

# NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

## FIRST QUARTER 2019/20 STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(April - June 2019: Provisional figures)



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um Staitisticí agus Taighde

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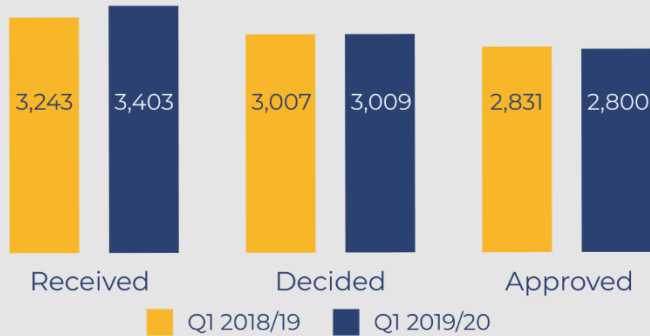
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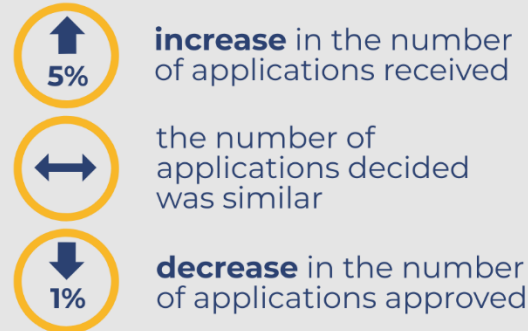
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## Overall planning applications

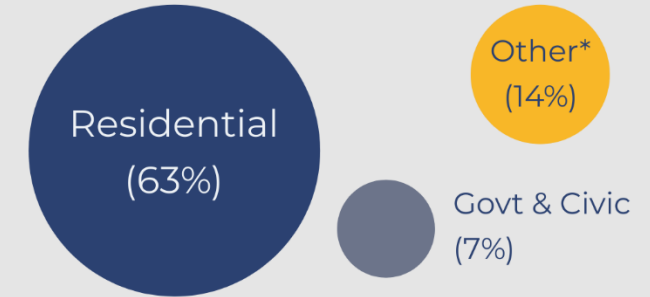
### Applications received/decided/approved



### Comparing Q1 2019/20 with Q1 2018/19:



### 3 largest development types (received)



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

## Local planning applications

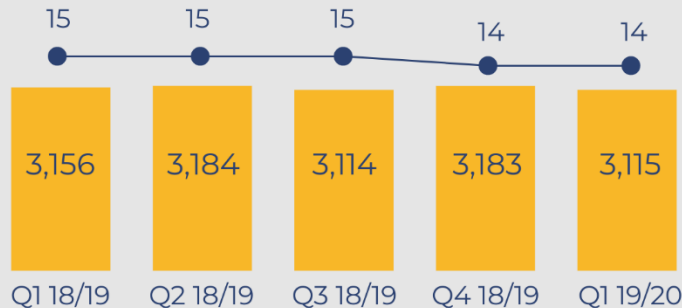
Q1 2018/19: **3,206**  
Q1 2019/20: **3,370**

**↑ 5%**



**99%**

of all received applications were local planning applications in Q1 2019/20

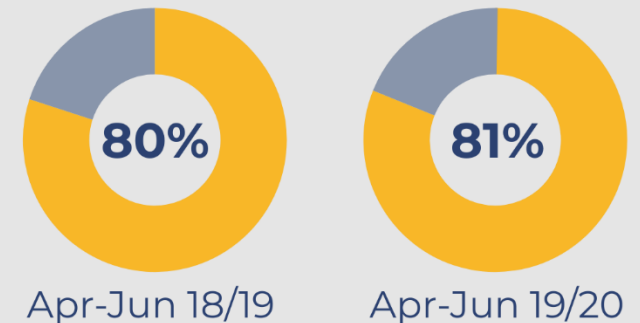


## Planning statutory targets (Apr-Jun)

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



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



## Key Points

- There were 3,403 planning applications received in Northern Ireland during the first quarter of 2019/20, up by over 7% on the previous quarter and 5% on the same period a year earlier. This comprised 3,370 local and 33 major applications.
- In the first quarter of 2019/20, 3,009 planning applications were decided; a decrease of over 2% from the previous quarter, and similar to the figure reported for the same period a year earlier. During this period decisions were issued on 2,971 local, 37 major and one regionally significant planning application.
- In the first three months of 2019/20 it took, on average, 13.8 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal. This was within the 15 week target and represented an improvement of 1.4 weeks from the same period a year earlier. Eight of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target at the end of the first quarter of 2019/20.
- The average processing time for major applications during the first three months of 2019/20 was 55.8 weeks across all councils. This represents an improvement of 11.8 weeks from the first quarter of 2018/19 but is still considerably higher than the 30 week target.
- Across councils, four in every five (81%) enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first three months of 2019/20. This is 11 percentage points higher than the statutory target of 70% and a small increase on the figure reported for the same period a year earlier (80%). Individually, 10 of the 11 councils were within the 39 week target at the end of the first quarter of 2019/20.

## Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for councils and the Department for Infrastructure, during the first quarter of 2019/20. Note that from the 8th 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 tables report data for the first quarter of 2019/20, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous years. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the year and changes over the last quarter. Please note that these quarterly figures for 2019/20 are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures, to be published in June / July 2020.

## 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 December 2019. This will contain planning data up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019 (i.e. for Q2 2019/20).

The next annual report covering 2019/20 is planned for release in June / July 2020.

In addition, the first edition of the Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework, providing data for 2018/19, was published on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The statistical bulletin and accompanying Excel tables can be found at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-monitoring-framework>.

See [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) Release Calendar for release dates of future publications.

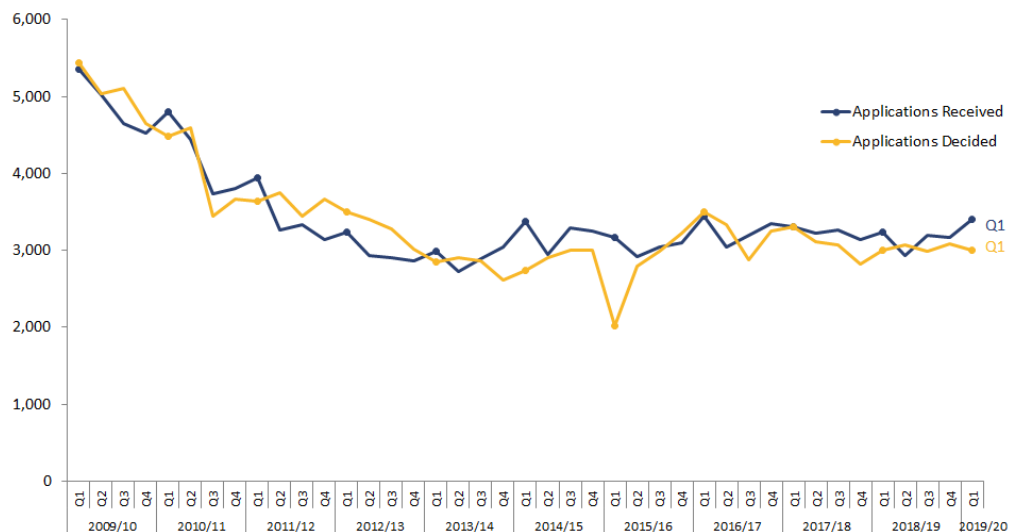
# 1. Overall NI Planning Activity

## Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period April to June 2019 (Q1) was **3,403**; an increase of 7.5% on the previous quarter (3,166) and 4.9% on the same period a year earlier (3,243).

The number of planning applications received generally declined between its peak in 2004/05 and 2013/14, when it reached its lowest level of the series. Over the last eight years, the number of applications received has been fairly stable, although the 3,403 received in Q1 2019/20 was the highest of any quarter since Q1 2016/17.

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly Apr 2009 – Jun 2019

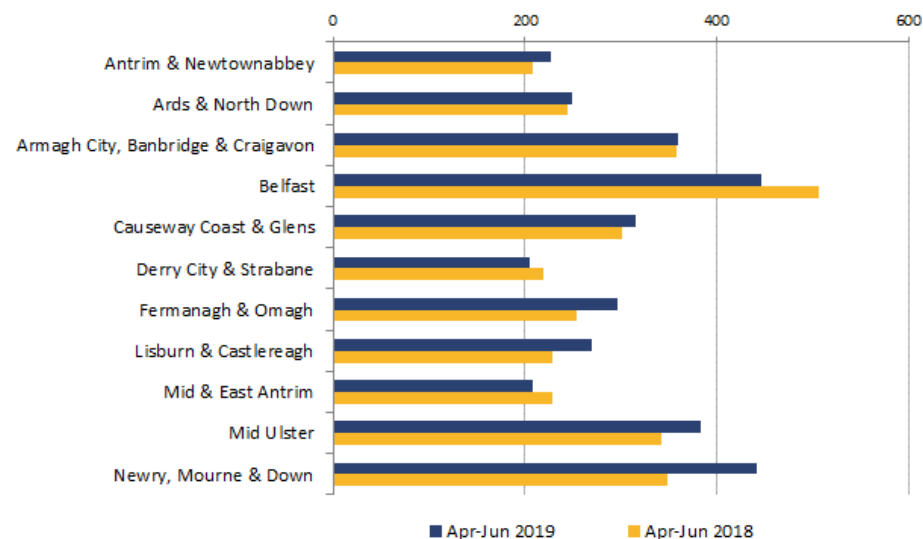


Of the 3,403 applications received in Q1 2019/20, over three-quarters were for full planning permission (76.6%); an increase of two percentage points from the same period last year (74.6%).

In Q1 2019/20, the number of planning applications received varied across councils, ranging from 446 in Belfast (accounting for 13.1% of all applications received across NI), to 205 in Derry City and Strabane (6.0% of all applications received).

The volume of planning applications received in Q1 2019/20 increased in eight of the 11 councils, when compared with the same period in 2018/19. The largest increase occurred in Newry, Mourne and Down (26.4%). Three councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest occurring in Belfast (-12.0%).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q1 2018/19 & Q1 2019/20



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

## Applications Decided

The number of planning decisions issued during Q1 2019/20 was **3,009**; a decrease of 2.5% from the previous quarter (3,086), and similar to the figure reported for the same period a year earlier (3,007). Over three-quarters of planning decisions in Q1 2019/20 (77.8%) were for full planning permission.

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning authority to councils, the level of decisions issued dropped sharply, before quickly recovering in subsequent quarters. Nonetheless, since Q3 2016/17 the number of applications received has generally exceeded the number decided, and this was true in Q1 2019/20 (Fig 1.1).

In Q1 2019/20, **147** applications were **withdrawn**, similar to the previous quarter (149), and an 18.8% decrease from the same period the previous year (181). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

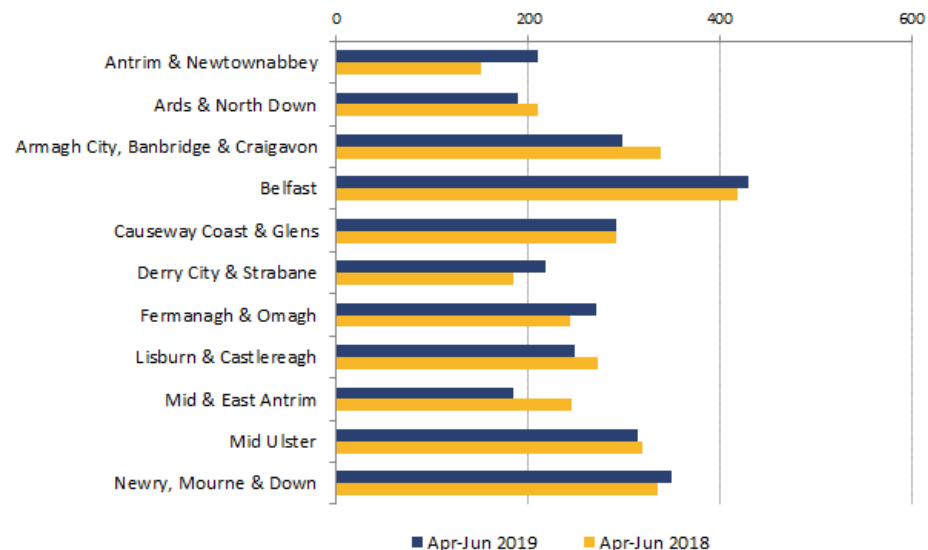
## Applications Decided by Council

Across councils the number of decisions issued in Q1 2019/20 ranged from 429 in Belfast (accounting for 14.3% of all decisions across NI), to 185 in Mid and East Antrim (6.1% of all decisions).

Six of the 11 councils issued more decisions during Q1 2019/20 than they did during the same period a year earlier, with the greatest increase reported for Antrim and Newtownabbey (40.0%). Five councils reported decreases in the number of decisions issued over the year, with the largest occurring in Mid and East Antrim (-24.5%).

Derry City and Strabane was the only council where the number of decisions issued was higher than the number of applications received in Q1 2019/20 (+6.3%). [Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2.](#)

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q1 2018/19 & Q1 2019/20



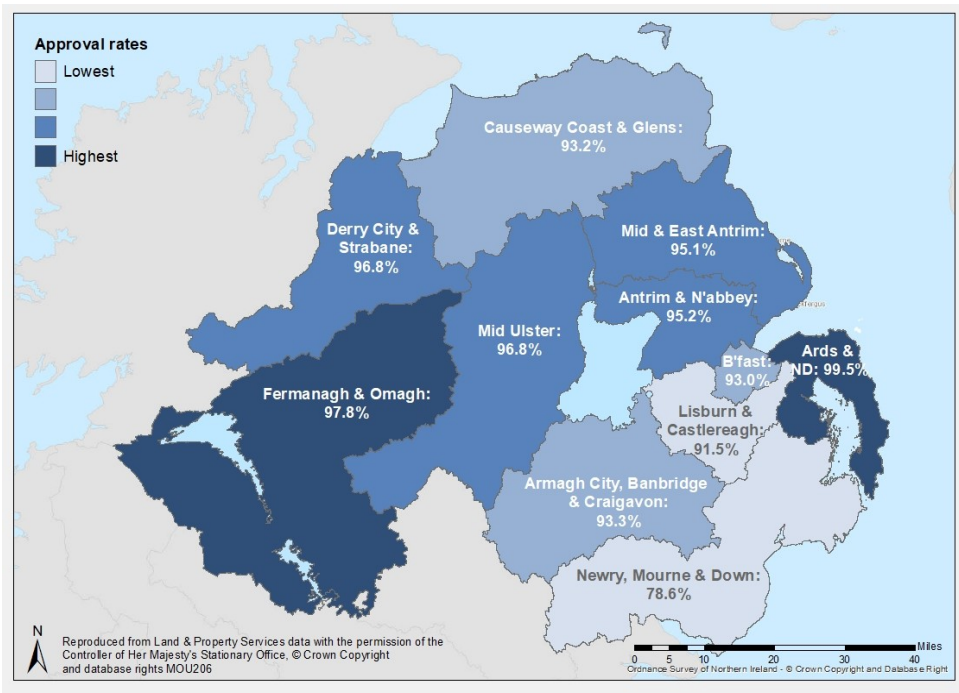
In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q1 2019/20, they processed to decision or withdrawal: 259 discharge of conditions; 211 certificates of lawfulness; and 135 non-material changes. In each case, the Q1 2019/20 figure represented an increase from Q1 2018/19. 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 **93.1%** in Q1 2019/20; an increase from the previous quarter (91.5%), but a decrease from the same period a year earlier (94.1%). Approval rates varied across councils during Q1 2019/20, from a high of 99.5% in Ards and North Down to a low of 78.6% in Newry, Mourne and Down. These rates are dependent on many factors and care should be taken in making any comparisons.



Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, Q1 2019/20



Seven of the 11 councils reported a decreased approval rate over the year, with the decrease greatest in Newry, Mourne and Down (down 8.3 percentage points to 78.6%). The remaining four councils reported an increased approval rate when compared with the same quarter a year earlier, with Ards and North Down reporting the greatest increase (up 4.7 percentage points to 99.5%).

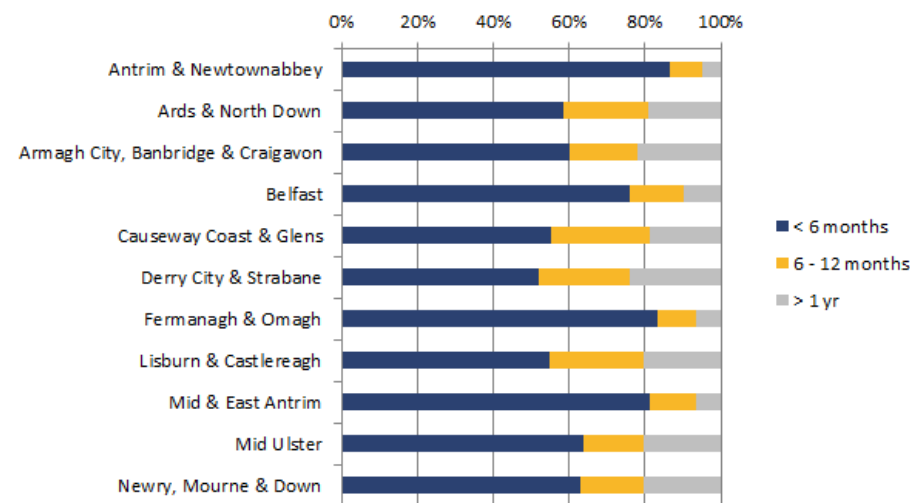
[Refer to Table 1.2.](#)

### Live applications

There were **6,696** live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of June 2019; a decrease of 0.8% from 6,753 at the end of June 2018. Over one-sixth of all live applications in the planning system at the end of

June 2019 were over one year old (1,203; 18.0%); an increase of 1.9 percentage points from the proportion reported for the end of June 2018 (1,087; 16.1%). [Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Jun 2019



As Figure 1.5 shows, the proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of June 2019 varies across councils, ranging from 24.0% in Derry City and Strabane to 4.7% in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Compared with the same point last year, three councils reduced the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year, with the greatest decrease occurring in Newry, Mourne and Down (down 3.0 percentage points to 20.1%). The proportion of live cases in the system for over a year increased in seven councils, with Derry City and Strabane (up 4.7 percentage points to 24.0%) reporting the greatest increase. In Mid and East Antrim 6.4% of live cases were in the system for over a year at the end of June 2019; the same proportion as reported for the end of June 2018.

[Refer to Table 1.4.](#)

## 2. Departmental Activity

During Q1 2019/20, the Department **received two** new applications; four fewer than were received during the same period a year earlier (six). Both applications received during Q1 2019/20 were categorised as **other**<sup>1</sup>.

The Department reached **decisions on five** applications during Q1 2019/20. This compares with no decisions made during the same period a year earlier. During Q1 2019/20, decisions were made on **one regionally significant** and **four other** applications. No Departmental applications were withdrawn during Q1 2019/20.

Overall, the average processing time for the five applications processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal in Q1 2019/20 was 45.4 weeks. It is important to bear in mind the low number of applications processed when considering this average processing time.

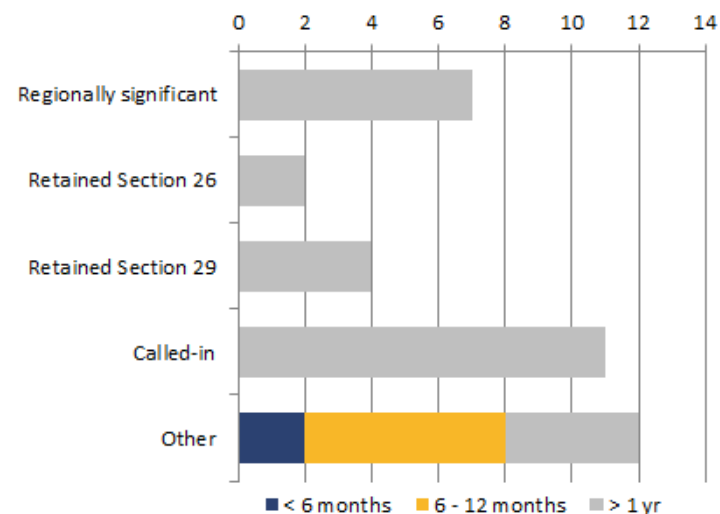
At the end of June 2019, there were: **seven** ongoing **regionally significant development (RSD)** applications; **11 called-in**; **six retained applications** and **12 other applications**. More than three-quarters of these applications (28 of 36) were in the system over a year (Figure 2.1).

[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 Jun 2019



**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<sup>2</sup>.**

No RSD applications were progressed to Ministerial Recommendation or withdrawn during the first three months of 2019/20. Of the seven RSD applications live on the planning system at the end of June 2019, six have already been progressed to Ministerial Recommendation prior to quarter one 2019/20. The 30 week period for recommendation/withdrawal has been exceeded for the remaining application and progress on it, and any other new RSD applications received, will continue to be assessed in future reports.

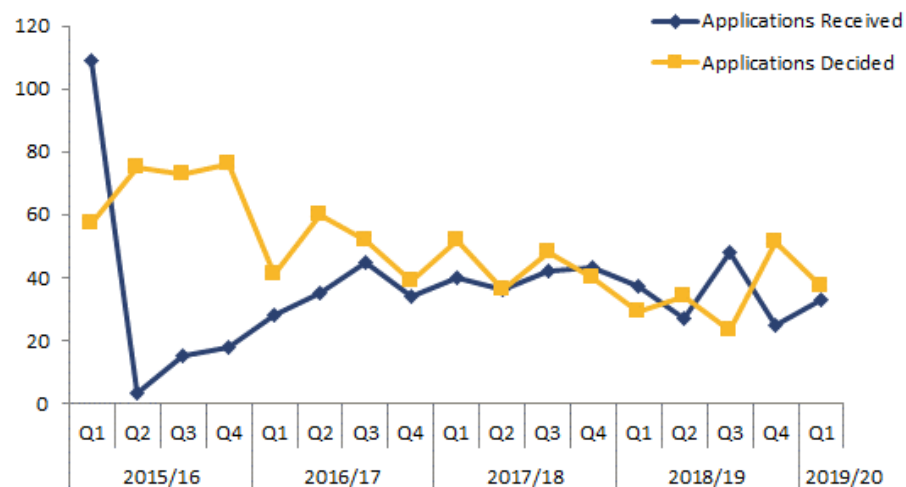
<sup>2</sup> From Q1 2019/20 this revised target replaces the previous Departmental target.

### 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 Q1 2019/20 was **33**; an increase of eight applications over the quarter (25), but a decrease of four compared with the same period a year earlier (37).

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, quarterly Apr 2015 – Jun 2019



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.

Q2 2015/16 had the lowest number of major applications received across the whole series but this can be attributed to the new community consultation requirement. From Q2 2015/16, the number of major applications received steadily increased quarter on quarter until Q3 2016/17. Since then, the number of major applications received each quarter suggests something of a levelling out, although there has been some fluctuations across the last four quarters.

The number of major applications received across the councils during Q1 2019/20 ranged from six each in Belfast, and Newry Mourne and Down, to one each in Ards and North Down, Derry City and Strabane, and Mid and East Antrim.

During Q1 2019/20, **37 major** planning applications were **decided**; a decrease of 14 applications over the quarter (51), but an increase of eight over the year (29). **Three major** applications were **withdrawn** during Q1 2019/20.

Nine of the 11 councils issued decisions on major applications in Q1 2019/20, with Belfast issuing the most (10).

[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.**

During Q1 2019/20, the **average processing time** for **major** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal was **55.8 weeks** across all councils. This represents an improvement compared with the same point a year ago (down 11.8 weeks from 67.6 weeks), but is still considerably higher than the 30 week target.

Across councils there was an insufficient number of major applications processed to decision or withdrawal during the first quarter of both the current and previous year to allow any meaningful assessment of their individual performance. Comparison against the target and across councils will become more robust as the year progresses, with more applications being processed. With this in mind, two councils processed major applications within the 30 week target time in Q1 2019/20: Antrim and Newtownabbey (an average of 26.2 weeks across three applications); and Fermanagh and Omagh (23.4 weeks for one application).

[Refer to Table 3.2.](#)

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

Across Northern Ireland in Q1 2019/20, **86.5%** of major planning applications decided upon were **approved**. Nine councils issued decisions on major applications during the first quarter of the year; in six of these, 100% of major applications decided upon were approved.

## 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 Q1 2019/20 was **3,370**; an increase of 7.3% on the previous quarter (3,141) and 5.1% over the year (3,206). The 3,370 local applications received in Q1 2019/20 was the highest quarterly total reported since Q1 2016/17.

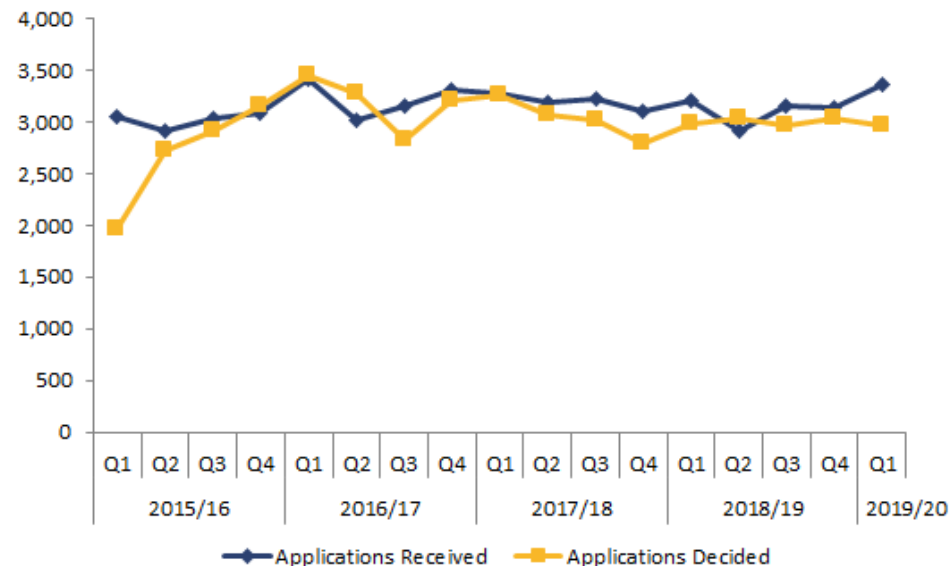
Across councils the number of local applications received during Q1 2019/20 ranged from 440 in Belfast to 204 in Derry City and Strabane.

Eight councils reported an increase in the number of local applications received in Q1 2019/20 compared with the same period a year earlier, with the largest increase recorded in Newry Mourne and Down (25.0%). Three councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest occurring in Belfast (-11.6%).

The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q1 2019/20 was **2,971**; a decrease of 2.1% over the quarter (3,035), and similar to the number decided during the same period the previous year (2,978).

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils, the number of local applications received was considerably higher than the number of decisions made. In 2016/17 this gap narrowed considerably. Since Q3 2016/17, however, the number of applications received has generally exceeded the number decided. This was true in Q1 2019/20, and this gap (399 applications) was the highest of any quarter since Q1 2015/16 (Figure 4.1).

Fig 4.1 Local Development applications, quarterly Apr 2015 – Jun 2019



During Q1 2019/20, the number of local planning decisions issued across councils ranged from 419 in Belfast to 185 in Mid and East Antrim.

Five councils issued more decisions on local applications during Q1 2019/20 than they did during the same period a year earlier, with the greatest increase reported for Antrim and Newtownabbey (39.9%). Six councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest occurring in Mid and East Antrim (-22.9%).

Over the quarter, 144 local applications were withdrawn across NI. Across councils, this ranged from 22 in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon to six 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 Q1 2019/20, the **average processing time** for local applications brought to decision or withdrawal was **13.8 weeks** across all councils, within the statutory target of 15 weeks. This represented an improvement of 1.4 weeks compared with Q1 2018/19 (15.2 weeks).

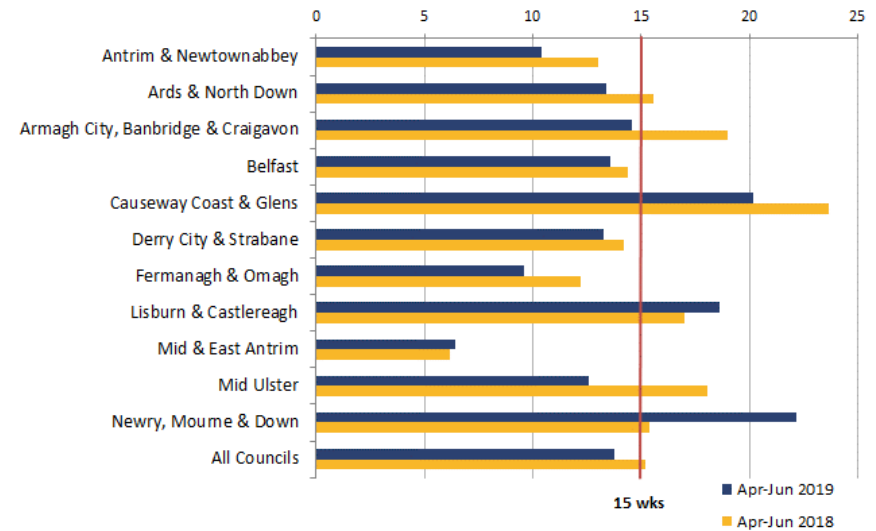
Across the councils, average processing times for local applications ranged from 6.4 weeks in Mid and East Antrim to 22.2 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Eight of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target in Q1 2019/20: Mid and East Antrim (6.4 weeks); Fermanagh and Omagh (9.6 weeks); Antrim and Newtownabbey (10.4 weeks); Mid Ulster (12.6 weeks); Derry City and Strabane (13.3 weeks); Ards and North Down (13.4 weeks); Belfast (13.6 weeks); and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.6 weeks).

Eight councils reduced their average processing times for local applications during Q1 2019/20 compared with Q1 2018/19. The improvement was greatest Mid Ulster (down 5.5 weeks, from 18.1 to 12.6 weeks). Over the same period, average processing times for local applications increased in three councils (Figure 4.2).

[Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local Development average processing times by council, Q1 2018/19 & Q1 2019/20



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](#).

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for local applications was **93.1%** in Q1 2019/20; an increase of 1.7 percentage points from the previous quarter (91.5%), but a decrease of 1.0 percentage points over the year (94.2%). Across councils, approval rates for local applications ranged from 99.5% in Ards and North Down to 79.1% in Newry, Mourne and Down in Q1 2019/20.

## 5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During Q1 2019/20, **residential** applications accounted for **62.7%** of all planning applications received in NI; an increase of 2.5 percentage points from Q1 2018/19 (60.3%).

Residential was the most commonly received application type in all councils in Q1 2019/20. The proportion of all applications received that were residential ranged from 70.1% in Mid Ulster to 48.0% in Belfast.

Belfast (22.4%) and Derry City and Strabane (22.0%) received a higher proportion of applications categorised as 'other' in Q1 2019/20, compared with the other councils. See Appendix 1 – 'Definitions' for a description of the types of applications included in this category.

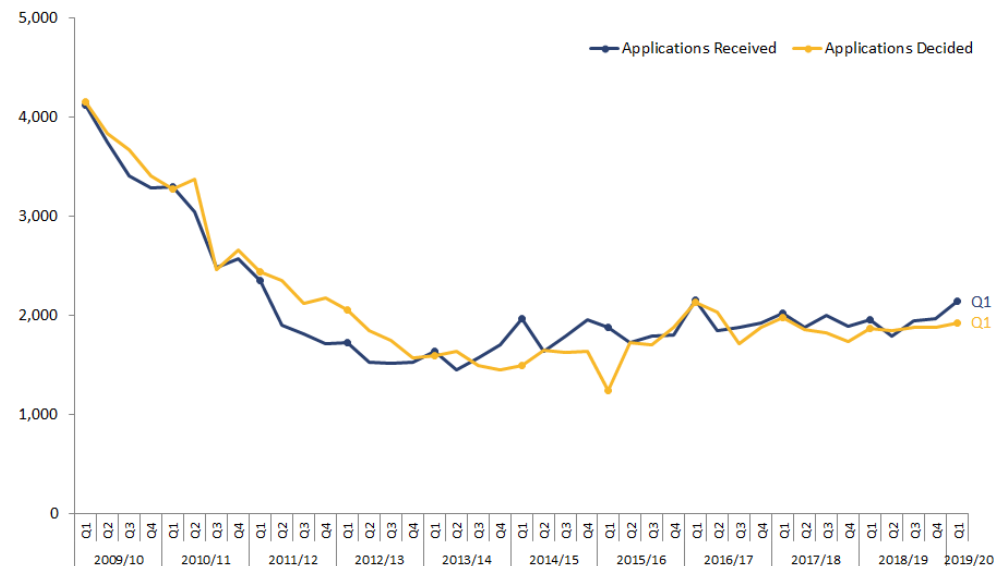
[Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.](#)

### Residential applications

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in NI during Q1 2019/20 was **2,135**; an increase of 8.4% over the quarter (1,970) and 9.2% from the same period a year earlier (1,955). This also represents the highest number reported for any quarter since Q1 2016/17.

During Q1 2019/20, **1,917 residential** planning applications were **decided** in NI; an increase of 1.9% on the previous quarter (1,881) and 2.6% on the same period a year earlier (1,868).

Fig 5.1 NI Residential applications, quarterly Apr 2009 – Jun 2019

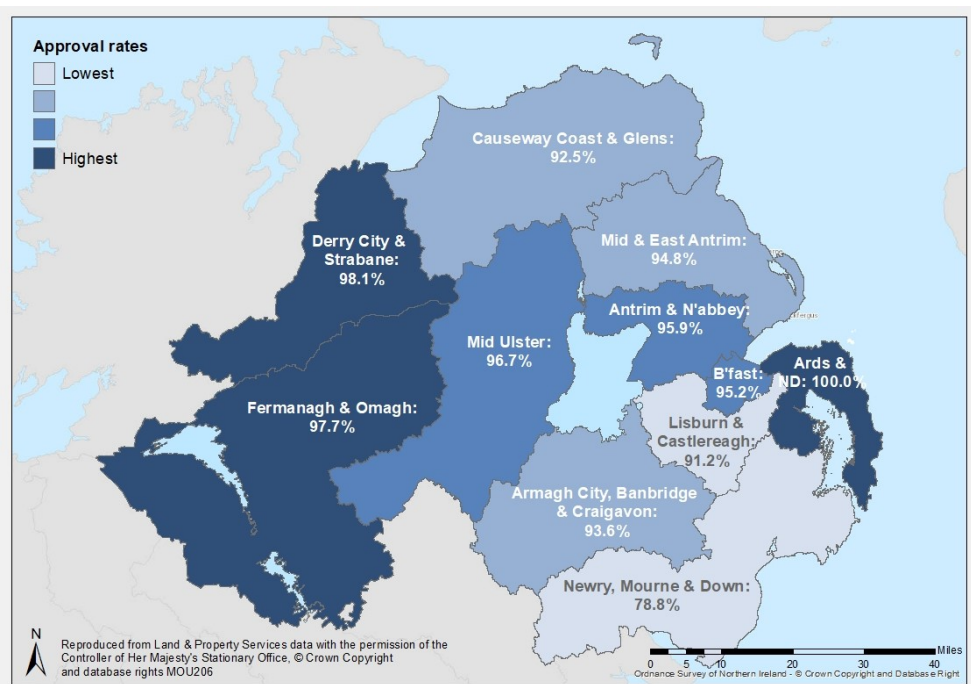


[Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for residential planning applications was **93.1%** in Q1 2019/20; an increase of 2.7 percentage points on the previous quarter (90.4%), but down 1.4 percentage points from the corresponding period a year earlier (94.5%).

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in Q1 2019/20, ranging from 100.0% in Ards and North Down to 78.8% in Newry, Mourne and Down (Figure 5.2).

Fig 5.2 Residential approval rates by council, Q1 2019/20



Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in five councils between Q1 2018/19 and Q1 2019/20. The largest percentage point increases were in Ards and North Down (up from 95.7% to 100.0%) and Belfast (up from 90.9% to 95.2%).

Approval rates declined in six councils over the year, with the largest percentage point decrease occurring in Newry, Mourne and Down (down from 85.8% to 78.8%).

During Q1 2019/20, 84 residential applications were withdrawn across NI; an increase on the previous quarter (76) but a decrease from the same period a year earlier (104).

[Refer to Table 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 Q1 2019/20 was 744; an increase of 13.4% from the previous quarter (656) and 7.8% from the same period a year earlier (690).

In rural settlements (*those with a population less than 5,000*), 257 residential applications were received in Q1 2019/20; an increase of 14.2% over the quarter (225), and similar to the number reported for the same period a year earlier (255).

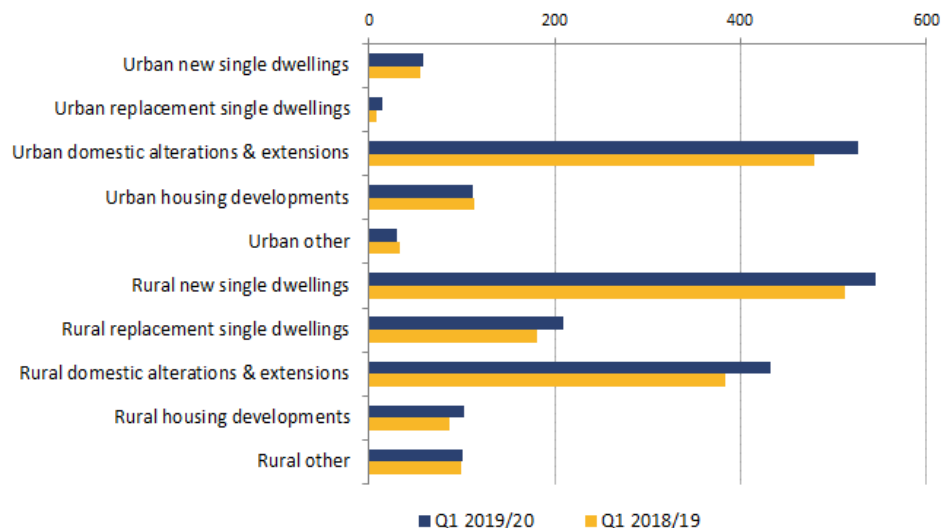
In the open countryside (*outside population settlements*), the number of residential applications received in Q1 2019/20 (1,134) increased over the quarter (from 1,089; 4.1%) and the year (from 1,010; 12.3%).



## Residential applications – Urban and Rural

Figure 5.3 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications received in Q1 2018/19 and Q1 2019/20. 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, Q1 2018/19 & Q1 2019/20



New single dwellings in rural areas (546) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (527) continue to dominate, together accounting for just over half (50.3%) of all residential applications received during Q1 2019/20; similar to the position in Q1 2018/19 (50.7%).

The increase over the year in the number of residential applications received (9.2%) was driven in large part by increases in the number of applications received for: domestic alterations and extensions in rural (up

12.8%; from 384 to 433) and urban (up 10.0%; from 479 to 527) areas; and new single dwellings in rural areas (up 6.4% from 513 to 546).

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q1 2018/19 & Q1 2019/20

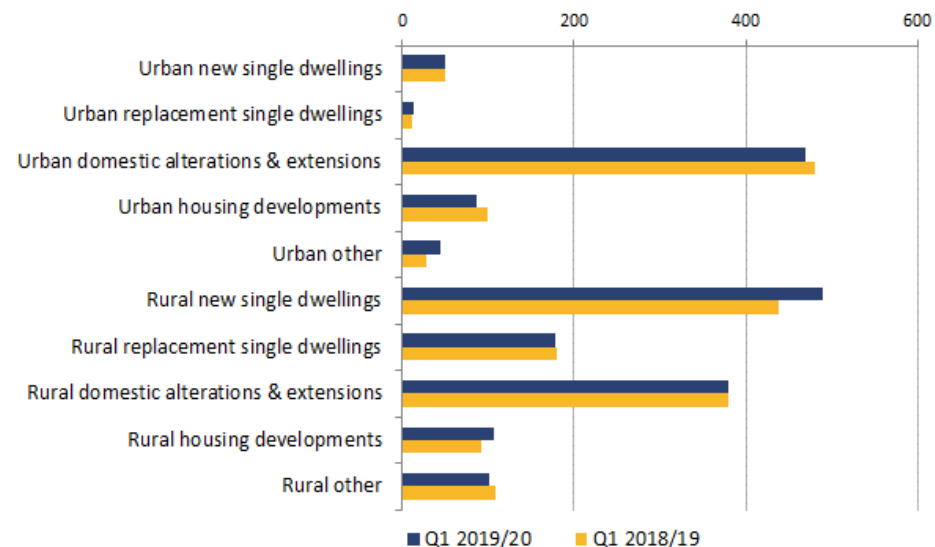


Figure 5.4 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications decided in Q1 2018/19 and Q1 2019/20. The increase over the year in the overall number of residential applications decided (2.6%) was driven in large part by an increase in the number of decisions for new single dwellings in rural areas (up 11.9%; from 438 to 490).

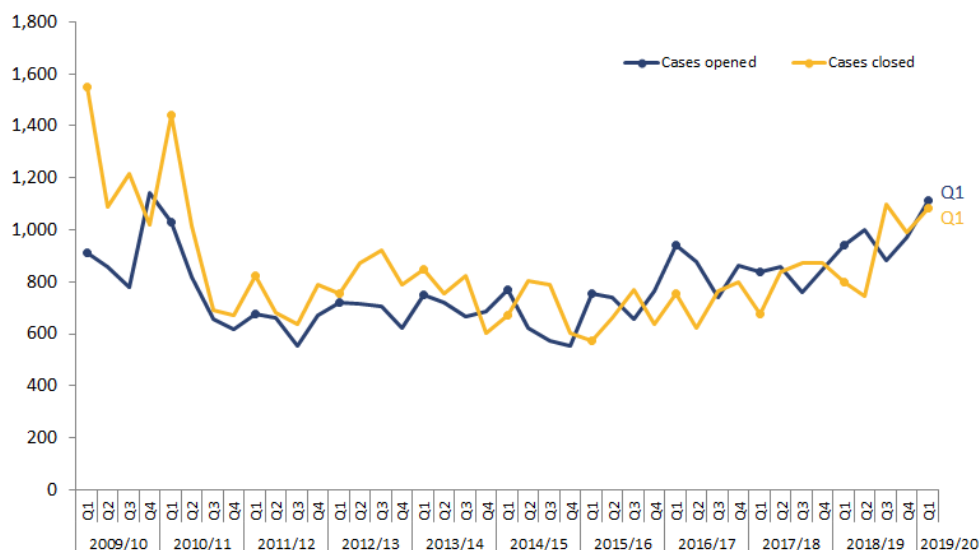
[Refer to Table 5.5.](#)

## 6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during Q1 2019/20 was **1,111**; an increase of 14.3% from Q4 2018/19 (972) and 18.2% from the same period a year earlier (940). The 1,111 cases opened in Q1 2019/20 was the highest quarterly figure reported since Q4 2009/10 (1,141).

Across the councils, the number of enforcement cases opened in Q1 2019/20 ranged from 293 in Belfast to 35 in Derry City and Strabane. Seven of the 11 councils reported increases in the volume of enforcement cases opened in Q1 2019/20 compared with the same period a year earlier. The increase was greatest in Belfast, where the number of cases opened more than doubled from 129 to 293 over the year.

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly, Apr 2009 – Jun 2019



The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q1 2019/20 was **1,085**; an increase of 9.7% over the last quarter (989), and 36.0% compared with the same period a year earlier (798).

The number of cases closed in Q1 2019/20 varied across councils, ranging from 175 in Belfast to 25 in Derry City and Strabane. Eight of the 11 councils reported increases in the volume of enforcement cases closed in Q1 2019/20 compared with same period a year earlier. This increase was greatest in Newry Mourne and Down, where the number of cases closed more than trebled over the year (from 52 to 164).

The most common reasons for enforcement cases closing in Q1 2019/20 were that no breach had actually occurred (33.4%) or that the cases had been remedied or resolved (31.9%). Together these accounted for almost two-thirds (708; 65.3%) of the 1,085 cases closed during Q1.

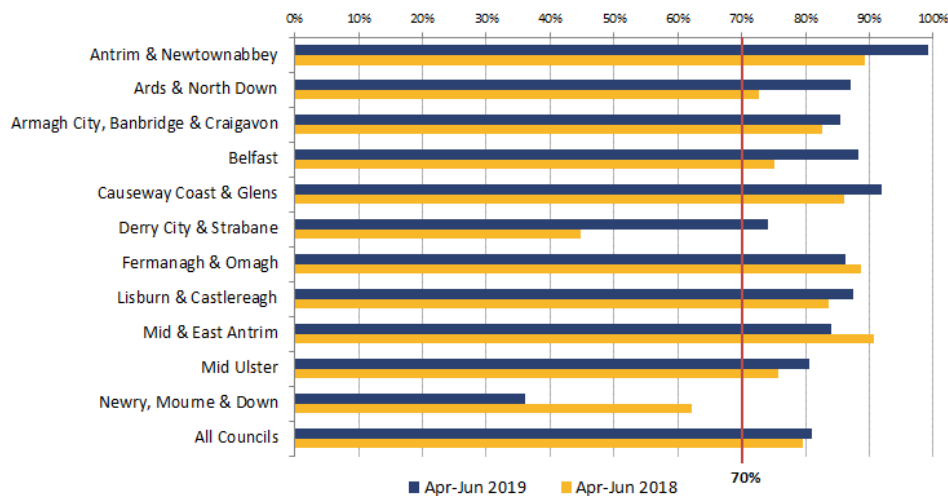
[Refer to Tables 6.1, 6.2.](#)

**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 (81.1%)** enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks in Q1 2019/20. This is 11.1 percentage points above the statutory target and 1.6 percentage points higher than the rate for Q1 2018/19 (79.5%).

At the end of Q1 2019/20, 10 of the 11 councils were within the 39 week target, with a high of 99.3% recorded in Antrim and Newtownabbey. Eight councils improved the proportion of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks compared with the previous year, most notably in Derry City and Strabane (up 29.3 percentage points from 44.7% to 74.1%). [Refer to Table 6.2.](#)

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, Q1 2018/19 & Q1 2019/20



During Q1 2019/20, there were **15 prosecutions** initiated across NI; a decrease over the quarter (from 22) and the year (from 21). Five councils initiated prosecutions in Q1 2019/20, with Fermanagh and Omagh initiating the most (six).

There were **four convictions** across NI during Q1 2019/20; two each in Antrim and Newtownabbey, and Fermanagh and Omagh.

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

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of June 2019 was **3,569**; a small increase over the quarter (0.7%; from 3,544) and the year (1.4%; from 3,520).

The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **1,059** at the end of June 2019, accounting for 29.7% of all live cases. This compares with 30.6% of all live cases at the end of March 2019 (a decrease of 0.9 percentage

points), and 28.1% of live cases at the end of June 2018 (an increase of 1.6 percentage points).

[Refer to Table 6.4.](#)

Across the councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest number of live cases at the end of June 2019 (1,028), with 46.6% of these in the system for over 2 years; the highest proportion across all councils. Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of live cases (122) at this point and 12.3% of these were in the system for over 2 years.

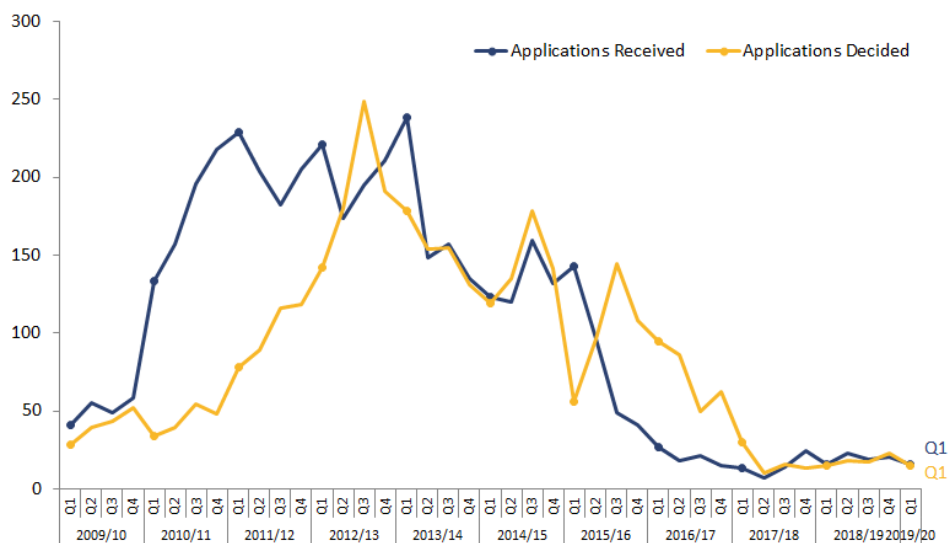
Although there was a small increase in the overall number of live enforcement cases between the end of June 2018 and June 2019 (up 1.4%), the number decreased in six of the 11 councils. The overall increase was largely driven by increases in the number of live enforcement cases in Belfast (35.3%; up by 113 enforcements), and Newry Mourne and Down (5.8%; up by 56 enforcements).

[Refer to Table 6.5.](#)

## 7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in Q1 2019/20 was **16**; the same number as reported for Q1 2018/19. The number of applications received during April to June peaked in 2013/14 at 238. 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 **93.3%** decrease from 238 in Q1 2013/14 to 16 applications in Q1 2019/20) 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, quarterly, Apr 2009 – Jun 2019



The number of renewable energy applications **decided** during Q1 2019/20 was **15**; the same as reported for Q1 2018/19, but a 91.6% decrease from the series' first quarter peak of 178 applications decided in 2013/14. Three renewable energy applications were withdrawn during Q1 2019/20.

During this period, the average time taken to process a renewable energy application to decision or withdrawal was 22.8 weeks across NI; a decrease of 8.4 weeks over the quarter (from 31.2 weeks) and 84.8 weeks over the year (from 107.6 weeks).

Single wind turbines continue to be the most common renewable energy application, accounting for 13 out of 16 applications received during Q1 2019/20. Three-fifths (nine out of 15) of renewable energy decisions issued in Q1 2019/20 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 Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (six) receiving the most in Q1 2019/20.

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by authority, Q1 2018/19 & Q1 2019/20

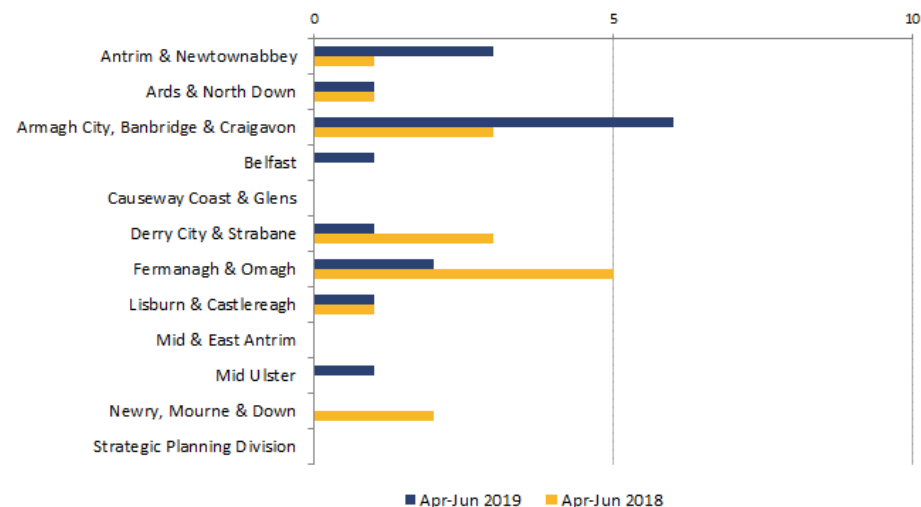
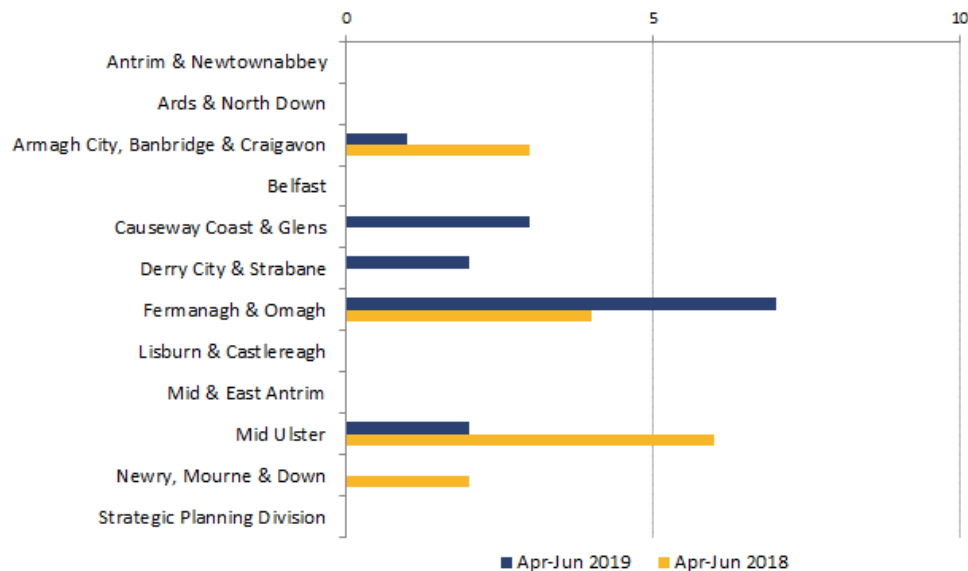


Figure 7.3 shows that the number of renewable energy planning decisions issued across planning authorities was highest in Fermanagh and Omagh (seven) in Q1 2019/20.

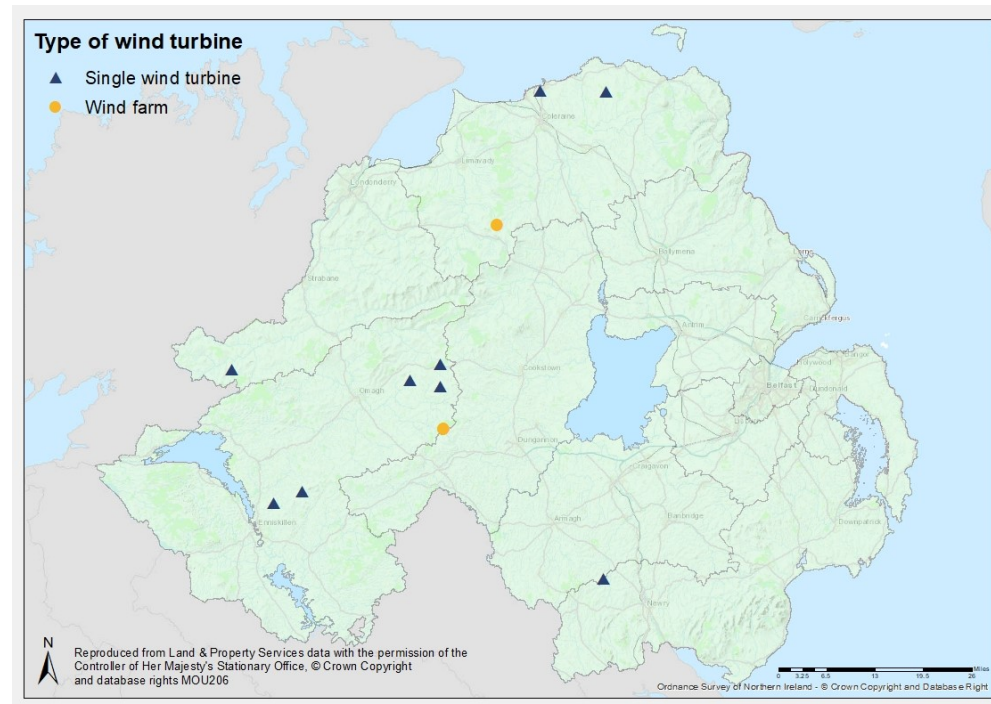
Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by authority, Q1 2018/19 & Q1 2019/20



At the end of June 2019, there were **91 live renewable energy applications**. Over three-fifths of these (56 of 91) were for single wind turbines. Of these 91 live applications, almost half (47.3%) were in the planning system for over a year; a decrease of 5.3 percentage points from the same point in 2018 (52.6%).

The **NI approval rate** for renewable energy applications was **93.3%** in Q1 2019/20, i.e. 14 out of 15 decisions during this period were approvals. This approval rate was the same as was reported for Q1 2018/19.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Q1 2019/20



[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 2019 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019 were transferred in July 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 August 2019. Quarterly data for 2019/20 are regarded as provisional and will retain this status until the annual report for 2019/20 is published in June / July 2020.

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 applications 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 (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 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.

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 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 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:*

<https://www.gov.scot/publications>

*Wales:*

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

*Republic of Ireland:*

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

*Northern Ireland:*

*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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