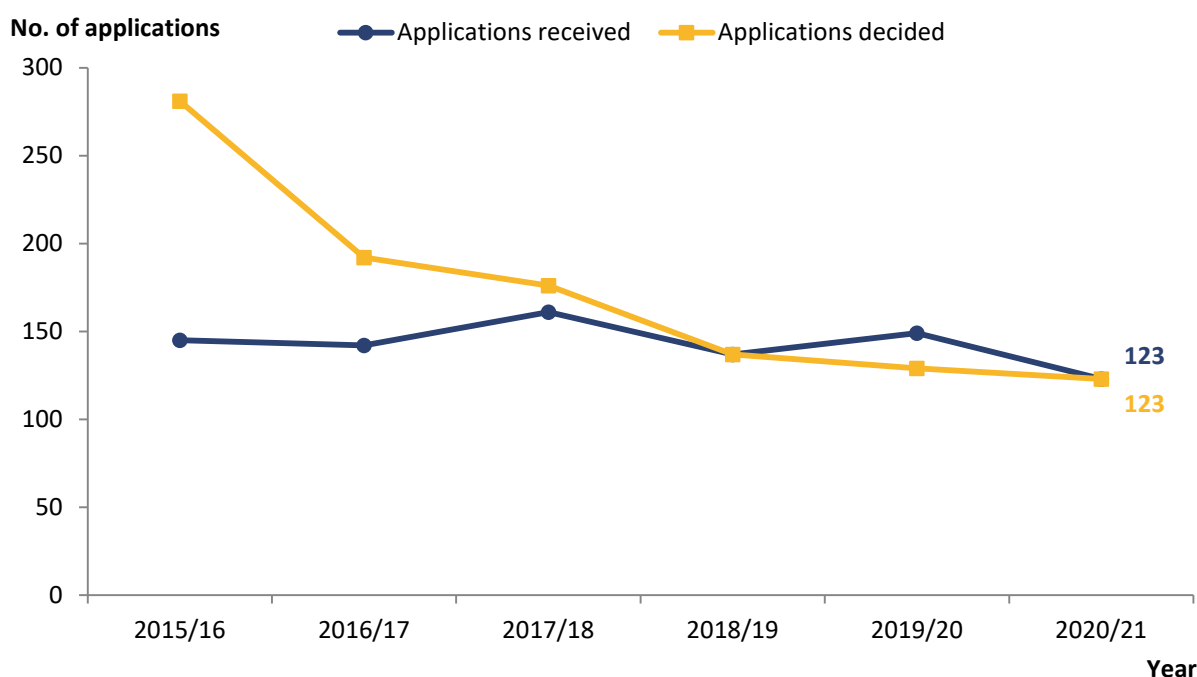
Chapter 3: Major development planning applications

Chapter 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.

A total of **123 major** planning applications were **received** in NI during 2020/21; a decrease of just over one-sixth from 2019/20 (down 17.4%, from 149), and the lowest number received in any year since the transfer of planning powers ([Figure 3.1](#)).

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, annually, 2015/16 to 2020/21



From 1 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, particularly when considering quarterly data. As [Figure 3.1](#) shows, the impact of this requirement is less evident for annual data. Despite the decrease over the last year, the number of major applications received has been relatively stable since the time series began in 2015/16, ranging from 123 in 2020/21 to 161 in 2017/18.

From 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has subsequently been extended until 30 September 2021². Examining 2020/21 in more detail, the number of major applications received was lowest in April (seven) and May (six) with increases recorded in subsequent months, providing some

² For more information, see the [Departmental website](#).

evidence that this change may have had a positive impact on the number of major applications received.

The number of major applications received across the councils in 2020/21 ranged from 30 in Belfast to four in Fermanagh and Omagh. Nine councils recorded decreases in the number of major applications received in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20, with the largest decrease recorded in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (down nine, from 19 to 10). Increases over the year were recorded in Mid and East Antrim (up four, from six to 10), and Newry, Mourne and Down (also up four, from eight to 12).

During 2020/21, **123 major** planning applications were **decided**; a decrease of 4.7% from the previous year (129), and the lowest number decided in any year since the transfer of planning powers ([Figure 3.1](#)).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of major applications decided was 21; the lowest number decided in any quarter since the transfer of planning powers. The number decided was higher in the following three quarters, with 35 decided in Q2, 32 in Q3 and 35 in Q4.

Seven major applications were **withdrawn** during 2020/21, compared with 11 in 2019/20.

At council level, the number of major applications decided in 2020/21 ranged from 37 in Belfast to two in Fermanagh and Omagh. Six of the 11 councils issued fewer decisions on major applications in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20.

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate for major** applications was **94.3%** in 2020/21; up from 91.5% recorded in 2019/20, and the highest rate recorded for any year since the transfer of planning powers. All eleven councils issued decisions on major applications during the most recent year; in six of these, 100% of the major applications decided upon were approved.

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

Major planning applications statutory target



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

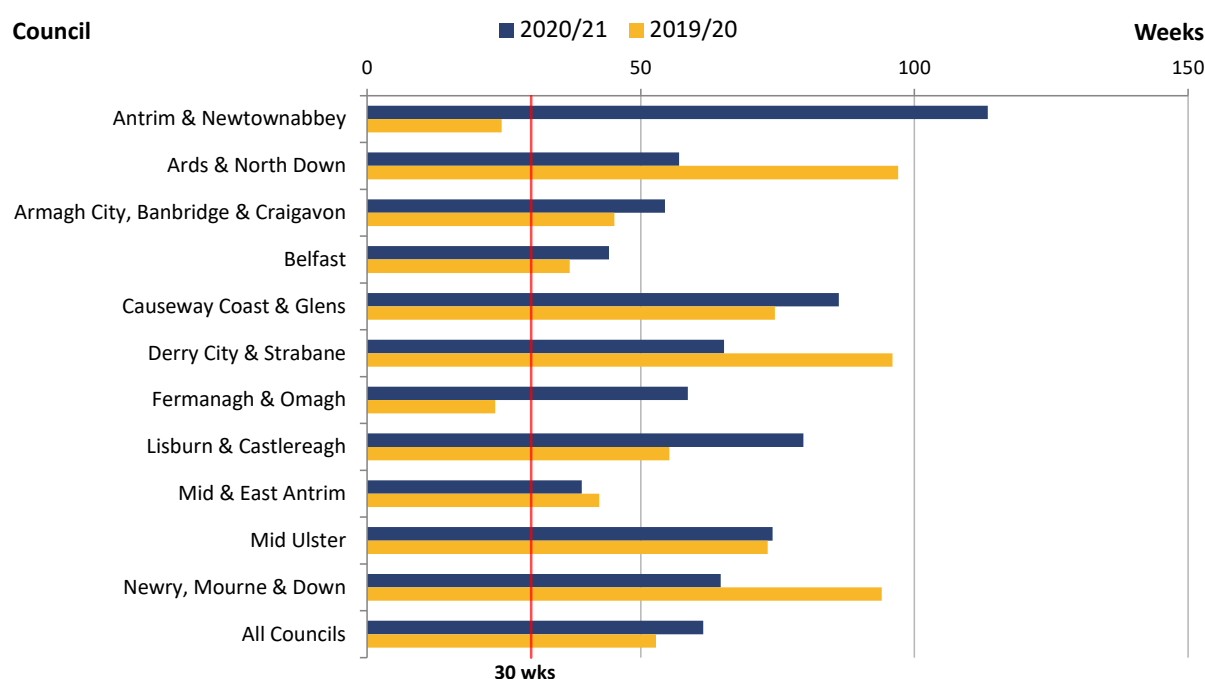
[Figure 3.2](#) presents annual average processing times for major applications. The **average processing time** for **major** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during **2020/21** was **61.4 weeks** across all councils. This represents an increase of 8.6 weeks compared with 2019/20 (52.8 weeks) and is more than double the 30 week target, as councils' ability to process major planning applications was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Whilst [Figure 3.2](#) has been provided for completeness, the majority of councils (six of the 11) processed fewer than 10 major applications to decision or withdrawal during 2020/21. [Refer to Table 3.2 for further information.](#)

None of the 11 councils met the statutory target of 30 weeks in 2020/21. The average processing time was lowest in Mid and East Antrim (an average of 39.2 weeks across five applications). The second lowest average processing time was recorded for Belfast (44.2 weeks), which processed more than twice as many major applications (40) as any other council during the most recent year. [Refer to Table 3.2.](#)

Seven of the 11 councils reported increased average processing times for major applications in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20. The remaining four councils reported improvements over the year: Ards and North Down (down 40.0 weeks, from 97.0 to 57.0 weeks); Derry City and Strabane (down 30.8 weeks, from 96.0 to 65.2 weeks); Newry, Mourne and Down (down 29.4 weeks, from 94.0 to 64.6 weeks); and Mid and East Antrim (down 3.2 weeks, from 42.4 to 39.2 weeks).

Fig 3.2 Major development average processing times by council, 2019/20 and 2020/21



Only three of the 127 major applications processed by councils in 2020/21 were legacy cases (i.e. those received before 1 April 2015). Newry, Mourne and Down processed two of these legacy cases in an average of 279.4 weeks. The council also processed five major applications which were received on or after 1 April 2015 (i.e. council received cases) in an average of 36.8 weeks. Taking these together, Newry Mourne and Down brought seven major applications to a decision or withdrawal during 2020/21, in an average of 64.6 weeks. A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2.](#)



Chapter 4: Local development planning applications

Chapter 4: Local development planning applications

Local Development planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications and are largely determined by the councils. The number of **local** planning applications **received** in NI during 2020/21 was **12,709**; an increase of 5.4% from the 12,058 received during 2019/20 ([Figure 4.1](#)).

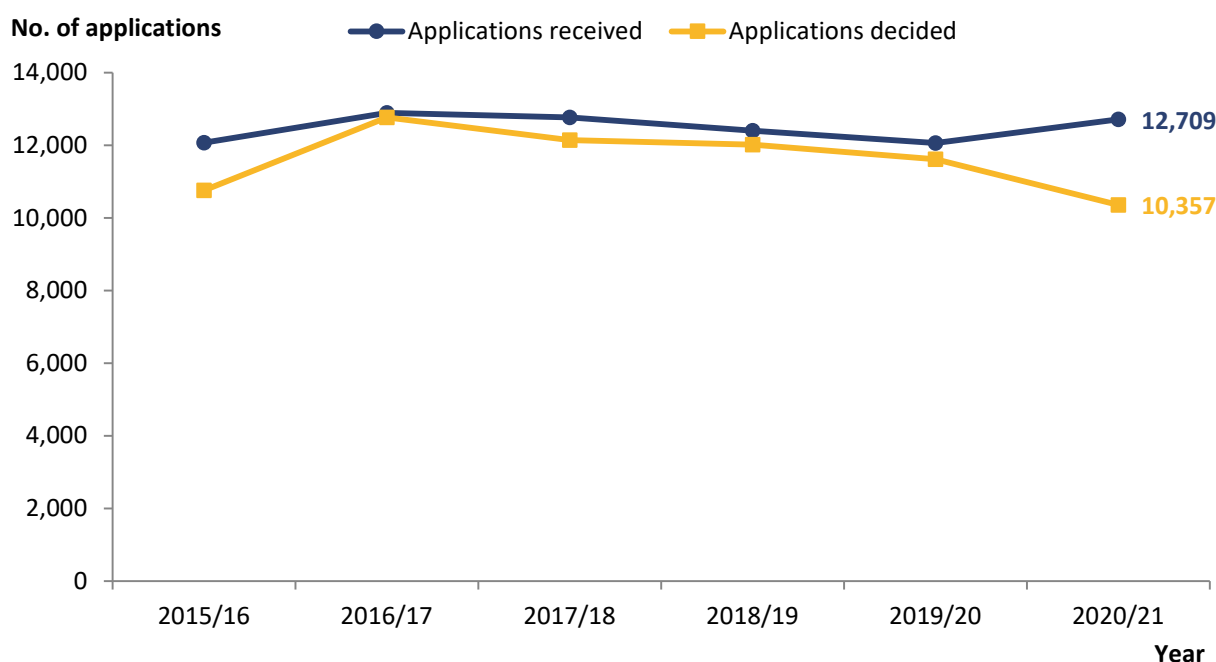
During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of local applications received was 2,284. This was the lowest number received in any quarter since the transfer of planning powers. During the following three quarters there were consecutive increases in the number of local applications received, with the 3,637 received in Q4 2020/21 the highest quarterly total since transfer. [Refer to Table 4.1.](#)

Across councils the number of local applications received during 2020/21 ranged from 1,645 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 722 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Reflecting the overall increase in the number of local applications received in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 (5.4%), nine of the 11 councils reported an increase over the year. The largest increase, in percentage terms, was in Derry City and Strabane (14.9%). Over the same period, the volume of local planning applications received decreased in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-6.1%), and Lisburn and Castlereagh (-5.7%).

The number of **local** applications **decided** in 2020/21 was **10,357**; decrease of 10.8% from 2019/20 (11,616), and the lowest number recorded for any year since the transfer of planning powers ([Figure 4.1](#)).

Fig 4.1 Local development applications, annually, 2015/16 to 2020/21



In each year since the transfer of planning powers the number of local applications received has exceeded the number decided. This difference was considerable in 2015/16, in large part due to the gap between the number received and decided during the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following transfer. In 2016/17 the gap narrowed considerably, before widening again in subsequent years. In 2020/21 this gap increased considerably; exceeding the difference reported for each previous year, suggesting that the coronavirus pandemic and resulting restrictions have had a greater impact on the ability of planning authorities to issue decisions on local applications ([Figure 4.1](#)).

During 2020/21 the number of local planning decisions issued across councils ranged from 1,417 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 538 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Reflecting the overall decrease in the number of local planning decisions issued in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 (-10.8%), 10 of the 11 councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest, in percentage terms, occurring in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-27.0%). Over the same period, the number of local planning applications decided increased in Mid and East Antrim (8.2%).

In 2020/21, **497 local** applications were **withdrawn** across NI; a decrease of 8.3% from the number withdrawn in 2019/20 (542). Across councils the number of local applications withdrawn in 2020/21 ranged from 80 in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon to 26 in Derry City and Strabane.

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for **local** applications was **95.7%** in 2020/21; an increase from 94.0% in 2019/20 and the highest approval rate for local applications reported for any year since the transfer of planning powers.

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

Local planning applications statutory target



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

[Figure 4.2](#) provides average processing times for local applications. The **average processing time** for **local** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during 2020/21 was **17.8 weeks** across all councils, exceeding the statutory target of 15 weeks. This represents an increase of 3.8 weeks compared with 2019/20 (14.0 weeks), as councils' ability to process applications was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

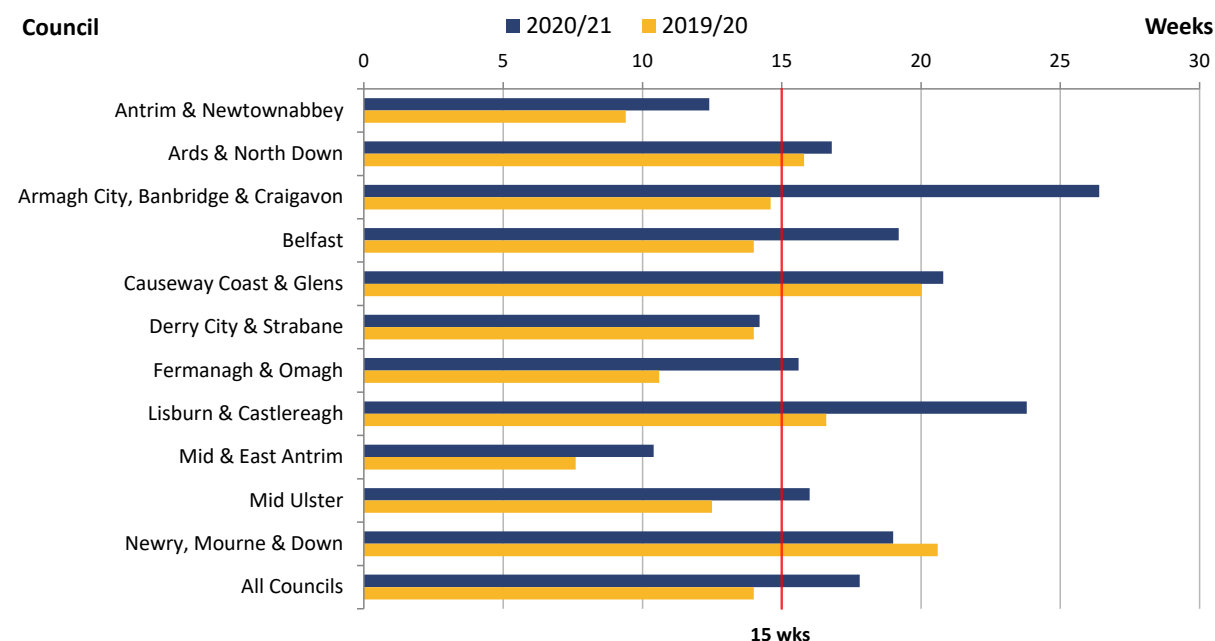
Three of the 11 councils met the 15 week target in 2020/21: Mid and East Antrim (10.4 weeks); Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.4 weeks); and Derry City and Strabane (14.2 weeks).

Newry, Mourne and Down was the only council where the average processing time for local applications improved during 2020/21, compared with 2019/20 (down 1.6 weeks, from 20.6 to 19.0 weeks). Over the same period, average processing times for local applications

increased in the remaining 10 councils, with the increase greatest in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (up 11.8 weeks, from 14.6 to 26.4 weeks).

[Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local development average processing times by council, 2019/20 and 2020/21



Only eight of the 10,847 local applications processed by councils in 2020/21 were legacy cases (i.e. those received before 1 April 2015). A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2.](#)



Chapter 5: Development type

Chapter 5: Development type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During 2020/21, **residential** applications accounted for **over two-thirds (68.1%)** of all planning applications received in NI; an increase from the proportion reported for 2019/20 (62.4%).

Residential applications accounted for the majority of applications received in each council during 2020/21; ranging from nearly three-quarters (73.7%) in Lisburn and Castlereagh to just over one-half (52.9%) in Belfast.

Consistent with previous years, a higher proportion of applications received in Belfast (23.2%) and Derry City and Strabane (20.6%) were categorised as 'other' in 2020/21, 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 received increased by 5.1% between 2019/20 and 2020/21. Examining the change by development type, a more mixed picture emerges. There were increases over the year in the number of commercial (up 14.9%, from 462 to 531), residential (up 14.6%, from 7,618 to 8,734), agricultural (up 11.4%, from 167 to 186) and industrial (up 9.5%, from 148 to 162) applications received. Decreases were recorded in the number of change of use (down 21.1%, from 731 to 577), 'other' (down 17.8%, from 1,835 to 1,508), government and civic (down 12.4%, from 863 to 756) and mixed use (down 1.0%, from 383 to 379) applications received. [Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.](#)

Residential applications

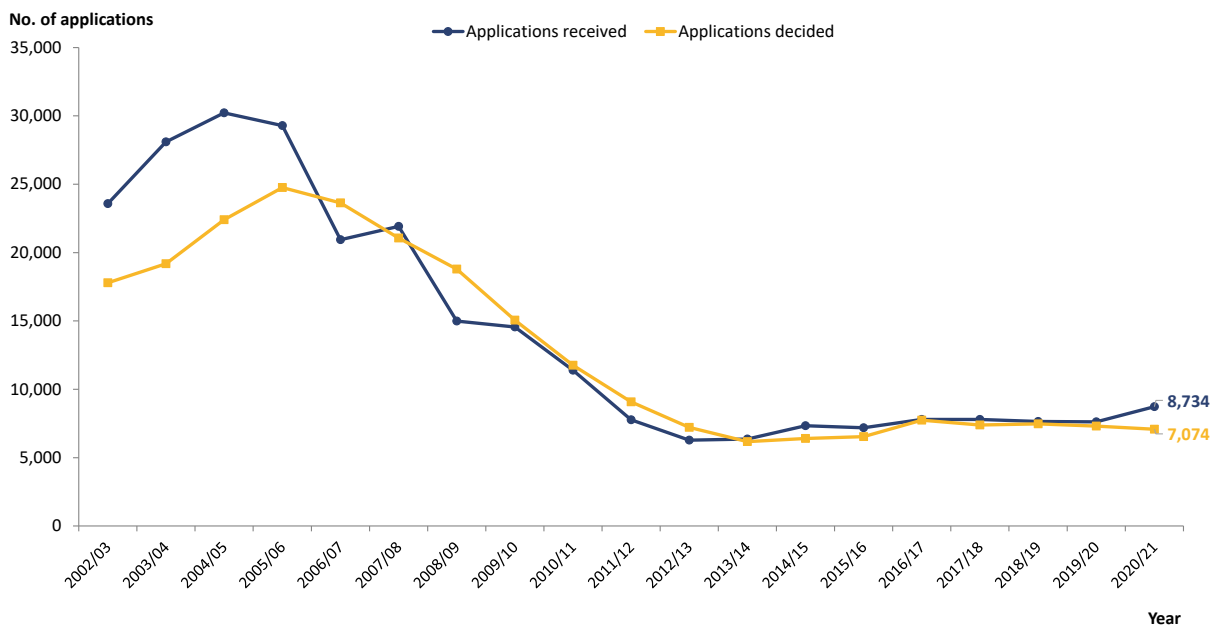
The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in NI during 2020/21 was **8,734**; an increase of 14.6% from 2019/20 (7,618) and the highest annual total recorded since 2010/11 ([Figure 5.1](#)).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of residential applications received was 1,583; the lowest number received in any quarter since Q3 2013/14. During the following three quarters there were consecutive increases in the number of residential applications received, with the 2,522 received in Q4 2020/21 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q4 2010/11. [Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

During 2020/21, **7,074 residential** planning applications were **decided**; a decrease of 3.1% from 2019/20 (7,301) ([Figure 5.1](#)).

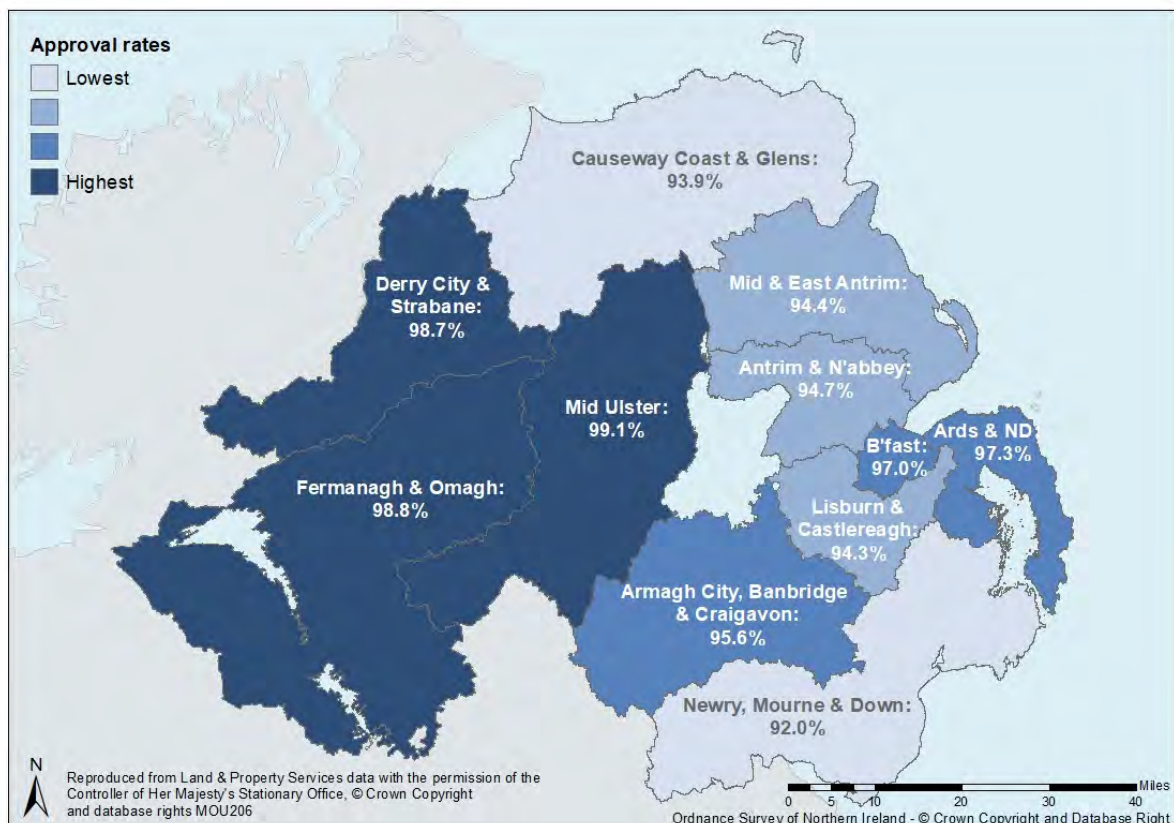
During Q1 2020/21, decisions were issued on 1,177 residential planning applications; the lowest number of decisions issued in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. Consecutive increases in the number of residential applications decided were recorded during the following three quarters, with the 2,258 decisions issued in Q4 2020/21 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q2 2011/12. [Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

Fig 5.1 NI Residential applications, annually, 2002/03 to 2020/21



The Northern Ireland approval rate for residential planning applications was 95.9% in 2020/21; an increase from the rate reported for 2019/20 (94.2%) and the highest residential approval rate reported for any year since the series began in 2002/03. Refer to Table 5.3. Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in 2020/21, ranging from 99.1% in Mid Ulster to 92.0% in Newry, Mourne and Down (Figure 5.2).

Fig 5.2 Residential approval rates by council, 2020/21



Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in 10 councils between 2019/20 and 2020/21, with the largest increase recorded in Fermanagh and Omagh (up from 95.2% to 98.8%). Approval rates for residential applications declined slightly in Ards and North Down over the same period (down from 97.6% to 97.3%).

During 2020/21, 307 residential applications were withdrawn across NI; similar to the number reported for the previous year (306).

[Refer to Tables 5.3 and 5.4.](#)

Residential applications – urban, rural and open countryside

Across urban areas (settlements greater than or equal to 5,000 population), the number of residential applications received in 2020/21 was 2,888; an increase of 14.6% from 2019/20 (2,519).

In rural areas, within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was an increase in the number of residential applications received in 2020/21 (1,023) compared with 2019/20 (up 13.0%, from 905).

In the open countryside (outside population settlements), the number of residential applications received in 2020/21 (4,823) also increased over the year (up 15.0%, from 4,194).

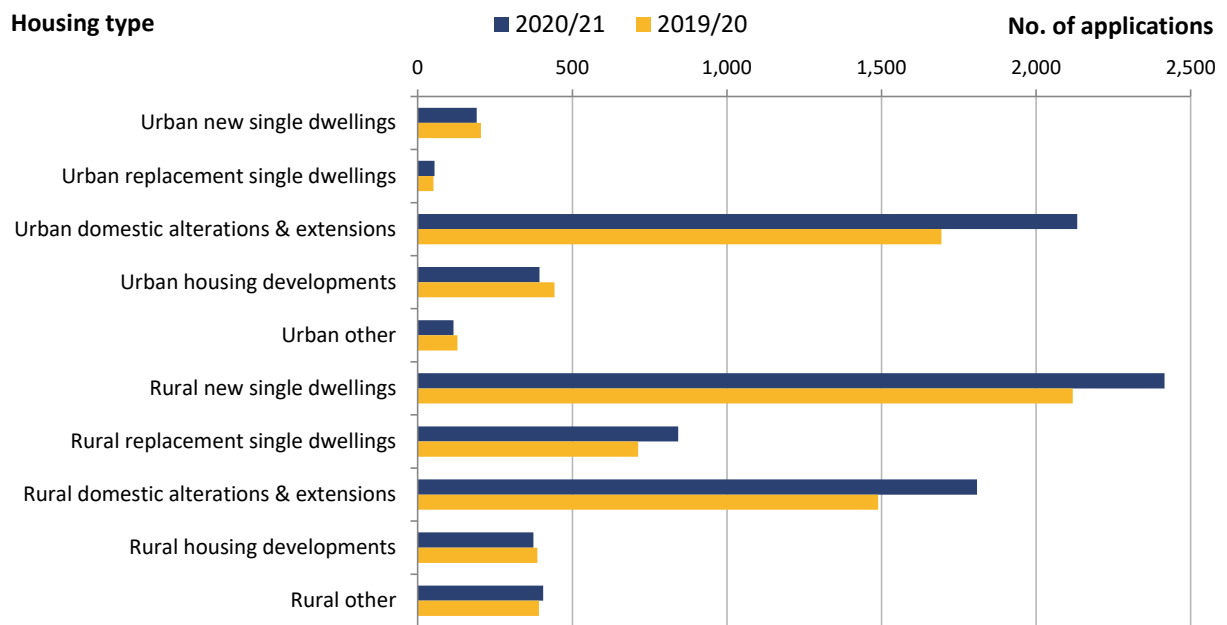
Residential applications – urban and rural

[Figure 5.3](#) shows the number of residential applications received in 2019/20 and 2020/21, broken down by urban and rural housing type. Urban is based on areas with settlements greater than 5,000 population while rural is a combination of settlements below 5,000 population and the open countryside.

New single dwellings in rural areas (2,415) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (2,133) continue to be the most common types of residential application, together accounting for over one-half (52.1%) of all residential applications received during 2020/21.

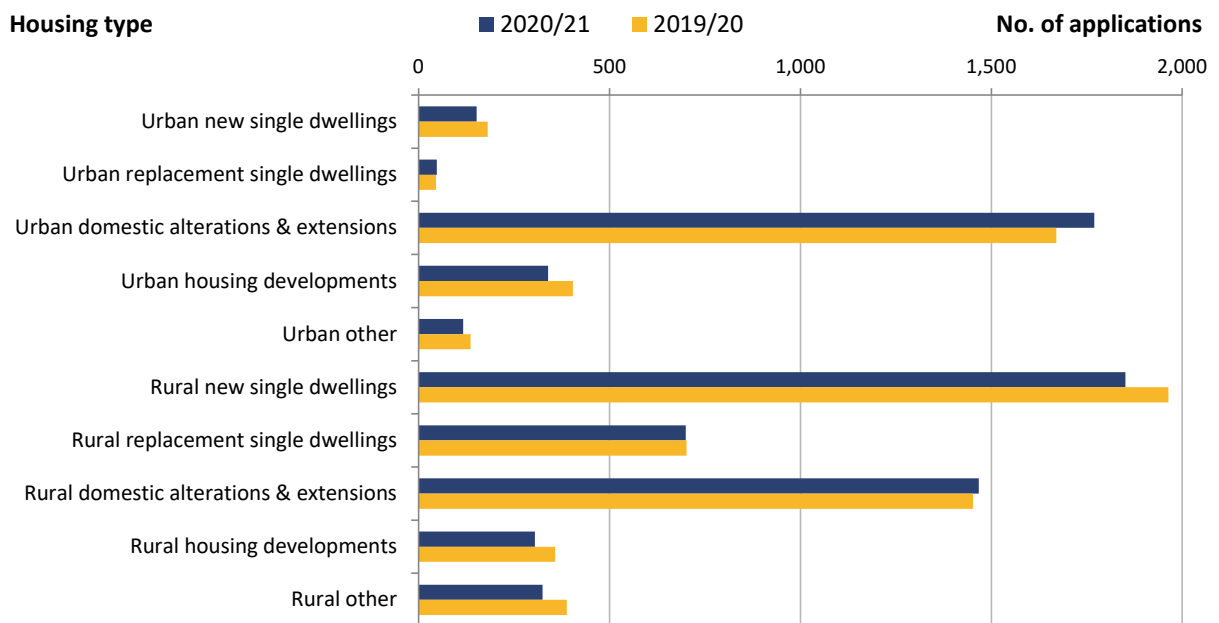
The overall increase over the year in the number of residential applications received (14.6%) was largely driven by increases in the number of applications received for: domestic alterations and extensions in both urban (up 25.9%, from 1,694 to 2,133) and rural (up 21.5%, from 1,489 to 1,809) areas; and new single dwellings in rural areas (up 14.0%, from 2,118 to 2,415).

Fig 5.3 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, 2019/20 and 2020/21



The overall decrease in the number of residential applications decided between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (-3.1%), was driven by decreases in the number of decisions issued on: new single rural dwellings (down 5.8%, from 1,964 to 1,851); housing developments in urban (down 16.1%, from 404 to 339) and rural (down 14.8%, from 358 to 305) areas; and ‘other’³ rural applications (down 16.2%, from 388 to 325). The overall decrease was somewhat offset by an increase in the number of decisions issued on urban domestic alterations and extensions (up 6.0% from 1,670 to 1,770). [Refer to Table 5.5](#) and [Figure 5.4](#).

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, 2019/20 and 2020/21



³ Includes temporary buildings, change of house types and hotels, motels and guest houses.



Chapter 6: Compliance and enforcement activity

Chapter 6: Compliance and enforcement activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in NI during 2020/21 was **3,229**; down almost one-quarter (-24.2%) from the number opened in 2019/20 (4,262), and the lowest annual total reported since 2015/16 ([Figure 6.1](#)).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, 628 enforcement cases were opened; the lowest number opened in any quarter since Q4 2014/15. The number opened was higher in the following three quarters (848 in Q2, 882 in Q3 and 871 in Q4). [Refer to Table 6.1](#).

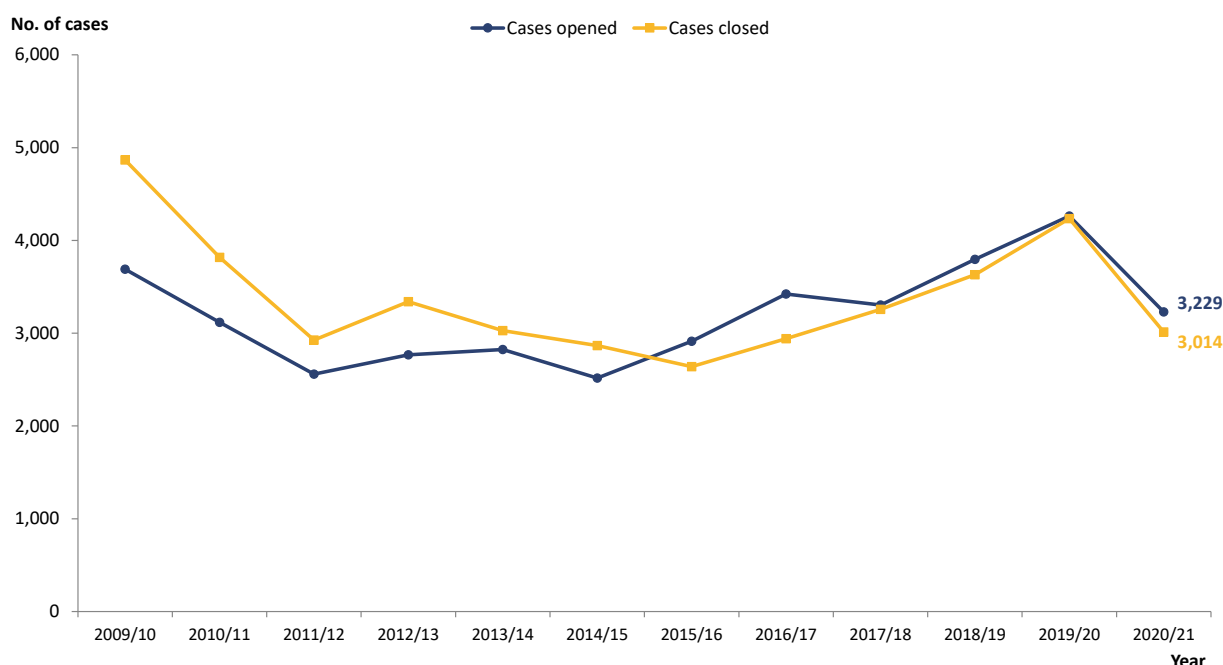
Across councils, the number of enforcement cases opened in 2020/21 ranged from 445 in Belfast to 177 in Mid and East Antrim. Eight councils reported decreases in the number of cases opened in 2020/21 compared with the previous year. This decrease was greatest in Belfast, where the number of cases opened fell by more than one-half (-54.8%) over the year (from 984 to 445). The number of cases opened increased in three councils over this period, with the largest increase, in percentage terms, recorded in Mid Ulster (up 11.2%, from 196 to 218).

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during 2020/21 was **3,014**; down by over one-quarter (-28.8%) from the same period a year earlier (4,236) ([Figure 6.1](#)).

During Q1 2020/21, 409 enforcement cases were closed; the lowest total recorded for any quarter since the series began in April 2009. The number of cases closed was higher in Q2 (747) and Q3 (743) and increased again in Q4 (1,115).

[Refer to Table 6.1](#).

Fig 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, annually, 2009/10 to 2020/21



The number of cases closed in 2020/21 varied across councils, ranging from 602 in Belfast to 161 in Mid Ulster. Ten councils recorded decreases in the number of enforcement cases closed in 2020/21 compared with the previous year, with the greatest decrease, in percentage terms, occurring in Ards and North Down, where the number closed fell by more than one-half (down 58.8%, from 422 to 174). Derry City and Strabane was the only council where the number of cases closed increased over the year (up 13.1%, from 176 to 199).

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 in the six years since 2015/16. In 2020/21, 7.1% more enforcement cases were opened (3,229) compared with the number closed (3,014).

The most common reasons for enforcement cases closing in 2020/21 were that no breach had actually occurred (34.9%) or that the case had been remedied or resolved (24.8%). Together these accounted for almost three-fifths (1,799; 59.7%) of the 3,014 cases closed.

A total of **3,029 enforcement cases** were **concluded**⁴ during 2020/21; down by over one-quarter (-27.7%) from the number reported for 2019/20 (4,192).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, 394 cases were concluded. Consecutive increases in the number concluded were recorded during the following three quarters; 754 in Q2, 783 in Q3 and 1,098 in Q4.

Across councils, the number of cases concluded during 2020/21 ranged from 619 in Belfast to 150 in Ards and North Down. Nine councils recorded decreases in the number of enforcement cases concluded in 2020/21 compared with the previous year, with the greatest decrease occurring in Ards and North Down, where the number concluded fell by more than two-thirds (down 67.0%, from 455 to 150). Increases in the number of cases concluded over the year were recorded in Derry City and Strabane (up 26.3%, from 160 to 202), and Mid Ulster (up 8.2%, from 171 to 185).

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

⁴ Refer to [User Guidance – Enforcement activity](#) for definitions of closed and concluded enforcement cases.

Enforcement cases statutory target



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.

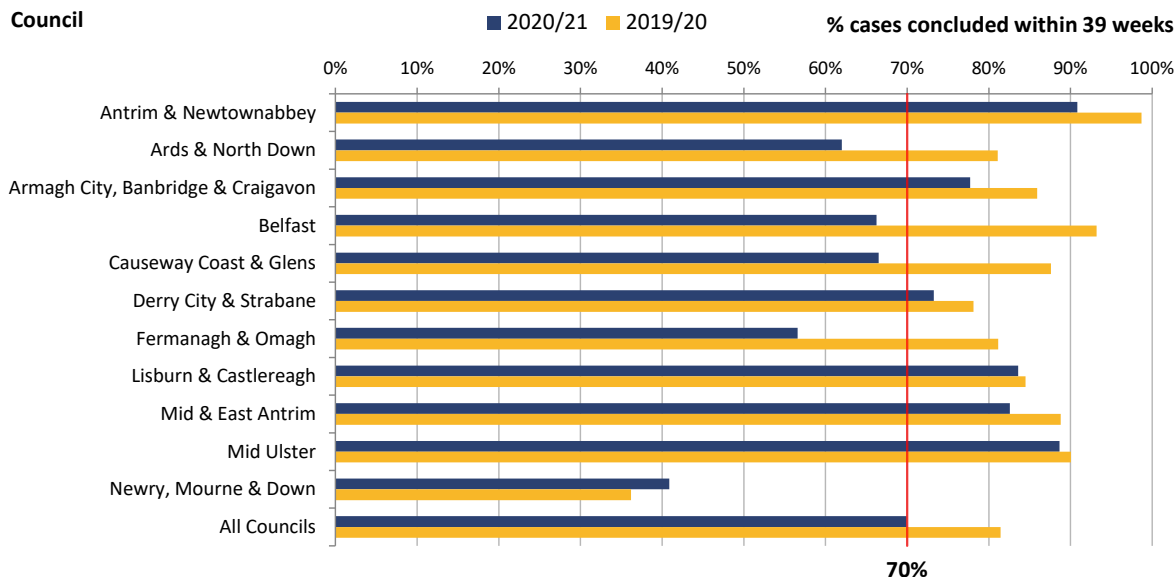
Across all councils, **69.9%** enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during 2020/21. This falls just outside the statutory target and represents a considerable decrease from the rate reported for 2019/20 (81.4%), as councils' ability to progress cases to conclusion was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Performance against the target was most affected during Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, when less than two-thirds (59.6%) of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks across all councils. This improved in subsequent quarters; 73.5% in Q2, 69.5% in Q3 and 71.5% in Q4.

Six councils met the target during 2020/21: Antrim and Newtownabbey (90.8% of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks); Mid Ulster (88.6%); Lisburn and Castlereagh (83.6%); Mid and East Antrim (82.6%); Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (77.7%); and Derry City and Strabane (73.3%) ([Figure 6.2](#)).

[Refer to Table 6.2.](#)

Fig 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, 2019/20 and 2020/21



The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of March 2021 was **3,830**; the highest end-of-year total since live enforcement cases were first recorded in 2012/13. This suggests that the coronavirus pandemic and resulting restrictions have had a greater impact on the ability of planning authorities to close enforcement cases than open cases during 2020/21 as a whole.

Examining 2020/21 in more detail, however, reveals that the number of live enforcement cases at the end of the end of March was the lowest end-of-quarter total recorded during

the year. The number of live cases increased during the first three quarters of the year, as the number of cases opened exceeded the number closed, reaching a peak of 4,074 cases at the end of December 2020. In Q4, the number of cases closed (1,115) exceeded the number opened (871), reducing the number of live cases at the end of the March to 3,830. This provides some evidence that the impact on councils' ability to close enforcement cases was lessened during the final quarter of the year.

The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **1,138** at the end of March 2021, accounting for 29.7% of all live cases. This compared with 27.3% of live cases at the end of March 2020.

[Refer to Tables and 6.1 and 6.4.](#)

Across councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest number of live cases at the end of March 2021 (819), with almost one-half (49.5%) of these in the system for over two years; the highest proportion across all councils.

Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of live cases (97) at the end of March 2021, with 8.2% of these in the system for over two years.

The number of live enforcement cases increased in seven of the 11 councils between the end of March 2020 and the end of March 2021. The increase was greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey, where the number of live cases more than doubled over the year (from 112 to 262).

In the remaining four councils, the number of live enforcements cases decreased over this period, with the decrease greatest in Belfast (down 29.2%, from 490 to 347).

[Refer to Table 6.5.](#)

Thirty-three prosecutions were initiated across NI in 2020/21; a drop of almost one-half from the number recorded for 2019/20 (64). Six councils initiated prosecutions during 2020/21, with Causeway Coast and Glens initiating the most (14).

There were 13 convictions across NI during 2020/21; down by almost one-half from the previous year (25), and the lowest annual total recorded since the series began in 2009/10. Six councils recorded convictions during the most recent year, with Mid Ulster recording the most (five).

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



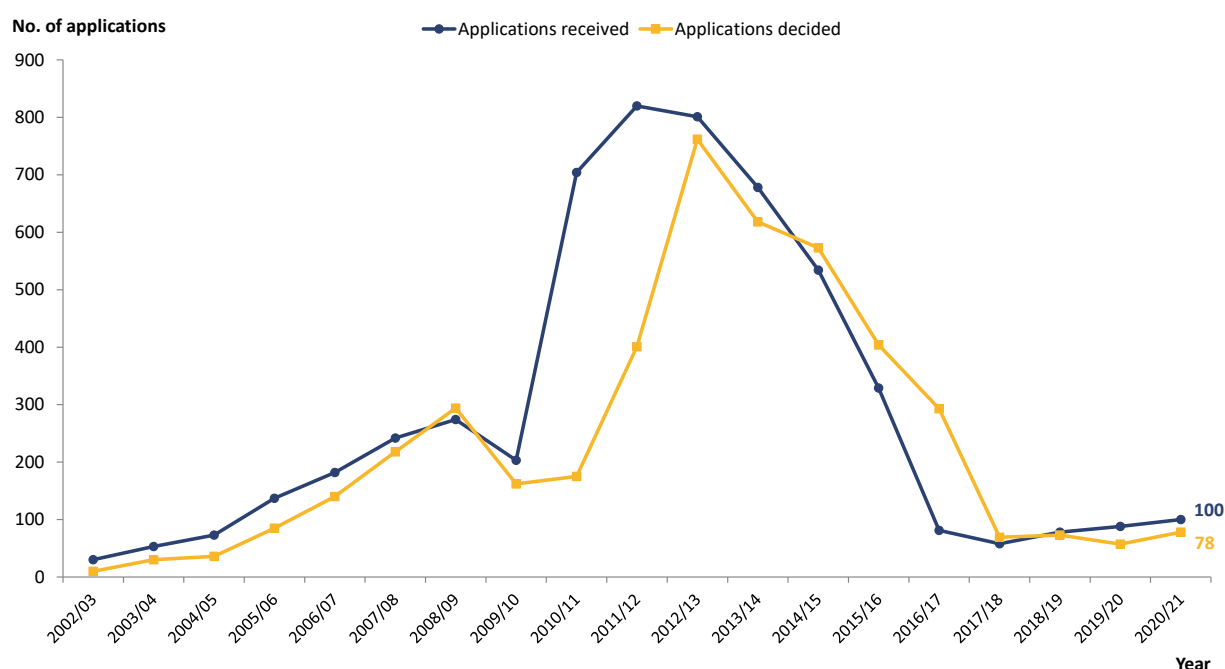
Chapter 7: Renewable energy activity

Chapter 7: Renewable energy (RE) activity

One-hundred renewable energy applications were **received** during 2020/21; an increase from 88 in 2019/20, and the highest number received annually since 2015/16.

The number of renewable energy 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 (from 820 in 2011/12 to 100 applications in 2020/21) 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 ([Figure 7.1](#)).

Fig 7.1 Renewable Energy applications, annually, 2002/03 to 2020/21



The number of renewable energy applications **decided** during 2020/21 was **78**; up from 57 reported for 2019/20 but a decrease from the series peak of 762 applications decided in 2012/13 ([Figure 7.1](#)). **Twelve** renewable energy applications were **withdrawn** during 2020/21. [Refer to Table 7.1.](#)

The average processing time for the 90 renewable energy applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during 2020/21 was 47.5 weeks across NI; an increase of 13.9 weeks from 33.6 weeks reported for 2019/20.

Single wind turbines continue to be the most common renewable energy application, accounting for 87% applications received during 2020/21 (87 out of 100 received). In addition, over four-fifths of renewable energy decisions issued during the year were for single wind turbines (66 out of 78). [Refer to Table 7.2.](#)

Figure 7.2 shows the distribution of renewable energy applications received across the different planning authorities in 2019/20 and 2020/21, with Fermanagh and Omagh receiving the most in both years (25 in 2019/20 and 23 in 2020/21). Five planning authorities received an increased amount of applications in 2020/21 compared with the previous year; this increase was greatest in Ards and North Down (up from two to 11).

Fig 7.2 Renewable Energy applications received by authority, 2019/20 and 2020/21

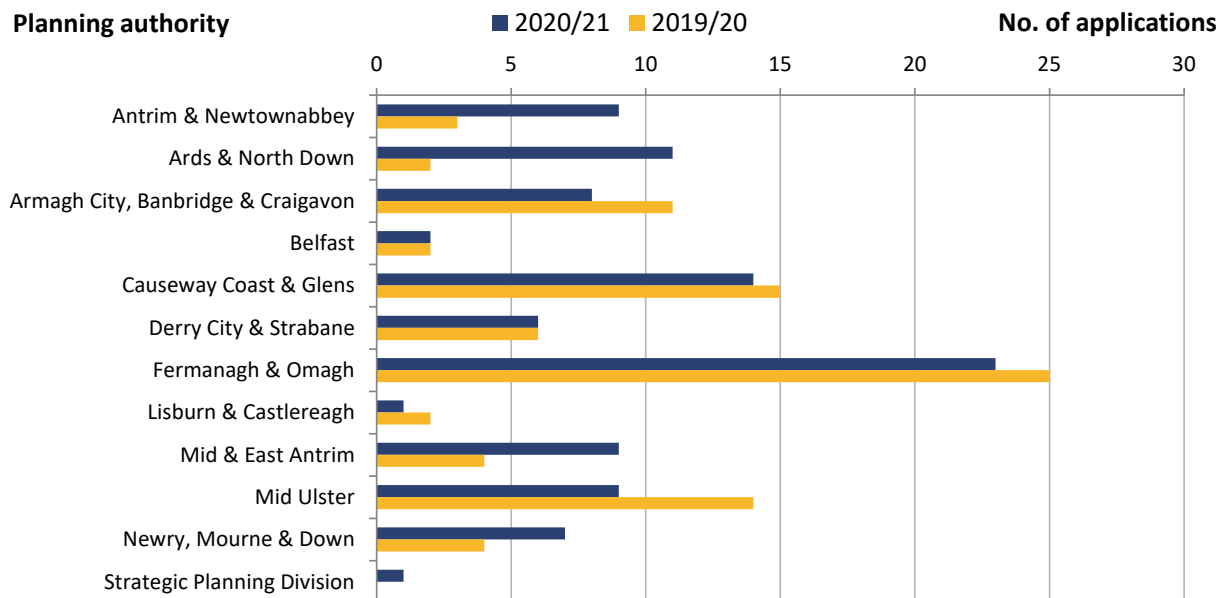
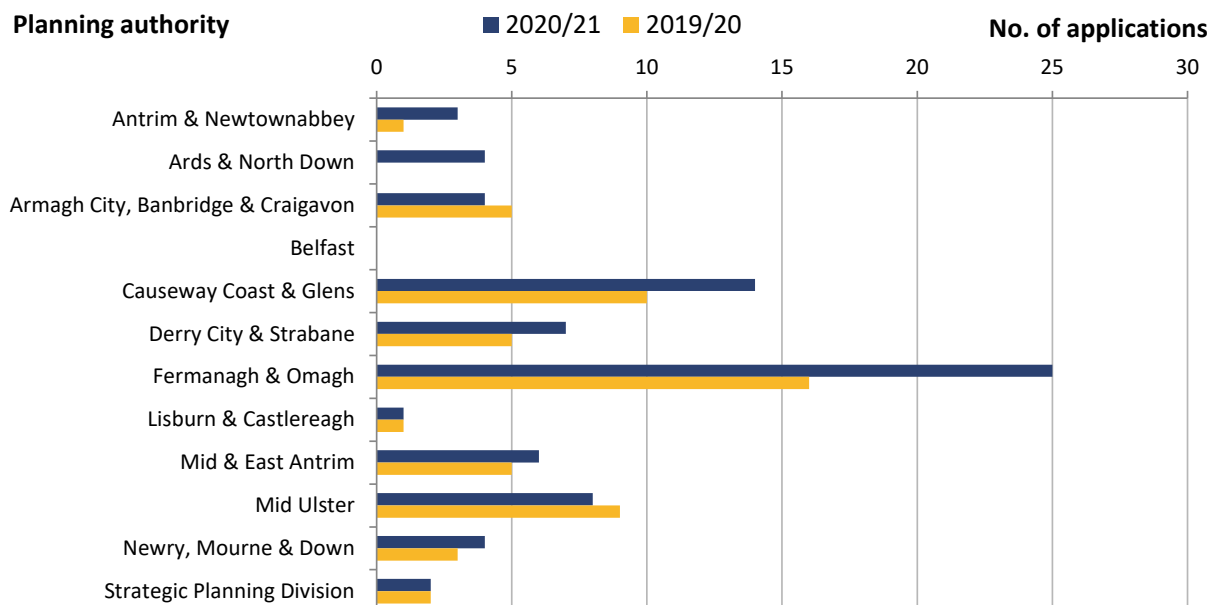


Figure 7.3 shows the distribution of decisions issued on renewable energy applications across the different planning authorities in 2019/20 and 2020/21, with Fermanagh and Omagh also deciding the most in both years (16 in 2019/20 and 25 in 2020/21). Fermanagh and Omagh also recorded the biggest increase in terms of the numbers decided in 2020/21 compared with the previous year, and was one of seven authorities to record an increase.

Fig 7.3 Renewable Energy applications decided by authority, 2019/20 and 2020/21

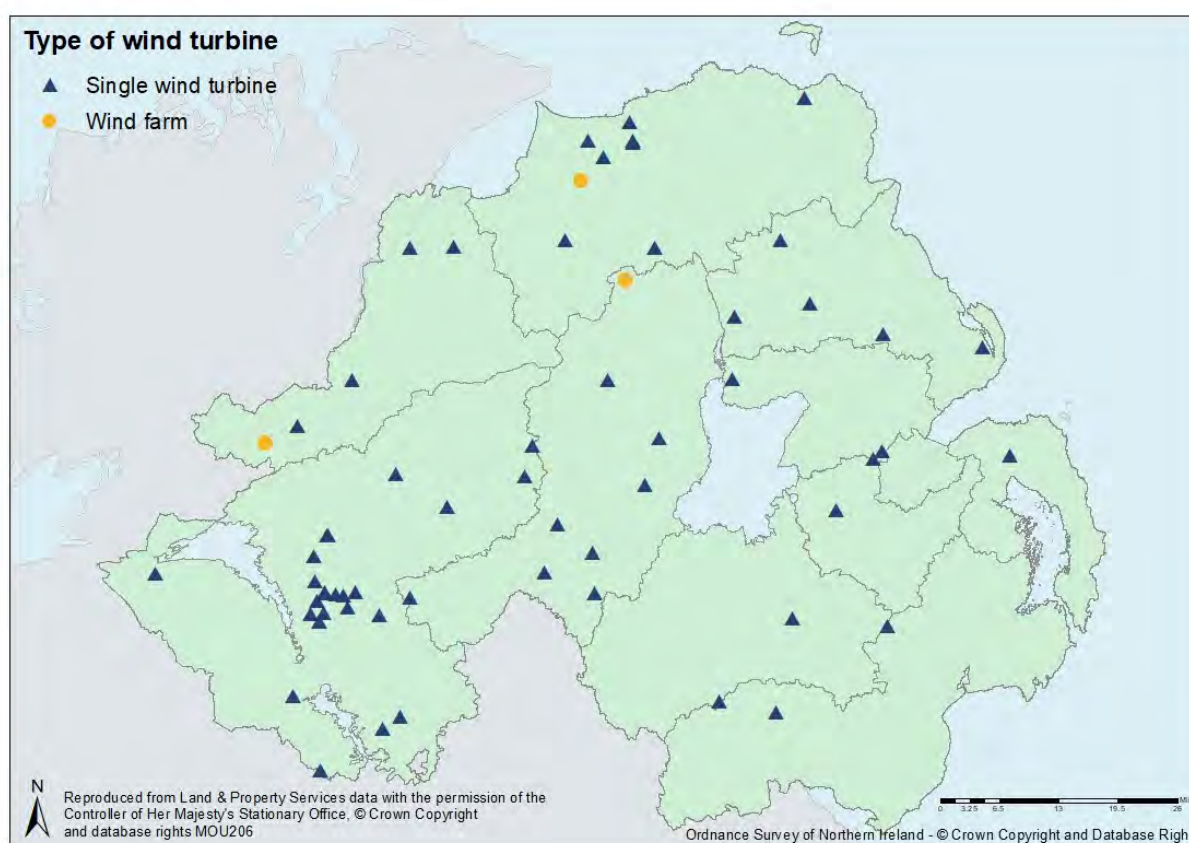


At the end of March 2021, there were **126 live renewable energy applications** in the planning system across NI; almost three-quarters of these (74.6%, 94 of 126) were for single wind turbines. Of these 126 live applications, 36.5% were in the planning system for over a year; a decrease from the proportion reported for the same point in 2020 (39.1%).

The **NI approval rate** for renewable energy applications was **88.5%** in 2020/21, with 69 out of the 78 decisions issued during the year being approvals.

[Figure 7.4](#) displays the locations of wind energy applications approved during 2020/21. A total of 58 single wind turbines and three wind farms were approved during the year. Please note, some approved wind energy applications are in close proximity to each other and may not be individually identifiable on the map.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, 2020/21



[Refer to Tables 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4.](#)

User Guidance

Notes on data source and quality

The records of all planning applications from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 were transferred in April 2021 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Northern Ireland Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) which involved quality checks and inspection of the coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils and the Department were provided with their own headline planning statistics as part of the quality assurance process. On completion of ASRB and planning authority validation, a final extract was taken in May 2021. Quarterly data for 2020/21 are now finalised and will not be subject to further scheduled revision.

Quality assurance of administrative data sources

In 2015 the UK Statistics Authority published a regulatory standard for the quality assurance of administrative data (QAAD). This standard is supported with an [Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit](#) which provides useful guidance to assure the quality of administrative data used in the production of statistics. ASRB have carried out a QAAD assessment on the Northern Ireland Planning Portal application – the administrative data source that is used to produce the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics. [This report](#) will be reviewed and updated as necessary on a biannual basis, with the most recent update published in May 2021.

Background quality report

In order to provide users with further information on how the statistics in the NI Planning Statistics report have been compiled and detail on the quality of the data used, a [background quality report has been published](#). This report will be reviewed and updated as necessary on a biannual basis, with the most recent update published in May 2021.

Regionally significant / major / local development applications after 1 April 2014

A new classification hierarchy of development for planning applications came into effect on 1 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 1 April 2015. It should be noted that there are some differences between the initial administrative hierarchy classifications in place from 1 April 2014 and the final classifications set out in the [Planning \(Development Management\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2015 \(S.R.2015 No.71\)](#). Data and analysis based on this new hierarchy is available from 1 April 2015.

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. Note that from 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has subsequently been extended until 30 September 2021.

Major developments have important economic, social and environmental implications. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community. Note that from 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has subsequently been extended until 30 September 2021.

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

[Refers to Chapter 2 of report](#)

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

Departmental target

From Q1 2019/20 the Departmental target for Regionally Significant planning applications in the NI Planning Statistics publication changed.

The previous target was:

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.

From Q1 2019/20 onwards, this was replaced by:

It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing regionally significant planning applications from date valid to a ministerial recommendation or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks.

Enforcement activity

[Refers to Chapter 6 of report](#)

Compliance and enforcement are important functions of the planning process. The summary data presented in this report and [accompanying Excel tables](#) covers enforcement cases opened, enforcement cases closed and concluded, court action taken and the live caseload as at the end of the quarter. A case is closed for one of the following 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; or
- the case is closed.

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

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

Processing times

The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The average processing time is the median. The median is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point in the middle of the sequence. The median is used because some planning applications can take several years to reach a decision. As a consequence, these extreme cases (outliers) can inflate the mean to the extent that the mean may not be considered as 'typical'. Therefore the median is considered 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. This is preferred to the previous method as it more accurately considers which of the eight settlement bands (A-H) 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 plot the location and subsequently determine the urban/rural banding.

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

In line with NISRA guidance, the following definitions have been used in this report:

- Urban settlements - settlements with a population greater than or equal to 5,000 (bands A-E);
- Rural settlements - settlements with a population less than 5,000 (bands F, G and part of H); and
- Rural countryside - the open countryside which falls outside population settlements (part of band H).

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' and 'rural settlements' together.

To obtain rural figures in line with the NISRA definition users should add 'rural settlements' and 'rural countryside' together.

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

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.

Note on exclusions

In addition to processing planning applications and enforcement activity, planning authorities deal with a range of other planning related work. Data on this 'non-application' workload is generally excluded from the main publication as it does not inform any of the calculation of performance against relevant statutory targets. Information on this part of the planning authorities' workload is included in [Table 9.1](#) of the accompanying Excel tables. Details of these exclusions are:

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).

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs), either proposed or existing, have not been included in the main NI Planning Statistics bulletin since 2012/13. 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.

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.

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.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

While applications for planning permission and other consents were included in the operational statistics produced prior to the transfer of planning powers, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) were excluded. In the interests of consistency TPOs are excluded from the main NI Planning Statistics bulletin.

Uses of the data

The data in this statistical release are used by a wide variety of users for a range of purposes. For example, the Department uses the information to inform policy and monitor performance in relation to planning in Northern Ireland, as required in legislation. Local councils use the information for policy briefing and development, and to monitor performance. The data are also used to ensure democratic accountability in answers to Northern Ireland Assembly Questions, ministerial correspondence, Freedom of Information Act cases and queries from the public.

User engagement

Users are encouraged to provide feedback on how these statistics are used and how well they meet their needs. Comments on any issues relating to this statistical release are welcomed and encouraged. Feedback can be provided through an [ongoing customer survey](#).

Alternatively users can email ASRB directly at: ASRB@nisra.gov.uk.

During 2019, ASRB undertook a specific user consultation exercise and [results of this were published](#) in October 2019. It is anticipated that an updated user consultation exercise will take place during summer / autumn 2021.

Further information

Information and statistics for England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, as well as other relevant NISRA statistics, can be found at the following links:

England

This [statistical release](#) presents National Statistics on authorities that undertake district and county level planning activities in England. It covers information on planning applications received and decided, including decisions on applications for residential developments (dwellings) and enforcement activities. Data are provided at national and local planning authority level.

Scotland

The Scottish Government establishes overarching land use policies and principles in Scottish Planning Policy, which is applied spatially in the National Planning Framework for Scotland. In the four largest city regions in Scotland, Strategic Development Planning Authorities prepare strategic development plans which set out the vision for long term development and which should address important land use issues that cross local authority boundaries or involve strategic infrastructure. There are 34 planning authorities in Scotland, 32 local authorities and two national park authorities, who must deliver local development plans, in these plans they must identify sites for new development and set decision-making policies. [Published planning statistics](#) include data on planning performance and vacant and derelict land.

Wales

The context for planning in Wales is established by Planning Policy Wales. There are 25 planning authorities in Wales and each must prepare a local development plan. These plans must conform to the national context and the plans must set out proposals and land use policies for the development of the area. Regional planning is a discretionary layer of the planning system, the Welsh Government has powers to identify 'Strategic Planning Areas', who have planning powers to produce strategic plans. Data on planning services performance are [published](#) on the Welsh Government website.

Republic of Ireland

[Central Statistics Office provides](#) a number of tables which present the number of planning permissions granted, floor area and units. Region and county data is available in associated tables.

Northern Ireland

Building Control (LPS Starts and completions)

Land & Property Services (LPS) receives information from Building Control in each council in Northern Ireland. [This information](#) contains the number of recorded new dwellings (houses and apartments) started and completed.

Housing Bulletin, Department for Communities (DfC)

[DfC produce](#) quarterly and annual compendium publications of housing statistics, as well as biannual homelessness statistics and an ongoing review of data included in these publications and their proposed changes. The Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin is a quarterly bulletin containing information on new housing starts and completions, homelessness, the House Price Index and new house sales and prices.

Cross-government working group on housing and planning

The Department for Infrastructure is part of a cross-government working group, working to improve the trustworthiness, quality and value of housing and planning statistics across the UK. ASRB's involvement in this group ensures continuous engagement with producers of similar and related statistics across the UK, ensuring opportunity for collaboration and improvement of this publication through understanding the wider UK picture. More information can be found on the [Government Statistical Service website](#).

OpenDataNI

Datasets accompanying the finalised Northern Ireland Planning Statistics annual reports are made available on [the OpenDataNI website](#). These datasets contain information on received and decided planning applications during the year, as well as details of pending applications at the end of the financial year. Datasets are available from 2016/17.

NINIS

Finalised annual data on planning applications and enforcements are also available on the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service, from 2002/03 (where applicable). These data can be found under the 'People and Places' theme on the [NINIS website](#).

Planning readership list

An email alert is sent after the release of each NI Planning Statistics publication to readers who wish to be informed of new / updated planning statistics. To sign up for this free service, please email: ASRB@nisra.gov.uk.

Pre-release access

Details of persons who receive pre-release access to this statistical release up to 24 hours prior to publication can be found on the [Department for Infrastructure website](#).

Appendix 1

Definitions

The statistical categories referred to in [Chapter 5](#) and [Excel Tables 5.1 and 5.2](#) 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

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

Mixed use

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

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

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