

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

THIRD QUARTER 2019/20 STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(October – December 2019: Provisional figures)



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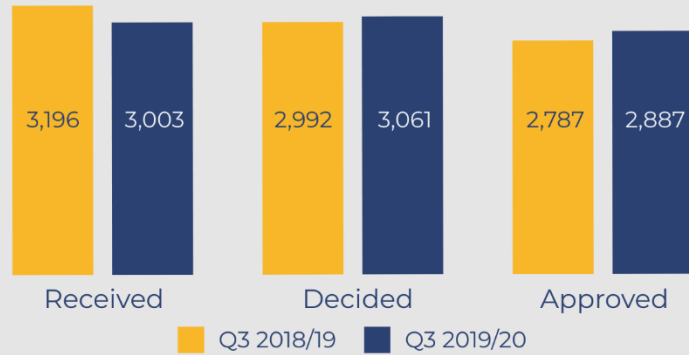
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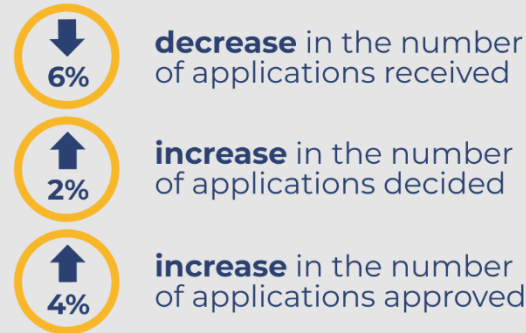
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Overall planning applications

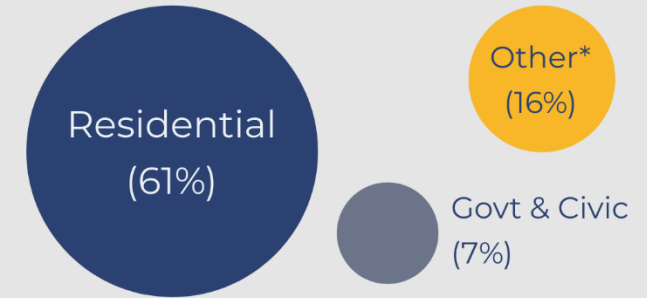
Applications received/decided/approved



Comparing Q3 2019/20 with Q3 2018/19:



3 largest development types (received)



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

Local planning applications

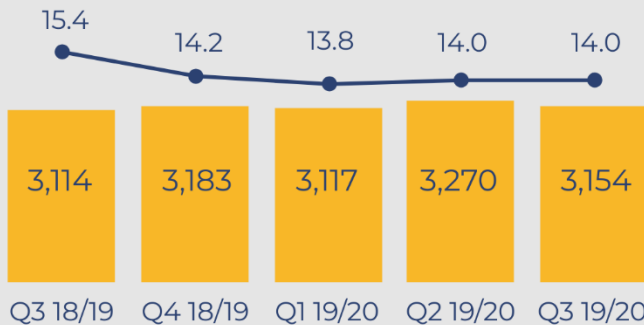
Q3 2018/19: **3,148**
Q3 2019/20: **2,956**

6%



98%

of all applications received in Q3 2019/20 were local planning applications



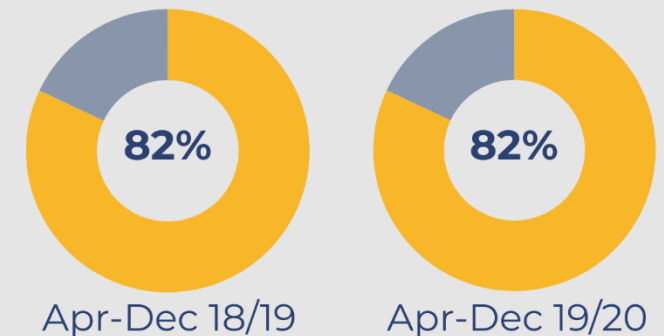
● Average processing times (weeks)
■ No. of applications decided/withdrawn

Planning statutory targets (Apr-Dec)

Major & local average processing times (weeks)



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



Key Points

- There were 3,003 planning applications received in Northern Ireland during the third quarter of 2019/20; an increase of over 2% on the previous quarter but down 6% compared with the same period a year earlier. This comprised 2,956 local and 47 major applications.
- In the third quarter of 2019/20, 3,061 planning applications were decided upon; a decrease of just over 3% from the previous quarter but up by over 2% compared with the same period a year earlier. Decisions were issued on 3,029 local and 32 major planning applications during the third quarter of 2019/20.
- In the first nine months of 2019/20 it took, on average, 14.0 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal. This was within the 15 week target and represented an improvement of one week from the same period a year earlier. Seven of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after three quarters of 2019/20.
- The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2019/20 was 54.5 weeks across all councils. This represents an improvement of 0.8 weeks compared with the same point in 2018/19, but is still considerably higher than the 30 week target.
- Across councils, over four-fifths (82%) of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first nine months of 2019/20. This meets the statutory target of 70% and represents no change from the rate reported for same period in the previous year (82%). Individually, 10 of the 11 councils were within the 39 week target at the end of the third 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 third 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 third 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 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) 2015¹. 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 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 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 finalised annual report for 2019/20 is due to be published in June / July 2020. The next quarterly release is due in September 2020. This will contain provisional planning data up to 30th June 2020 and will commence the quarterly reporting cycle for 2020/21. See [GOV.UK](#) Release Calendar for release dates of future publications.

Other information

The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics is undergoing an assessment by the Office of Statistics Regulation. Once available, a link to the assessment report will be included in future publications.

The next edition of the Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework, providing data for 2019/20, is due to be published in September 2020. The first edition of this report, with data for 2018/19, can be found at:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-monitoring-framework>

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2015/327/contents/made>

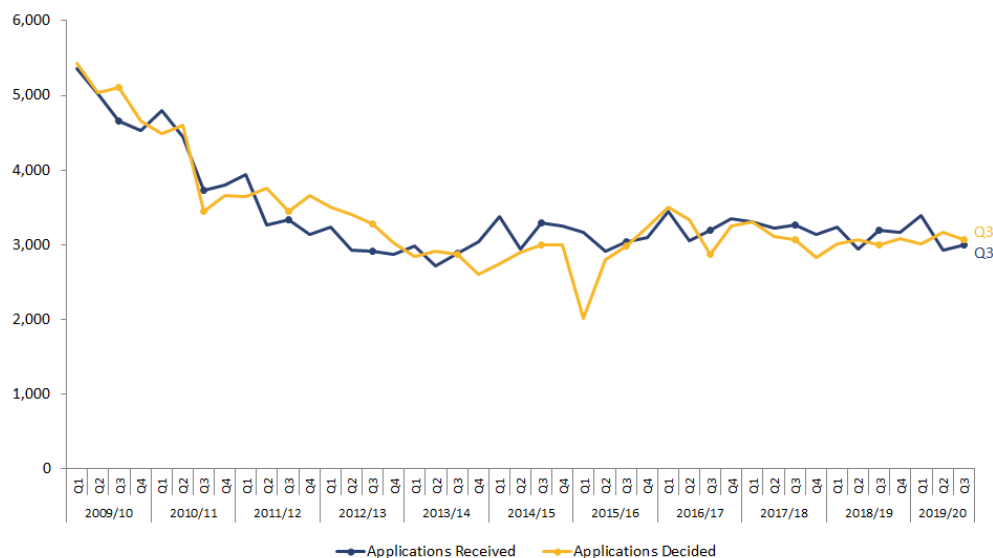
1. Overall NI Planning Activity

Applications received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period October to December 2019 (Q3 2019/20) was **3,003**; an increase of 2.4% on the previous quarter (2,934) but down 6.0% compared with the same period a year earlier (3,196).

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.

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

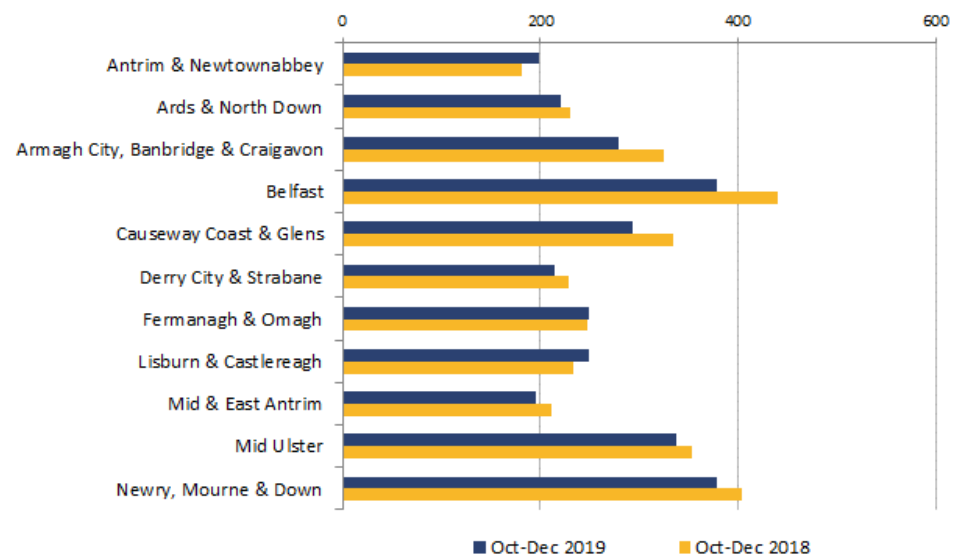


Of the 3,003 applications received in Q3 2019/20, three-quarters were for full planning permission (75.0%); down slightly from the proportion reported for the same period a year earlier (75.8%).

In Q3 2019/20, the number of planning applications received varied across councils, ranging from 379 in both Belfast, and Newry, Mourne and Down (together accounting for just over one-quarter, 25.2%, of all applications received across NI), to 196 in Mid and East Antrim (6.5% of all applications received).

Reflecting the overall decrease (-6.0%) in the number applications received in Q3 2019/20 compared with the same period a year earlier, eight of the 11 councils reported a decrease over the year, with the largest evident in Belfast (-13.9%). Over the same period, the volume of planning applications received increased in three councils, with the largest increase occurring in Antrim and Newtownabbey (8.8%). [Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2, 5.6.](#)

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q3 2018/19 & Q3 2019/20



Applications decided

The number of planning **decisions issued** during Q3 2019/20 was **3,061**; a decrease of 3.2% from the previous quarter (3,163) but up by 2.3% compared with the same period a year earlier (2,992). Over three-quarters of planning decisions in Q3 2019/20 (76.6%) were for full planning permission; similar to the proportion reported for Q3 2018/19 (76.9%).

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. Since Q3 2016/17 the number of applications received has generally exceeded the number decided each quarter, although the opposite was true in both Q2 and Q3 2019/20 (Figure 1.1).

In Q3 2019/20, **128** applications were **withdrawn**; decreases of 7.2% over the quarter (138) and 13.5% from the same period the previous year (148). This also represents the lowest number of applications withdrawn in any quarter since Q3 2015/16. Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being issued.

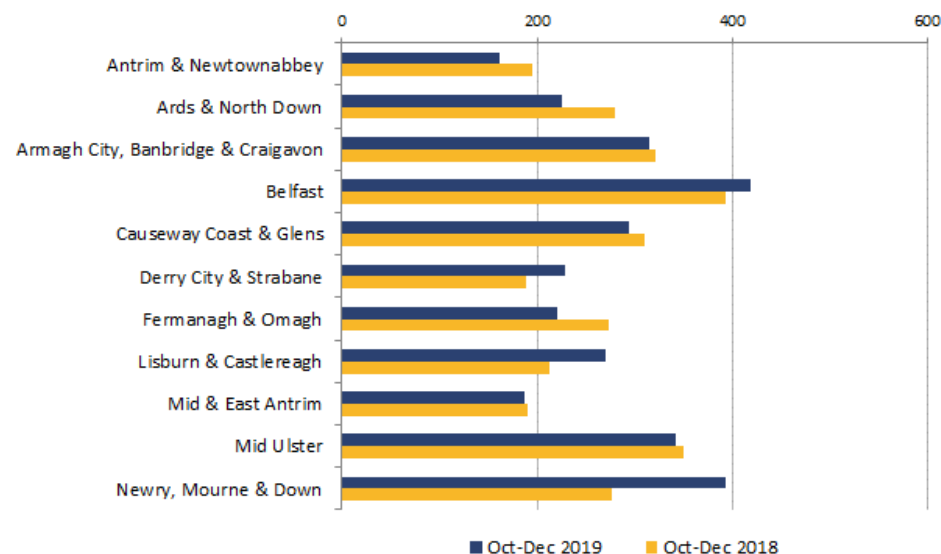
Across councils the number of decisions issued in Q3 2019/20 ranged from 419 in Belfast (accounting for 13.7% of all decisions across NI), to 162 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (5.3% of all decisions).

Four of the 11 councils issued more decisions during Q3 2019/20 than during the same period a year earlier, with the increase greatest in Newry, Mourne and Down (42.8%). Seven councils reported decreases in the number of decisions issued over the year, with the largest decrease, in percentage terms, occurring in Fermanagh and Omagh (-19.4%).

In eight councils, the number of decisions issued exceeded the number of applications received during Q3 2019/20. This difference was greatest, in percentage terms, in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, where 12.5%

more decisions were issued compared with the number of applications received. [Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2, 5.6.](#)

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q3 2018/19 & Q3 2019/20



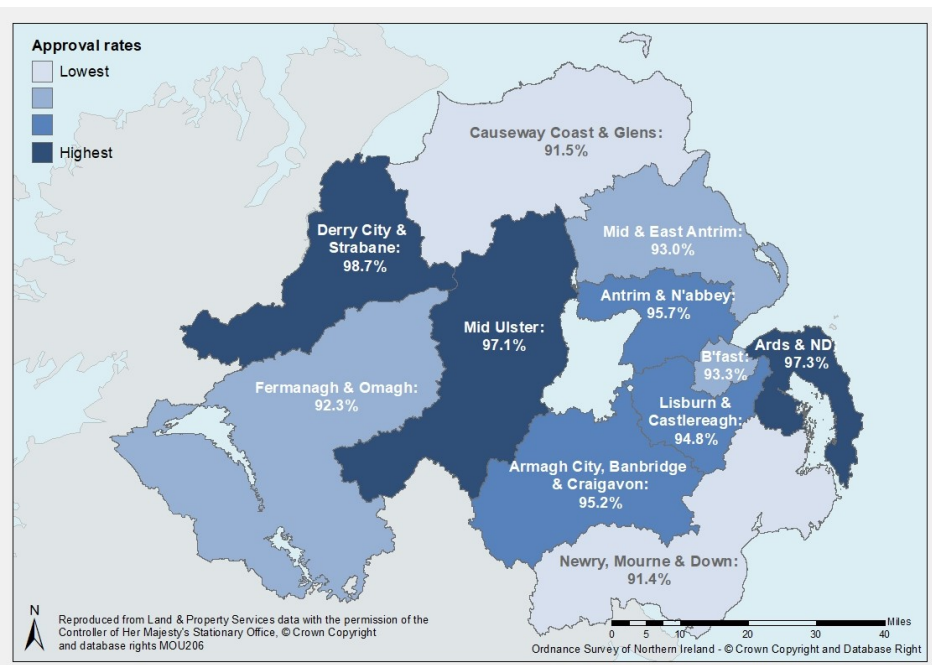
In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q3 2019/20, they processed to decision or withdrawal: 314 certificates of lawfulness; 239 discharge of conditions; 135 non-material changes; and 96 tree preservation orders. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1.](#)

Approval rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications was **94.3%** in Q3 2019/20; similar to the previous quarter (94.1%), and an increase compared with the rate reported for the same period a year earlier (93.1%). Approval rates varied across councils during Q3 2019/20, from 98.7% in Derry City and Strabane to 91.4% 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, Q3 2019/20



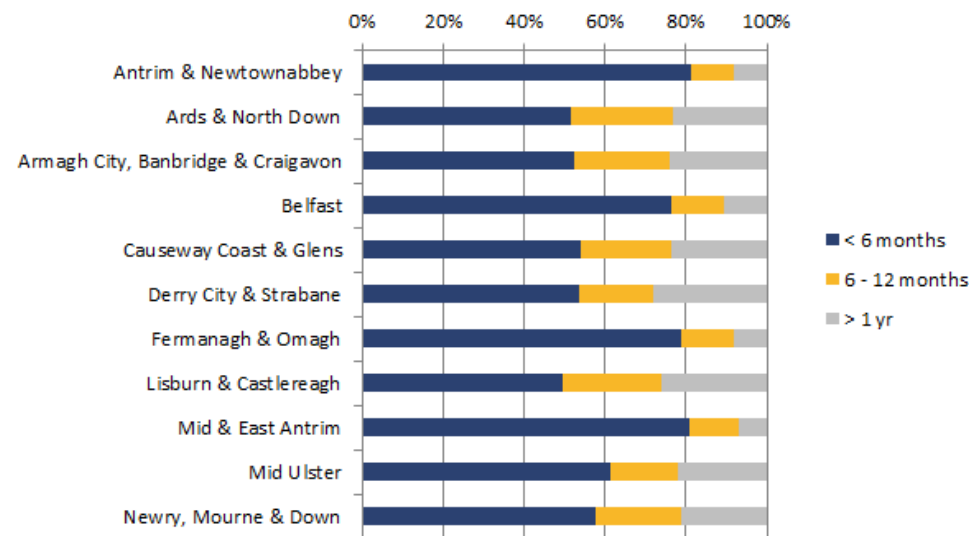
Seven councils reported an increased approval rate when compared with the same quarter a year earlier, with the largest increase occurring in Newry, Mourne and Down (up from 83.3% to 91.4%). The remaining four councils reported a decline in approval rates over the year, with Antrim and Newtownabbey reporting the largest decrease (down from 98.5% to 95.7%). [Refer to Table 1.2.](#)

Live applications

There were **6,133** live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of December 2019; a decrease of 6.0% from 6,523 at the end of December 2018, and the lowest end-of-quarter live count since Q4

2013/14. Just over one-fifth of all live applications in the planning system at the end of December 2019 were over one year old (1,261; 20.6%); an increase from the proportion reported for the end of December 2018 (1,234; 18.9%). [Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council and length of time in the planning system at end of Dec 2019



As Figure 1.5 shows, the proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of December 2019 varies across councils, ranging from 27.9% in Derry City and Strabane to 7.0% in Mid and East Antrim.

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 from 26.3% to 21.1%). The proportion of live cases in the system for over a year increased in the remaining eight councils, with Derry City and Strabane reporting the greatest increase (up from 18.1% to 27.9%). [Refer to Table 1.4.](#)

2. Departmental Activity

During Q3 2019/20, the Department **received six** applications; three **called-in** and three **other**² applications. This compares with five applications received during the same period a year earlier.

The Department reached **decisions on two** applications during Q3 2019/20; both of these were retained Section 29 applications. Two decisions were also made on Departmental applications during the same period a year earlier. No Departmental applications were **withdrawn** during Q3 2019/20.

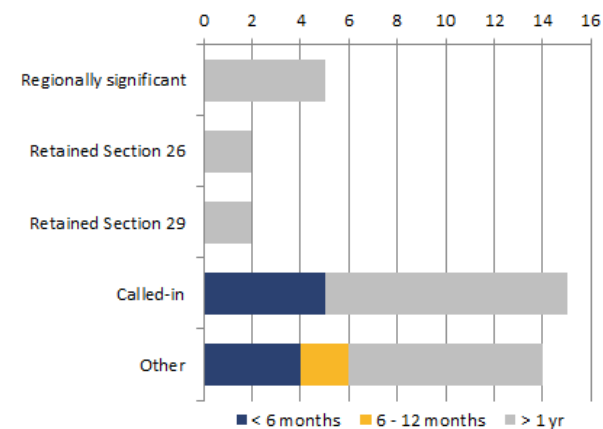
The average processing time for the two applications brought to a decision by the Department in Q3 2019/20 was 383.2 weeks. It is important to bear in mind the low number of applications processed when considering this average processing time.

At the end of December 2019, there were 38 live Departmental applications: **five ongoing regionally significant development (RSD)** applications; **four retained** applications; **15 called-in** applications; and **14 other** applications. The majority of these applications (27 of 38) 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.

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

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type and length of time in the planning system at end of Dec 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 weeks³.

No RSD applications were progressed to Ministerial Recommendation during the first nine months of 2019/20. One RSD application was withdrawn during this period. However, as this application had been progressed to Ministerial Recommendation prior to 2019/20, it falls outside the scope of the target. Of the five RSD applications live on the planning system at the end of December 2019, four have already been progressed to Ministerial Recommendation prior to 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.

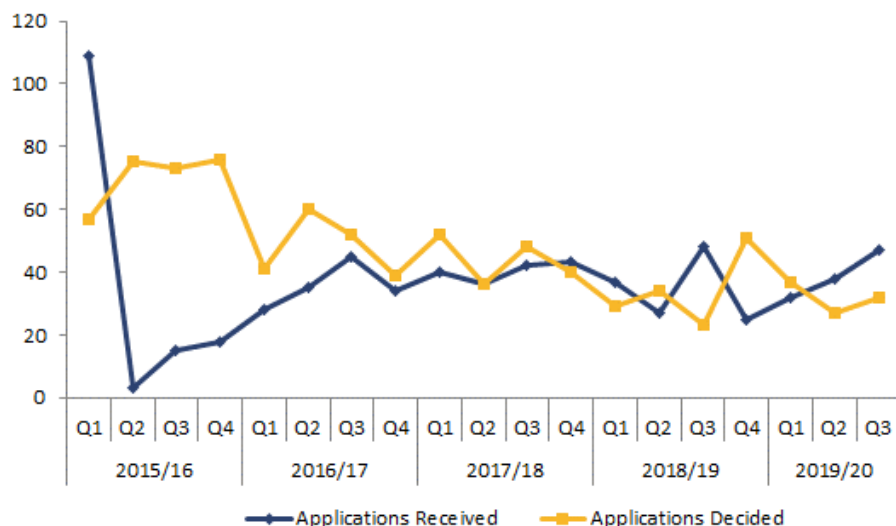
³ From Q1 2019/20 this revised target replaces the previous Departmental target. Please see User Guidance section for more information on this.

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 **47 major** planning applications were **received** in NI during Q3 2019/20; an increase of nine applications from the previous quarter (38) and similar to the number received during the same quarter a year earlier (48).

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, quarterly Apr 2015 – Dec 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.

The second quarter 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 onwards, 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 have been some fluctuations in the series.

Across councils, the number of major applications received in Q3 2019/20 was highest in Belfast (11) and lowest in Antrim and Newtownabbey (one).

During Q3 2019/20, **32 major** planning applications were **decided**; an increase of five applications over the quarter (27) and nine applications over the year (23). **Three major** applications were **withdrawn** during the most recent quarter.

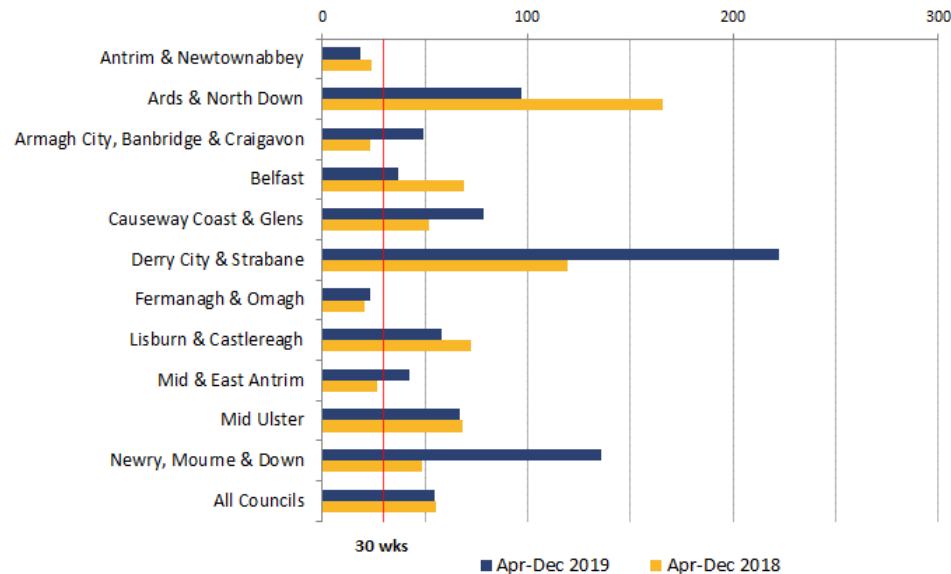
Ten of the 11 councils issued decisions on major applications during Q3 2019/20, with Belfast issuing the most (seven).

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

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

Figure 3.2 provides year-to-date processing times for major applications. During the first nine months of 2019/20, the **average processing time** for **major** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal was **54.5 weeks** across all councils. This represents a small improvement compared with the same point a year ago (down 0.8 weeks from 55.3 weeks), but is still considerably higher than the 30 week target.

Fig 3.2 Major development average processing times by council, Apr – Dec 2018 & 2019



Whilst Figure 3.2 has been provided for completeness, the majority of councils did not process a large number of major applications during the first nine months of the current and previous year. In the first three

quarters of 2019/20, only four councils processed to decision or withdrawal more than 10 major applications: Belfast (23); Causeway Coast and Glens (17); Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; and Newry, Mourne and Down (both 11).

Comparison against the target and across councils will become more robust as we reach the end of the year, with more applications being processed. With this in mind, two councils processed major applications within the 30 week target time during the first nine months of 2019/20: Antrim and Newtownabbey (an average of 18.4 weeks across seven applications); and Fermanagh and Omagh (an average of 23.6 weeks across four applications).

During the first three quarters of 2019/20, Belfast processed the most major planning applications to decision or withdrawal (23), with an average processing time of 37.0 weeks.

[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 Q3 2019/20, **31 out of 32 (96.9%)** major planning applications decided upon were **approved**. Ten councils issued decisions on major applications during this period; in nine 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 Q3 2019/20 was **2,956**; an increase of 2.1% on the previous quarter (2,896) but down by 6.1% compared with the same period a year earlier (3,148).

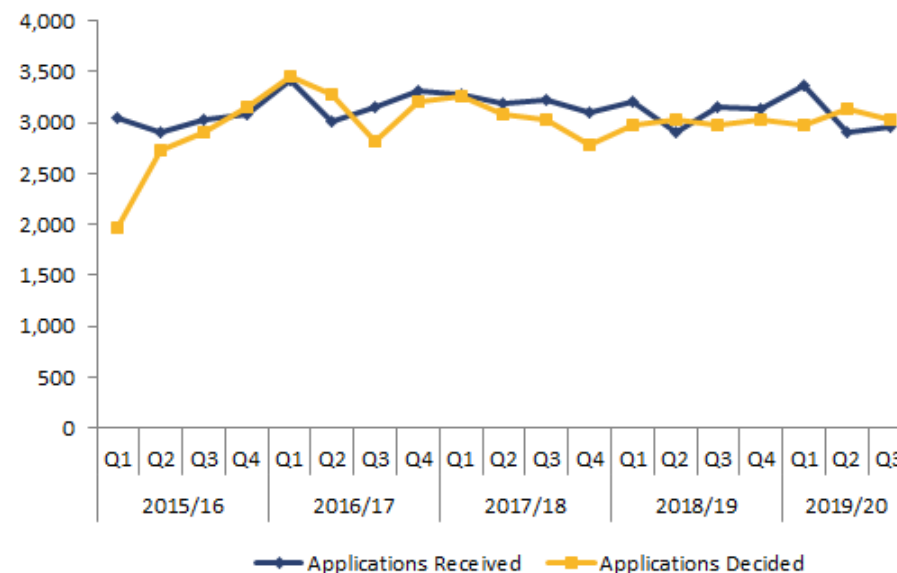
Across councils the number of local applications received during Q3 2019/20 ranged from 377 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 194 in Mid and East Antrim.

Only two councils reported an increase in the number of local applications received in Q3 2019/20 compared with the same period a year earlier, with the increase greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey (11.9%). The remaining nine councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest occurring in Belfast (-14.8%).

The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q3 2019/20 was **3,029**; a decrease of 3.4% from the previous quarter (3,135) but up by 2.0% compared with the same period a year earlier (2,969).

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 the number of applications received has generally exceeded the number decided; the opposite was true in both Q2 and Q3 2019/20 (Figure 4.1).

Fig 4.1 Local development applications, quarterly Apr 2015 – Dec 2019



During Q3 2019/20, the number of local planning decisions issued across councils ranged from 412 in Belfast to 159 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Although the overall number of local applications decided in Q3 2019/20 was up by 2.0% compared with the same period a year earlier, seven councils reported decreases over this period, with the greatest decrease occurring in Ards and North Down (-19.0%). The remaining four councils reported increases over the same period, with the largest occurring in Newry, Mourne and Down (42.0%).

Over the quarter, 125 local applications were withdrawn across NI; the lowest quarterly total reported since Q3 2015/16.

[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.

Figure 4.2 provides year-to-date processing times for local applications. During the first nine months of 2019/20 the **average processing time** for **local** applications brought to decision or withdrawal was **14.0 weeks** across all councils, which is within the statutory target of 15 weeks. This represents an improvement of one week compared with the same period in 2018/19 (15.0 weeks).

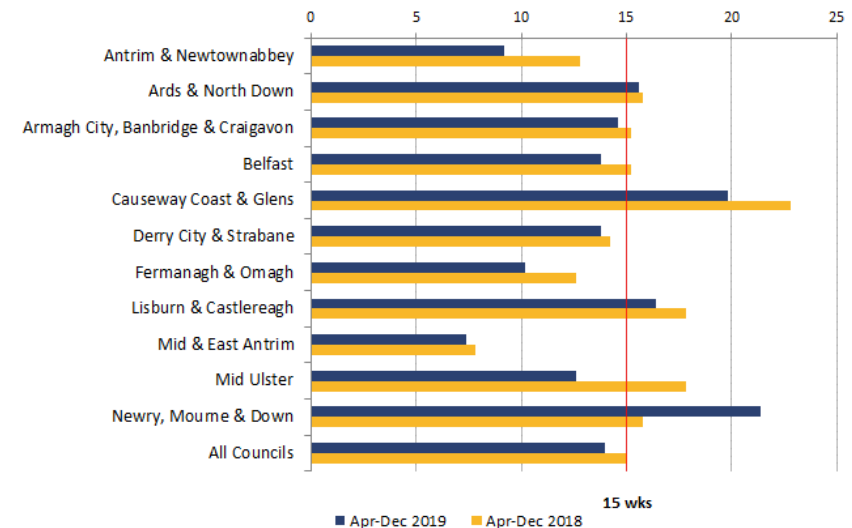
Across the councils, average processing times for local applications during April to December 2019 ranged from 7.4 weeks in Mid and East Antrim to 21.4 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Seven of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target during the first nine months of 2019/20: Mid and East Antrim (7.4 weeks); Antrim and Newtownabbey (9.2 weeks); Fermanagh and Omagh (10.2 weeks); Mid Ulster (12.6 weeks); Belfast (13.8 weeks); Derry City and Strabane (13.8 weeks); and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.6 weeks).

Average processing times for local applications decreased in 10 councils during April to December 2019, compared with the same period a year earlier. The improvement was greatest Mid Ulster (down 5.2 weeks, from 17.8 to 12.6 weeks). Over the same period, average processing times for local applications increased in Newry, Mourne and Down (up 5.6 weeks from 15.8 to 21.4 weeks).

[Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local development average processing times by council, Apr – Dec 2018 & 2019



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 **94.3%** in Q3 2019/20; similar to the previous quarter (94.1%), and an increase compared with the rate reported for the same period a year earlier (93.2%). Across councils, approval rates for local applications in Q3 2019/20 ranged from 99.1% in Derry City and Strabane to 91.3% in both Causeway Coast and Glens, and Newry, Mourne and Down.

5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During Q3 2019/20, **residential** applications accounted for **61.5%** of all planning applications received in NI; an increase from the proportion reported for Q3 2018/19 (60.7%).

Residential was the most commonly received application type in all councils in Q3 2019/20. The proportion of all applications received that were residential ranged from 69.2% in Mid Ulster to 41.4% in Belfast.

Consistent with previous periods, Belfast (27.2%) and Derry City and Strabane (26.0%) received a higher proportion of applications categorised as 'other' in Q3 2019/20, compared with the other councils. See [Appendix 1 – Definitions](#) for a description of the types of applications included in this category.

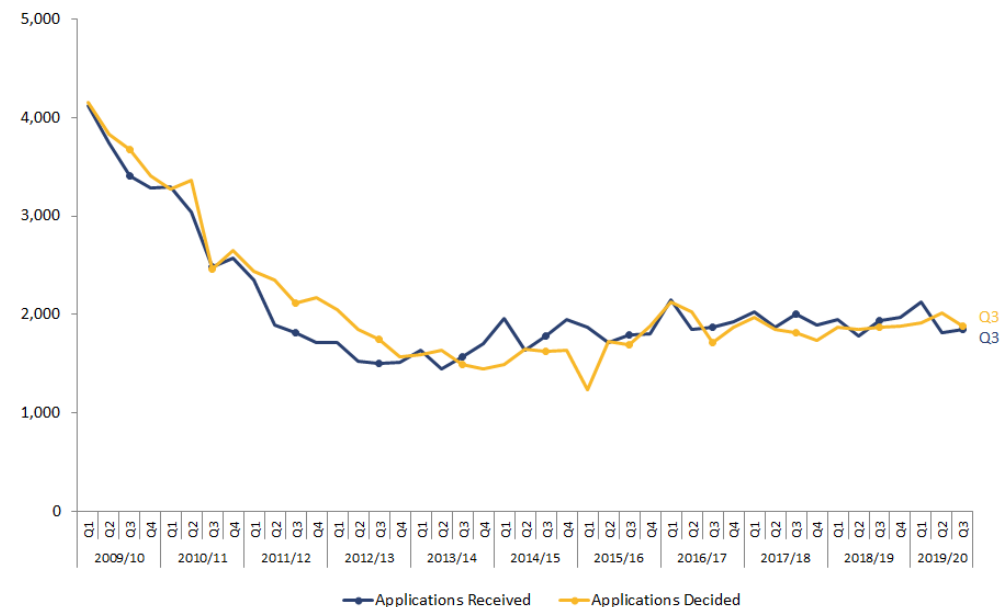
[Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.](#)

Residential applications

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in NI during Q3 2019/20 was **1,846**; an increase of 1.8% over the quarter (1,813) but a 4.8% decrease from the same period a year earlier (1,940).

During Q3 2019/20, **1,882 residential** planning applications were **decided** upon; a decrease of 6.5% on the previous quarter (2,012) but similar to the number reported for the same period last year (1,873).

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

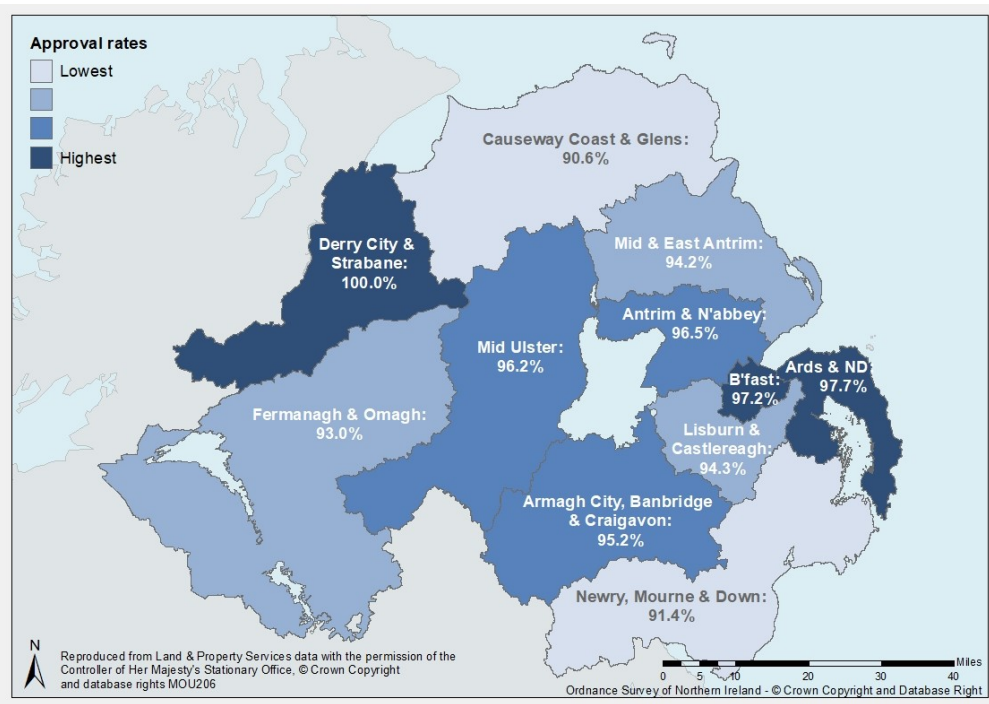


[Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for residential planning applications was **94.8%** in Q3 2019/20; an increase from the previous quarter (94.2%) and from the same period a year earlier (93.9%).

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in Q3 2019/20, ranging from 100.0% in Derry City and Strabane to 90.6% in Causeway Coast and Glens (Figure 5.2).

Fig 5.2 Residential approval rates by council, Q3 2019/20



Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in seven councils between Q3 2018/19 and Q3 2019/20. The largest increase over this period was in Newry, Mourne and Down (up from 86.4% to 91.4%).

Approval rates declined in four councils over the year, with the largest decrease occurring in Antrim and Newtownabbey (down from 98.5% to 96.5%).

During Q3 2019/20, 73 residential applications were withdrawn across NI; the same number as reported for the previous quarter (73) and an increase on the corresponding period a year earlier (65).

[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 Q3 2019/20 was 589; a small increase of 0.9% from the previous quarter (584) and a decrease of 11.3% from the same period a year earlier (664).

In rural settlements (*those with a population less than 5,000*), 235 residential applications were received in Q3 2019/20; an increase of 15.8% from the previous quarter (203) and a decrease of 3.3% from the same period a year earlier (243).

In the open countryside (*outside population settlements*), the number of residential applications received in Q3 2019/20 (1,022) represented small decreases over the quarter (from 1,026; -0.4%) and when compared with the same period a year earlier (from 1,033; -1.1%).

Residential applications – urban and rural

Figure 5.3 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications received in Q3 2018/19 and Q3 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 the open countryside.

Fig 5.3 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, Q3 2018/19 & Q3 2019/20

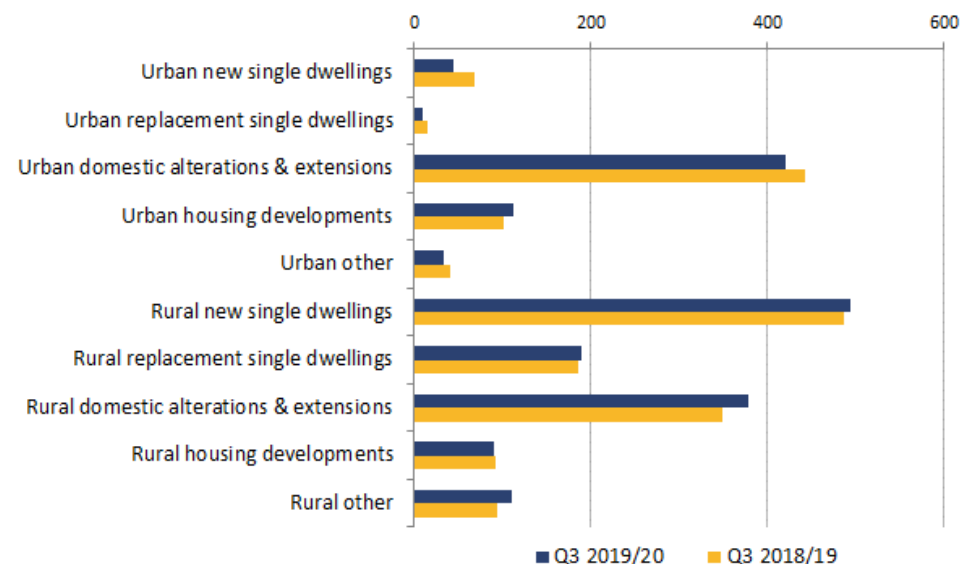


New single dwellings in rural areas (548) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (366) continue to be the most common types of residential application, together accounting for almost half (49.5%) of all residential applications received during Q3 2019/20; similar to the position in Q3 2018/19 (49.8%).

The decrease over the year in the number of residential applications received (-4.8%) was driven in large part by a decrease in the number of

applications received for domestic alterations and extensions in urban areas (down 13.3%; from 422 to 366).

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q3 2018/19 & Q3 2019/20



The overall number of residential applications decided in Q3 2019/20 (1,882) was similar to the number reported for Q3 2018/19 (1,873). Figure 5.4 shows a breakdown of these decisions by type. In general, decreases over the year in the number of decisions made on residential applications in urban areas (down 7.2% overall, from 668 to 620), were offset by increases in rural areas over the same period (up 4.7% overall, from 1,205 to 1,262).

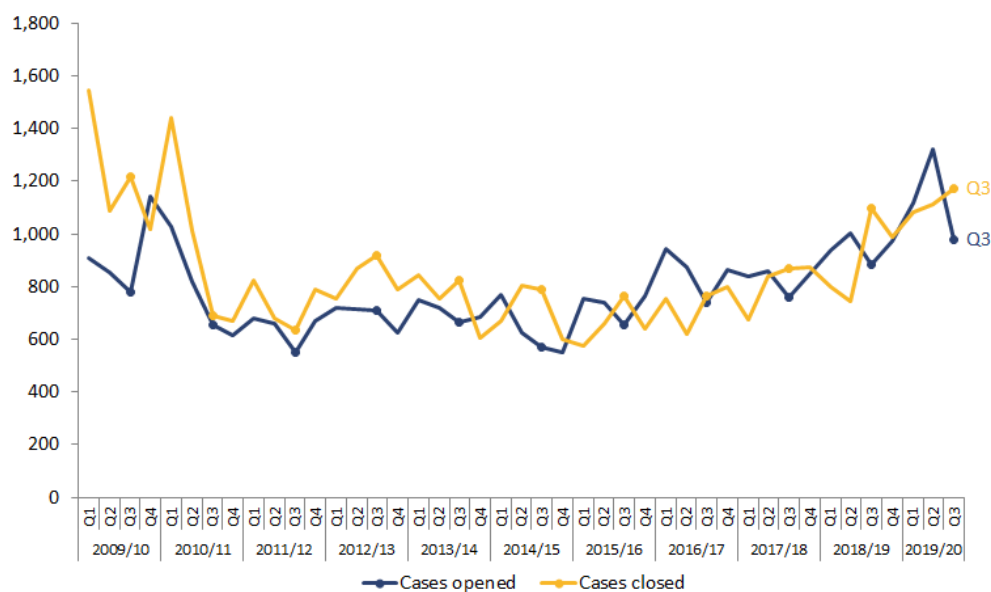
[Refer to Table 5.5.](#)

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during Q3 2019/20 was **978**; a decrease of 26.1% from the previous quarter (1,324) but an increase of 10.8% from same period a year earlier (883). This represents the largest quarter-on-quarter change, in percentage terms, in the number of enforcement cases opened since Q1 2015/16.

Across the councils, the number of enforcement cases opened in Q3 2019/20 ranged from 194 in Belfast to 49 in Mid Ulster. Eight of the 11 councils reported increases in the volume of enforcement cases opened in Q3 2019/20 compared with the same period a year earlier. The increase was greatest, in percentage terms, in Derry City and Strabane, where the number of cases opened increased by 64.3% over the year (from 42 to 69).

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



The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q3 2019/20 was **1,170**; an increase of 5.0% from the previous quarter (1,114) and up 6.7% compared with the same period a year earlier (1,097). The 1,170 cases closed in Q3 2019/20 was the highest quarterly figure reported since Q1 2010/11.

The number of cases closed in Q3 2019/20 varied across councils, ranging from 259 in Belfast to 45 in Derry City and Strabane. Six of the 11 councils reported increases in the volume of enforcement cases closed in Q3 2019/20 compared with same period a year earlier. This increase was greatest in Newry Mourne and Down, where the number of cases closed in Q3 2019/20 (191) was more than double the number closed during Q3 2018/19 (81).

The most common reasons for enforcement cases closing in Q3 2019/20 were that the cases had been remedied or resolved (39.2%) or that no breach had actually occurred (26.8%). Together these accounted for almost two-thirds (772; 66.0%) of the 1,170 cases closed during Q3.

[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.

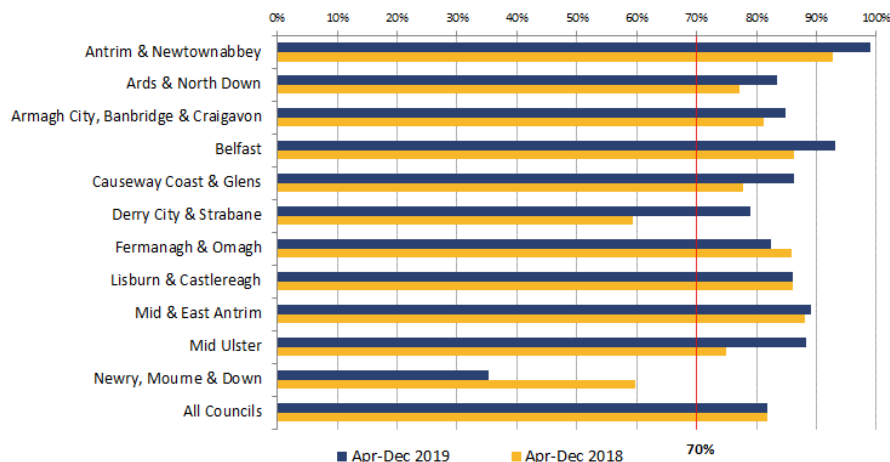
Across Northern Ireland, **over four-fifths (81.9%)** of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first nine months of 2019/20 (April to December 2019). This meets the statutory target and represents no change from the rate reported for same period in the previous year (81.9%).

During the first nine months of 2019/20, 10 of the 11 councils were within the 39 week target. Nine councils improved the proportion of enforcement

cases concluded within 39 weeks compared with the first nine months of the previous year, most notably in Derry City and Strabane (up from 59.3% to 78.9%).

[Refer to Table 6.2.](#)

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, Apr – Dec 2018 & 2019



During Q3 2019/20, there were **13 prosecutions** initiated across NI; a decrease over the quarter (19) and the year (29). Four councils initiated prosecutions during the most recent quarter, with Causeway Coast and Glens initiating the most (six).

There were **eight convictions** across NI during Q3 2019/20, with Antrim and Newtownabbey reporting the most (two).

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

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of December 2019 was **3,597**; a decrease over the quarter (-5.1%; from 3,789) and a small

increase from the number reported for the same point in the previous year (1.0%; 3,561).

The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **994** at the end of December 2019, accounting for 27.6% of all live cases. This compares with 30.4% of live cases at the end of December 2018.

[Refer to Table 6.4.](#)

Across councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest number of live cases at the end of December 2019 (909), with 46.0% of these in the system for over 2 years; the highest proportion across all councils.

Antrim and Newtownabbey had the smallest number of live cases (108) at the end of December 2019, with 13.0% of these in the system for over 2 years.

The number of live enforcement cases decreased in seven of the 11 councils between the end of December 2018 and the end of December 2019. This decrease was greatest, in percentage terms, in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-32.5%; down by 52 enforcements). There was also a notable decrease in the number of live cases in Newry Mourne and Down over this period (-16.8%; down by 183 enforcements).

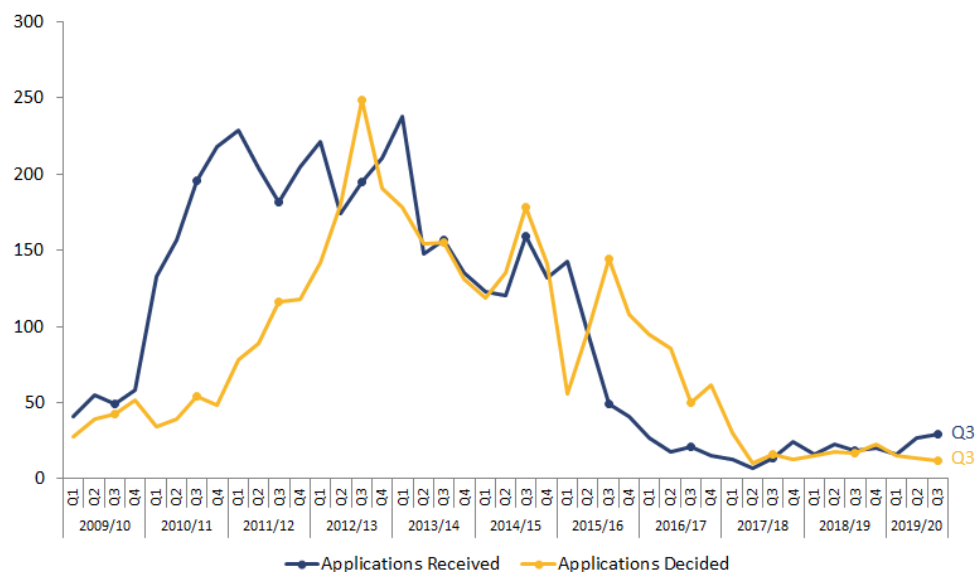
In the remaining four councils, the number of live enforcements cases increased over this period, with the greatest increase evident in Belfast (56.5%; up by 169 enforcements).

[Refer to Table 6.5.](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

Twenty-nine renewable energy applications were **received** in Q3 2019/20; an increase of 10 from the same period in the previous year (19). The number of applications received during October to December peaked in 2010/11 at 196. 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 (an **85.2%** decrease from 196 applications in Q3 2010/11 to 29 applications in Q3 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 – Dec 2019



The number of renewable energy applications **decided** during Q3 2019/20 was **12**, a decrease from 17 reported for Q3 2018/19. The 12 applications decided in Q3 2019/20 represents a 95.2% decrease from the series’ third

quarter peak of 249 applications decided in 2012/13. Three renewable energy applications were withdrawn during Q3 2019/20.

During this period, the average time taken for a renewable energy application to be brought to decision or withdrawal was 30.2 weeks across NI; a decrease of 13.4 weeks over the quarter (from 43.6 weeks) and down 51.7 weeks over the year (from 81.9 weeks).

Single wind turbines continue to be the most common renewable energy application, accounting for 25 out of 29 applications received during Q3 2019/20. In addition, seven of the 12 renewable energy decisions issued in Q3 2019/20 were for single wind turbines. [Refer to Tables 7.1, 7.2.](#)

Figure 7.2 shows the distribution of renewable energy applications received across the different planning authorities, with Fermanagh and Omagh (12) receiving the most in Q3 2019/20.

Fig 7.2 Renewable Energy applications received by authority, Q3 2018/19 & Q3 2019/20

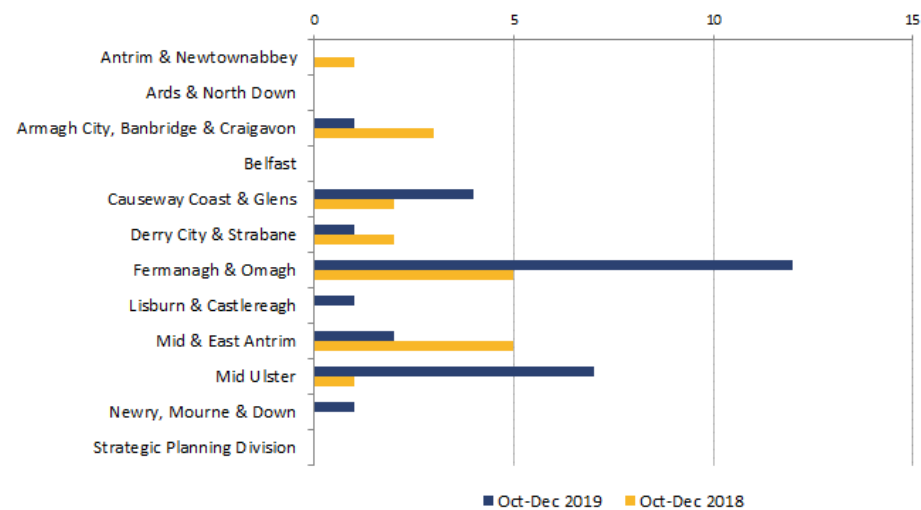
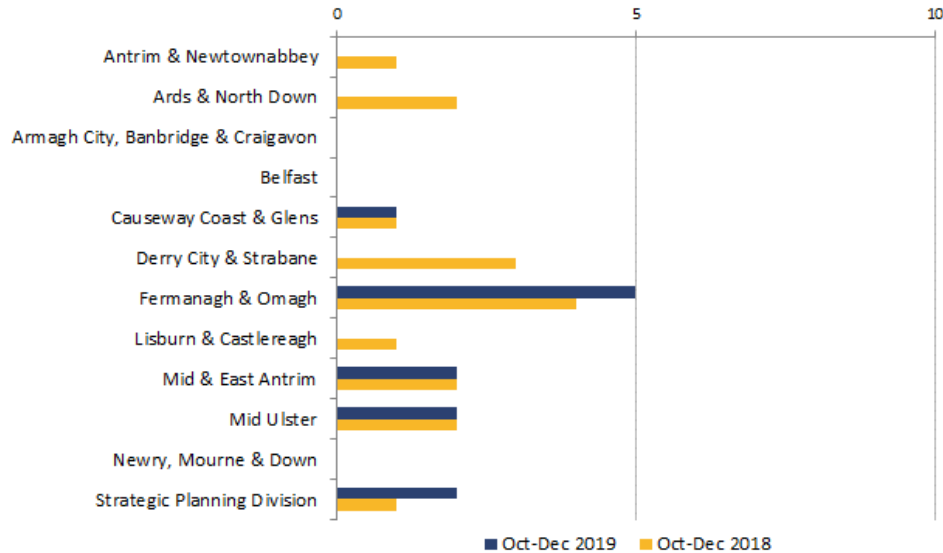


Figure 7.3 shows that across all planning authorities, Fermanagh and Omagh also issued the most decisions on renewable energy applications during Q3 2019/20 (five).

Fig 7.3 Renewable Energy applications decided by authority, Q3 2018/19 & Q3 2019/20

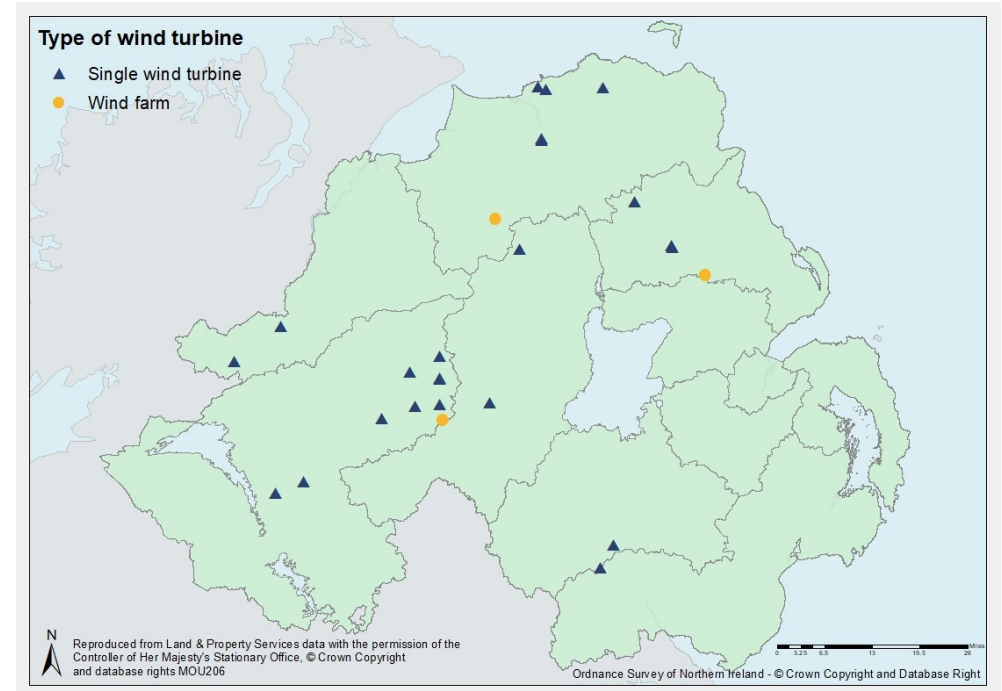


At the end of December 2019, there were **117 live renewable energy applications** in the planning system across NI. Over two-thirds (83 of 117) were for single wind turbines. Of these 117 live applications, 41.0% were in the planning system for over a year; an increase from the proportion reported for the same point in 2018 (39.6%).

The **NI approval rate** for renewable energy applications was **75.0%** in Q3 2019/20, with nine out of the 12 decisions issued during this period being approved.

Figure 7.4 displays locations of approved wind energy applications for the first nine months of 2019/20. A total of 23 single wind turbines and three wind farms have been approved over this period.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Apr – Dec 2019



Note: Some approved wind energy applications are in close proximity to each other and may not be individually identifiable on the map.

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

User Guidance

Notes on data source and quality

The records of all planning applications from 1st April 2019 to 31st December 2019 were transferred in January 2020 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 coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils and the Department 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 planning authority validation, a final extract was taken in February 2020. 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.

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 statistics⁴. 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 is available at:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-quality-assurance-administrative-data-sources>

⁴ For more information, please see: <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/osr/what-we-do/systemic-reviews/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/>

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 and is available at:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-background-quality-report>

New Northern Ireland regional planning IT system

The Department and local government have commenced the procurement of a new regional planning IT system, with the intention of awarding a contract in early spring 2020. 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.

Regionally Significant / Major / Local Development Applications after 1st April 2014

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). Data and analysis based on this new hierarchy is available from 1st 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.

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

[Refers to Section 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) 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.

Departmental target

From Q1 2019/20 the Departmental target for Regionally Significant planning applications reported on in the NI Planning Statistics has 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 has been 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 Section 6 of report](#)

Compliance and enforcement are important functions of the planning system. The summary data presented in this report and accompanying Excel tables covers enforcement cases opened, enforcement cases closed, court action taken and the live caseload as at the end of the quarter. Cases may be closed for a variety of reasons:

- case has been remedied or resolved (the breach may have been removed or amended accordingly);
- planning permission has been granted (so no breach has occurred);
- it would not be expedient to take further action;
- no breach has actually occurred;
- the breach may be immune from enforcement action (it may be outside the time limit in which to initiate action);
- Or an application has been allowed on appeal or indeed the notice has been quashed.

The time taken to conclude an enforcement case is calculated from the date the complaint is received to the earliest date of the following:

- a notice is issued;
- legal proceedings commence;
- a planning application is received;
- the case is closed.

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

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

Processing Times

The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The average processing time is the median. The median is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point in the middle of the sequence. The median is used because some planning applications can take several years to reach a decision. As a consequence, these extreme cases (outliers) 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 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, '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 co-ordinates 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 applications, planning authorities deal with a range of other planning related work. Data on this 'non-application' workload, whilst excluded from the publication and the calculation of performance against relevant statutory targets, are included in [Table 9.1](#) of the accompanying Excel tables. Details of these exclusions are:

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).

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 user needs. Comments on any issues relating to this statistical release are welcomed and encouraged. Feedback can be provided through an ongoing customer survey, available at:

https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ASRB_DfI

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

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:

<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>

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. More information can be found at:

<https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/user-facing-pages/housing-and-planning-statistics/>

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, available from 2016/17, as well as a description of variables used, can be found at:

<https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/dataset/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-annual-dataset>

NINIS

Finalised annual data on planning applications and enforcements are also

available on the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service, from 2002/03 to 2018/19 (where applicable). These data can be found under the 'People and Places' theme on the NINIS website:

<https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Home.aspx>

Planning Readership List

An email alert is sent after each Northern Ireland 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 at:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/pre-release-access-lists>

Appendix 1 – Definitions

The Statistical Categories referred to in Section 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.

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