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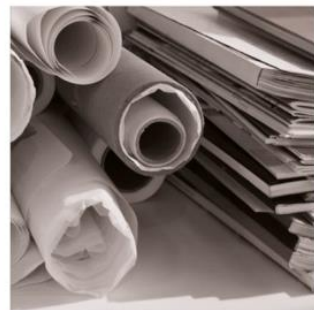
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Bonneagair

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NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

Third Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin

October to December 2021: 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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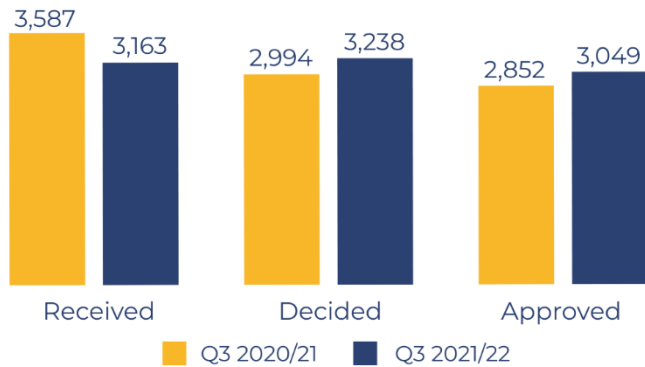
Key points

- **Planning activity and processing performance in 2020/21 and the first three quarters of 2021/22 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 3,163 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during the third quarter of 2021/22; a decrease of nearly five percent on the previous quarter and down by nearly twelve percent on the same period a year earlier. This comprised 3,132 local, 30 major and one regionally significant application.
- In the third quarter of 2021/22, 3,238 planning applications were decided upon; down by nearly one percent from the previous quarter but up by over eight percent from the same period a year earlier. Decisions were issued on 3,206 local and 32 major applications during the most recent quarter.
- The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2021/22 was 16.8 weeks across all councils. This exceeds the 15 week target and represents a decrease of 1.0 week from the same period a year earlier. Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first nine months of 2021/22.
- The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2021/22 was 55.9 weeks across all councils. This represents a decrease of 5.9 weeks compared with the same period a year earlier but is still considerably higher than the 30 week target.
- Across councils over 70% of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first nine months of 2021/22. This meets the statutory target of 70% and represents an increase from the rate reported for the same period in 2020/21 (69%). Individually, eight of the 11 councils were within target after the first nine months of 2021/22.

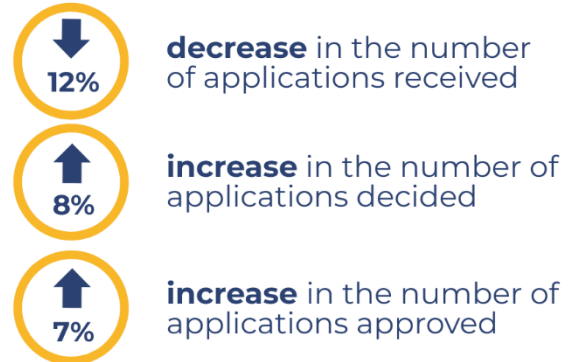
Planning activity and processing performance during 2020/21 and the first three quarters of 2021/22 were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. This should be borne in mind when interpreting these figures or making comparisons with other periods.

Overall planning applications

Applications received, decided & approved



Comparing Q3 2021/22 with Q3 2020/21:

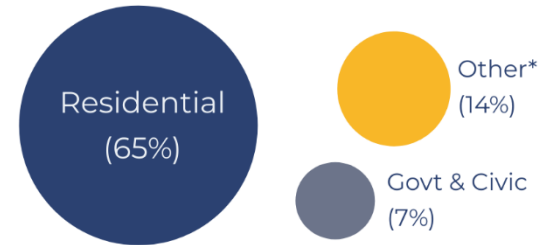


Applications received Q3 2021/22

A total of **3,163** planning applications were received during Q3 2021/22:



3 largest development types



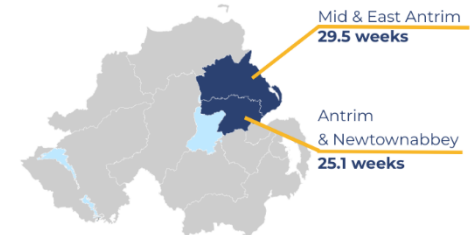
*Other includes work to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements & listed buildings

Planning statutory targets April - December 2020 and 2021

Average processing times (weeks) - major



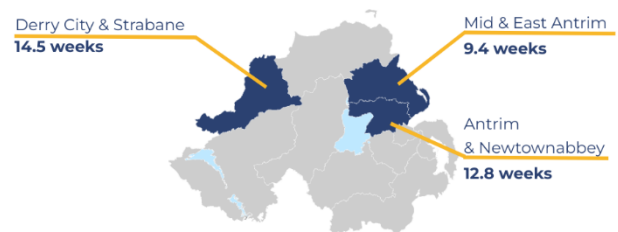
Councils within major target



Average processing times (weeks) - local



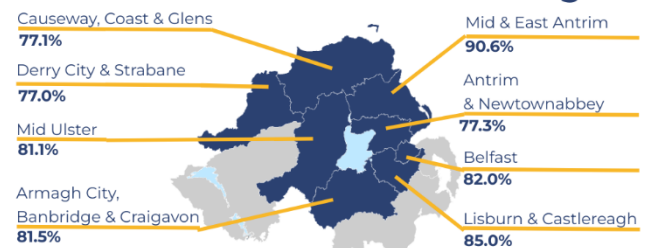
Councils within local target



% of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks



Councils within enforcement target



Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Third Quarter 2021/22 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 2021/22. 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 tables](#) report data for the third quarter of 2021/22, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous periods. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the last quarter and comparing the current quarter with the same period a year earlier. Please note that these quarterly figures for 2021/22 are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures, to be published in July 2022.

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 data 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 data 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 data 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 data 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 2021/22 is due to be published in July 2022. The next quarterly release is due in September 2022. This will contain provisional planning data up to 30 June 2022 and will commence the quarterly reporting cycle for 2022/23. 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 continue to work collaboratively on the configuration of a new Regional Planning IT System with an external provider. Configuration is due to be completed in April 2022 and it is anticipated that the new system will be phased into operation in summer 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 still too early to include any further information on potential impacts to NI Planning Statistics.

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

impacts to NI Planning Statistics but any relevant updates will be included within future publications.

Planning Monitoring Framework

The [Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework 2020/21](#) was published at the beginning of December 2021. The next edition of this report, with data for 2021/22, is planned for publication in winter 2022.

Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

This bulletin and the accompanying [data tables](#) present data for the period 1 October 2021 to 31 December 2021.

Restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic commenced on 12 March 2020 with the start of the delay phase, before lockdown was applied on 23 March 2020. Although lockdown was gradually eased from May 2020, varying levels of restrictions have continued to be in place up to December 2021.

Planning activity and processing performance has been impacted by these restrictions but in the last nine months the number of planning applications received and decided has exceeded activity levels recorded for the same period in any year since the transfer of planning powers.

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

Whilst the overall activity has been higher in the first three quarters of 2021/22 when compared to the same period in 2020/21, there has been a notable reduction during the last two quarters in the number of planning applications received and enforcement cases opened. Therefore caution should continue to be taken when interpreting 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. Whilst this may present some challenge, 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

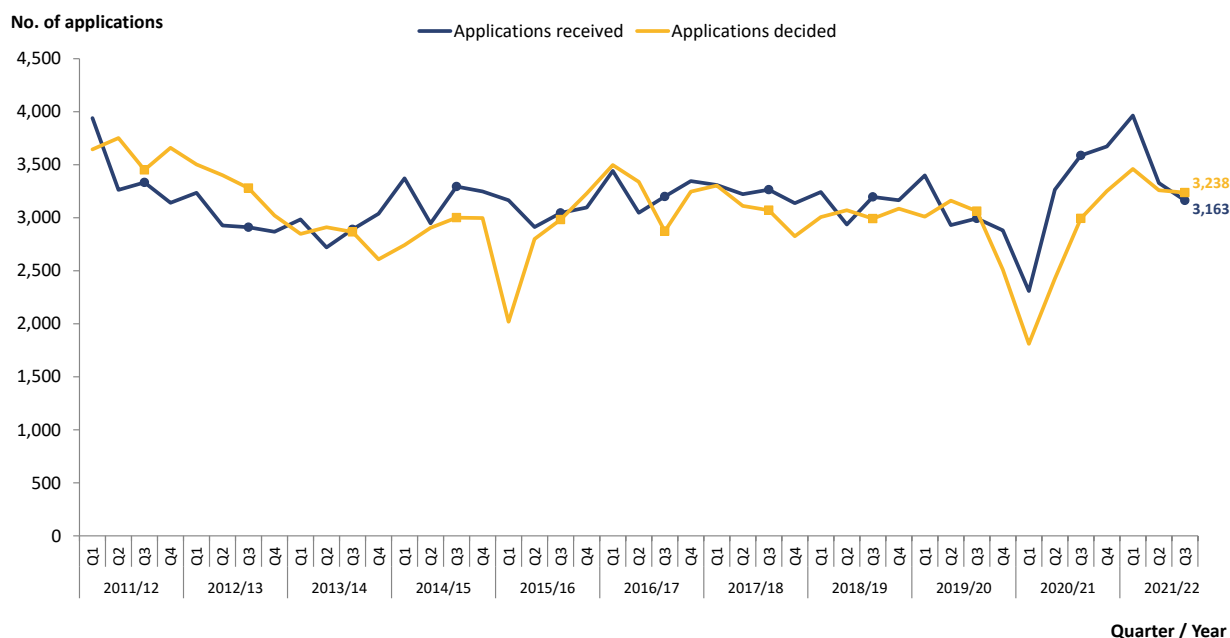
The volume of planning applications received in the third quarter of 2021/22 has decreased from the previous quarter and from the same period last year. For applications processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) the volume processed has decreased slightly from the previous quarter but remains higher than the levels that were recorded during the same period the previous year when the effects of the coronavirus and associated restrictions were most significant.

The pandemic continues to have an impact on planning activity and processing performance which is evident from the information presented in this report (for the first nine months of 2021/22) and the regular feedback received from planning authorities. **Caution should continue to 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 2021 (Q3) was 3,163; decreases of 4.9% on the previous quarter (3,327) and 11.8% on the same period a year earlier (3,587). ([Figure 1.1](#)). [Refer to Table 1.1](#).

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly, April 2011 to December 2021



During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of applications received was 2,309. This was the lowest number received in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. The following four quarters recorded consecutive increases peaking in Q1 2021/22. The number of planning applications received decreased in Q2 2021/22 with a further decrease recorded in Q3.

Just under three-quarters of the planning applications received in Q3 2021/22 were for full planning permission (74.7%); down over the quarter (75.7%) and same period a year earlier (76.1%).

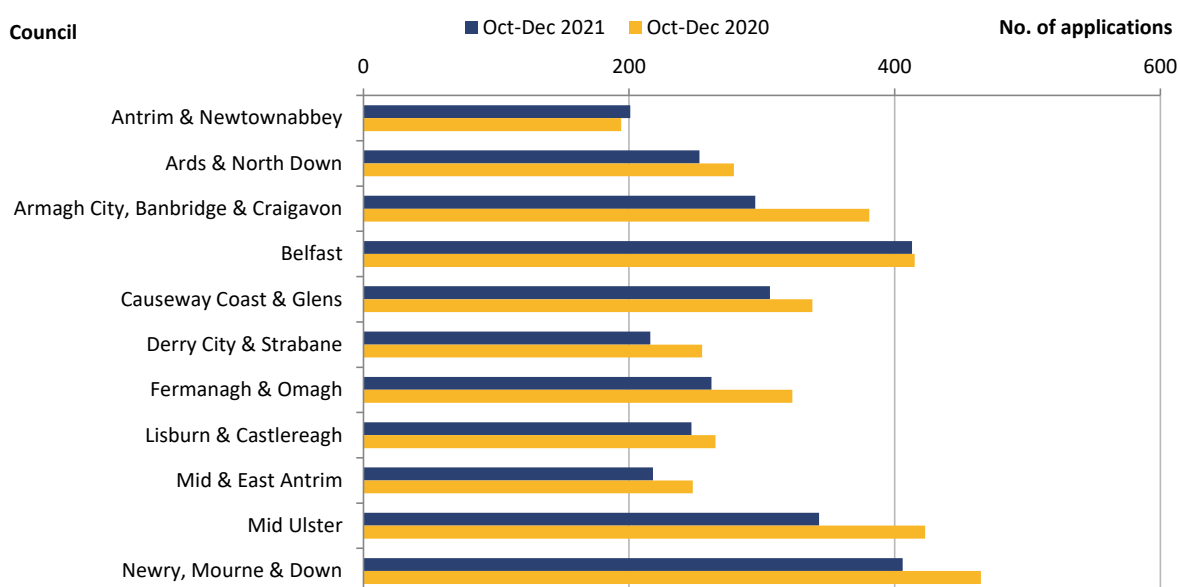
In Q3 2021/22, the number of planning applications received varied across councils, ranging from 413 in Belfast (accounting for 13.1% of all applications received across NI) to 201 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (6.4% of all applications received).

Eight councils reported a decrease in the number of planning applications received in Q3 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter, with the decrease greatest in Derry City and Strabane (-24.2%). Three councils reported an increase over the quarter with the increase greatest in Belfast (7.0%).

Comparing Q3 in 2021/22 with the same period in 2020/21, ten councils reported a decrease in the number of applications received, with the greatest decrease reported by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (-22.6%). Antrim and Newtownabbey were the only council to report an increase over the same period (3.6%) ([Figure 1.2](#)).

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

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, October to December 2020 & 2021



Applications decided

The number of planning **decisions issued** during Q3 2021/22 was **3,238**; down by 0.7% on Q2 2020/21 (3,260) but up by 8.1% when compared with the same period a year earlier (2,994) ([Figure 1.1](#)).

Over three quarters of planning decisions in Q3 2021/22 (76.9%) were for full planning permission; this was down over the quarter from 79.0% but similar to the same period a year earlier (77.0%).

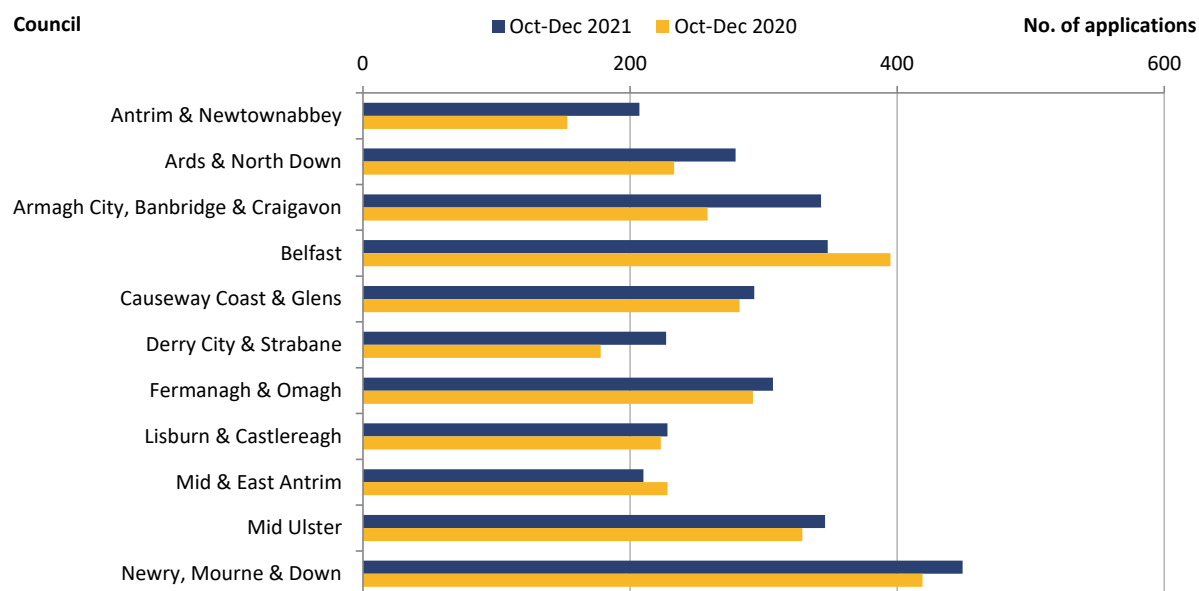
Across councils the number of decisions issued during Q3 2021/22 ranged from 449 in Newry, Mourne and Down (accounting for 13.9% of all decisions across NI) to 207 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (6.4% of all decisions).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of applications decided was 1,811. This was the lowest number decided in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. During the following four quarters, however, there were consecutive increases in the number of applications decided, with the 3,460 decided in Q1 2021/22 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q1 2016/17. The number of decisions issued declined during the latest two quarters with 3,238 decisions being issued in Q3 2021/22. [Refer to Table 1.1.](#)

Six of the 11 councils reported a decrease in the number of applications decided in Q3 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter, with the decrease greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-21.3%). The number of decisions issued increased over the quarter in five councils, with the largest increase reported in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (27.4%).

Comparing Q3 in 2021/22 with the same period in 2020/21, nine councils reported an increase in the number of applications decided, with the highest percentage increase recorded in Antrim and Newtownabbey (35.3%). Two councils reported a decrease over the same period with Belfast reporting the largest decline (-11.9%). ([Figure 1.3](#)).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, October to December 2020 & 2021



The number of applications received exceeded the number of decisions issued in four out of the 11 councils during Q3 2021/22.

In Q3 2021/22, **173** applications were **withdrawn**; a decrease of 16.9% on the previous quarter (148) but up by 17.7% when compared with the same period a year earlier (147).

Overall, the number of applications processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) in Q3 2021/22 was 3,411; similar to the previous quarter (3,408) but up by 8.6% when compared with the same period a year earlier (3,141).

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

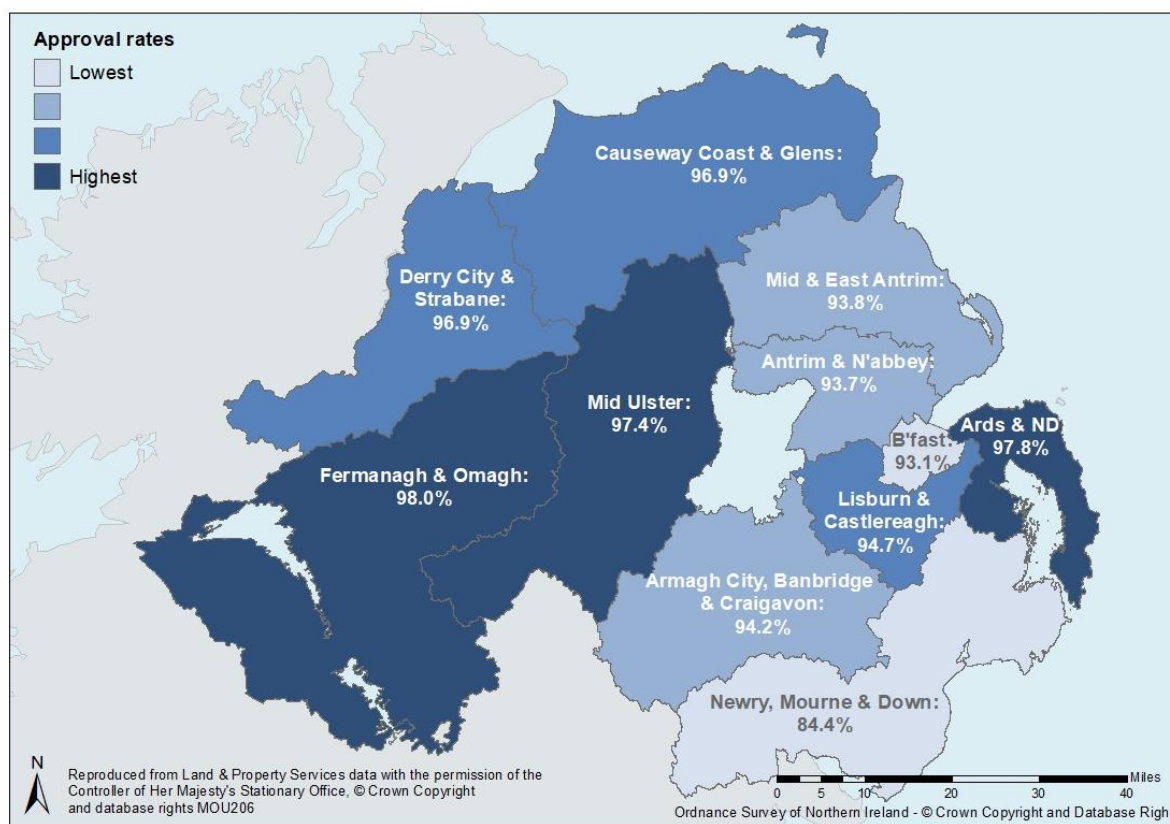
In addition to processing applications, planning authorities deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q3 2021/22 they processed to decision or withdrawal: 270 certificates of lawfulness; 248 discharge of conditions; 112 non-material changes; and 69 tree preservation orders. 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 **94.2%** in Q3 2021/22; a decrease from the rates reported for the previous quarter (95.5%) and for the same period a year earlier (95.3%). [Refer to Table 1.1.](#)

Approval rates varied across councils during Q3 2021/22, from 98.0% in Fermanagh and Omagh to 84.4% 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, October to December 2021



In Q3 2021/22 eight councils reported a decrease in approval rate when compared with the same period a year earlier (Q3 2020/21), with the largest decrease occurring in Mid and East

Antrim (down from 97.4% to 93.8%). Approval rates increased over this period in the remaining three councils, with Causeway Coast and Glens (up from 95.0% to 96.9%) reporting the largest decrease. [Refer to Table 1.2.](#)

Live applications

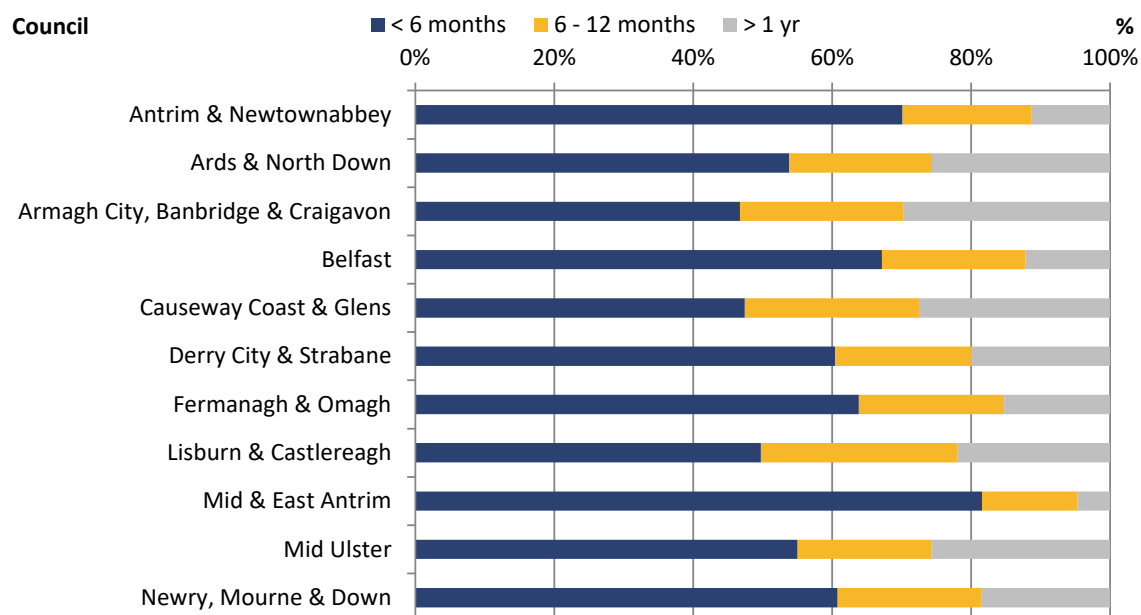
There were 8,200 live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of December 2021; an increase of 2.8% from 7,978 at the end of December 2020, but a decrease of 2.9% from 8,448 at the end of the previous quarter.

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

Over one-fifth of all live applications in the planning system at the end of December 2021 were over one year old (21.6%); a slight increase from the proportion reported for the end of December 2020 (19.9%). [Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of December 2021 varied across councils, ranging from 29.8% in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon to 4.7% in Mid and East Antrim ([Figure 1.5](#)).

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council & time in the planning system at end of December 2021



Comparing the end of December 2021 with the same point a year earlier, the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year increased across six councils, with the increase greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey (up from 5.1% to 11.3%) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (up from 23.7% to 29.8%). The remaining five councils reported a decrease in the proportion of live cases over the year with the decrease greatest in Mid and East Antrim (down from 9.9% to 4.7%). [Refer to Table 1.4.](#)



Chapter 2: Departmental activity

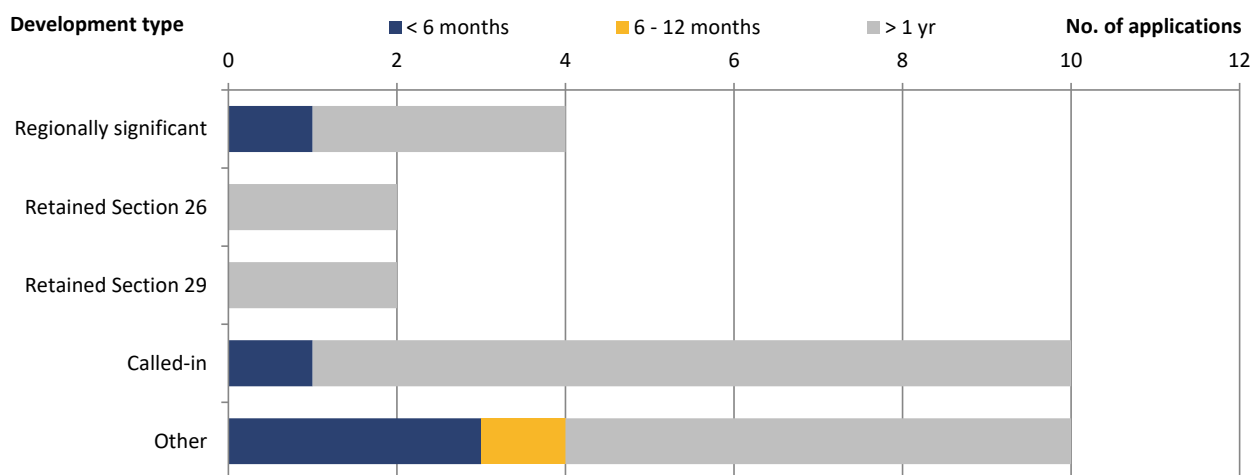
Chapter 2: Departmental activity

Departmental planning activity

During Q3 2021/22 there were four applications received by the Department. There was one application received during the previous quarter and three during the same period a year earlier. The Department reached a **decision** on one ‘Other’ application during the third quarter of 2021/22, with the application being approved. This compares to two decisions during the previous quarter and four decisions during the same period a year earlier, with five out of these six decisions approvals. There was no applications **withdrawn** during Q3 2021/22.

At the end of December 2021 there were 28 live Departmental applications: **four** ongoing RSD applications; **four retained** applications; **10 called-in** applications; and **10 other** applications. The vast majority of these applications (22 out of 28) were in the planning system for over a year at the end of December 2021 ([Figure 2.1](#)). [Refer to Tables 2.1, 2.2.](#)

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type & time in system at end of December 2021



Departmental target

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



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

Of the four RSD applications live in the planning system at the end of December 2021, one had already been progressed to Ministerial recommendation prior to 2021/22. Another was progressed to Ministerial recommendation in Q2 2021/22 but the 30 week period for recommendation / withdrawal had been exceeded. Of the remaining two awaiting Ministerial recommendation, the 30 week period has been exceeded for one, and the other which was received during Q3 2021/22 will be progressed in future months.

Progress on these applications, and any new RSD applications received, will continue to be assessed in future reports.



Chapter 3: Major development planning applications

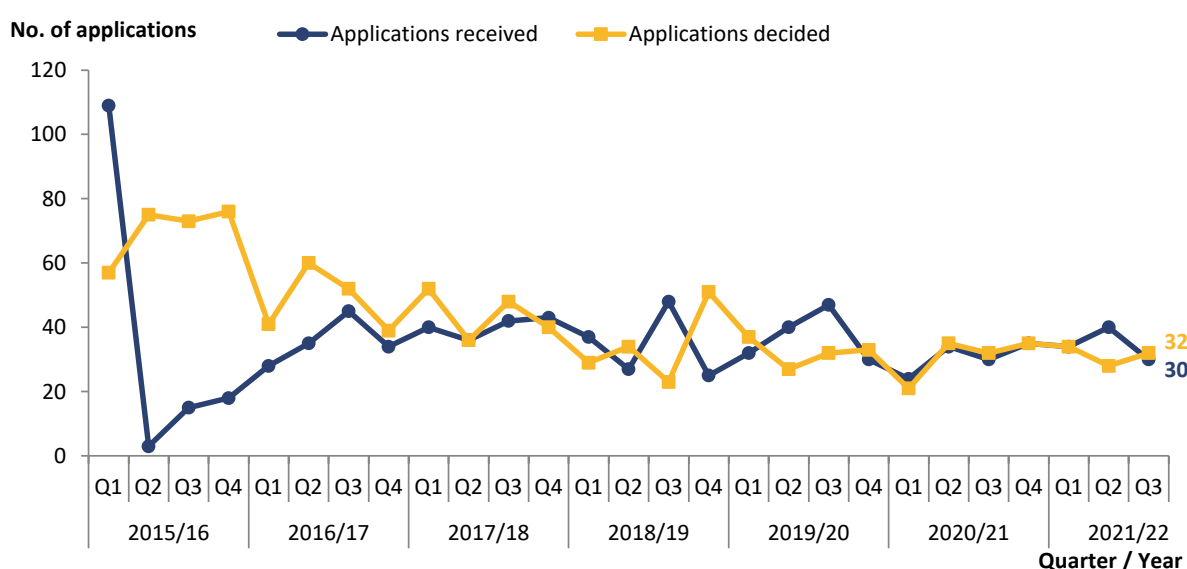
Chapter 3: Major development planning applications

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.

Major applications received

A total of **30 major** planning applications were **received** in NI during Q3 2021/22; down from the previous quarter (40) but the same as Q3 2020/21 (30) ([Figure 3.1](#)).

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to December 2021



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

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 Q3 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 five 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 has subsequently been extended until 31 March 2022¹.

¹ For more information, see the [Departmental website](#).

Eight councils received major planning applications during the third quarter of 2021/22, with Belfast receiving the most (nine).

Major applications decided

During Q3 2021/22, **32 major** planning applications were **decided**; up from 28 decided in the previous quarter and the same as the number decided during the third quarter of 2020/21 (32) ([Figure 3.1](#)). There was one major applications **withdrawn** during the Q3 2021/22.

Ten councils issued decisions on major applications during Q3 2021/22, with Belfast issuing the most (ten).

Thirty-one of the 32 major applications decided upon in NI during Q3 2021/22 were approved, meaning the overall approval rate was 96.9%. Of the ten councils that issued decisions on major applications during the quarter; in nine of these, 100% of the major applications decided upon were approved. [Refer to Tables 3.1, 3.2.](#)

Major planning applications statutory target

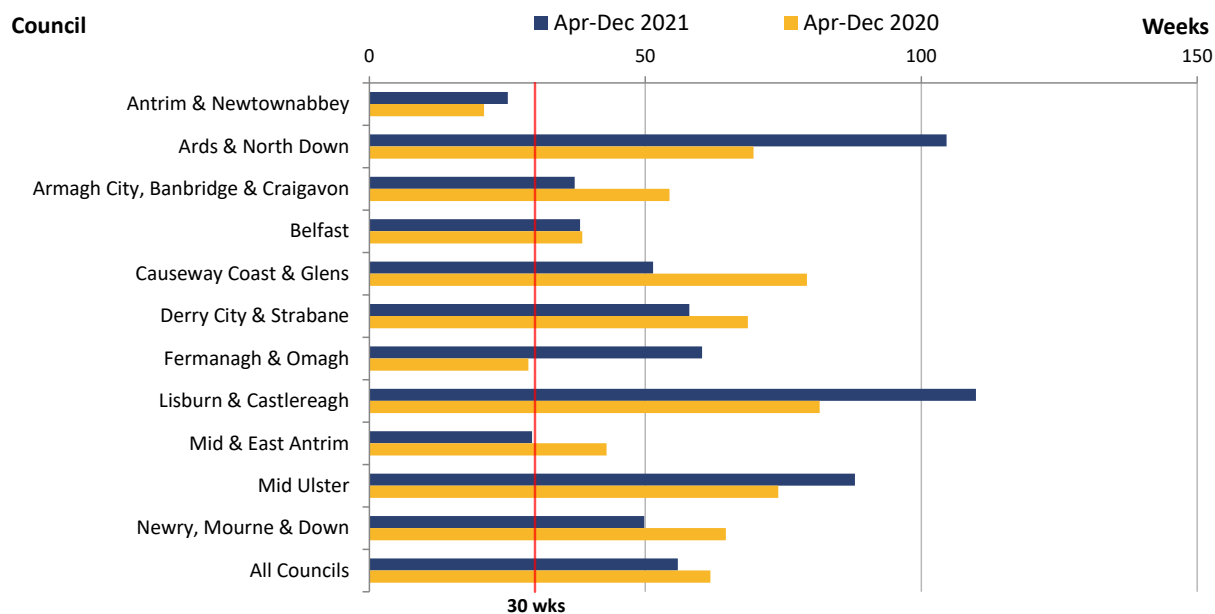


It is a statutory target for each council that major development planning applications will be processed from the date valid to decision issued or withdrawal date within an average of 30 weeks.

[Figure 3.2](#) presents annual average processing times for major applications. The **average processing time** for **major** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of **2021/22** was **55.9 weeks** across all councils. This represents a decrease of 5.9 weeks compared with the same period in 2020/21 (61.8 weeks) and is considerably higher than the 30 week target.

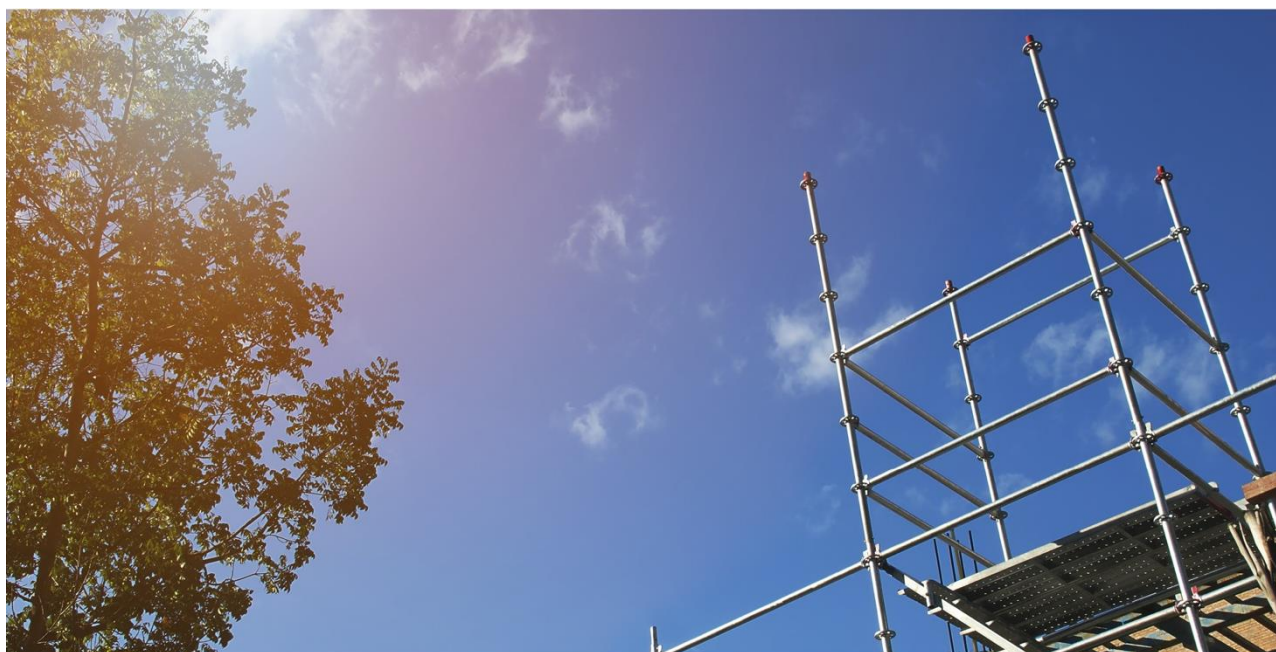
Whilst [Figure 3.2](#) below has been provided for completeness, across councils there was an insufficient number of major applications processed to decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of both the current and previous year to allow any meaningful assessment of their individual performance. Comparison against the target and across councils becomes more robust as the year progresses, with more applications being processed. With this in mind, two councils were within the 30 week target time in the first nine months of 2021/22, Antrim and Newtownabbey (with an average of 25.1 weeks across 6 applications) and Mid and East Antrim (with an average of 29.5 weeks across 6 applications).

Fig 3.2 Major development average processing times by council, April to December 2020 & 2021



[Refer to Table 3.2 for further information.](#)

A 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 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** applications **received** in NI during Q3 2021/22 was **3,132**; a decrease of 4.7% on the previous quarter (3,287) and down by 11.9% on the same the same period a year earlier (3,557) ([Figure 4.1](#)).

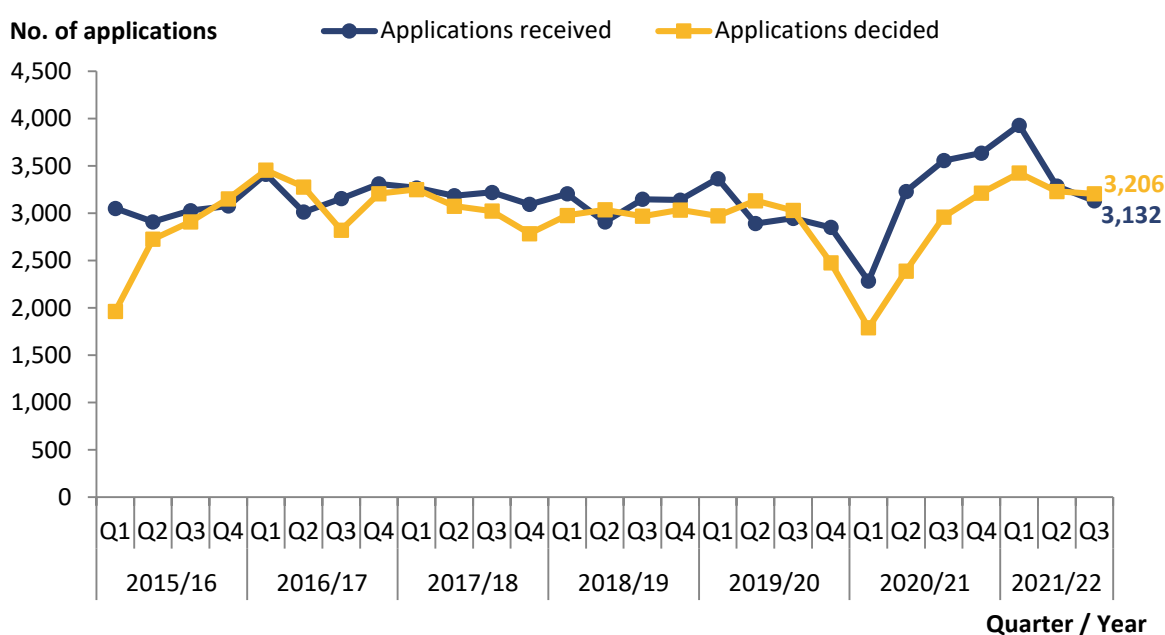
Local applications received

In Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of local applications received was 2,284. This was the lowest number received in any quarter since the transfer of planning powers. During the following four quarters there were consecutive increases in the number of local applications received, with the 3,930 received in Q1 2021/22 the highest quarterly total since transfer. The number of local applications received in the most recent two quarters reported have declined from this peak. [Refer to Table 4.1](#).

Across councils the number of local applications received during Q3 2021/22 ranged from 406 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 199 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Seven councils reported a decrease in the number of local applications received in Q3 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter. The decrease was greatest in Derry and Strabane, where the number of local applications received was down by nearly one quarter (24.6%). Over the same period three councils reported an increase with the largest increase reported in Belfast (8.3%). There was no change in Mid and East Antrim over the quarter.

Fig 4.1 Local development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to December 2021



Comparing Q3 in 2021/22 with the same period in 2020/21, ten councils reported a decrease in the number of local applications received, with the largest decrease reported in

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, where the number of local applications received was down by nearly one quarter (23.2%). Antrim and Newtownabbey were the only council to report an increase over the same period (4.2%)

Local applications decided

The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q3 2021/22 was **3,206**; down by 0.8% on Q2 2021/22 (3,232) but up by 8.3% compared with the same period a year earlier (2,961). Refer to [Figure 4.1](#).

In Q1 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils, the number of local applications received was much higher than the number of decisions made. In 2016/17 this gap narrowed substantially. From Q3 2016/17 the number of local applications received has generally exceeded the number decided. Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic the gap between the numbers received and decided has been wider than any quarter since Q1 2015/16, suggesting that the pandemic and resulting restrictions have had a greater impact on the ability of planning authorities to issue decisions on local applications. During Q2 2021/22 the gap between the number of applications received and decisions made lessened considerably. In the most recent quarter, for the first time since Q3 2019/20 the number of applications decided (3,206) has exceeded the number of applications received (3,132) during the same period. ([Figure 4.1](#)).

During the third quarter of 2021/22 the number of local planning decisions issued across councils ranged from 446 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 206 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Six of the 11 councils reported a decrease in the number of local applications decided in Q3 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter, with the decrease greatest in percentage terms in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-20.8%). In the remaining five councils the number of decisions issued on local applications increased over the same period, with the greatest increase in Ards and North Down (up 27.1%).

Comparing Q3 in 2021/22 with the same period in 2020/21, nine of the 11 councils reported an increase in the number of local applications decided, with the increase greatest in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (36.4%). Two councils reported a decrease over the same period, with the decline greatest in Belfast (-12.4%).

In Q3 2021/21, **172** local applications were **withdrawn**; an increase of 16.2% on the previous quarter (148) and up 17.8% when compared with the same period a year earlier (146).

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for **local** applications was **94.1%** in Q3 2021/22; a decrease from the rates reported for the previous quarter (95.5%) and for the same period a year earlier (95.3%).

[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 most recent quarter (Q3 2021/22) was 18.4 weeks, this is up over the quarter from 16.2 weeks, and up when compared to the same period the previous year (17.0 weeks). With exception of Q2 2020/21 this is the highest quarterly processing time for local applications since 2015/16.

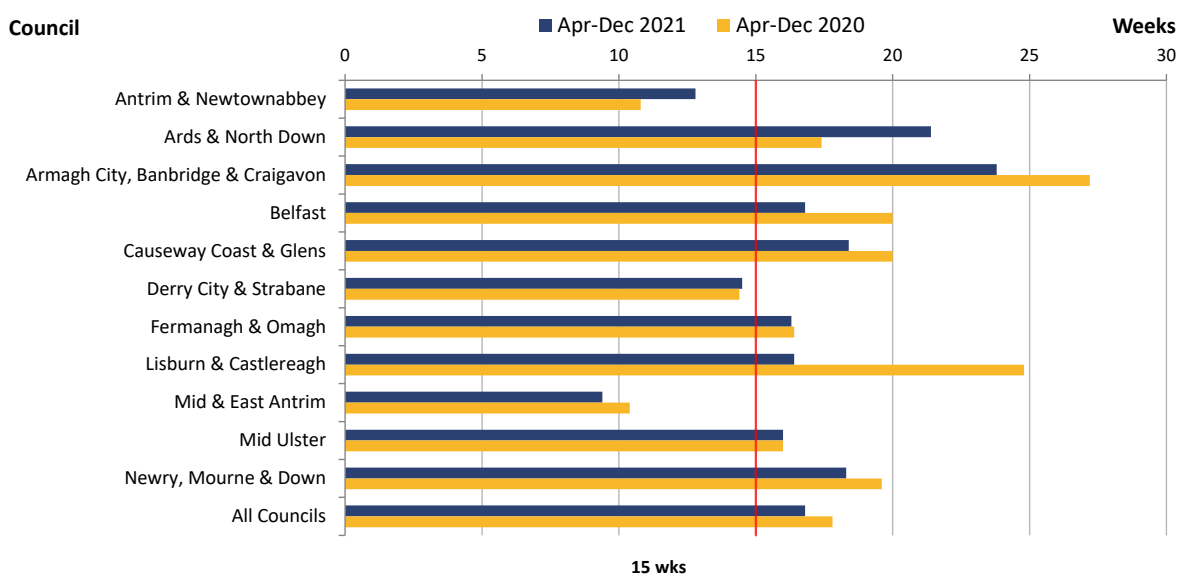
When comparing Q3 2021/22 with the same period in 2020/21, in seven of the 11 councils processing times during October to December 2021 were lower than they were for the same period a year earlier, three councils reported an increase and one remained the same.

For target monitoring the **average processing time** for **local** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2021/22 was **16.8 weeks** across all councils. This exceeds the statutory target of 15 weeks but represents a decrease of 1.0 week from the same period a year earlier (17.8 weeks). Seven of the 11 Councils report a decrease from the same period a year earlier.

Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first nine months of 2021/22: Mid and East Antrim (9.4 weeks); Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.8 weeks) and Derry City and Strabane (14.5 weeks).

[Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local development average processing times by council, April to December 2020 & 2021



A 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 2021/22, **residential** applications accounted for nearly **two-thirds (64.7%)** of all planning applications received in NI; a decrease on the proportions reported for the previous quarter (66.8%) and the same period a year earlier (67.4%).

Residential applications accounted for the majority of applications received in each council during the third quarter of 2021/22; ranging from over seven-tenths (71.4%) in Mid Ulster to just over half (51.1%) in Belfast.

The overall number of planning applications received during Q3 2021/22 was 3,163; a decrease of 11.8% on the same period a year earlier (3,587). While the number of applications received decreased across a number of development types during this period, the largest decrease was in residential, which accounted for most of the decline (down 15.2% from 2,416 to 2,048).

Over the quarter the number of planning applications received also decreased (down 4.9%), this again was largely driven by the decline in residential applications received (down 7.8%; from 2,222 to 2,048).

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

Consistent with previous quarters, a higher proportion of applications received in Belfast (26.2%) and Derry City and Strabane (20.8%) were categorised as 'other'² in Q3 2021/22, compared with the other councils. See [Appendix 1 – Definitions](#) for a description of the types of applications included in this category.

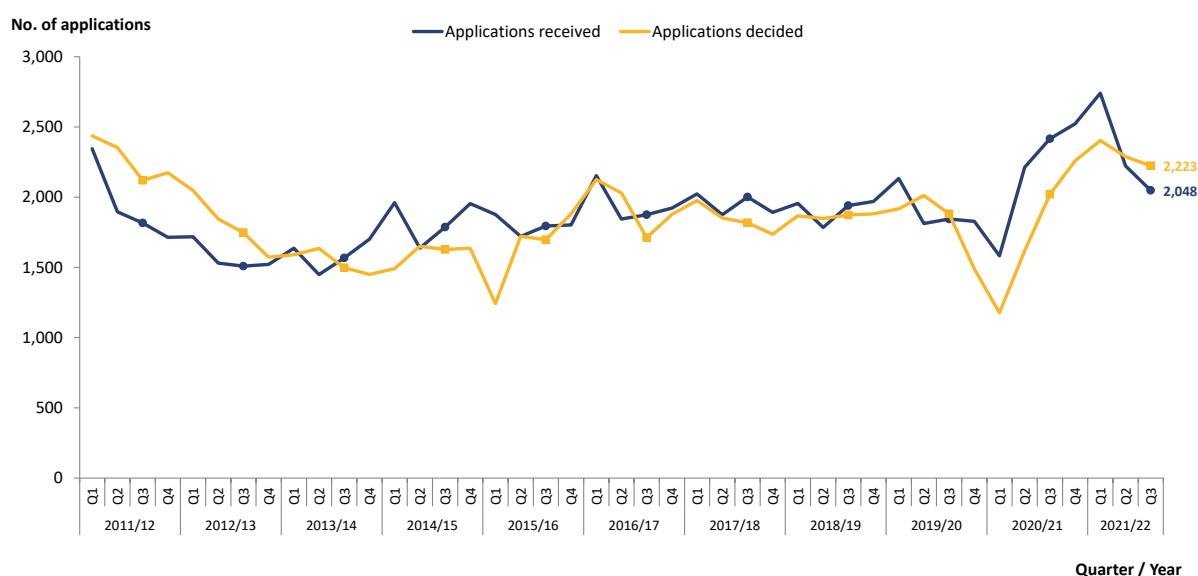
Residential applications received

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in NI during Q3 2021/22 was **2,048**; decreases of 7.8% over the quarter (from 2,222) and 15.2% from the same period a year earlier (from 2,416). [See Figure 5.1.](#)

In Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of residential applications received was 1,583; the lowest number received in any quarter since Q3 2013/14. During the following four quarters (from Q3 2020/21) there were consecutive increases in the number of residential applications received, with the 2,741 received in Q1 2021/22 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q2 2010/11. The number of residential applications received have declined in the last two quarters with Q3 2021/22 reporting a substantial decrease from the Q1 peak. [Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

² See [Appendix 1 – Definitions](#) for a description of the types of applications included in this category

Fig 5.1 NI Residential applications, quarterly, April 2011 to December 2021



Residential applications decided

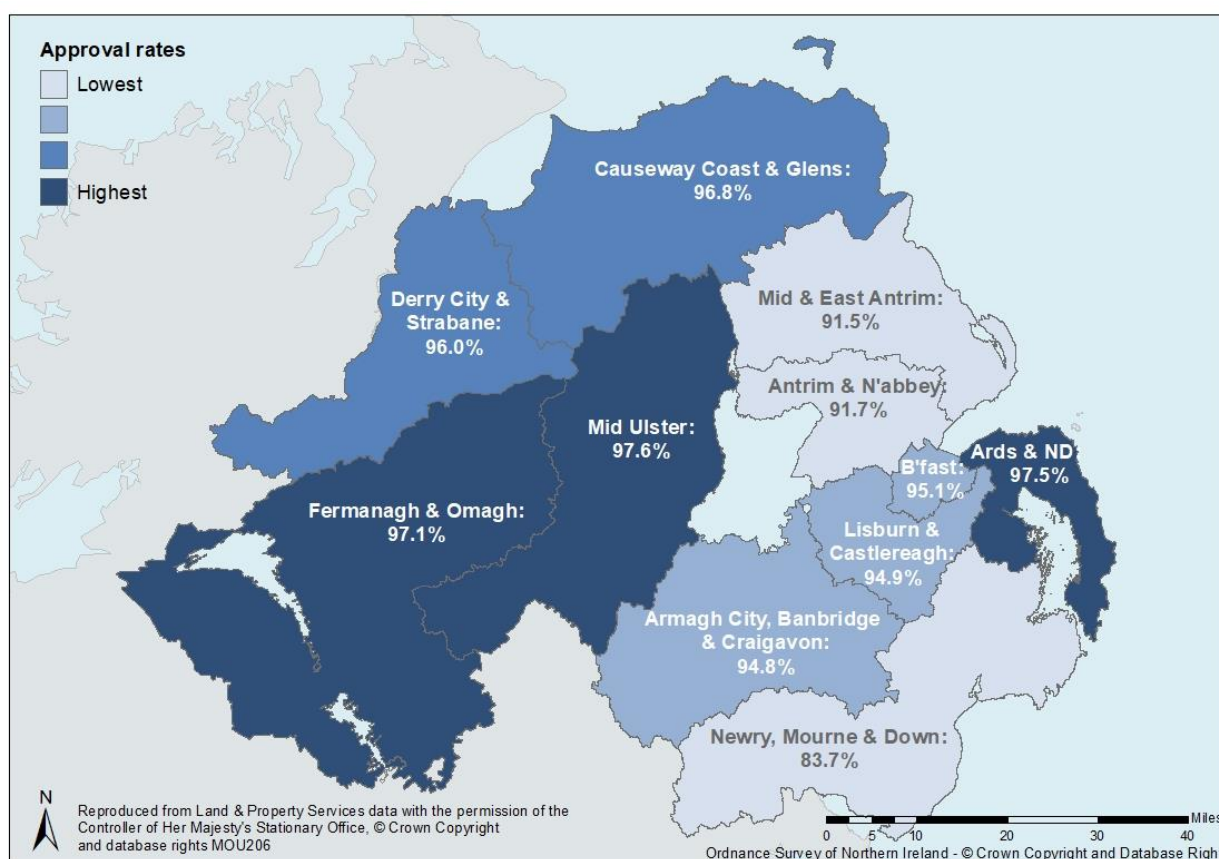
There were **2,223 residential** planning applications **decided** during the third quarter of 2021/22; a decrease of 2.8% over the quarter (2,288) but 10.0% more than the same period the previous year (2,021). [See Figure 5.1.](#)

In Q1 2020/21, decisions were issued on 1,177 residential planning applications; the lowest number of decisions issued in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. Consecutive increases in the number of residential applications decided were recorded during the following four quarters, with the 2,403 decisions issued in Q1 2021/22 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q1 2011/12. The number of decisions issued on residential applications has declined in the latest two quarters. [Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

The **Northern Ireland approval rate for residential** planning applications was **93.9%** in Q3 2021/22; down from the rates for previous quarter (95.9%) and the same period a year earlier (95.6%).

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in the most recent quarter, ranging from 97.6% in Mid Ulster to 83.7% in Newry, Mourne and Down ([Figure 5.2](#)).

Fig 5.2 Residential approval rates by council, October to December 2021



In Q3 2021/22 approval rates for residential planning applications decreased in nine councils when compared with the same period in 2020/21, with the largest decrease occurring in Newry, Mourne and Down (down from 90.4% to 83.7%). Two councils reported an increase in residential approval rates over the same period with the greatest of these reported in Causeway Coast and Glens (up from 93.9% to 96.8%).

During Q3 2021/22, 105 residential applications were withdrawn across NI; an increase on the previous quarter (93) and the same period a year earlier (87).

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

Residential applications – urban, rural and open countryside

Across urban areas (settlements greater than or equal to 5,000 population), the number of residential applications received in Q3 2021/22 was 680; a decrease from the previous quarter (down 2.6%; from 698) and the same period a year earlier (down 10.6%; from 761).

In rural areas, within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was a decrease in the number of residential applications received in Q3 2021/22 (224) compared with the previous quarter (down 23.5%; from 293) and the same period a year earlier (down 30.2%; from 321).

In the open countryside (outside population settlements), the number of residential applications received in Q3 2021/22 (1,144) also decreased over the quarter (down 7.1%; from 1,231) and the same period a year earlier (down 14.2%; from 1,334).

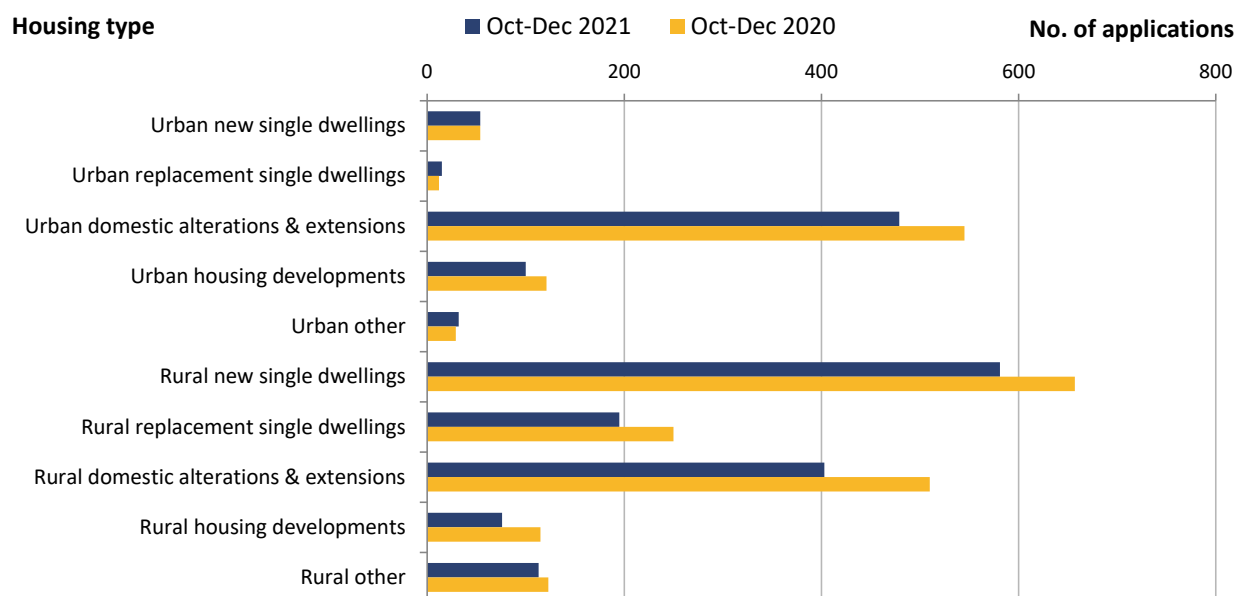
Residential applications – urban and rural

[Figure 5.3](#) shows the number of residential applications received in the third quarter of both 2020/21 and 2021/22, broken down by urban and rural housing type. Urban is based on areas with settlements greater than 5,000 population while rural is a combination of settlements below 5,000 population and the open countryside.

New single dwellings in rural areas (581) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (479) continue to be the most common types of residential application, together accounting for over half (51.8%) of all residential applications received during the third quarter of 2021/22.

Comparing Q3 in 2021/22 with the same period in 2020/21 the number of residential applications received decreased (-15.2%). Decreases were reported across the majority of housing types with the largest decrease in rural domestic alterations and extensions (down 21.0% from 510 to 403), see [Figure 5.3](#).

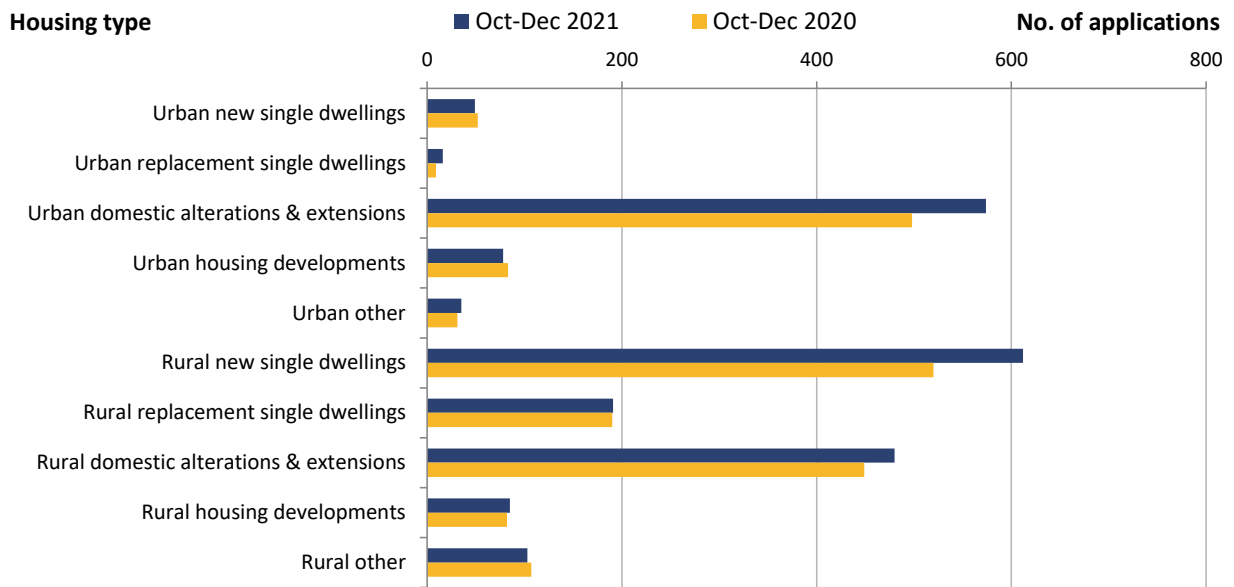
[Fig 5.3 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, October to December 2020 & 2021](#)

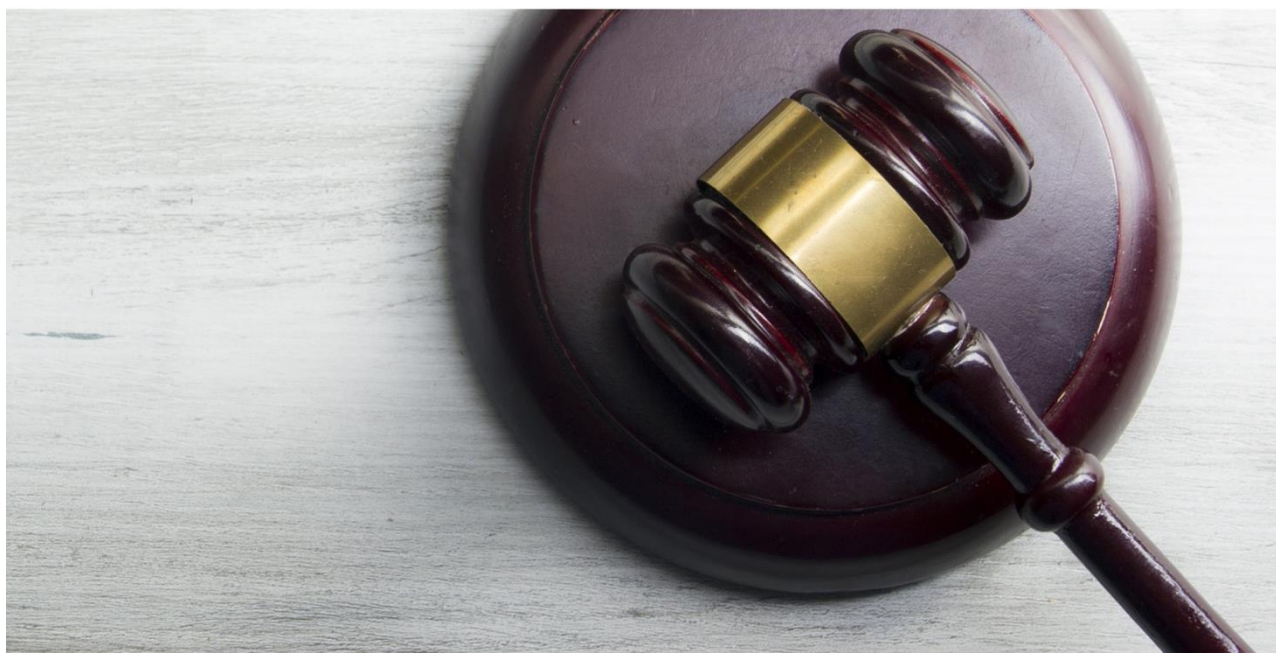


Comparing Q3 in 2021/22 with the same period in 2020/21 the number of residential applications decided increased (10.0%). This was driven in large part by increases in the number of decisions issued on new single dwellings in rural areas (up 17.7%; from 520 to 612) and domestic alterations and extensions in urban areas (up 15.3%; from 498 to 574).

[Refer to Table 5.5](#) and [Figure 5.4](#).

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, October to December 2020 & 2021





Chapter 6: Compliance and enforcement activity

Chapter 6: Compliance and enforcement activity

Enforcement cases

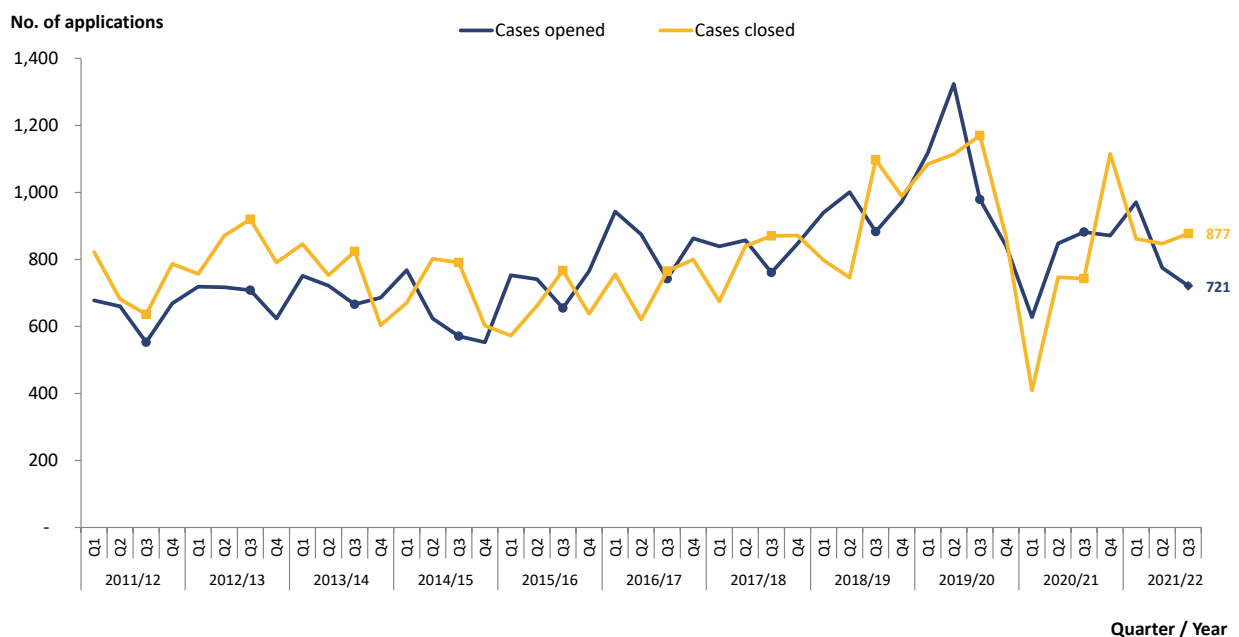
The number of **enforcement cases opened** in NI during the third quarter of 2021/22 was **721**; down by 7.0% over the quarter (775) and down by 18.3% from the same period a year earlier (882) ([Figure 6.1](#)).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, 628 enforcement cases were opened; the lowest number opened in any quarter since Q4 2014/15. The levels recorded over the last six quarters have all exceeded this, with Q1 2021/22 being the highest number opened in any quarter since Q3 2019/20. The number of enforcements opened during the last two quarters has declined with Q3 2021/22 reporting the lowest number of cases opened in any third quarter since Q3 2015/16. [Refer to Table 6.1](#).

Across the councils, the number of enforcement cases opened in Q3 2021/22 ranged from 109 in Belfast to 26 in Fermanagh and Omagh. The number of enforcement cases opened decreased in five of the 11 councils between Q3 2020/21 and the same period in 2021/22, with the decrease greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey (down 60.2%; from 176 to 70). Five councils reported an increase in the number of enforcement cases opened over the same period, with Derry City and Strabane reporting the greatest increase in percentage terms (up 38.9%; from 36 to 50). Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon reported no change with 94 enforcements opened in both periods.

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q3 2021/22 was **877**; up by 3.5% over the quarter (847) and up by 18.0% from the same period a year earlier (743) ([Figure 6.1](#)).

Fig 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly from April 2011 to December 2021



The number of cases closed in Q3 2021/22 varied across councils, ranging from 168 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 31 in Mid Ulster. Six of the 11 councils reported an increase in the number of enforcement cases closed in Q3 2021/22 compared with the same period a year earlier. This increase was greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey, where the number of cases closed increased from 11 to 131. Five councils reported a decrease in the number of cases closed with the greatest of these in percentage terms in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon down 46.5% (from 101 to 54).

The most common reasons for enforcement cases closing in Q3 2021/22 were that no breach had actually occurred (36.4 %) or that the case had been remedied or resolved (20.4%). Together these accounted for nearly three-fifths (498; 56.8%) of the 877 cases closed during the quarter.

A total of **897 enforcement cases were concluded³** during the third quarter of 2021/22; an increase of 7.8% from the previous quarter (832) and up by 14.6% from the same period a year earlier (783). Across councils, the number of cases concluded during Q3 2021/22 ranged from 178 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 30 in Mid Ulster.

Six councils recorded increases in the number of enforcement cases concluded in Q3 2021/22 compared with the same period the previous year, with the greatest increase occurring in Antrim and Newtownabbey, up from 12 to 128. Five councils reported a decline in the number of enforcement cases concluded over the same period with the largest percentage decrease reported in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (down 45.8%; from 107 to 58).

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

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, 394 cases were concluded. Consecutive increases in the number concluded were recorded during the following three quarters with 1,098 cases concluded in Q4 2020/21. Numbers concluded have declined from this level in the first three quarters of 2021/22, ranging from 832 to 897 being concluded quarterly.

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, **70.0%** enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first nine months of 2021/22, meeting the statutory target of 70%. This represents an increase from the rate reported for the first nine months of 2020/21 (69.0%).

Performance against the target was most affected during Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, when less than two-thirds (59.6%) of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks across all

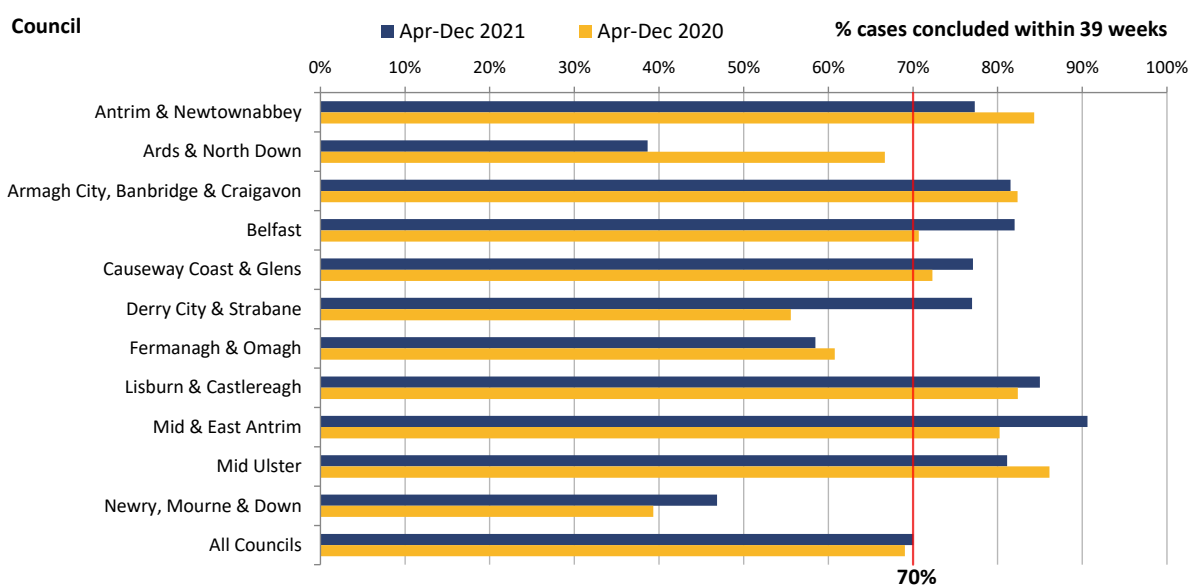
³ Refer to [User Guidance – Enforcement activity](#) for definitions of closed and concluded enforcement cases.

councils. Whilst this has improved in the latest six quarters with the target being achieved overall in four out of the last six quarterly periods there has been a decline in the most recent quarter to 65.8%.

During the first nine months of 2021/22 eight of the 11 councils were meeting the statutory target ([Figure 6.2](#)).

[Refer to Table 6.2.](#)

Fig 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, April to December 2020 & 2021



The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of December 2021 was **3,710**. Examining the last seven quarters in more detail, however, reveals that the number of live enforcement cases increased during the first three quarters of 2020/21, as the number of cases opened exceeded the number closed. The number of live enforcement cases peaked at the end of December 2020 with 4,074 live cases. In the quarters that followed the number of live cases have fluctuated, with the live number reducing to 3,710 at the end of December 2021. Over the last six months the number of enforcement cases opened was lower than the number closed, therefore leading to a reduction in the live load.

The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **1,216** at the end of December 2021, accounting for 32.8% of all live cases. This compared with 27.4% of live cases at the end of December 2020.

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

Across councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest number of live cases at the end of December 2021 (739), with almost one-half (48.2%) of these in the system for over two years.

Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of live cases (85) at the end of December 2021, with 20.0% of these in the system for over two years.

The number of live enforcement cases decreased in five of the 11 councils between the end of December 2020 and the end of December 2021. The decrease was greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey, where the number of live cases decreased by 66.3% over the year (from 398 to 134).

The overall decrease in the enforcement live count recorded across the year was offset by increases reported in the remaining six councils, with the greatest of these in percentage terms reported in Lisburn and Castlereagh (up 28.6%; from 199 to 256).

[Refer to Table 6.5.](#)

Compliance activity

There were eight prosecutions initiated during Q3 2021/22, across three councils, with Causeway Coast and Glens initiating the most (five).

During the third quarter of 2021/22, there were six convictions across NI. Two councils recorded convictions during this period, with Causeway Coast and Glens recording the most (four).

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



Chapter 7: Renewable energy activity

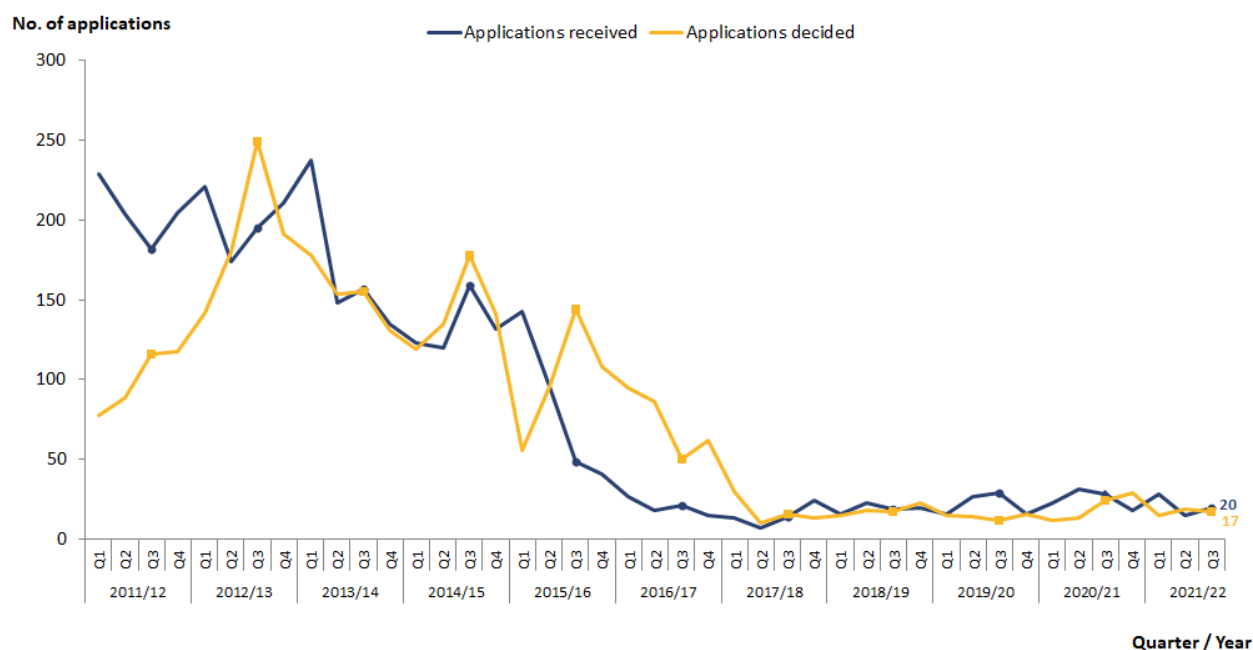
Chapter 7: Renewable energy (RE) activity

Renewable energy applications received

Twenty renewable energy applications were **received** in Q3 2021/22; up from the previous quarter (15) but down when compared to the same period the previous year (28).

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 (a **89.8%** decrease from 196 applications in Q3 2010/11 to 20 applications in Q3 2021/22) 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 from April 2011 to December 2021



Renewable energy applications decided

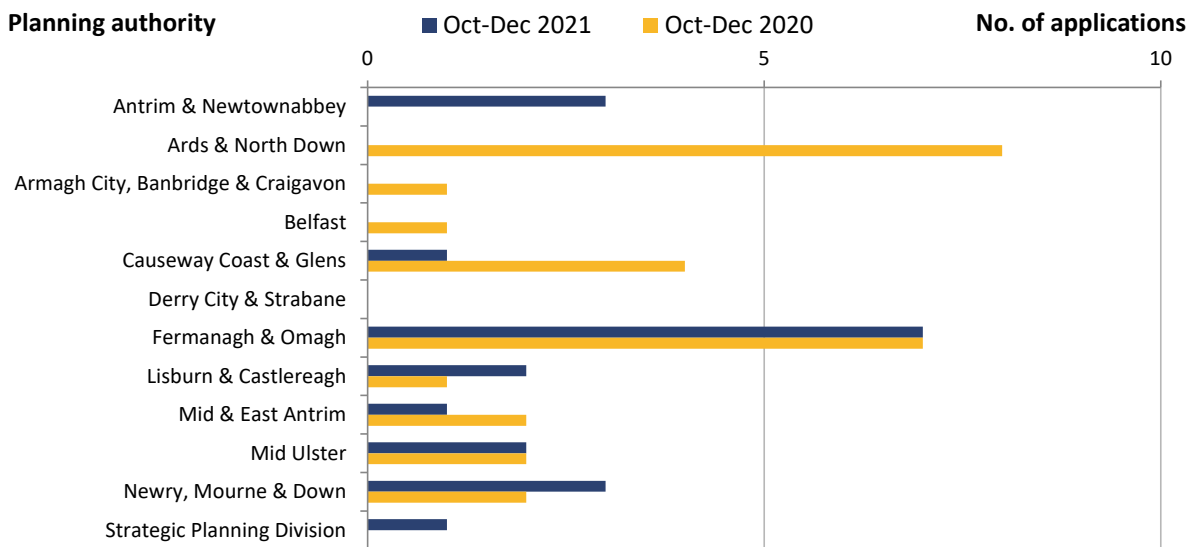
The number of renewable energy applications **decided** during Q3 2021/22 was **17**; down over the quarter (19) and the same period a year earlier (24), and a **93.2%** decrease from the series' third quarter peak of 249 applications decided in 2012/13 ([Figure 7.1](#)). **Four** renewable energy applications were **withdrawn** during Q3 2021/22. [Refer to Table 7.1.](#)

The average processing time for the 21 renewable energy applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the third quarter of 2021/22 was 33.8 weeks across NI; with processing times decreasing over the latest quarter (from 44.6 weeks) and the same period a year earlier (from 63.2 weeks).

Single wind turbines continue to be the most common renewable energy application, accounting for 16 out of 20 applications received during Q3 2021/22. In addition, 14 of the 17 renewable energy decisions issued during the most recent quarter were for single wind turbines. [Refer to Table 7.2.](#)

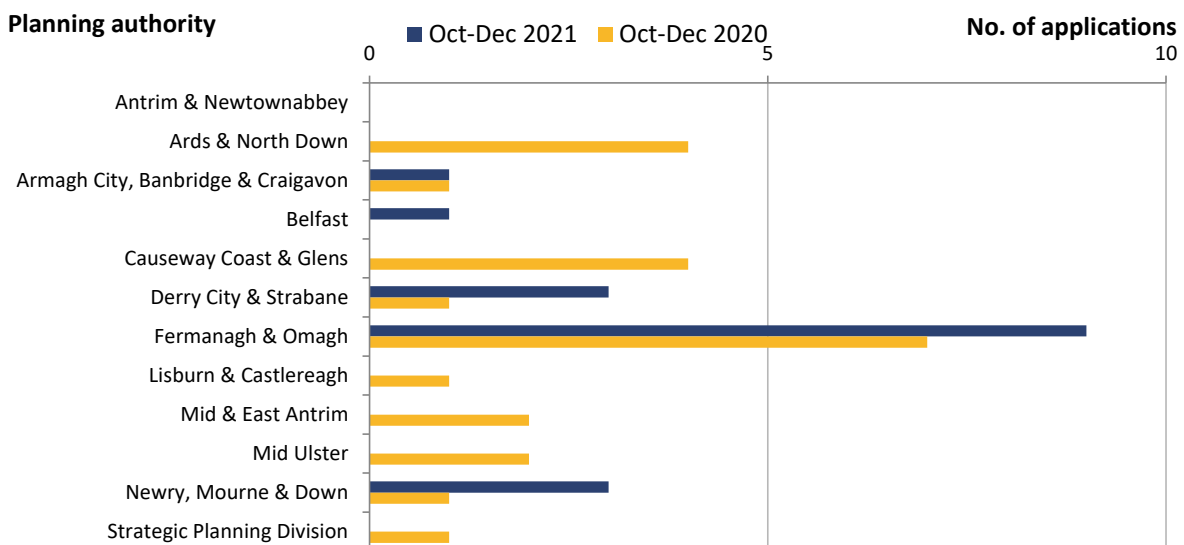
[Figure 7.2](#) shows the distribution of renewable energy applications received across the different planning authorities, with Fermanagh and Omagh (seven) receiving the most in Q3 2021/22.

Fig 7.2 Renewable Energy applications received by authority, October to December 2020 & 2021



[Figure 7.3](#) shows the distribution of decisions issued on renewable energy applications across the different planning authorities, with Fermanagh and Omagh (nine) issuing the most during the third quarter of 2021/22.

Fig 7.3 Renewable Energy applications decided by authority, October to December 2020 & 2021

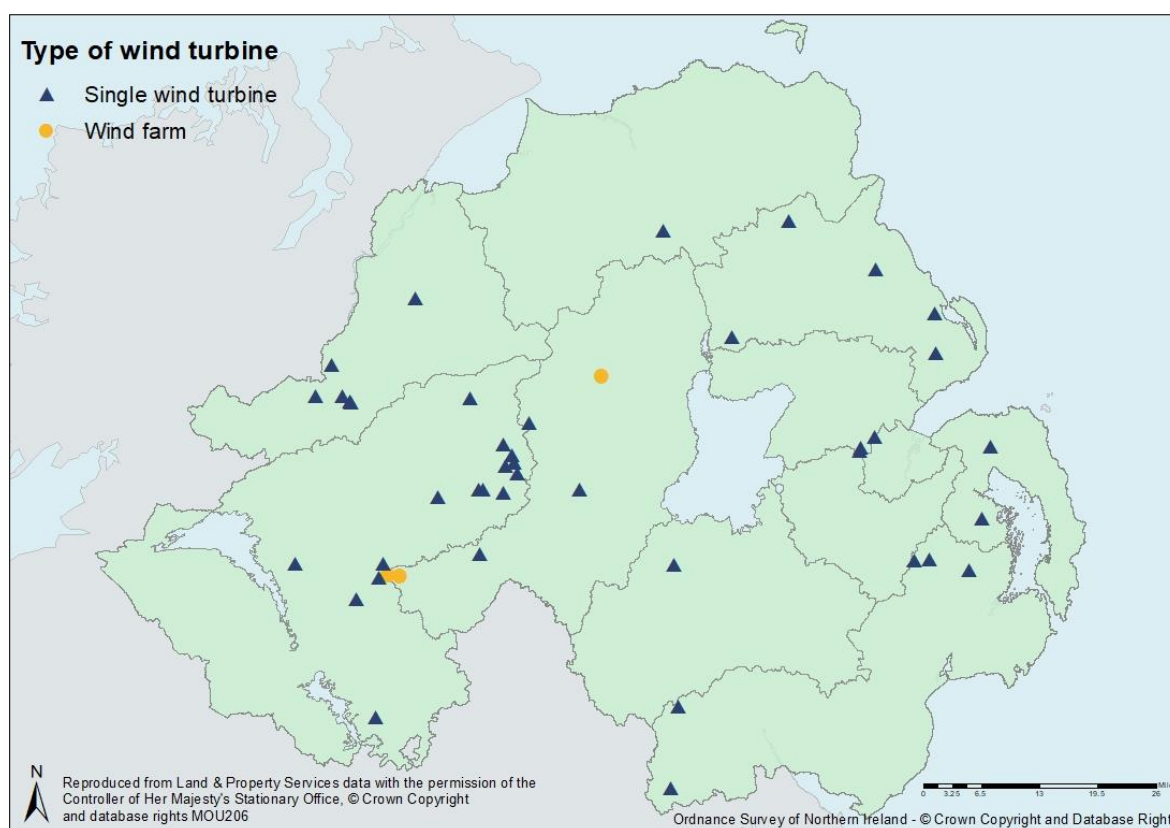


At the end of December 2021, there were **123 live renewable energy applications** in the planning system across NI; over seven tenths of these (71.5%, 88 of 123) were for single wind turbines. Of these 123 live applications, 48.8% were in the planning system for over a year; an increase from the proportion reported for the same point in 2020 (36.4%).

The **NI approval rate** for renewable energy applications was **88.2%** in Q3 2021/22, with 15 out of the 17 decisions issued during this period being approvals.

[Figure 7.4](#) displays the locations of wind energy applications approved during the first nine months of 2021/22. A total of 41 single wind turbines and three wind farms were approved during this period.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, April to December 2021



[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 2021 to 31 December 2021 were transferred in January 2022 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 2022. Quarterly data for 2021/22 are regarded as provisional and will retain this status until the annual report of the 2021/22 is published in July 2022.

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 December 2021.

Background quality report

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

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

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

Regionally significant developments (RSD) are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or involve a substantial departure from a local development plan. Applications for these development proposals will be submitted to and determined by the Department. However, the thresholds for RSD may mean that applications which may have previously been dealt with by the Department will now be classified as major development and thus determined by the relevant council. Like major applications, RSD proposals will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community. Note that from 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has subsequently been extended until [31 March 2022](#).

Major developments have important economic, social and environmental implications. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community. Note that from 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has subsequently been extended until 31 March 2022.

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

Departmental activity

[Refers to Chapter 2 of report](#)

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

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

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

It should be noted that in Chapter 2 of this report, processing times for called-in applications are calculated from the date the application was called-in by the Department. This method is only used in Chapter 2 of the report in order to show Departmental processing performance. All other processing times reported in the publication are based on the date the application is made valid.

Departmental target

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

The previous target was:

It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing 50% of regionally significant planning applications to a ministerial recommendation within 30 weeks, subject to pre-application discussions having taken place and meeting the requirements of relevant environmental legislation.

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

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

Enforcement activity

[Refers to Chapter 6 of report](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Processing times

The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The average processing time is the median. The median is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point in the middle of the sequence. The median is used because some planning applications can take several years to reach a decision. As a consequence, these extreme cases (outliers) can inflate the mean to the extent that the mean may not be considered as 'typical'. Therefore the median is considered to better represent the 'average' or 'typical' processing time.

Geographical classification

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

From Q3 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 data tables. Details of these exclusions are:

Discharge of Conditions (DCs)

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

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

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

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

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

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs)

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

Non Material Changes (NMCs)

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

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

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

Uses of the data

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

User engagement

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

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

During 2019, ASRB undertook a specific user consultation exercise and [results of this were published](#) in October 2019. It is anticipated that an updated user consultation exercise will take place during 2022/23.

Further information

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

England

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

Scotland

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

Wales

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

Republic of Ireland

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

Northern Ireland

Building Control (LPS Starts and completions)

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

Housing Bulletin, Department for Communities (DfC)

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

Cross-government working group on housing and planning

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

OpenDataNI

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

NINIS

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

Planning readership list

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

Pre-release access

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

Appendix 1

Definitions

The statistical categories referred to in [Chapter 5](#) and [Data 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 [Data Table 5.6](#) are defined below.

Outline permission

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

Full permission

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

Approval of reserved matters

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

Consent to display an advertisement

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

Listed building consent

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

Conservation area consent

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

Hazardous substances consent

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

Reader information

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