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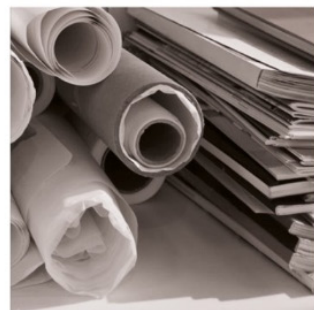
Department for  
**Infrastructure**  
An Roinn  
**Bonneagair**

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# NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

## Third Quarter 2020/21 Statistical Bulletin

### October to December 2020: Provisional Figures



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### **National Statistics status**

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

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

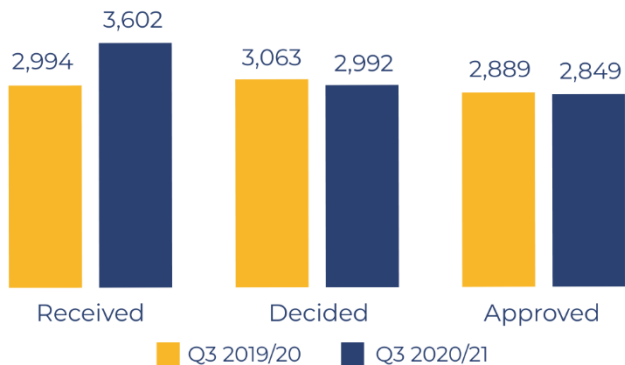
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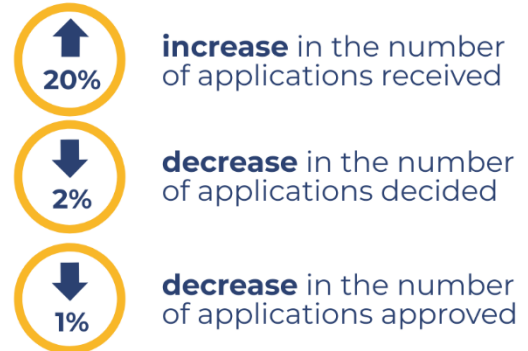
**Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic:** Planning activity and processing performance during the first three quarters of 2020/21 were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. This should be borne in mind when interpreting these figures.

## Overall planning applications

### Applications received/decided/approved



### Comparing Q3 2020/21 with Q3 2019/20:



## Applications received Q3 2020/21

A total of 3,602 planning applications were received during Q3 2020/21:



**3,574**  
(99%)

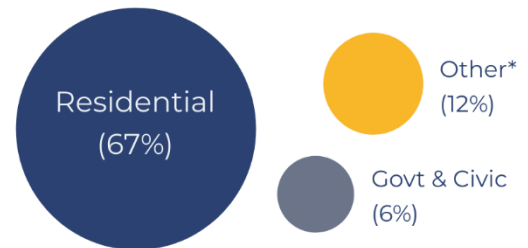
Local applications



**28**  
(1%)

Major applications

### 3 largest development types



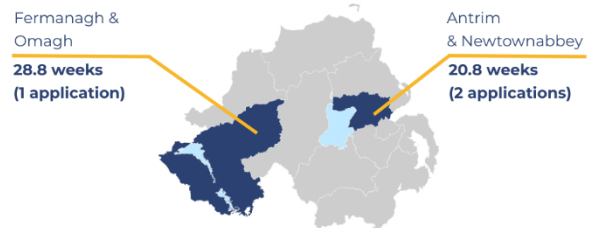
\*Other includes work to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements and listed buildings

## Planning statutory targets Apr-Dec 2020

### Average processing times (weeks) - major



### Councils within major target



### Average processing times (weeks) - local



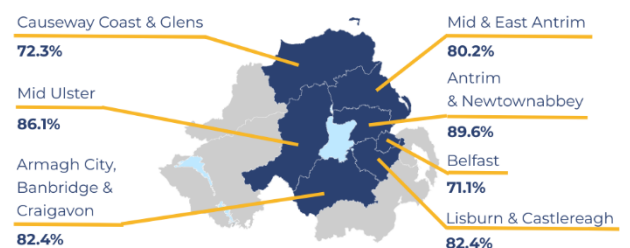
### Councils within local target



### % of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks



### Councils within enforcement target



## Key points

- **Planning activity and processing performance during the first three quarters of 2020/21 were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. This should be borne in mind and caution should be taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.**
- There were 3,602 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during the third quarter of 2020/21; an increase of one-tenth on the previous quarter and one-fifth on the same period a year earlier. This comprised 3,574 local and 28 major applications.
- In the third quarter of 2020/21, 2,992 planning applications were decided upon; up almost one-quarter from Q2 2020/21 but down 2% from the same period a year earlier. Decisions were issued on 2,959 local, 32 major and one regionally significant application during the most recent quarter.
- The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2020/21 was 17.8 weeks across all councils. This exceeds the 15 week target and represents an increase of 3.8 weeks from the same period a year earlier. Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first three quarters of 2020/21.
- The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2020/21 was 61.8 weeks across all councils. This represents an increase of 7.3 weeks compared with the same period a year earlier and is more than double the 30 week target.
- Across councils 69.2% of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first nine months of 2020/21. This falls just outside the statutory target of 70% and represents a considerable decrease from the rate reported for the same period in 2019/20 (81.9%). Individually, seven of the 11 councils were within target after the first three quarters of 2020/21.

# Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Third Quarter 2020/21 Statistical Bulletin

## 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 2020/21. Note that from 8 May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of the Environment to the Department for Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental re-organisation.

Whilst the bulletin and accompanying Excel tables report data for the third quarter of 2020/21, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous periods. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the last quarter and year. Please note that these quarterly figures for 2020/21 are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures, to be published in July 2021.

## Background

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the '2011 Act') sets out the legislative framework for development management in NI and provides that, from 1 April 2015, councils largely have responsibility for this planning function.

Planning applications for development categorised as being either major development or local development are largely determined by the councils. Responsibility for planning applications for regionally significant development rests with the Department. In addition, the Department retains responsibility for legacy 'Article 31' applications (i.e. Article 31 of the [Planning \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1991](#)).

Furthermore, the Department has the power to 'call in' both major and local development applications from councils, where it so directs, and determine them. Responsibility for planning legislation, and for formulating and co-ordinating policy for securing the orderly and consistent development of land, remains with the Department.

Consequently, the responsibility for development management is shared between the 11 councils and the Department (the 12 planning authorities).

The Department continues to have responsibility for the provision and publication of statistics relating to the overall development management function, including enforcement. The quarterly and annual reports provide the NI headline results split by district council (and the Department where relevant). These data will also provide councils with information on their performance in order to meet their own reporting obligations under the [Local Government Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2014](#).

Note that whilst pre-transfer activity volumes can be mapped historically to the new organisational areas from which the demands arise, it would not be valid to do the same with performance data as the newly established district councils did not exist, nor do they neatly overlap with the old area planning office jurisdictions.

The first year of data under the new organisational areas was 2015/16. Therefore 2015/16 is regarded as the base year for reporting of performance-related data at council level with comparative trend data building from that point onwards. Whilst historic comparisons of performance at NI level can still be made, it is important to be aware that there were a number of significant changes to the planning system which will have had an impact. Where relevant these have been highlighted throughout the report.

## Statistics included in this report

This bulletin provides an overall view of planning activity across NI. It provides summary statistical information on council progress across the three statutory targets for major development applications, local development applications and enforcement cases as laid out in the [Local Government \(Performance Indicators and Standards\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#). It also provides information relating to Departmental performance against a quantitative corporate business plan target.

All of the information underlying the charts and graphs featured in this bulletin are included in [accompanying Excel tables](#) (see [Appendix 1 for additional definitions](#) used in these tables). This summary bulletin provides an overview and high level commentary with more detail and further analysis available [in the Excel tables](#). Where relevant, some of the more detailed findings may be referred to in the commentary.

## Revisions and changes since Quarter 1 2015/16

(i) Major versus local classification - following the publication of the first quarter provisional bulletin in November 2015, a number of planning application classification issues were identified which required further investigation. This led to a number of revisions to the first quarter 2015/16 provisional figures which are reflected in later quarterly bulletins. The validation exercise additionally highlighted some inconsistencies in major and local development classification between 2015/16 and 2014/15 when the new classification hierarchy was first administratively implemented. It was decided, therefore, that 2015/16, when the classification hierarchy was given full legal effect, would be the base year for future comparisons of major and local development activity. As such, back-comparisons at council level for these application types are not possible.

(ii) 'Discharge of conditions' - whilst forming part of a council's workload, these are not planning applications per se and hence should be excluded from the assessment of target processing performance. This led to some further revisions from the previously released first quarter 2015/16 results. However, whilst there were some small changes to activity volumes, their exclusion did not materially affect average processing times across the vast majority of councils. See [User Guidance](#) for further detail on excluded planning activity. Table 9.1, in the [accompanying Excel tables](#), provides volumes and processing times for all such 'non-application' workload.

(iii) Legacy versus new council activity – in order to provide additional context around council performance, two additional analyses have been included in the Excel tables. [Table 8.1](#) shows the volume of legacy work which each council inherited on 1 April 2015 and to what extent it has since been reducing, while [Table 8.2](#) splits out processing performance for major and local development into legacy versus council applications. These tables will be retained until the legacy applications become a negligible part of overall council workload.

## Future releases

The finalised annual report for 2020/21 is due to be published in July 2021. The next quarterly release is due in September 2021. This will contain provisional planning data up to 30 June 2021 and will commence the quarterly reporting cycle for 2021/22. See [GOV.UK Release Calendar](#) and [upcoming statistical releases](#) on the Department's website for future publication dates.

## National Statistics designation

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

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

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

## New Northern Ireland regional planning IT system

The Department and 10 councils have been working collaboratively on the configuration of a new Regional Planning IT System with an external provider. It is planned that this new system will be phased into operation in late 2021 and early 2022. Relevant updates on the development of this new system and any potential impacts on statistical reporting will be included within future NI Planning Statistics publications. However, at this stage of the project it is too early to include any further information on potential impacts to NI Planning Statistics.

## Planning Monitoring Framework

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



## Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

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

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

The volume of planning applications received and processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) during the third quarter of 2020/21 have increased from the previous quarter and are now similar to, or in the case of applications received exceed, totals recorded during the same period the previous year, before the effects of the coronavirus were seen. Enforcement activity remained at a lower level compared with the same period in 2019/20.

Overall processing performance presented in this report (for the first nine months of 2020/21) was impacted considerably by the restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic and therefore caution should be taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.

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

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



# Chapter 1: Overall Northern Ireland planning activity

## Chapter 1: Overall NI planning activity

Planning activity and processing performance during the third quarter of 2020/21 continued to be impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The volume of planning applications received and processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) have increased from the previous quarter and are now similar to, or in the case of applications received exceed, totals recorded during the same period the previous year, before the effects of the coronavirus were seen. Enforcement activity remained at a lower level compared with the same period in 2019/20.

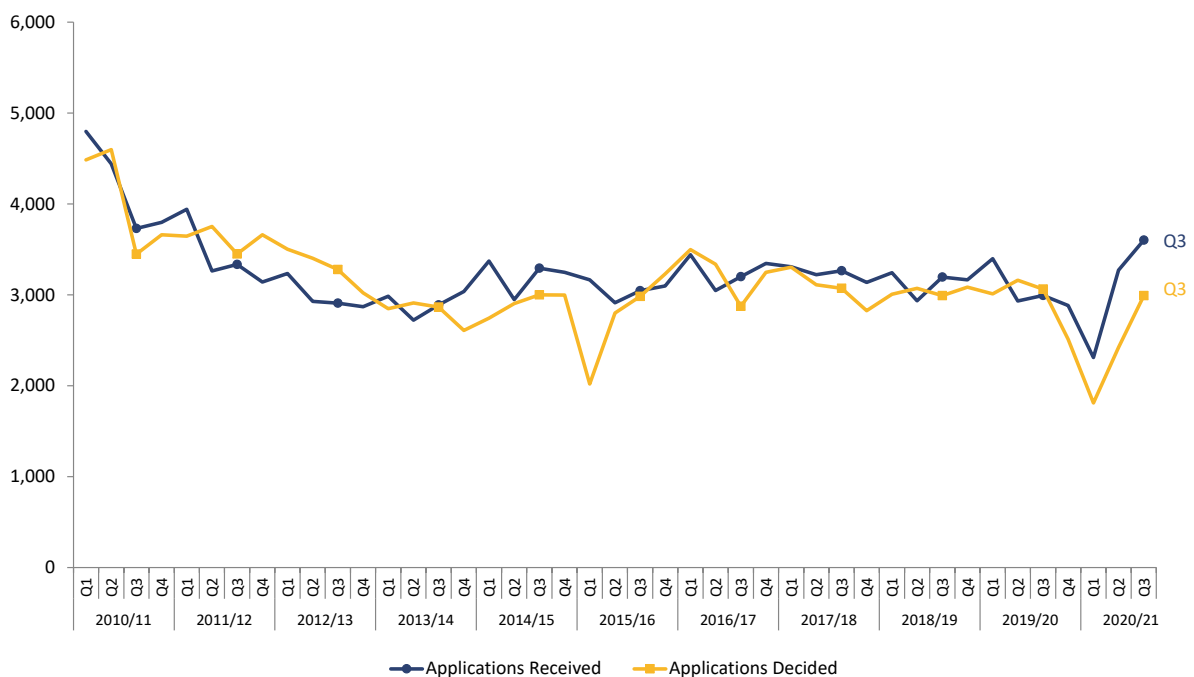
Overall processing performance presented in this report (for the first nine months of 2020/21) was impacted considerably by the restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic and therefore caution should be taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.

### Applications received

The number of planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period October to December 2020 (Q3) was 3,602; an increase of one-tenth (10.1%) on the previous quarter (3,272) and one-fifth (20.3%) on the same period a year earlier (2,994). This also represents the highest number of applications received in any quarter since Q1 2011/12 ([Figure 1.1](#)).

Approximately three-quarters of planning applications received in Q3 2020/21 were for full planning permission (75.9%); similar to the proportions reported for earlier quarters.

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly, Apr 2010 – Dec 2020



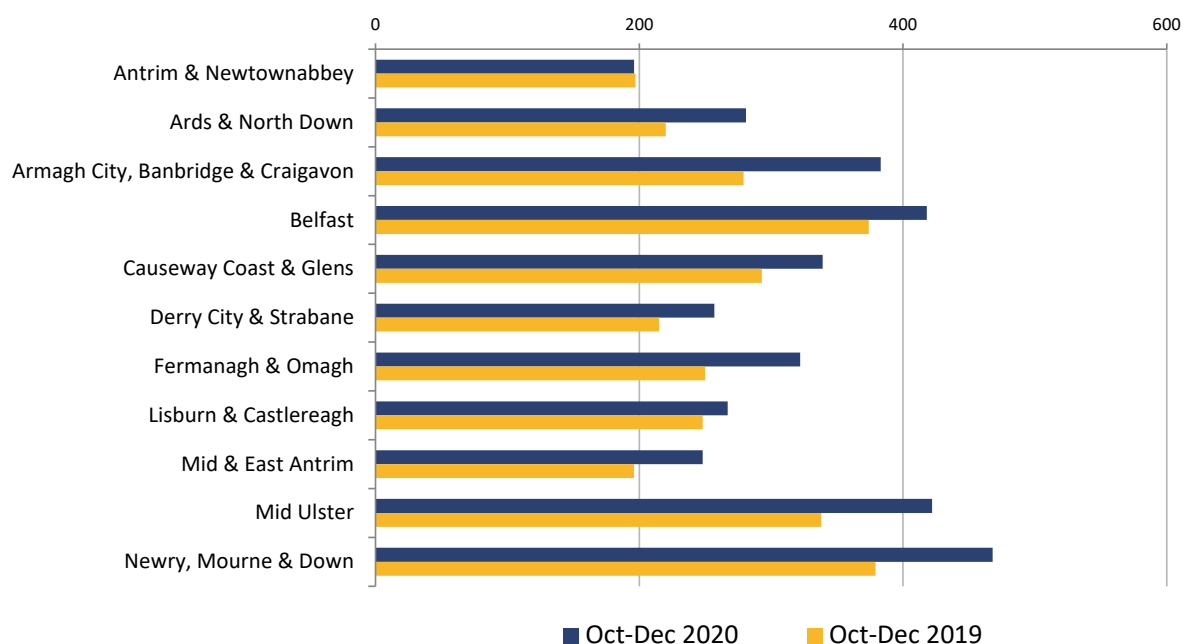
In Q3 2020/21, the number of planning applications received varied across councils, ranging from 468 in Newry, Mourne and Down (accounting for 13.0% of all applications received across NI) to 196 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (5.4% of all applications received).

Ten councils reported an increase in the number of applications received in Q3 2020/21 compared with the previous quarter, with the increase greatest in Lisburn and Castlereagh (32.2%). In Belfast, the number of applications received in Q3 2020/21 (418) was similar to the figure reported for the previous quarter (420).

Over the year, 10 councils reported an increase in the number of applications received, with the highest increase evident in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (37.3%). In Antrim and Newtownabbey, the number of applications received in Q3 2020/21 (196) was similar to the number received during the same period the previous year (197) ([Figure 1.2](#)).

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

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q3 2019/20 & Q3 2020/21



## Applications decided

The number of planning **decisions issued** during Q3 2020/21 was **2,992**; up almost one-quarter (23.6%) on Q2 2020/21 (2,421), but down by 2.3% compared with the same period a year earlier (3,063) ([Figure 1.1](#)).

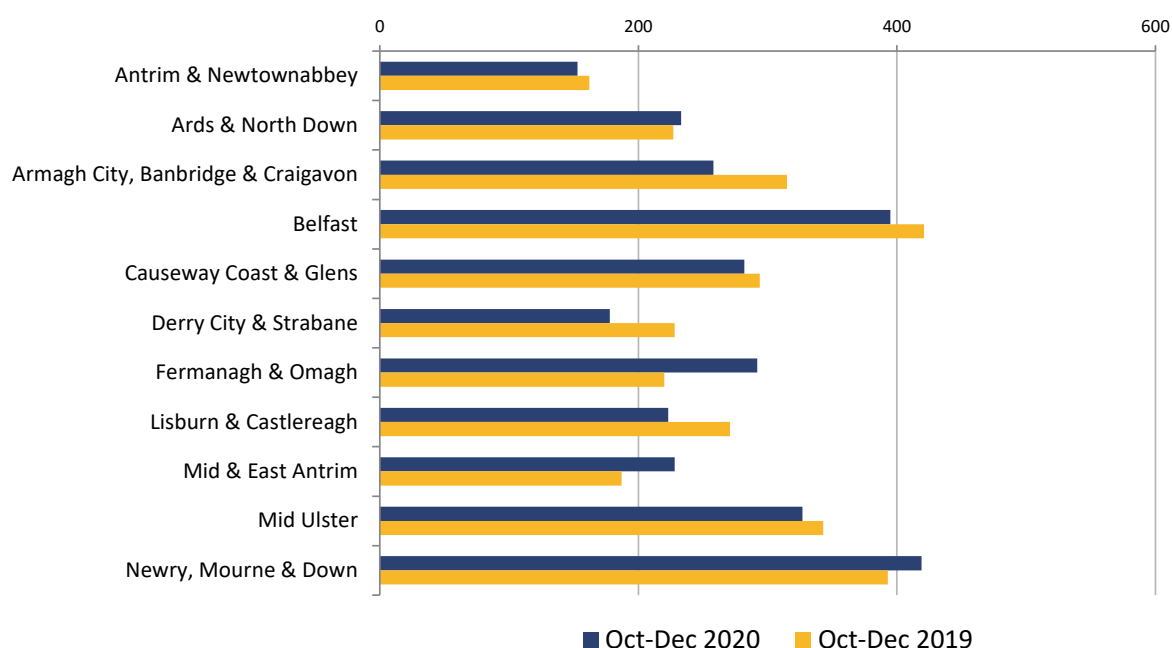
Over three-quarters of planning decisions in Q3 2020/21 (77.0%) were for full planning permission; similar to the proportions reported for earlier quarters.

Across councils the number of decisions issued during Q3 2020/21 ranged from 419 in Newry, Mourne and Down (accounting for 14.0% of all decisions across NI) to 153 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (5.1% of all decisions).

Ten of the 11 councils reported an increase in the number of applications decided in Q3 2020/21 compared with the previous quarter, with the increase greatest in Causeway Coast and Glens (68.9%). The number of decisions issued decreased over the quarter in Derry City and Strabane (-23.9%).

Over the year seven councils reported a decrease in the number of decisions issued, with the decrease greatest, in percentage terms, in Derry City and Strabane (-21.9%). Four councils reported an increase in the number of decisions issued in Q3 2020/21 compared with the same period a year earlier, with the increase greatest in Fermanagh and Omagh (up 32.7%) ([Figure 1.3](#)).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q3 2019/20 & Q3 2020/21



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

In Q3 2020/21, **147** applications were **withdrawn**; an increase of 37.4% on the previous quarter (107) and 14.8% compared with the same period a year earlier (128).

Overall, the number of applications processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) in Q3 2020/21 was 3,139; an increase of almost one-quarter (24.2%) from Q2 2020/21 (2,528) but down slightly (-1.6%) compared with the same period a year earlier (3,191).

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

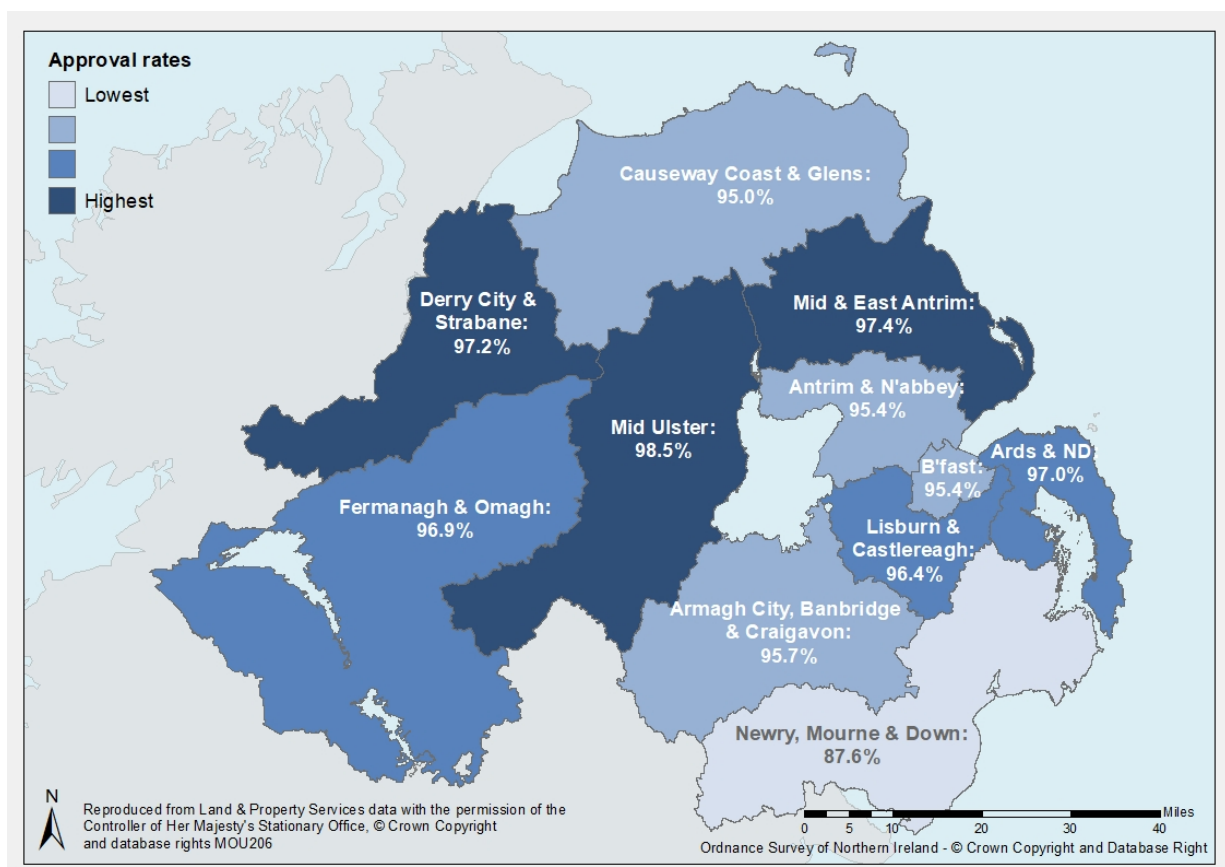
In addition to processing applications, planning authorities deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q3 2020/21 they processed to decision or withdrawal: 331 certificates of lawfulness; 216 discharge of conditions; 133 non-material changes; and 109 tree preservation orders. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

## Approval rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications was **95.2%** in Q3 2020/21; a decrease from the rate reported for the previous quarter (96.0%) but up from the rate reported for the same period a year earlier (94.3%).

Approval rates varied across councils during Q3 2020/21, from 98.5% in Mid Ulster to 87.6% in Newry, Mourne and Down ([Figure 1.4](#)). These rates are dependent on many factors and care should be taken in making any comparisons.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, Q3 2020/21



Seven councils reported an increased approval rate when compared with Q3 2019/20, with the largest increase occurring in Fermanagh and Omagh (up from 92.3% to 96.9%). Approval rates declined over the year in the remaining four councils, with Newry, Mourne and Down (down from 91.3% to 87.6%) reporting the largest decrease. [Refer to Table 1.2.](#)

## Live applications

There were 8,017 live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of December 2020; an increase of 31.0% from 6,120 at the end of December 2019, and the highest end-of-quarter live count since June 2012.

An increase in the live count is due to fewer applications being processed, i.e. decided or withdrawn, compared with applications received over a given period. For example, in Q3

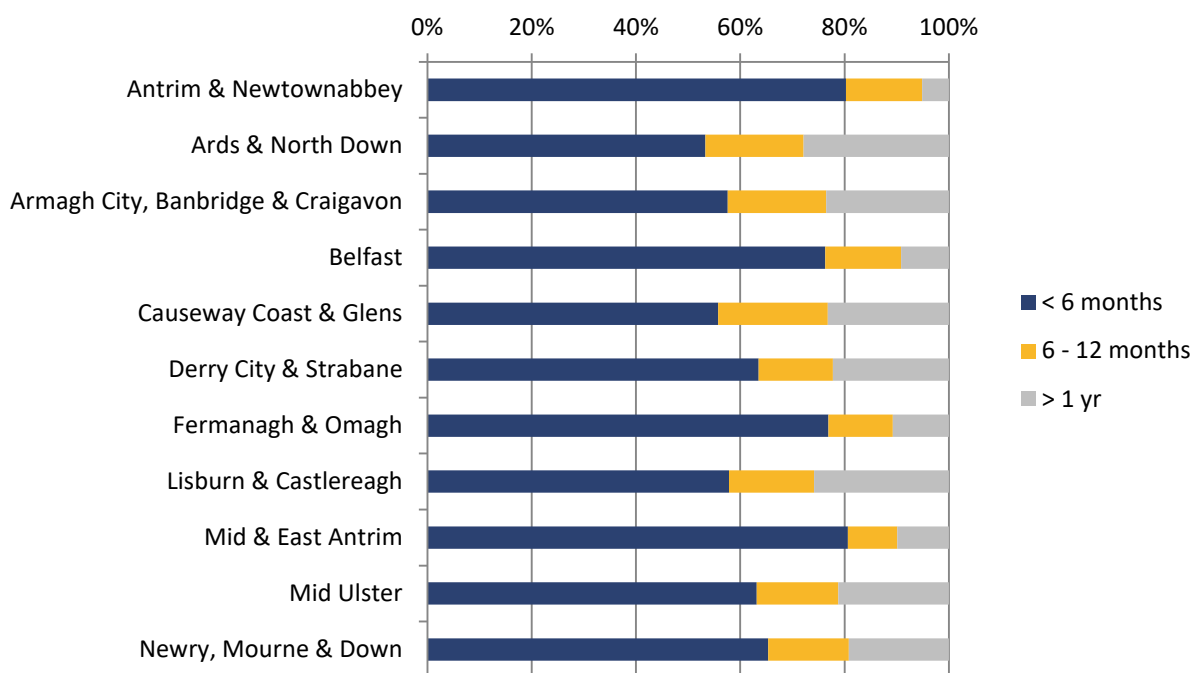
2020/21, 3,139 applications were processed compared with 3,602 received. This means that while the number of applications processed in the third quarter of 2020/21 was similar to the total recorded during the same period the previous year, before the effects of the coronavirus were seen, the number of applications received in the most recent quarter exceeded the amount recorded in any quarter since April to June 2011. A similar situation was reported for the first two quarters of 2020/21 as well.

Just under one-fifth of all live applications in the planning system at the end of December 2020 were over one year old (19.8%); a decrease from the proportion reported for the end of December 2019 (20.6%).

[Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of December 2020 varied across councils, ranging from 27.9% in Ards and North Down to 5.1% in Antrim and Newtownabbey ([Figure 1.5](#)).

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council and length of time in the planning system at end of Dec 2020



Comparing the end of December 2020 with the same point a year earlier, the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year decreased for eight councils, with the decrease greatest in Derry City and Strabane (down from 27.9% to 22.2%). This proportion increased in the remaining three councils over the same period, with the largest increase occurring in Ards and North Down (up from 23.2% to 27.9%).

[Refer to Table 1.4.](#)



## Chapter 2: Departmental activity

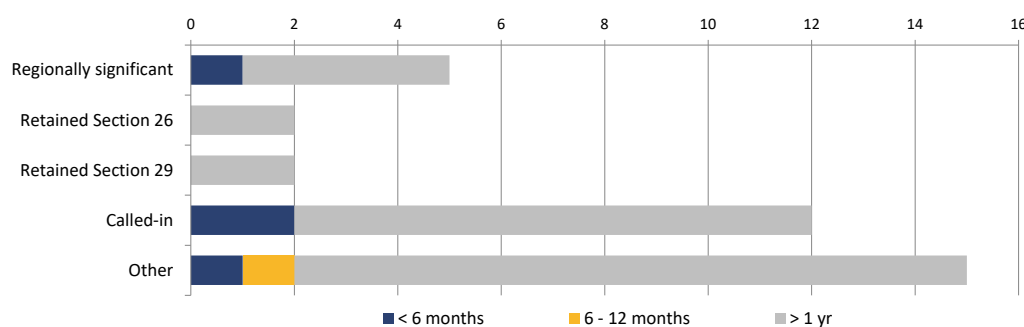


## Chapter 2: Departmental activity

During Q3 2020/21 the Department **received three** applications; two called-in and one other<sup>1</sup> application. This compares with six received during the same period a year earlier. The Department reached **decisions on four** applications during the third quarter of 2020/21; one regionally significant development (RSD), two called-in and one other application. This compares with two decisions issued during the same period in 2019/20. In addition, **two** called-in applications were **withdrawn** during the most recent quarter.

At the end of December 2020 there were 36 live Departmental applications: **five** ongoing RSD applications; **four retained** applications; **12 called-in** applications; and **15 other** applications. The vast majority of these applications (31 out of 36) were in the planning system for over a year at the end of December 2020 ([Figure 2.1](#)). [Refer to Tables 2.1, 2.2.](#)

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type and length of time in the planning system at end of Dec 2020



### Departmental target

RSD applications are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or involve a substantial departure from a local development plan.



**It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing Regionally Significant Planning Applications from date valid to a Ministerial Recommendation or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks.**

Of the five RSD applications live on the planning system at the end of December 2020, three had already been progressed to Ministerial Recommendation prior to Q3 2020/21. The 30 week period for recommendation / withdrawal has been exceeded for one of the two remaining applications, while the other was made valid at the end of September 2020. Progress on these two applications and any new RSD applications received, will continue to be assessed in future reports.

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



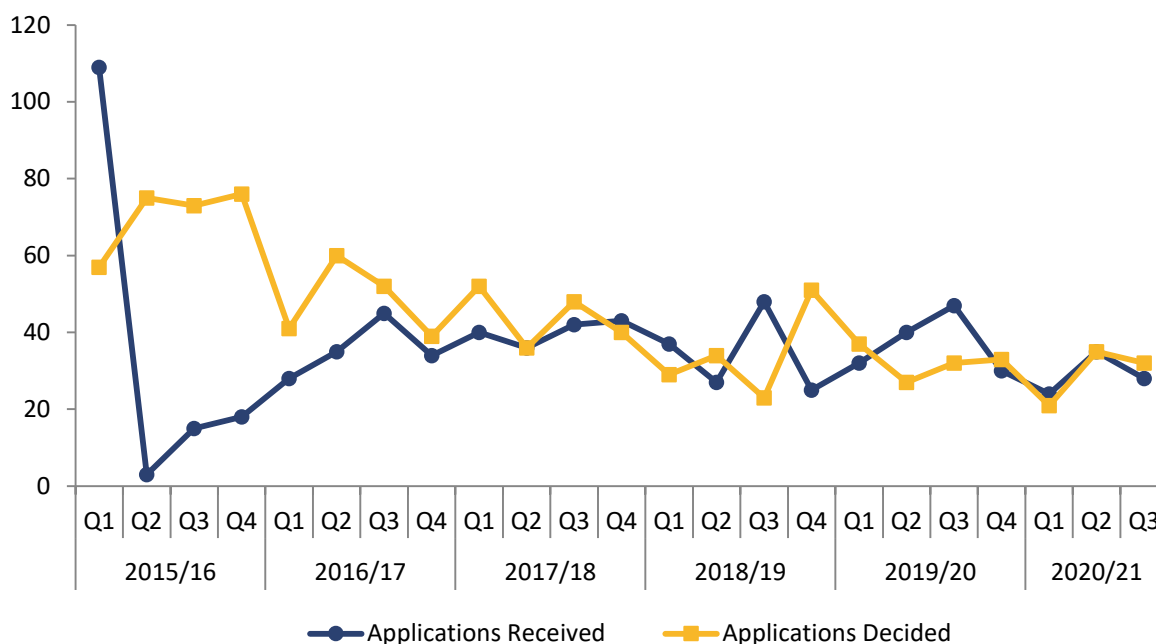
# Chapter 3: Major development planning applications

## Chapter 3: Major development planning applications

**Major Developments** have important economic, social and environmental implications. The majority of major applications are multiple housing, commercial, and government and civic types of development.

A total of **28 major** planning applications were **received** in NI during Q3 2020/21; a decrease from the previous quarter (35) and from the same period a year earlier (47) ([Figure 3.1](#)).

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, quarterly, Apr 2015 – Dec 2020



From 1 July 2015, pre-application community consultation became a pre-requisite to a major application. All major applications now go through a minimum 12 week consultation process before being accepted. The impact of this requirement should be borne in mind when considering the longer term trend in major applications received.

Q2 2015/16 had the lowest number of major applications received across the whole series but this can be attributed to the introduction of the 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, with some quarterly fluctuations over the last three years.

From 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This was subsequently extended until 31 March 2021<sup>2</sup>. The impact of

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see the [Departmental website](#).

this change will be more apparent once the finalised figures for 2020/21 are published in July 2021.

All 11 councils received at least one major application during the third quarter of 2020/21, with Mid Ulster receiving the most (four).

During Q3 2020/21, **32 major** planning applications were **decided**; down from 35 in the previous quarter and the same as the number decided during the third quarter of 2019/20 (32) ([Figure 3.1](#)). **One** major application was **withdrawn** during the most recent quarter.

Nine councils issued decisions on major applications during Q3 2020/21, with Belfast issuing the most (nine).

Thirty-one of the 32 major applications decided upon in NI during Q3 2020/21 were approved, meaning the overall approval rate was 96.9%. Nine councils issued decisions on major applications during the quarter; in eight of these, 100% of the major applications decided upon were approved.

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

### Major planning applications statutory target



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

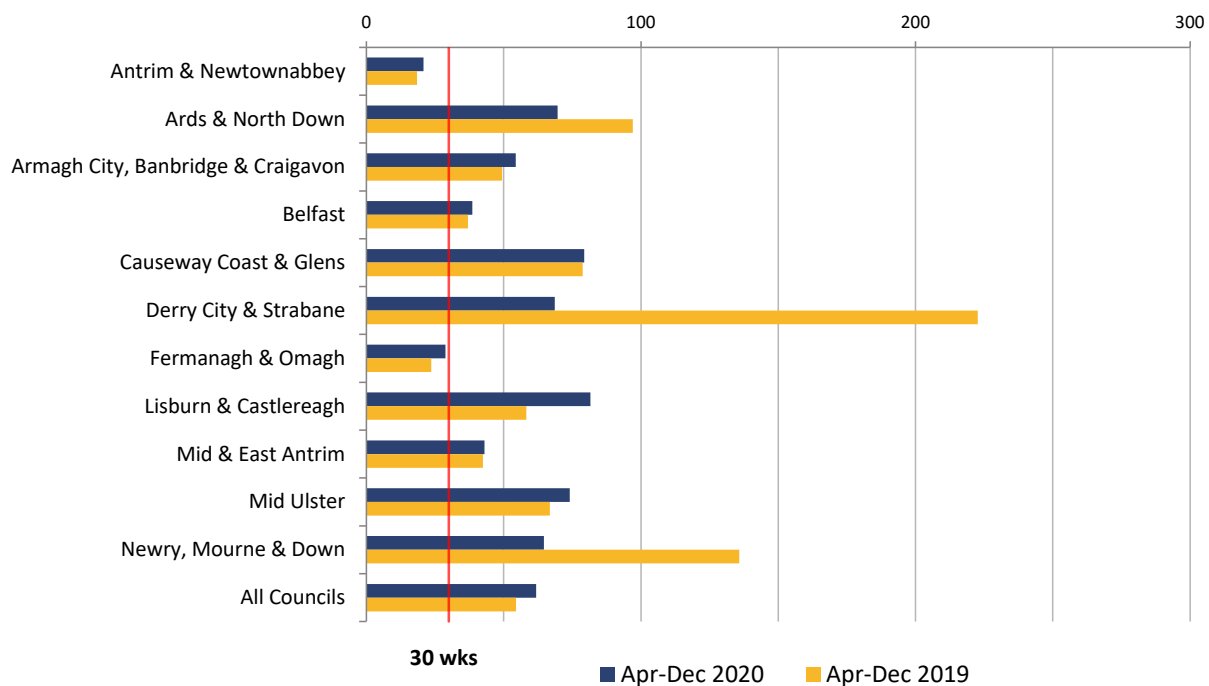
The **average processing time** for **major** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first **nine months of 2020/21** was **61.8 weeks** across all councils. This represents an increase of 7.3 weeks compared with the same period in 2019/20 (from 54.5 weeks) and is more than double the 30 week target, as councils' ability to process major planning applications was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during Q3 2020/21 was 47.0 weeks, an improvement on processing times reported for both the first and second quarters of the year (54.8 weeks and 77.8 weeks respectively).

[Figure 3.2](#) presents average processing times for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of the current and previous year for each council; the majority of councils did not process a large number of major applications during the time periods presented ([Refer to Table 3.2 for further information](#)).

With this in mind, two councils were within the 30 week target after the first nine months of 2020/21; Antrim and Newtownabbey (two applications processed in an average of 20.8 weeks) and Fermanagh and Omagh (one application processed in 28.8 weeks). The average processing time for Belfast, which processed more than twice as many major applications (27) as any other council during this period, was 38.6 weeks. [Refer to Table 3.2.](#)

Fig 3.2 Major development average processing times by council, Apr - Dec 2019 & 2020



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



# Chapter 4: Local development planning applications

## Chapter 4: Local development planning applications

**Local Development** planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications and are largely determined by the councils. The number of **local** planning applications **received** in NI during Q3 2020/21 was **3,574**; an increase of over one-tenth (10.4%) on the previous quarter (3,237) and over one-fifth (21.3%) on the same period a year earlier (2,947). This also represents the highest number of local applications received in any quarter since the transfer of planning powers ([Figure 4.1](#)).

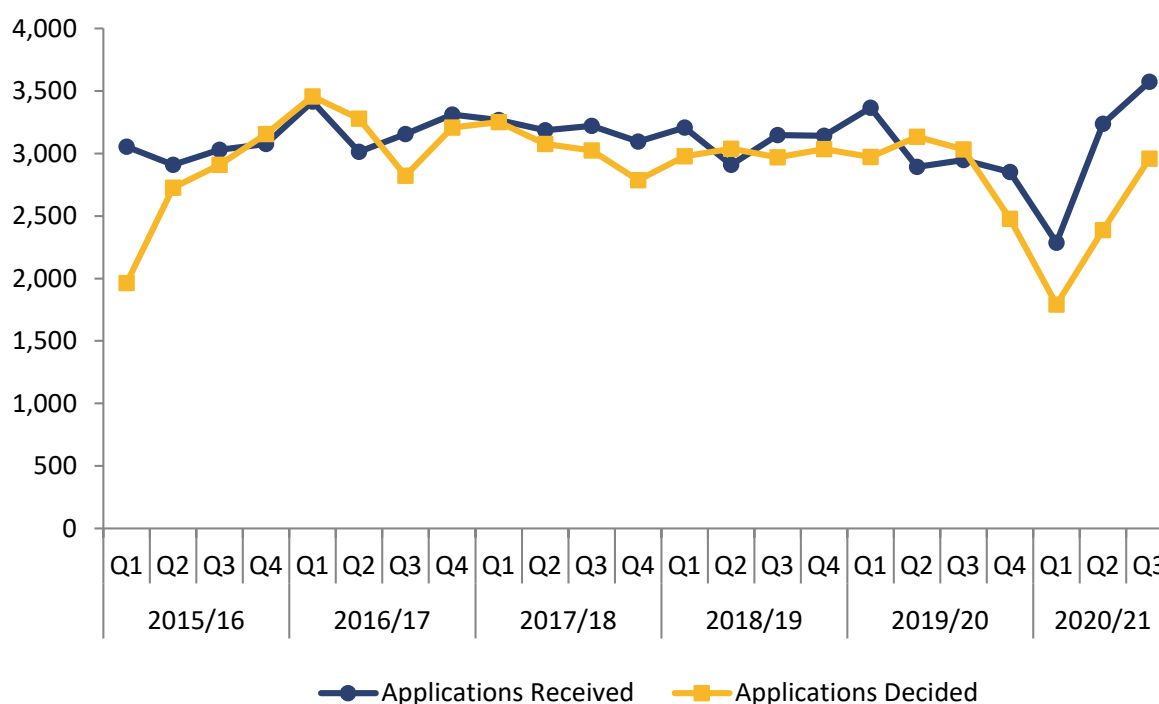
Across councils the number of local applications received during the Q3 2020/21 ranged from 466 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 193 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

All councils reported an increase in the number of local applications received in Q3 2020/21 compared with the previous quarter, with the increase greatest in Lisburn and Castlereagh, where the number received was up by one-third (33.3%).

Over the year, 10 councils reported an increase in the number of local applications received, with the largest increase evident in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (38.5%). In Antrim and Newtownabbey, 193 local applications were received in the third quarter of 2020/21; a small decrease of 1.5% from the same period a year earlier (196).

The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q3 2020/21 was **2,959**; up almost one-quarter (24.0%) on Q2 2020/21 (2,386), but down by 2.4% compared with the same period a year earlier (3,031) ([Figure 4.1](#)).

Fig 4.1 Local development applications, quarterly, Apr 2015 – Dec 2020



In Q1 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 local applications received has generally exceeded the number decided. For each of the first three quarters of 2020/21 the gap between the numbers received and decided was wider than any quarter since Q1 2015/16 ([Figure 4.1](#)).

During the third quarter of 2020/21 the number of local planning decisions issued across councils ranged from 419 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 153 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Ten of the 11 councils reported an increase in the number of local applications decided in Q3 2020/21 compared with the previous quarter, with the increase greatest in Causeway Coast and Glens (69.9%). The number of decisions issued on local applications decreased by almost one-quarter (-24.6%) over this period in Derry City and Strabane.

Over the year seven councils reported a decrease in the number of local applications decided, with the decrease greatest, in percentage terms, in Derry City and Strabane (-22.2%). Four councils reported an increase in the number of local decisions issued in Q3 2020/21 compared with the same period a year earlier, with the increase greatest in Fermanagh and Omagh (up 32.9%).

In Q3 2020/21, **146** local applications were **withdrawn**; an increase of two-fifths (40.4%) on the previous quarter (104) and 16.8% compared with the same period a year earlier (125).

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for **local** applications was **95.2%** in Q3 2020/21; a decrease from the rate reported for the previous quarter (95.9%) but up from the rate reported for the same period a year earlier (94.3%).

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

### Local planning applications statutory target



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

The **average processing time** for **local** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2020/21 was **17.8 weeks** across all councils, exceeding the statutory target of 15 weeks. This represents an increase of 3.8 weeks compared with the same period last year (14.0 weeks), as councils' ability to process applications was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the most recent quarter (17.0 weeks) was, however, an improvement on figures reported for both the first and second quarters of the year (17.4 weeks and 19.0 weeks respectively); providing some evidence that the impact on councils' ability to process local applications was lessened during the third quarter of 2020/21.



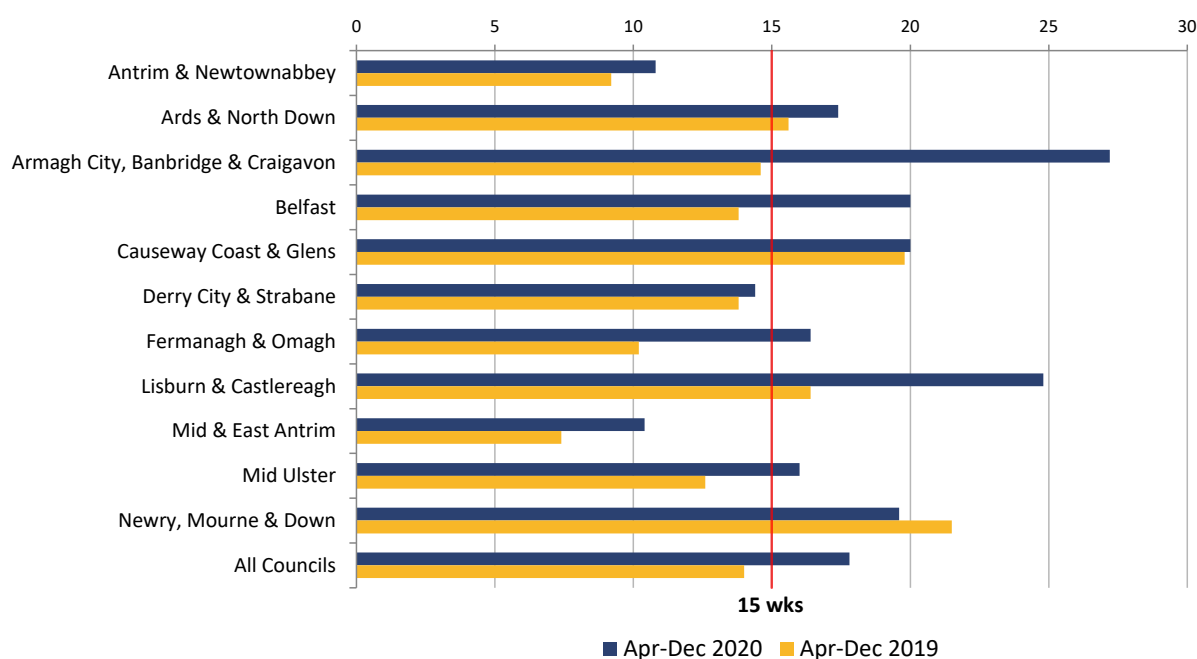
Processing performance should also be viewed in the context of the number of applications processed. Councils processed considerably more local applications in the third quarter (3,100) compared with the first (up by two-thirds; 66.7%; from 1,860) and second (up by almost one-quarter; 24.5%; from 2,490) quarters of the current year.

Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first three quarters of 2020/21: Mid and East Antrim (10.4 weeks); Antrim and Newtownabbey (10.8 weeks); and Derry City and Strabane (14.4 weeks).

Newry Mourne and Down was the only council where the average processing time for local applications decreased during April to December 2020, compared with the same period a year earlier (down 1.9 weeks, from 21.5 to 19.6). Over the same period, average processing times for local applications increased in the remaining 10 councils, with the increase greatest in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (up 12.6 weeks, from 14.6 to 27.2). ([Figure 4.2](#)).

[Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local development average processing times by council, Apr - Dec 2019 & 2020



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](#).



# Chapter 5: Development type

## Chapter 5: Development type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During Q3 2020/21, **residential** applications accounted for just **over two-thirds (67.4%)** of all planning applications received in NI; an increase from the proportion reported for Q3 2019/20 (61.6%).

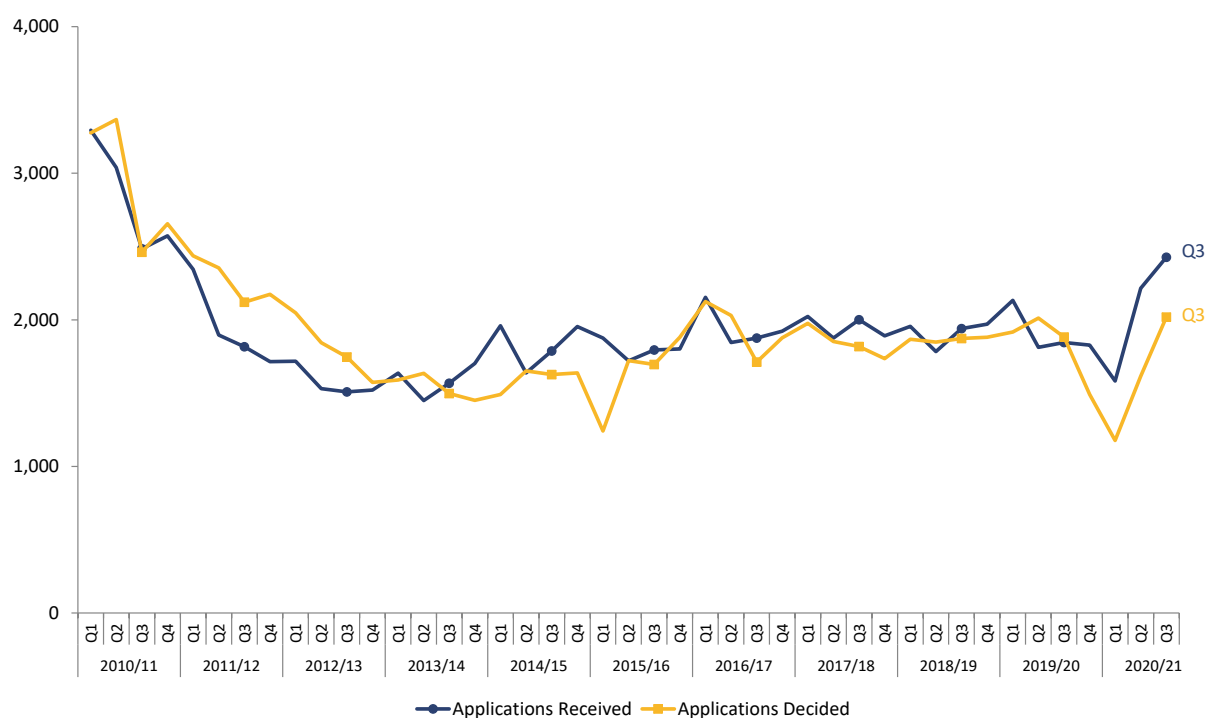
Residential applications accounted for the majority of applications received in each council during the third quarter of 2020/21; ranging from just under three-quarters (73.4%) in Mid and East Antrim to just over one-half (53.6%) in Belfast.

The overall number of planning applications received during Q3 2020/21 was 3,602; an increase of one-fifth (20.3%) on the same period a year earlier (2,994). While the number received increased for all development types over this period, with the exception of those categorised as 'other'<sup>3</sup>, the overall increase was largely driven by the increase in residential applications received (up 31.5%; from 1,845 to 2,427). [Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.](#)

### Residential applications

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in NI during Q3 2020/21 was **2,427**; an increase of 9.5% over the quarter (2,216) and 31.5% over the year (1,845). This represents the highest number of residential applications received in any quarter since Q4 2010/11 ([Figure 5.1](#)).

Fig 5.1 NI Residential applications, quarterly, Apr 2010 – Dec 2020



<sup>3</sup> See [Appendix 1 – Definitions](#) for a description of the types of applications included in this category

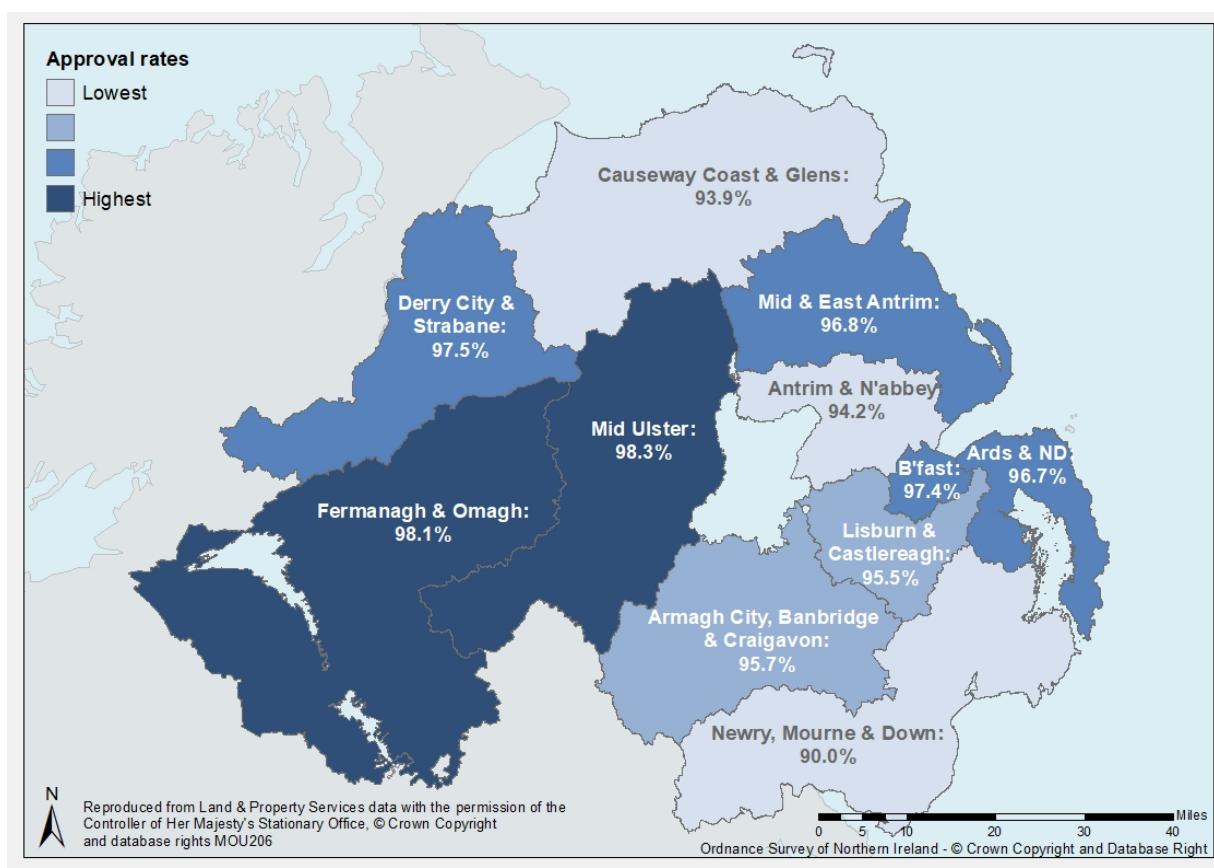
During Q3 2020/21, **2,019 residential** planning applications were **decided**; an increase of one-quarter (25.0%) from Q2 2020/21 (1,615) and up 7.3% from the same period a year earlier (1,882). This also represents the highest number of residential applications decided in any quarter since Q2 2016/17 ([Figure 5.1](#)).

[Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for **residential** planning applications was **95.6%** in Q3 2020/21; down from 96.3% in the previous quarter but up from 94.8% in Q3 2019/20.

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in the most recent quarter, ranging from 98.3% in Mid Ulster to 90.0% in Newry, Mourne and Down ([Figure 5.2](#)).

Fig 5.2 Residential approval rates by council, Q3 2020/21



Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in seven councils between Q3 2019/20 and Q3 2020/21. The largest increase over this period was in Fermanagh and Omagh (up from 93.0% to 98.1%). Approval rates declined in four councils over the year, with the largest decrease occurring in Derry City and Strabane (down from 100.0% to 97.5%).

During Q3 2020/21, 87 residential applications were withdrawn across NI; an increase over the quarter (67) and the year (73).

[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 2020/21 was 762; an increase from the previous quarter (3.7%; from 735) and the same period a year earlier (29.4%; from 589).

In rural areas, within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was an increase in the number of residential applications received in Q3 2020/21 (320) compared with the previous quarter (34.5%; from 238) and the same period a year earlier (36.2%; from 235).

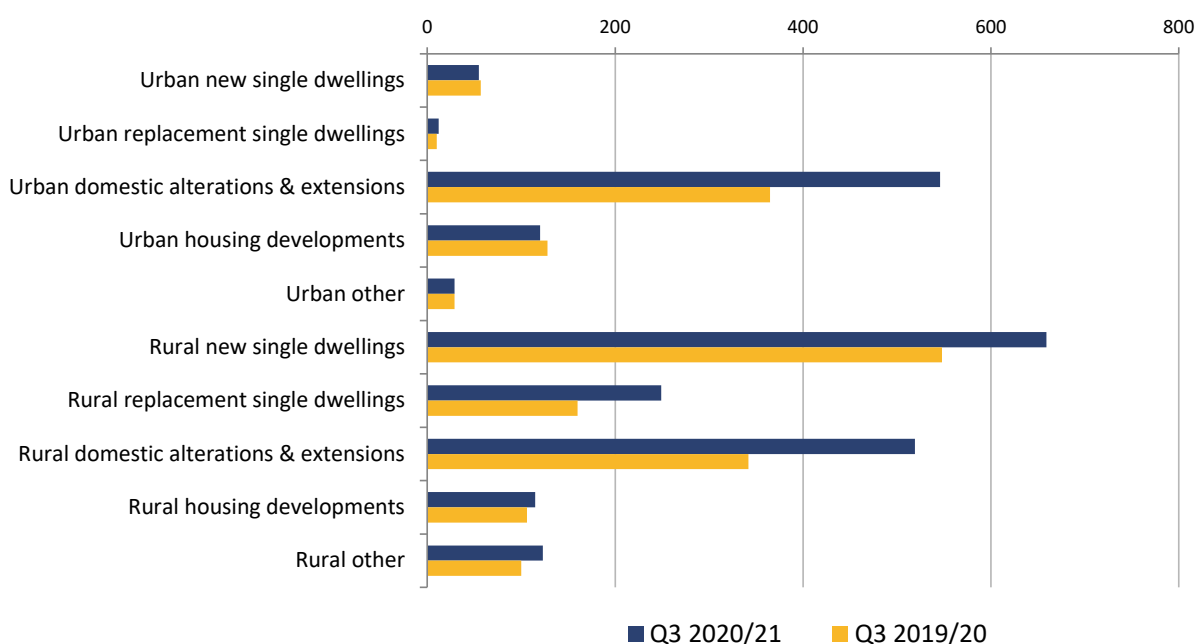
In the open countryside (outside population settlements), the number of residential applications received in Q3 2020/21 (1,345) also increased over the quarter (8.2%; from 1,243) and the year (31.7%; from 1,021).

## Residential applications – urban and rural

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

New single dwellings in rural areas (659) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (546) continue to be the most common types of residential application, together accounting for almost half (49.6%) of all residential applications received during the third quarter of 2020/21. The overall increase over the year in the number of residential applications received (31.5%) was driven in large part by increases in the number of applications received for: domestic alterations and extensions in both urban (up 49.6%; from 365 to 546) and rural (up 51.8%; from 342 to 519) areas; and new (up 20.3%; from 548 to 659) and replacement (up 55.6%; from 160 to 249) single dwellings in rural areas.

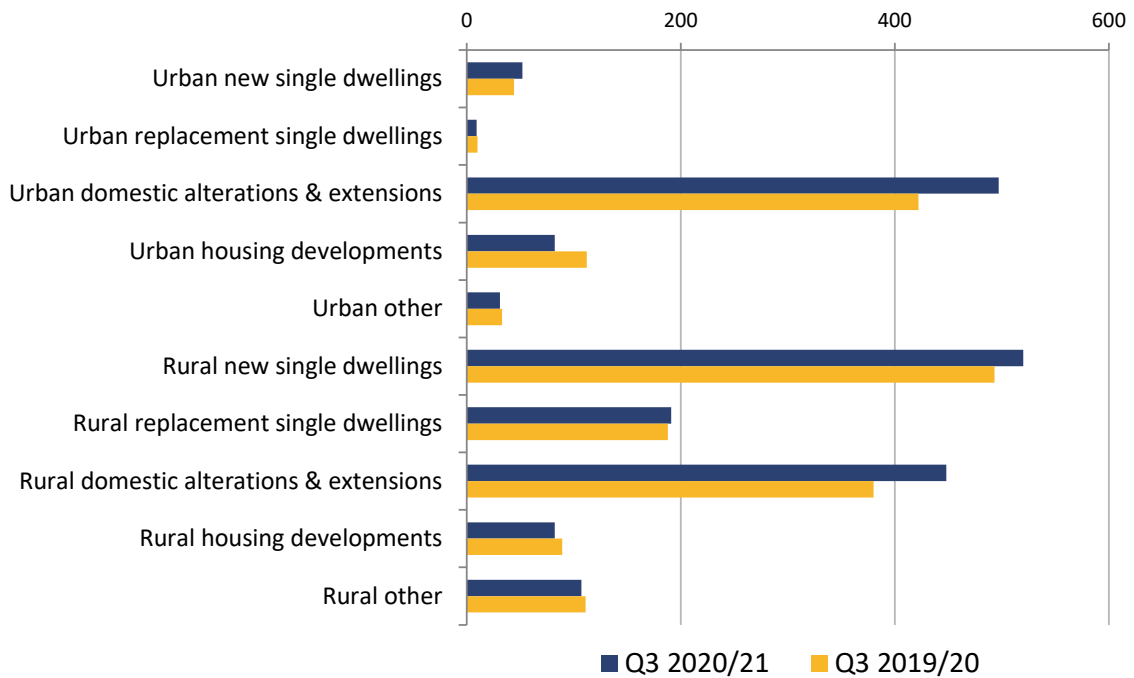
Fig 5.3 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, Q3 2019/20 & Q3 2020/21



The overall increase in the number of residential applications decided between Q3 2019/20 and Q3 2020/21 (7.3%), was driven in large part by increases in the number of decisions issued on domestic alterations and extensions in both urban (up 17.8%; from 422 to 497) and rural (up 17.9%; from 380 to 448) areas ([Figure 5.4](#)).

[Refer to Table 5.5.](#)

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q3 2019/20 & Q3 2020/21





# Chapter 6: Compliance and enforcement activity

## Chapter 6: Compliance and enforcement activity

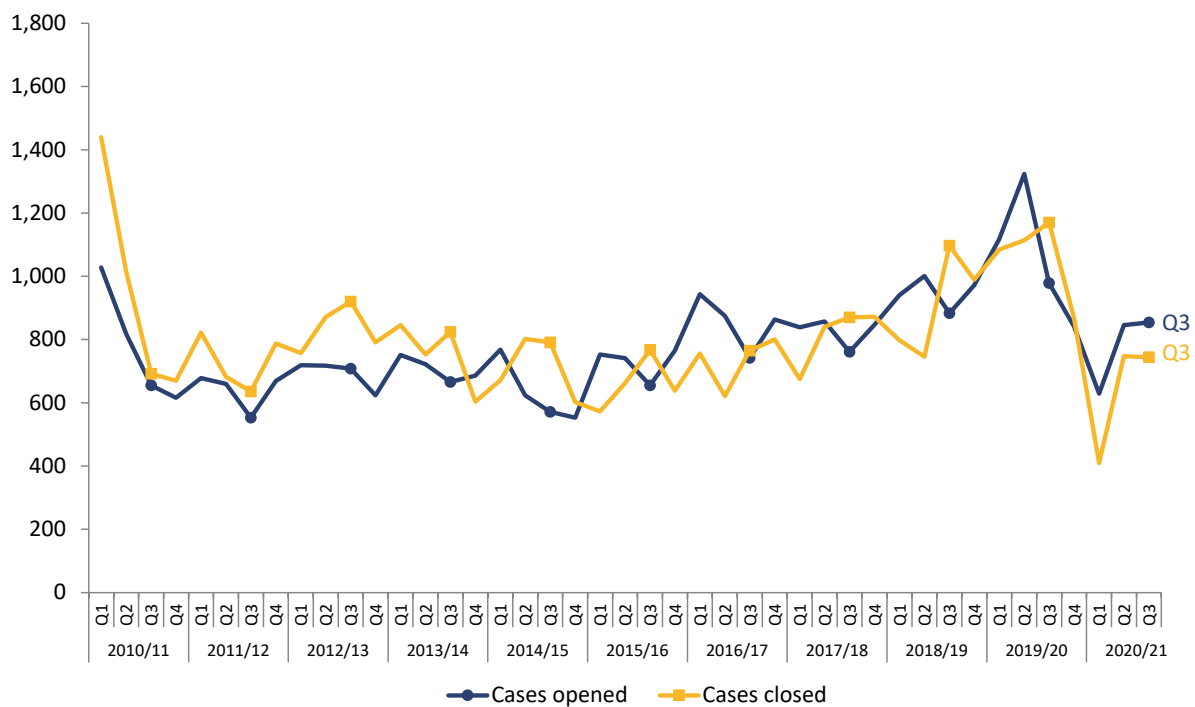
The number of **enforcement cases opened** in NI during the third quarter of 2020/21 was **854**; similar to the previous quarter (846) but down by 12.8% from the same period a year earlier (979) ([Figure 6.1](#)).

Across the councils, the number of enforcement cases opened in Q3 2020/21 ranged from 162 in Belfast to 35 in Derry City and Strabane. The number of enforcement cases opened decreased in nine councils between Q3 2019/20 and the same period a year later, with the decrease greatest, in percentage terms, in Derry City and Strabane (down 47.8%; from 67 to 35). Increases over the year were evident in Antrim and Newtownabbey (up 57.1%; from 98 to 154) and Mid Ulster (up 12.2%; from 49 to 55).

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q3 2020/21 was **744**; similar to the previous quarter (747) but down by over one-third (-36.4%) from the same period a year earlier (1,170) ([Figure 6.1](#)).

The number of cases closed in Q3 2020/21 varied across councils, ranging from 156 in Belfast to 11 in Antrim and Newtownabbey. Seven of the 11 councils reported decreases in the number of enforcement cases closed in Q3 2020/21 compared with the same period a year earlier. This decrease was greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey, where the number of cases closed fell by 92.4% over the year (from 145 to 11). Four councils reported increases over the year, with the largest, in percentage terms, evident in Mid and East Antrim (up 32.7%; from 52 to 69).

Fig 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly, Apr 2010 – Dec 2020





The most common reasons for enforcement cases closing in Q3 2020/21 were that no breach had actually occurred (39.5%) or that the case had been remedied or resolved (24.9%). Together these accounted for almost two-thirds (479; 64.4%) of the 744 cases closed during the quarter.

A total of 781 enforcement cases were concluded during the third quarter of 2020/21; an increase of 3.9% from the previous quarter (752) but down 30.8% from the same period a year earlier (1,128). Across councils, the number of cases concluded during Q3 2020/21 ranged from 169 in Belfast to 12 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

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

### Enforcement cases statutory target



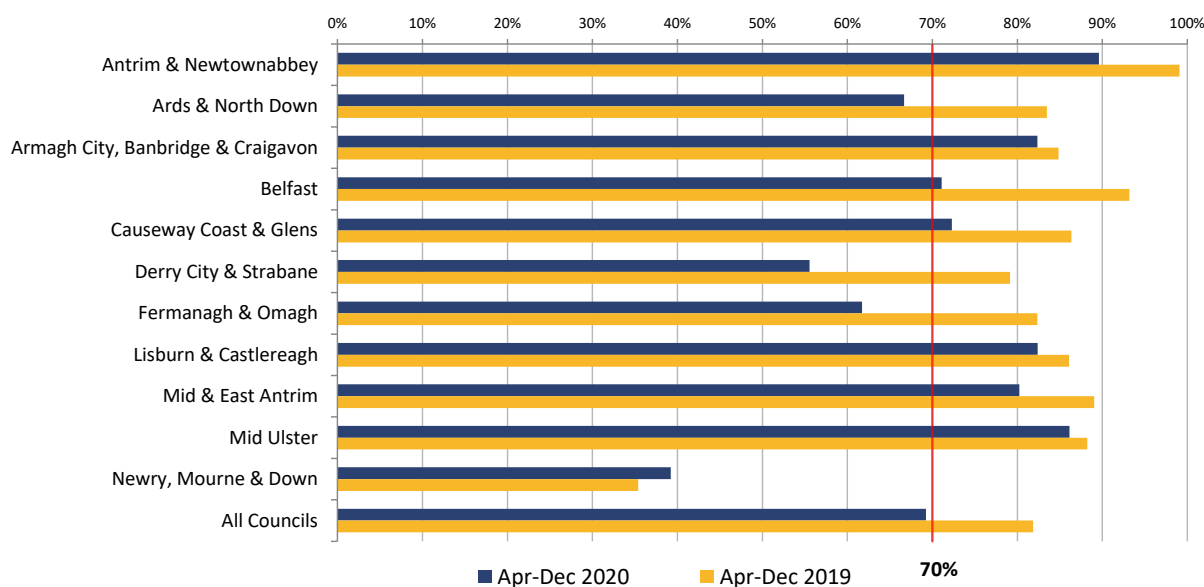
**It is a statutory target that 70% of all enforcement cases dealt with by councils are progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.**

Across all councils, **69.2%** enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first nine months of 2020/21. This falls just outside the statutory target and represents a considerable decrease from the rate reported for the first nine months of 2019/20 (81.9%), as councils' ability to progress cases to conclusion was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The impact on councils' ability to process cases to conclusion varied, with seven within the target after the first three quarters of 2020/21: Antrim and Newtownabbey (89.6% of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks); Mid Ulster (86.1%); Lisburn and Castlereagh (82.4%); Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (82.4%); Mid and East Antrim (80.2%); Causeway Coast and Glens (72.3%); and Belfast (71.1%) ([Figure 6.2](#)).

[Refer to Table 6.2.](#)

**Fig 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, Apr - Dec 2019 & 2020**



There were 11 prosecutions initiated across four councils during Q3 2020/21, with Causeway Coast and Glens initiating the most (five).

During the third quarter of 2020/21, there nine convictions across NI. Five councils recorded convictions during this period, with Mid Ulster recording the most (three).

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

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of December 2020 was **4,042**; an increase over the quarter (2.8%; from 3,932) and the year (12.4%; 3,596), and the highest end-of-quarter total since live enforcement cases were first recorded in Q3 2012/13. This suggests that the coronavirus pandemic and resulting restrictions have had a greater impact on the ability of planning authorities to close enforcement cases than open cases.

The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **1,116** at the end of December 2020, accounting for 27.6% of all live cases; the same as the proportion reported for the end of December 2019 (27.6%).

[Refer to Table 6.4.](#)

Across councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest number of live cases at the end of December 2020 (797), with just over half (51.4%) of these in the system for over two years; the highest proportion across all councils. The number of live enforcement cases for Newry, Mourne and Down did, however, decrease considerably between the end of December 2019 and the same point a year later (down 12.4%; from 910 to 797).

Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of live cases (82) at the end of December 2020, with 9.8% of these in the system for over two years.

[Refer to Table 6.5.](#)

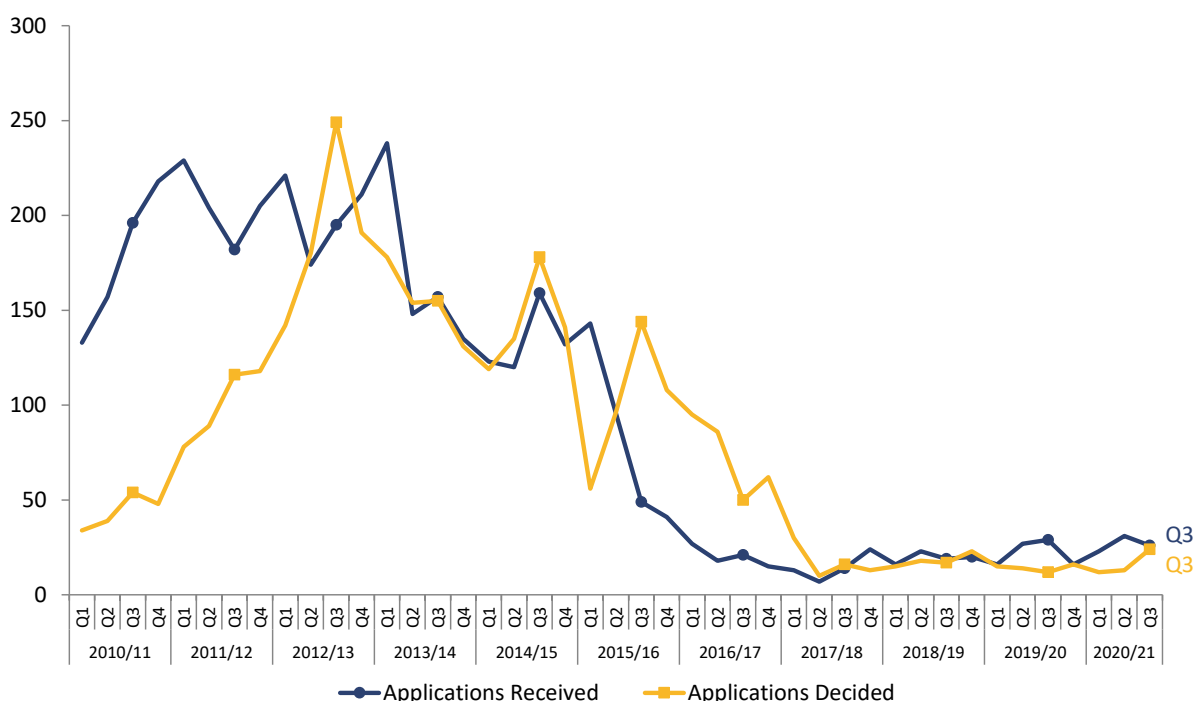


# Chapter 7: Renewable energy activity

## Chapter 7: Renewable energy (RE) activity

**Twenty-six renewable energy applications were received** in Q3 2020/21; a decrease of three applications compared with the same period the previous year (29). 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 **86.7%** decrease from 196 applications in Q3 2010/11 to 26 applications in Q3 2020/21) may be partly due to a reduction in government funding available, as well as a lack of capacity on the power grid to allow for new connections ([Figure 7.1](#)).

Fig 7.1 Renewable Energy applications, quarterly, Apr 2010 – Dec 2020



The number of renewable energy applications **decided** during Q3 2020/21 was **24**; double the total reported for the same period a year earlier (12) but a **90.4%** decrease from the series’ third quarter peak of 249 applications decided in 2012/13 ([Figure 7.1](#)). **Three** renewable energy applications were **withdrawn** during Q3 2020/21. [Refer to Table 7.1.](#)

The average processing time for renewable energy applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the third quarter of 2020/21 was 63.2 weeks across NI; more than double the figure reported for the same period a year earlier (30.2 weeks).

Single wind turbines continue to be the most common renewable energy application, accounting for 23 out of 26 applications received during Q3 2020/21. In addition, 19 of the 24 renewable energy decisions issued during the quarter were for single wind turbines. [Refer to Table 7.2.](#)

Figure 7.2 shows the distribution of renewable energy applications received across the different planning authorities, with Ards and North Down (eight) receiving the most in Q3 2020/21.

Fig 7.2 Renewable Energy applications received by authority, Q3 2019/20 & Q3 2020/21

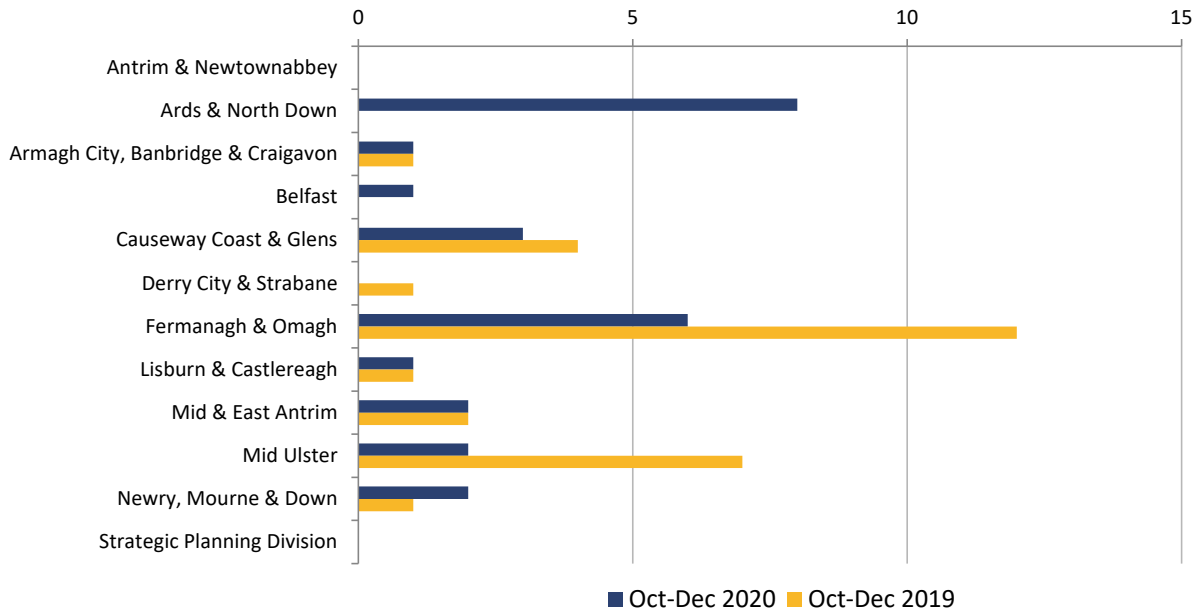
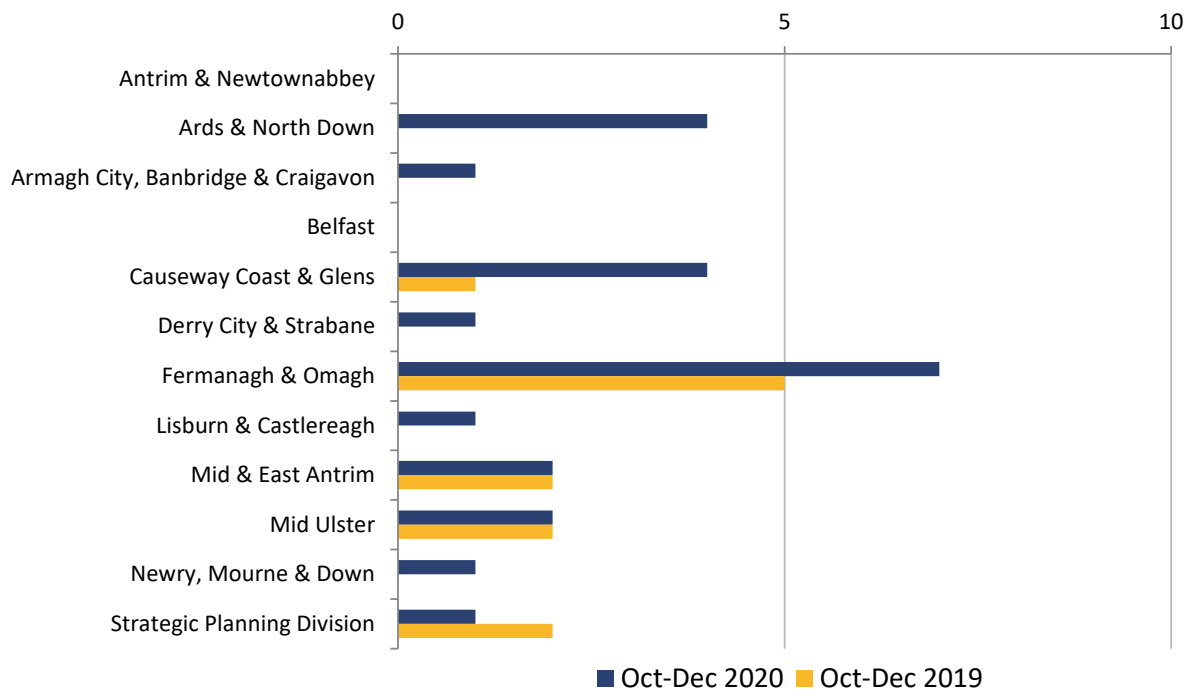


Figure 7.3 shows the distribution of decisions issued on renewable energy applications across the different planning authorities, with Fermanagh and Omagh (seven) issuing the most during the third quarter of 2020/21.

Fig 7.3 Renewable Energy applications decided by authority, Q3 2019/20 & Q3 2020/21

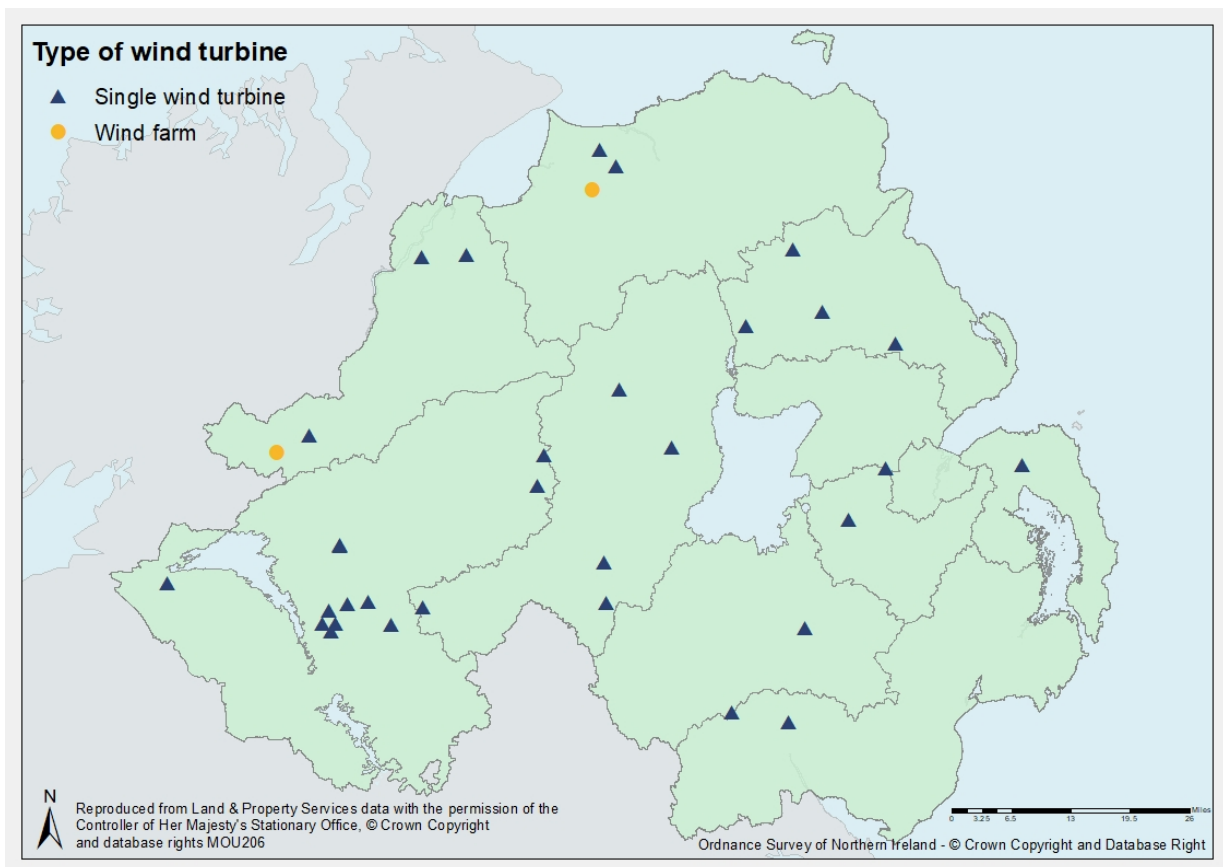


At the end of December 2020, there were **140 live renewable energy applications** in the planning system across NI; almost four-fifths (79.3%; 111 of 140) were for single wind turbines. Of these 140 live applications, 37.1% were in the planning system for over a year; a decrease from the proportion reported for the same point in 2019 (41.0%).

The **NI approval rate** for renewable energy applications was **79.2%** in Q3 2020/21, with 19 out of the 24 decisions issued during this period being approvals.

[Figure 7.4](#) displays the locations of wind energy applications approved during the first nine months of 2020/21. A total of 32 single wind turbines and two wind farms were approved during this period. Please note, some approved wind energy applications are in close proximity to each other and may not be individually identifiable on the map.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Apr – Dec 2020



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

## User Guidance

### Notes on data source and quality

The records of all planning applications from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020 were transferred in January 2021 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Northern Ireland Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) which involved quality checks and inspection of the coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils and the Department were provided with their own headline planning statistics as part of the quality assurance process. On completion of ASRB and planning authority validation, a final extract was taken in February 2021. Quarterly data for 2020/21 are regarded as provisional and will retain this status until the annual report for 2020/21 is published in July 2021.

### Quality assurance of administrative data sources

In 2015 the UK Statistics Authority published a regulatory standard for the quality assurance of administrative data (QAAD). This standard is supported with an [Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit](#) which provides useful guidance to assure the quality of administrative data used in the production of statistics. ASRB have carried out a QAAD assessment on the Northern Ireland Planning Portal application – the administrative data source that is used to produce the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics. [This report](#) will be reviewed and updated as necessary on a biannual basis, with the most recent update published in September 2020.

### Background quality report

In order to provide users with further information on how the statistics in the NI Planning Statistics report have been compiled and detail on the quality of the data used, a [background quality report has been published](#). This report will be reviewed and updated as necessary on a biannual basis, with the most recent update published in September 2020.

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

A new classification hierarchy of development for planning applications came into effect on 1 April 2014, on an administrative basis, with the introduction of the following new categories – regionally significant, major and local development. The hierarchy was subsequently placed on a statutory basis in line with the transfer of planning functions to the new district councils on 1 April 2015. It should be noted that there are some differences between the initial administrative hierarchy classifications in place from 1 April 2014 and the final classifications set out in the [Planning \(Development Management\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2015 \(S.R.2015 No.71\)](#). Data and analysis based on this new hierarchy is available from 1 April 2015.

*Regionally significant developments (RSD)* are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or involve a substantial departure from a local development plan. Applications for these development proposals will be submitted to and determined by the Department. However, the thresholds for RSD may mean that applications which may have previously been dealt with by the Department will now be classified as major development and thus determined by the relevant council. Like major applications, RSD proposals will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community. Note that from 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. In October 2020 this was extended to 31 March 2021.

*Major developments* have important economic, social and environmental implications. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community. Note that from 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. In October 2020 this was extended to 31 March 2021.

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

## Departmental activity

### [Refers to Chapter 2 of report](#)

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

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

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

It should be noted that in 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 in the NI Planning Statistics publication changed.

The previous target was:

*It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing 50% of Regionally Significant Planning Applications to a Ministerial Recommendation within 30 weeks, subject to pre-application discussions having taken place and meeting the requirements of relevant Environmental Legislation.*

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

*It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing Regionally Significant Planning Applications from date valid to a Ministerial Recommendation or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks.*

## Enforcement activity

[Refers to Chapter 6 of report](#)

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

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

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

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

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

The value at 70% is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point at the 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 is considered to better represent the 'average' or 'typical' processing time.

## Geographical classification

The method of classifying the urban and rural marker has been updated to reflect the latest [NISRA guidance](#) using the 2015 Settlement limits. This is preferred to the previous method as it more accurately considers which of the eight settlement bands (A-H) fall into mainly urban or rural areas. The limitation of the previous method was that all settlement bands were classified as urban. Under the new method it is recognised that smaller settlements are more rural than urban in character and should be distinguished as such. Presently the mid-point of the application polygon is used to plot the location and subsequently determine the urban/rural banding.

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

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

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

If users want to compare this information with information published before 2015/16 the 'housing developments' and 'other' residential applications should be excluded first; the next step to obtain a comparative figure would be to add 'urban settlements' and 'rural settlements' together.

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

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

## Appeals

All applicants of a planning application have the right to appeal a decision or the conditions attached to a decision. The statistics reflected in this publication only reflect the original decision and not any subsequent decision on appeal.

## Note on exclusions

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

### Discharge of Conditions (DCs)

It will be necessary to seek to discharge a condition where planning approval has been granted and a condition has been attached to the decision which requires the further consent, agreement or approval of the council (or the Department).

### Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs), either proposed or existing, have not been included in the main NI Planning Statistics bulletin since 2012/13. A council will issue a CLUD if it is satisfied that a particular development is lawful within the provisions of planning legislation. Examples include proposed extensions, which fall within the provisions of the [Planning \(General Permitted Development\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#) for permitted development and do not require planning permission, or uses that have become lawful due to the length of time they have been in existence.

### Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs) are not provided for in planning legislation and councils may adopt different approaches in relation to these, as may the Department.

### Proposal of Application Notices (PANs)

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs) are provided for under Section 27 of the 2011 Act, but they are not planning applications. They are essentially advance notices of major/RSD planning applications and detail how a developer proposes to engage with the community. A major/RSD development planning application cannot be submitted without a PAN having been issued.

## Non Material Changes (NMCs)

Applications for a Non Material Change (NMCs) to an existing planning permission are provided for under the 2011 Act, but they are not planning applications. There is no requirement to advertise or consult on NMCs.

## Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

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

## Uses of the data

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

## User engagement

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

Alternatively users can email ASRB directly at: [ASRB@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:ASRB@nisra.gov.uk).

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

## Further information

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

### England

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

## Scotland

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

## Wales

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

## Republic of Ireland

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

## Northern Ireland

### Building Control (LPS Starts and completions)

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

### Housing Bulletin, Department for Communities (DfC)

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

## Cross-government working group on housing and planning

The Department for Infrastructure is part of a cross-government working group, working to improve the trustworthiness, quality and value of housing and planning statistics across the

UK. ASRB's involvement in this group ensures continuous engagement with producers of similar and related statistics across the UK, ensuring opportunity for collaboration and improvement of this publication through understanding the wider UK picture. More information can be found on the [Government Statistical Service website](#).

## OpenDataNI

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

## NINIS

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

## Planning readership list

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

## Pre-release access

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

# Appendix 1

## Definitions

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

### Agricultural

These include: agricultural buildings or structures for the storage of slurry and/or manure; agricultural glasshouses, stables and livery yards; and infilling of land for agricultural purposes.

### Commercial

These include: food supermarkets and superstores; non-food retailing; major retail developments exceeding 1000 sq. m; alterations, extensions and improvements to buildings used for retailing; retail warehouses; clubs; post offices; factory outlets; petrol stations; offices; purpose built office developments; restaurants; car parking; and motor vehicle display, hire, repair or sale.

### Government and civic

These include: police stations; coastguard stations; civic amenity sites; recycling centres; schools and colleges; hospitals; clinics; other medical establishments including surgeries and dental practices; and 'hard infrastructure' facilities such as roads, water mains, water treatment works, trunk sewers, waste water treatment works and natural gas pipelines. This also includes: recreational facilities, including indoor and outdoor sports facilities, and swimming pools; and renewable energy applications, including wind turbines, wind farms, solar panels, biomass burners, hydroelectric schemes etc. Note that this category also includes non-public sector applications related to the above topics.

### Industrial

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

### Mixed use

These include applications for mixed development, incorporating a number of development types such as residential, retailing, offices, community and leisure.

### Residential

These include: housing developments (incorporating a mixture of house types and apartments); purpose built apartment developments; sheltered housing schemes; single dwellings including dwellings on farms; holiday chalets; caravans and mobile homes;

alteration, extension or improvement of existing dwellings; residential homes or nursing homes; and hotels or motels.

### Change of use

These include applications for a change in the use of land or buildings, including changes to residential, retailing, offices, community or leisure uses.

### Other

All other types of applications not mentioned above are put into the 'Other' category but mainly comprise 'Works to Facilitate Persons Who Are Disabled', 'Advertisements', and 'Listed Buildings'.

**The application types referred to in [Excel Table 5.6](#) are defined below.**

### Outline permission

An application for outline planning permission can be used to ascertain whether a proposed development is acceptable in principle. This usually means that detailed drawings are not needed. However, the council or, as the case may be, the Department, may, in certain circumstances, require the submission of additional information or insist that an application for full planning permission be submitted.

### Full permission

An application for full planning permission requires the submission of all details of the proposal. This type of application would be appropriate, for example, if the erection of new buildings is proposed and / or if a change of use of land or buildings is proposed.

### Approval of reserved matters

If outline planning permission is granted, then a subsequent application and approval relating to the siting, design, external appearance, means of access and landscaping details, known as 'reserved matters', will be required before building work can commence. The reserved matters application must be consistent with the outline planning permission and take into account any conditions that have been attached to it. If the development proposal changes, then it may be necessary to submit a new planning application.

### Consent to display an advertisement

Advertisement consent is normally required to display an advertisement, particularly large signs and illuminated adverts.

### Listed building consent

Works that would affect the character of a listed building need listed building consent. This includes work to the internal or external fabric of the building, or any demolition. It should be noted that the requirement for listed building consent is in addition to any requirement for planning permission for works to a listed building.



### Conservation area consent

Works that would entail the full or partial demolition of a non-listed building in a conservation area need conservation area consent. It should be noted that the requirement for conservation area consent may be in addition to any requirement for planning permission.

### Hazardous substances consent

The Planning (Hazardous Substances) (No2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 are concerned with the storage and use of hazardous substances which could, in quantities at or above specified limits, present a risk. Hazardous substances consent ensures that hazardous substances can be kept or used in significant amounts only after the council or, as the case may be, the Department has had the opportunity to assess the degree of risk arising to persons in the surrounding area and to the environment.

### Reader information

This document may be made available in alternative formats, please contact us to discuss your requirements. Contact details are available on the cover page of this report.