

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2016/17 FIRST QUARTERLY STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(April 2016 – June 2016: Provisional figures)



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Key Points

- There were 3,438 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during April to June 2016 (Q1), an increase of 11.0% over the previous quarter and 8.6% on the same quarter in 2015/16. This comprised 3,409 local development and 29 major development applications. No new Regionally Significant Developments applications were received in the first quarter.
- During Q1, 3,490 planning applications were decided, up 8.0% over the quarter and a notable 72.8% on the previous year. In Q4 2015/16 and continuing into Q1 2016/17, the number of decisions issued exceeded the number of applications being received.
- In Q1, the average processing time for major development applications across councils was 67.1 weeks, compared to 35.4 weeks in the same quarter in 2015/16. This is over 37 weeks longer than the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks, although it is still a relatively early stage in the year.
- The number of local planning applications received in NI during Q1 2016/17 was 3,409, the highest number of local planning applications received in any quarter since the transfer of planning authority in April 2015. Across councils, Belfast City (471), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (396) and Newry, Mourne and Down (378) received the highest number of local planning applications during the quarter.
- In NI, across councils it took on average 18.0 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal in Q1 2016/17, very similar to first quarter performance last year but three weeks longer than the statutory target. The shortest average processing time was 9.8 weeks in Mid and East Antrim whilst the longest was 27.2 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down. Notably, however, this council processed four times as many applications in Q1 compared to the same time last year. Five of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target in the first quarter for 2016/17.
- The number of enforcement cases opened in Northern Ireland during Q1 2016/17 was 943, an increase of over one quarter (25.2%) compared to the same period last year. This is the highest number of first quarter enforcement cases opened in any year since 2010/11 when 1,028 cases were opened. Belfast City (113), Ards and North Down (110) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (107) opened the largest number of enforcement cases in Q1.
- In Q1 2016/17, 81.3% of enforcement cases across Northern Ireland were concluded within 39 weeks, over 11 percentage points above the statutory target and an improvement of just over 7 percentage points on the equivalent quarter last year. Ten of the eleven councils were on track to meet the statutory enforcement case target during this first quarter.
- The NI approval rate for all planning applications for Q1 2016/17 was 94.5%, the same as the rate for Q1 2015/16. First quarter approval rates varied across councils from 92.6% to 96.3%.
- The number of renewable energy applications received in Q1 2016/17 was the lowest first quarter figure in over ten years (since 2004/05). Of the 27 applications received in Q1, nearly half were for single wind turbines. The average processing time for renewable energy applications was 54.4 weeks in Q1, up from 47.9 weeks when compared to the same period last year.

Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for the new district councils, and the Department of Infrastructure, during the first quarter of 2016/17. Note that from the 8th May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of Environment to the new Department of Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental reorganisation.

Whilst the bulletin and accompanying tables report data for the first quarter of 2016/17, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous years. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the year and changes over the latest quarter. In the absence of historic data for the new councils prior to 2015/16, reference may instead be made to their more recent quarterly figures. Please note that quarterly figures for the 2016/17 year are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures being published in June 2017.

Background

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the '2011 Act') sets out the legislative framework for development management in NI and provides that, from 1 April 2015, councils now largely have responsibility for this planning function. Planning applications for development categorised as being either major development or local development are determined by the councils. Responsibility for planning applications for regionally significant development rests with the Department. In addition, the Department retains responsibility for legacy 'Article 31' applications (i.e. Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991). Furthermore, the Department has the power to 'call in' both major and local development applications from councils, where it so directs, and determine them (see 'User Guidance' for a fuller description of the different planning application types). Responsibility for planning

legislation, and for formulating and co-ordinating policy for securing the orderly and consistent development of land, remains with the Department. Consequently, the responsibility for development management is shared between the 11 new councils and the Department.

The Department will continue to have responsibility for the provision and publication of Official Statistics relating to the overall development management function, including enforcement. The quarterly and annual reports provide the NI headline results split by district council (and the Department where relevant). These data will also provide councils with information on their performance in order to meet their own reporting obligations under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. Note that whilst pre-transfer activity volumes can be mapped historically to the new organisational areas from which the demands arise, it would not be valid to do the same with performance data as the newly established district councils did not exist, nor do they neatly overlap with the old area planning office jurisdictions. The first year of data under the new organisational areas was 2015/16, therefore, 2015/16 is regarded as the base year for reporting of performance-related data at council level with comparative trend data building from that point onwards. Whilst historic comparisons of performance at NI level can still be made, it is important to be aware that there have been a number of significant recent changes to the Planning system which will have had an impact. Where relevant these have been highlighted throughout the report.

Statistics included in this report

This bulletin provides an overall view of planning activity across NI. It provides summary statistical information on council progress across the 3 statutory targets for major development applications, local development applications and enforcement cases as laid out in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015. It also provides information relating to Departmental performance against quantitative Corporate Business Plan targets.

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

Revisions and changes since Quarter 1 2015/16

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

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

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

Future Releases

The next quarterly release is due in December 2016. This will contain planning data up to 30th September 2016 (i.e. for Q2 2016/17).

The next annual report covering 2016/17 is planned for release in late June 2017.

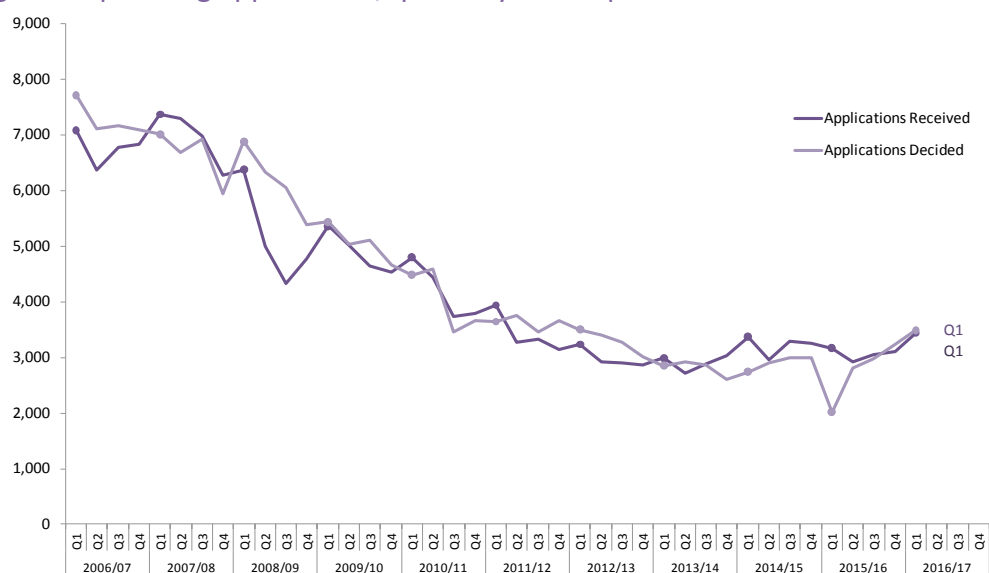
See Gov.UK Release Calendar for release dates of future publications – <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>.

1. Overall NI Planning Activity

Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period April to June 2016 (Q1), was **3,438**, an increase of 11.0% on the previous quarter (3,097) and an increase of 8.6% on the same period in 2015/16 (3,165). When compared to the same quarter in earlier years, Q1 2016/17 had the highest number of planning applications received since Q1 2011/12, having followed a general downward trend from the full series peak of 10,924 received in Q1 2005/06. Of the 3,438 applications received in Q1 2016/17, over three quarters were for full planning permission (76.4%).

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly from Apr 2006 – Jun 2016

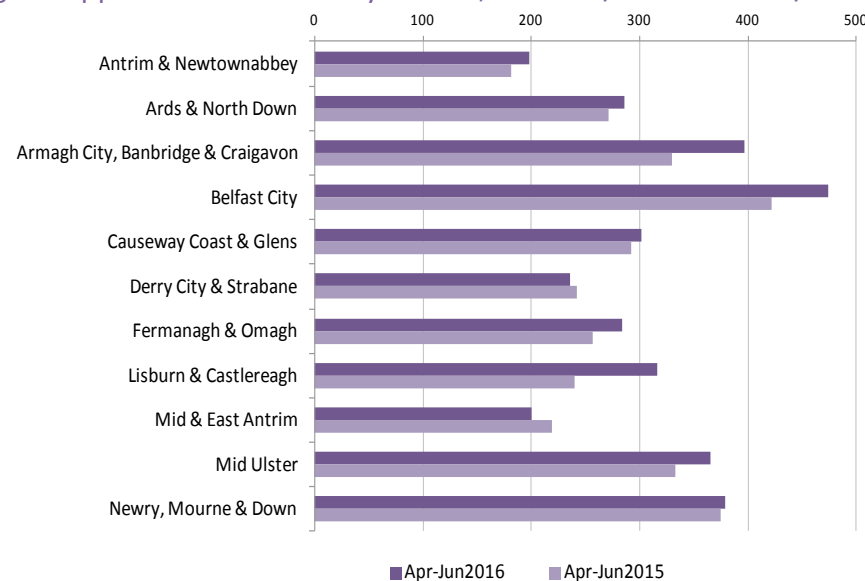


Across NI in Q1, there were 18.6 planning applications received per 10,000 population. This is a stark decline when compared to the 63.2 applications received per 10,000 population in the same quarter of 2005/06.

In Q1, Belfast City council received the most (474) planning applications, followed by Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (397); between them accounting for one quarter (25.3%) of all applications received across NI. The councils receiving the least applications were Antrim and Newtownabbey (198) and Mid and East Antrim (200).

The volume of planning applications received in Q1 increased in nine of the eleven councils over the year with the largest increases in percentage terms occurring in Lisburn and Castlereagh (+31.7%), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (+20.3%) and Belfast City (+12.3%). Where decreases were recorded, these were in Mid and East Antrim (-8.7%) and Derry City and Strabane (-2.5%).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q1 2015/16 & Q1 2016/17



At council level, Mid Ulster (25.3) and Fermanagh and Omagh (24.6) received the most planning applications per 10,000 population, whilst Belfast City (14.0) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (14.1) received the

least. The supporting Excel table provides activity per head of population for each district council. [Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

Applications Decided

The number of planning decisions **issued** during April to June 2016 was **3,490**, representing increases of 8.0% over the quarter and a very significant 72.8% on the same period a year earlier (2,020). In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning authority out to councils, the level of decisions issued dropped sharply. However, they quickly recovered in subsequent quarters and have since closely tracked applications received. Nearly 8 out of every 10 decisions made (78.1%) were for full planning permission.

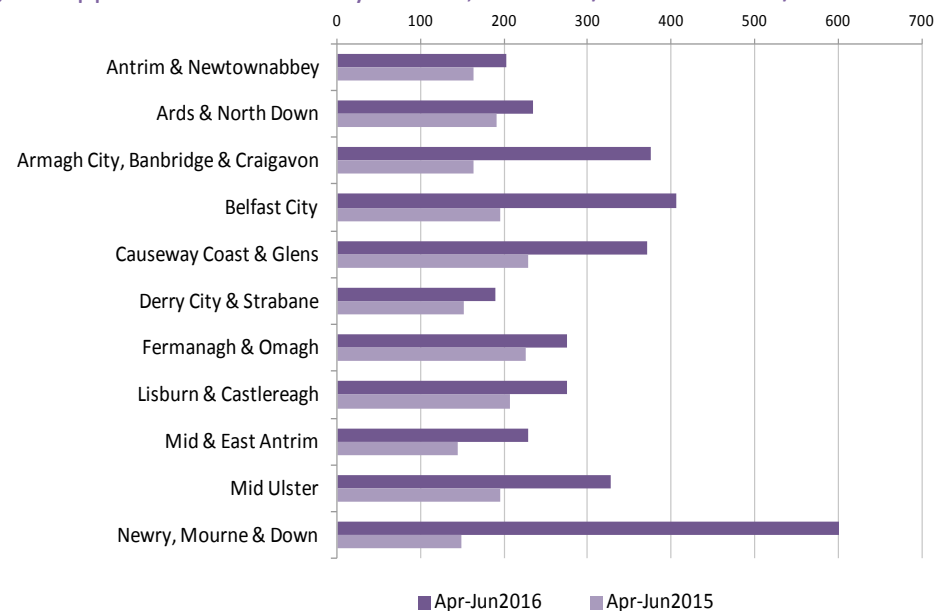
In Q1 2016/17, **143** applications were **withdrawn**, almost double the number compared to the same period a year earlier (75). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

Applications Decided by Council

The number of decisions issued in Q1 2016/17 was higher across all councils when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. The councils issuing the most planning decisions in Q1 were Newry, Mourne and Down (601), issuing just over four times as many as the same quarter a year earlier (149), and Belfast City (406) who issued over twice as many (196).

The number of planning applications decided across councils in Q1 ranged from a high of 601 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 203 in Antrim and Newtownabbey. In the latter case, this is largely reflective of the much lower volume of applications received. Newry, Mourne and Down, Causeway Coast and Glens, Mid and East Antrim and Antrim and Newtownabbey councils all issued more planning decisions during the quarter than they received – by 58.6%, 23.3%, 14.5% and 2.5% respectively.

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q1 2015/16 & Q1 2016/17



[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q1, they processed to decision or withdrawal 103 discharge of conditions, 97 certificates of lawfulness and 125 non material changes. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

Approval Rates

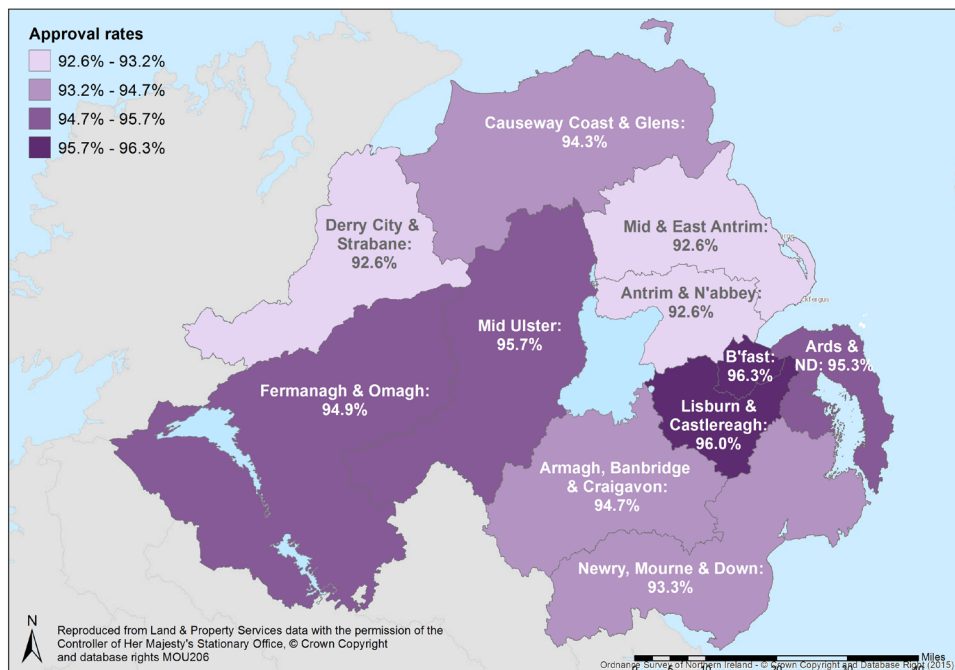
The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications for Q1 was **94.5%**, which was the same as the rate a year earlier. The first quarter approval rate over the last five years has been fairly stable.

In Q1, planning approval rates varied across councils from highs of 96.3% in Belfast City and 96.0% in Lisburn and Castlereagh to a low of 92.6% in Antrim and Newtownabbey, Derry City and Strabane and Mid and East

Antrim. Five out of the eleven councils had an approval rate which was lower than the overall NI approval rate of 94.5%.

[Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, Q1 2016/17



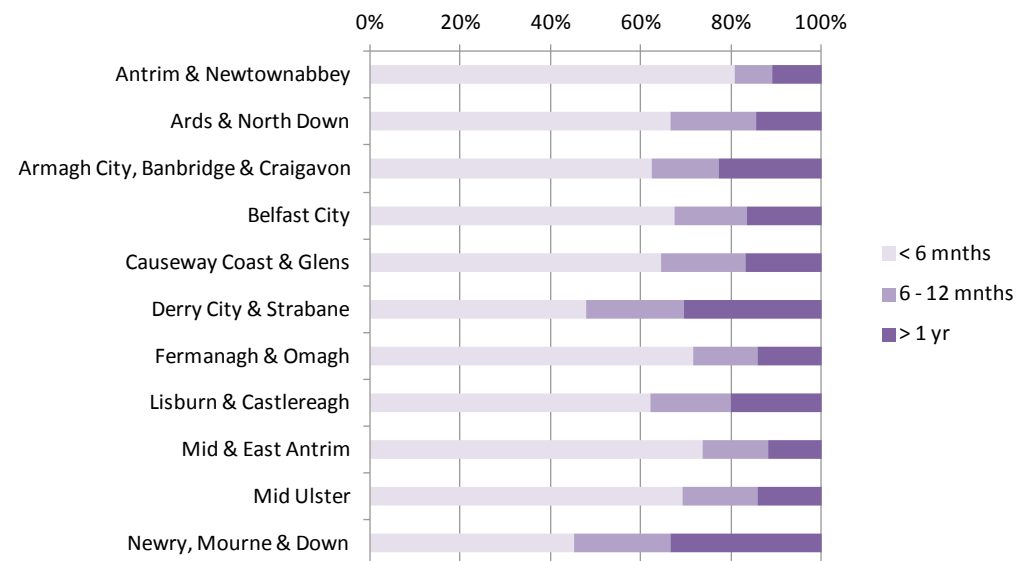
Live applications¹

At the end of June 2016, across NI there were **1,475 live applications** in the planning system for over one year. In other words, just over 1 out of every 5 live applications in the planning system was **over one year old**, which was similar to the end of March 2016. However, at the end of June

¹ It is important to note that the vast majority of cases currently over one year will have been inherited from the Department.

2016, 20.8% of live applications were over one year old compared to 19.6% at the end of the previous quarter. [Refer to Table 1.3](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Jun 2016



The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of June 2016 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.4. Antrim and Newtownabbey had the lowest proportion of cases over one year (10.7%), which equates to just under 1 in every 9 applications compared to Newry Mourne and Down (33.3%) who had the highest proportion (1 in every 3).

Over the last quarter, five of the eleven councils have reduced the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year, with the greatest changes in Ards and North Down (- 2.4pp) and Fermanagh and Omagh (2.2 pp)².

[Refer to Table 1.4](#)

² Percentage Point change (pp)

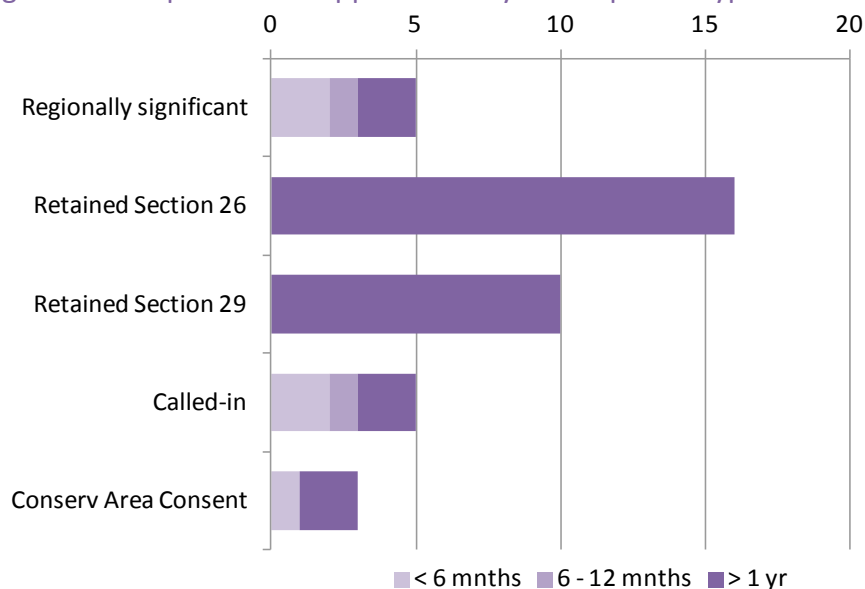
2. Departmental Activity

At the end of June 2016, there were **5 ongoing regionally significant development (RSD) applications, 5 called-in; 3 conservation area consents** (i.e. consent to demolish); and **26 retained applications**. Eighty-two percent of live applications (32 of 39) at the end of June were in the system over a year.

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. During Q1, there were no new RSD applications received.

[Refer to Table 2.2](#)

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end Jun'16



During Q1, the Department received 2 new applications, 1 called-in while the other was a conservation area consent. This is a reduction on the 5 applications received for the same period a year earlier.

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.

At the 30 June 2016, of the **5 RSD** applications that were live in the planning system, three were not subject to Pre-Application Discussions and therefore will not fall under the remit of the target. The remaining two cases, taking account of environmental requirements, currently have a target date for decision in 2016/17 and therefore will be assessed in future reports alongside any new applications which may come into scope

The Department reached **decisions** on **2** applications during Q1, the same as the equivalent period last year. One of these decisions was on a RSD application while the other was a conservation area consent. The decided RSD application was not subject to a Pre-Application Discussion and therefore does not fall under the remit of the target.

During Q1 there was **1 Retained Section 29** (former non Article 31) application **withdrawn**, equivalent to the number withdrawn over the same period last year.

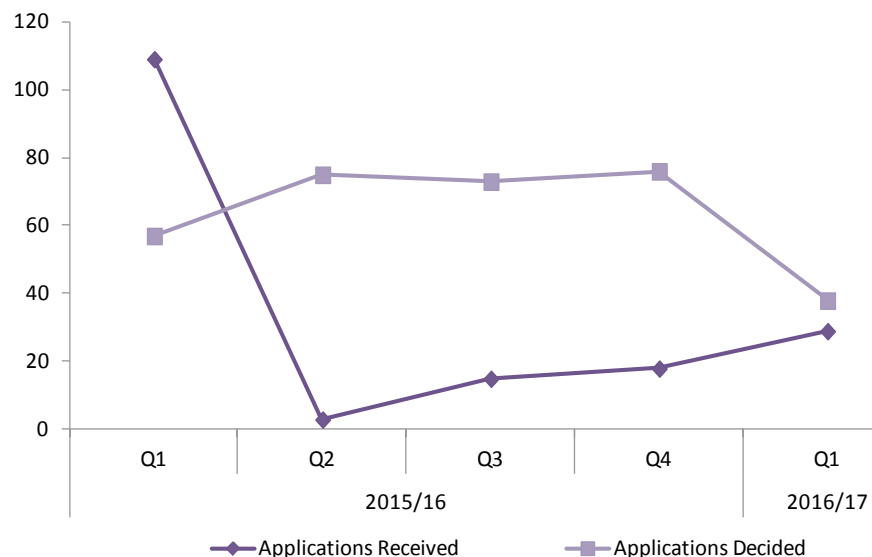
Overall, the average processing time in Q1 2016/17 for those applications which were processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal was **151.4 weeks up** from 94.6 weeks reported for the same period last year. Note, however, that these times are based on very small numbers and it is not possible, at this stage, to robustly assess any change in performance

[Refer to Table 2.1](#)

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. Excluding RSD applications (reported in Section 2), the number of **major** planning applications **received** in NI during Q1 2016/17 was **29**.

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, quarterly Apr 2015 – Jun 2016



From 1st July 2015, pre-application community consultation became a pre-requisite to a major application. This means that major applications will not be accepted until they have gone through the minimum 12 week consultation process and notice has been submitted to the council or the Department. This helps explain the very significant drop in major applications when you compare Q1 2015/16 with the small numbers received in subsequent quarters. It may also mean that Q1 2015/16 was atypically high with major

applications potentially being submitted ahead of the new process coming into effect.

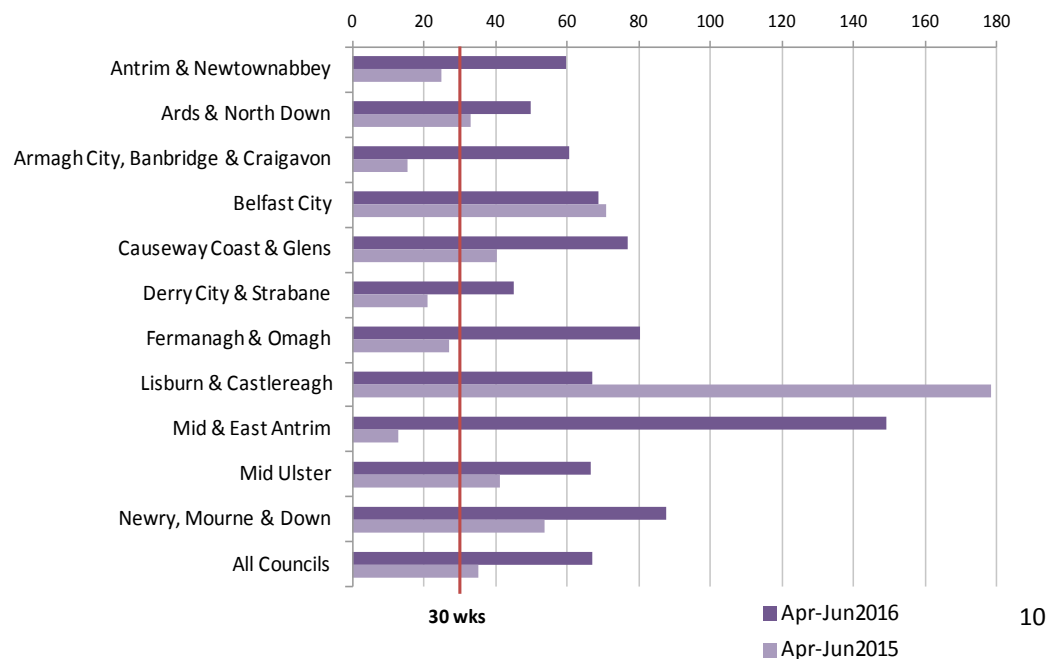
Of the 29 major applications received in Q1, Derry City and Strabane (8) and Causeway Coast and Glens (4) received the most.

Over the quarter, **38 major** planning applications were **decided** and **2 withdrawn**. Since Q2 2015/16, the number of planning decisions issued had far exceeded the numbers received but have greatly converged in this most recent quarter when 29 were received.

Newry Mourne and Down (9) issued most decisions on major applications followed by Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (5) and Belfast City (5).

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

Fig 3.2 Major processing times by council, Q1 2015/16 & Q1 2016/17



During Q1, the **average processing time** to process **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **67.1 weeks** across all councils, up significantly from the 35.4 weeks reported in the same period last year. This is over thirty seven weeks longer than the statutory processing time target which is an average of 30 weeks.

[Refer to Table 3.1](#)

Whilst Fig 3.2 has been provided for completeness, none of the councils had processed a sufficient number of major applications during the first quarter, either this year or last, to provide any meaningful assessment of their individual performance. Comparisons against target, and with each other, will become more robust as additional cases are processed and reported upon in subsequent quarters. At this point, no councils are close to meeting their statutory 30 week processing target.

[Refer to Table 3.2](#)

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](#).

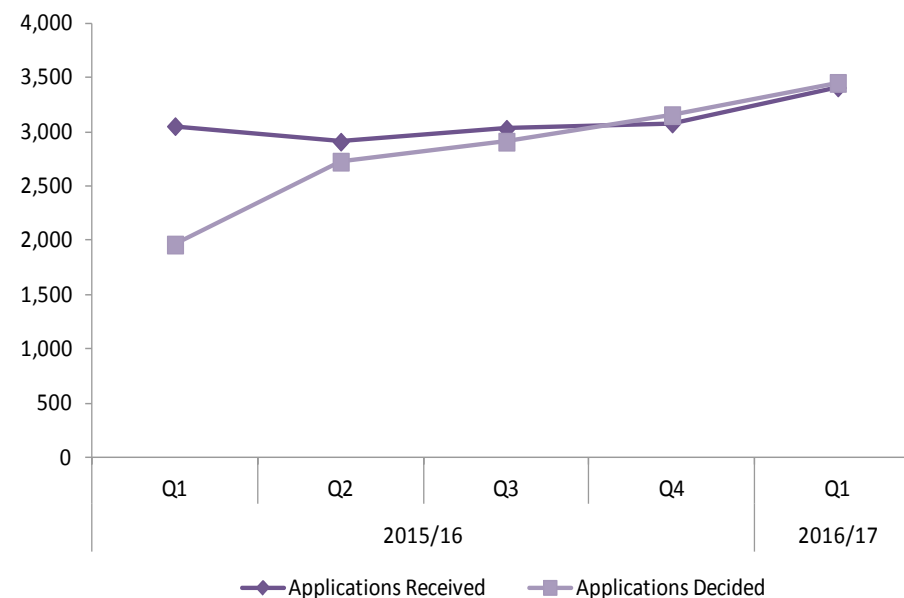
It is interesting to note that the average processing time for major applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (47.0 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (83.0 weeks). However it should be borne in mind that the former is still based on comparatively few cases and hence will be subject to greater change as the year progresses.

4. Local Development Planning Applications

Local Development planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications received and determined by a council. The number of **local** planning applications **received** in NI during Q1 2016/17 was **3,409**. This is the highest number of local planning applications received in any quarter since the transfer of planning authority and represents an increase of 11.7% on the same quarter last year.

Across councils, Belfast City (471), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (396) and Newry, Mourne and Down (378) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q1. Nine of the eleven councils received more local applications in Q1 compared to the same period last year.

Fig 4.1 Local applications, quarterly, Apr 2015 – Jun 2016



The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q1 2016/17 was **3,451** and, as with the applications received, represents the highest quarterly figure decided since the transfer of planning authority.

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils, the number of decisions reached on local planning applications was considerably lower than the number of applications being received. Moving through 2015/16, in each subsequent quarter the number of planning decisions increased whilst the number being received remained fairly static. In Q4 2015/16, and continuing into the first quarter of 2016/17, the volume of local applications decided exceeded the number of applications being received.

During Q1 2016/17, Newry Mourne and Down (592), Belfast City (401), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (370) and Causeway Coast and Glens (368) issued the most local decisions across councils, partly reflecting the high volumes of applications received.

Over the quarter, there were 141 local applications withdrawn across NI, this ranged from 29 applications withdrawn in Newry Mourne and Down to 5 in Ards and North Down.

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

In Q1, the **average processing time** to bring **local** applications to decision or withdrawal was **18.0 weeks** across all councils, a small improvement on the 18.2 weeks achieved in the same quarter last year but still three weeks longer than the statutory target. [Refer to Table 4.1](#)

The shortest average processing time for local applications in Q1 was 9.8 weeks in Mid and East Antrim (based on 226 local applications decided and 7 withdrawn) whilst the longest was 27.2 weeks in Newry, Mourne and

Down (based on 592 local applications decided and 29 withdrawn). Five of the 11 councils, namely Mid and East Antrim (9.8), Fermanagh and Omagh (10.8), Antrim and Newtownabbey (13.7), Mid Ulster (14.7) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (15.0) were within the 15 week target.

Fig 4.2 Local processing times by council, Q1 2015/16 and Q1 2016/17



Seven of the eleven councils improved their processing times for local applications in Q1 when compared with the same period last year.

[Refer to Table 4.2](#)

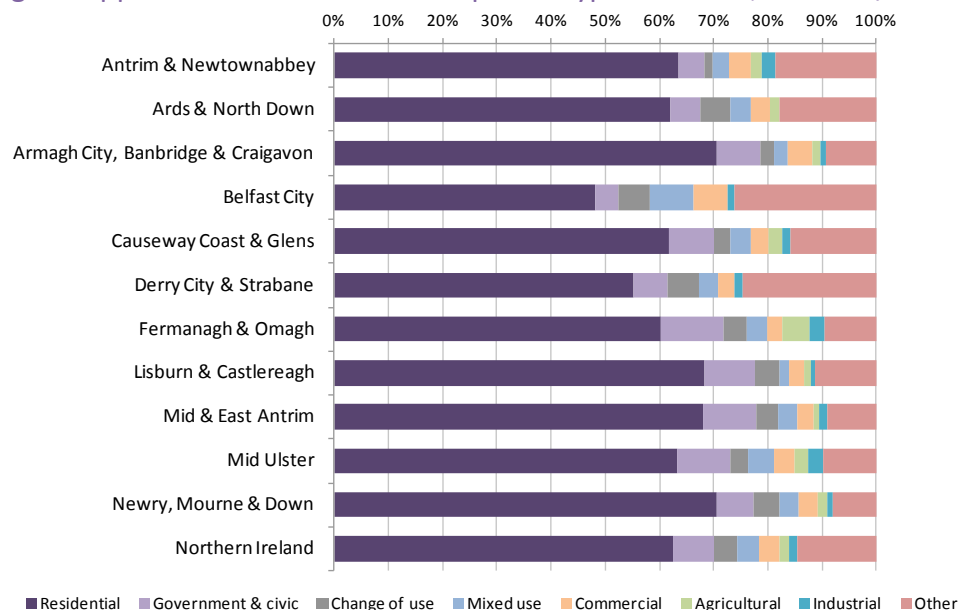
A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

It is interesting to note that the average processing time for local applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (16.0 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (72.0 weeks).

5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development and this has continued in Q1 2016/17. **Residential** applications received during Q1 made up **62.5%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications, this was 3.2 percentage points more than the same period last year (59.3%). Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, Q1 2016/17



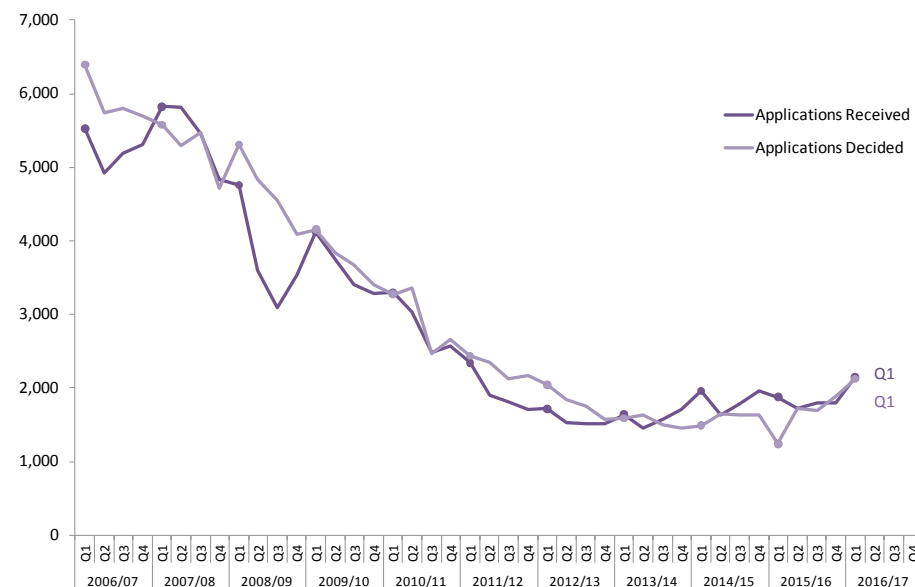
In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon and in Newry Mourne and Down, seven out of every ten applications (70.5% and 70.4%) were for residential development, compared to just under five in every ten in Belfast City (48.1%).

Belfast City (26.2%) and Derry City and Strabane (24.6%) both receive a much higher proportion of applications in the 'Other' category. See

Appendix 1 – 'Definitions' for a description of the types of applications included in these categories.

At NI level, the overall number of applications increased by 8.6% in Q1 when compared to the same period a year earlier. This was driven by increases of 14.5% in the number of 'Residential' applications received (up from 1,876 to 2,148) and by 21.2% in 'Other' (up from 415 to 503). These increases were slightly offset by a marked drop of 29.8% in the number of 'Government and Civic' applications received (down from 373 to 262), which was caused by the sharp decline in renewable energy applications over this period (refer to Section 7 for more details).

Fig 5.2 NI Residential applications, quarterly from Apr 2006 – Jun 2016



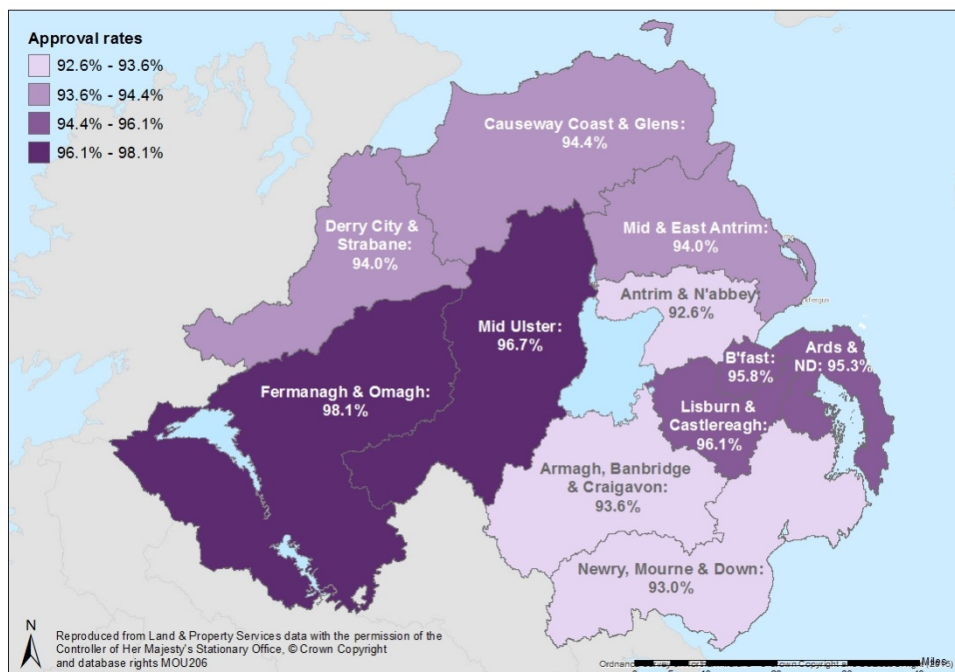
[Refer to Table 5.2](#)

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in total for Northern Ireland in Q1 was **2,148**, an increase of 14.5% compared to

the previous year (1,876). This is the highest number of residential planning applications received in any quarter since Q1 2011/12 (2,345). The number of **residential** planning applications **decided** in Q1 was **2,122**, an increase of 70.9% on the same period last year. The number of decisions issued between April and June 2016 is the highest for this period in any year since 2011/12 (2,437).

[Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council, Q1 2016/17



The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for residential planning applications in Q1 2016/17 was **94.7%**, a little higher than the rate for the same period in the previous year (94.3%). Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils with highs of 98.1% in Fermanagh and

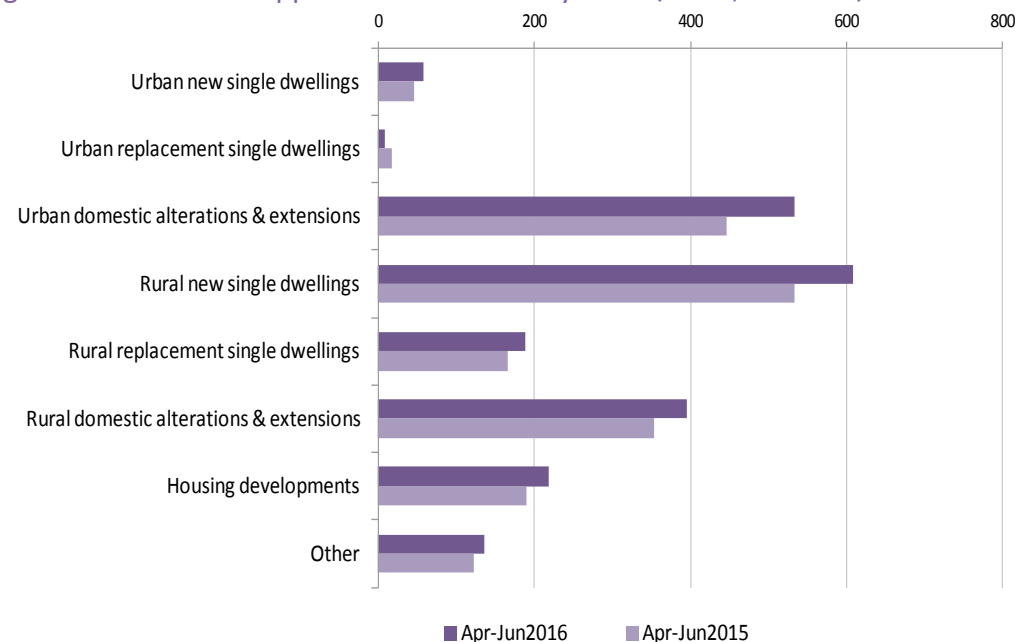
Omagh and 96.7% in Mid Ulster down to 92.6% in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Over the quarter, there were 73 residential applications withdrawn, more than double the number withdrawn during the same period last year (34).

[Refer to Table 5.4](#)

Fig 5.4 shows that of the residential applications received; new single dwellings in rural areas and alterations/extensions in urban areas continue to dominate, together making up over half (53.2%) of all residential applications received during Q1.

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, Q1 2016/17



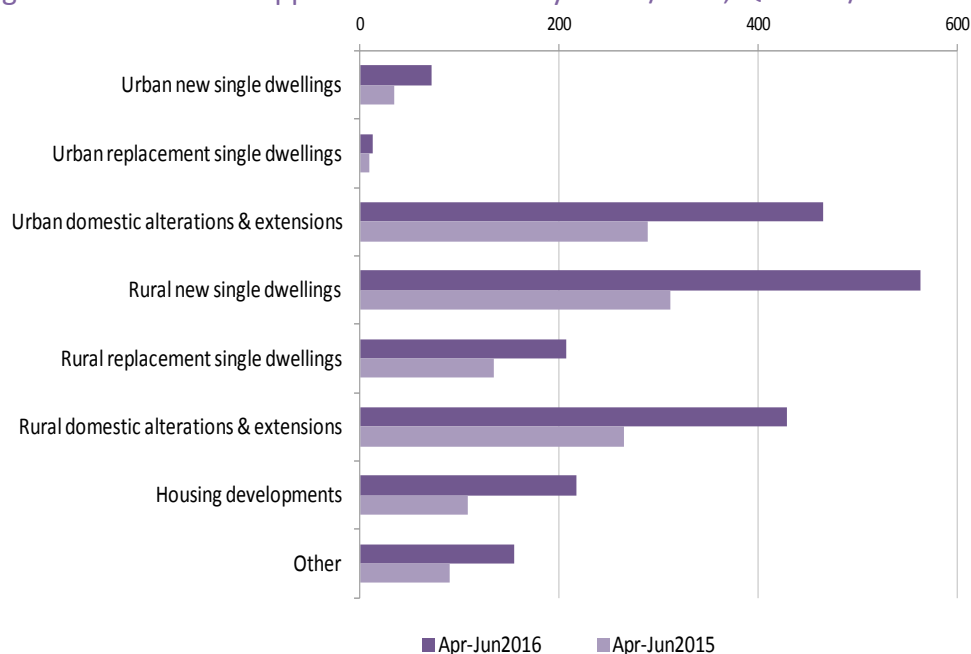
The largest increase in the number of residential applications received was in **urban domestic alterations and extensions**, up 19.2% from 447 to 533 applications when compared to the same quarter a year earlier.

Residential applications were up across the board with the exception of **urban replacement single dwelling** which decreased by almost half (from 17 to 9 applications).

Decisions on residential applications increased considerably when compared to Q1 2015/16 (up by 70.9% from 1,242 to 2,122), with the number of applications decided for **housing developments** and **new urban single dwellings** more than doubling. The number of applications decided was greatest for rural new single dwellings and urban domestic alterations and extensions which are in line with the volume of applications received.

[Refer to Table 5.5](#)

Fig 5.5 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q1 2016/17



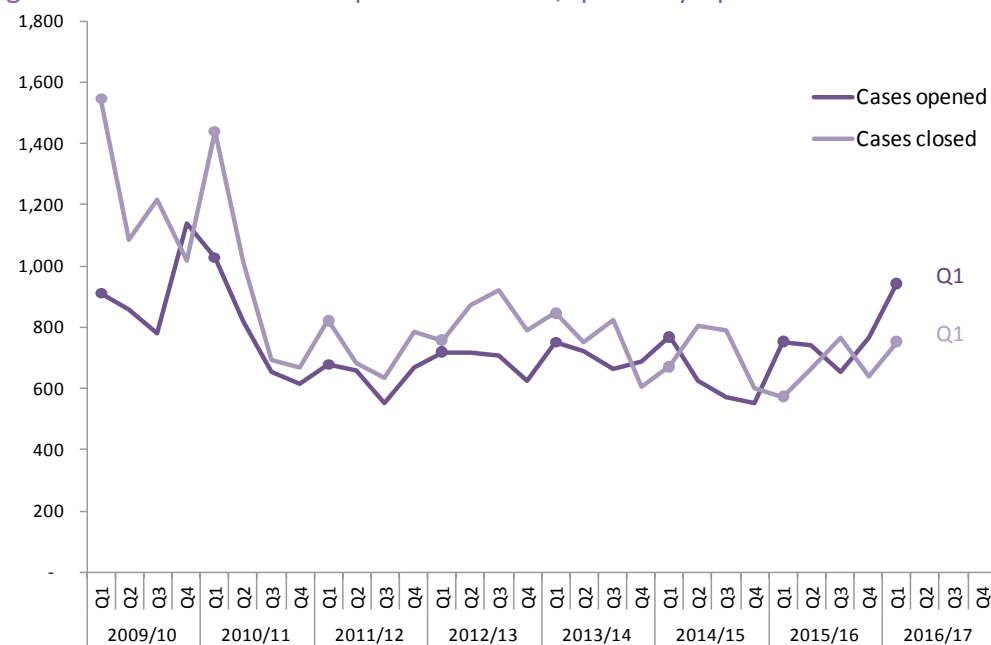
[Refer to Table 5.6](#)

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during Q1 2016/17 was **943**, an increase of just over one quarter (25.2%) compared to the same period a year earlier. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in this quarter since Q1 2010/11 when 1,028 cases were opened.

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q1 was **753**, this was up by a notable 31.4% on the same quarter last year.

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly Apr 2009–Jun 2016



Across the councils Belfast City (113), Ards and North Down (110) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (107) opened the largest number of enforcement cases in Q1.

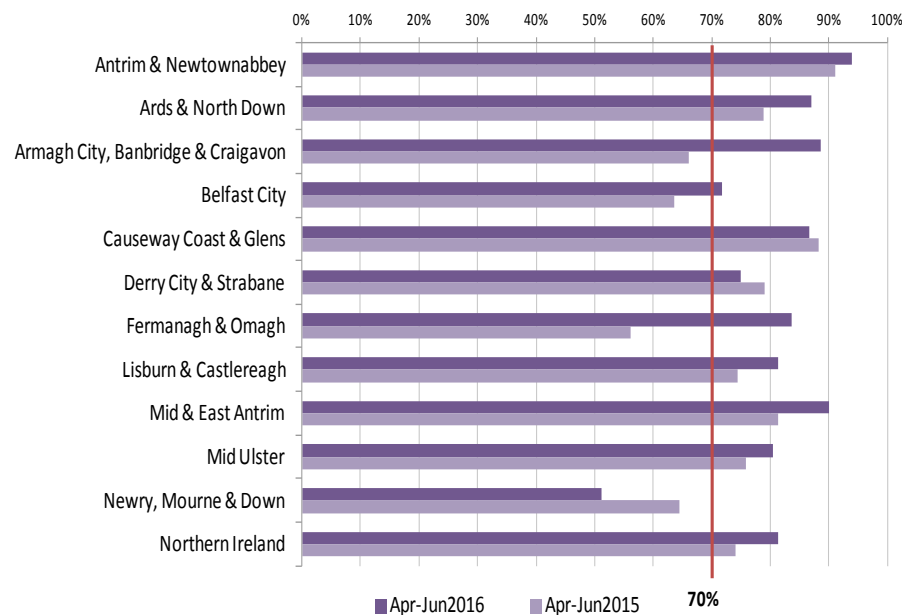
Belfast City (134) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (112) recorded the highest number of enforcement cases closed during the same period.

Of the **753** closed cases in Q1 2016/17, the main reason in over a third of cases (34.9%) was that no breach had actually occurred while a further 25.1% cases had been remedied or resolved.

[Refer to Table 6.1](#)

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.

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, Q1 2016/17



In Q1 2016/17, **81.3%** of enforcement cases across Northern Ireland were concluded within 39 weeks, over 11 percentage points above the statutory target and an improvement of just over 7 percentage points on the equivalent quarter last year.

Ten of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with highs of 93.9% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey and 90.0% in Mid and East Antrim during Q1 2016/17. Newry, Mourne and Down (51.1%) are currently below the target level.

[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

During Q1 2016/17 there were **8 prosecutions** initiated, double the number compared to the same quarter in the previous year. The number of prosecutions dropped significantly between 2012/13 (145) and 2014/15 (35). In 2015/16 there were 23 prosecutions over the year. Causeway Coast and Glens initiated 4 prosecutions in Q1 2016/17. During the quarter four of the eleven councils initiated prosecutions. There were **5 convictions** over the same period.

[Refer to Table 6.3](#)

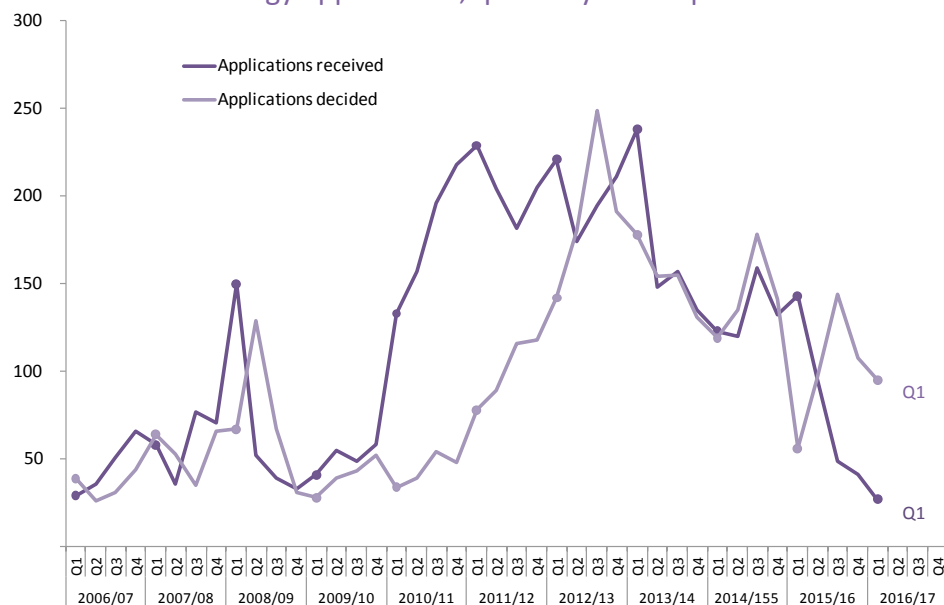
The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of June 2016 was **3,007**, 9.3% more than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **764**, accounting for over a quarter (25.4%) of all live cases. This proportion is 1.5 percentage points lower than the last quarter and considerably lower than the 34.6% reported at end of June 2013. Over the last two years, the proportion of live enforcement cases in the planning system for more than two years has remained relatively static.

[Refer to Table 6.3, 6.4](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in Q1 2016/17 was **27**, the lowest Q1 figure since 2004/05 (13). The number of applications received during April to June peaked in 2013/14 with 238 applications. In Q2 2015/16, the number of renewable energy applications received dropped to below one hundred for the first time since Q4 2009/10. This decline in 2015/16, and continuing into Q1 2016/17, 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. Over the last year, renewable energy applications received fell markedly from 143 to 27.

Fig 7.1 Renewable Energy applications, quarterly from Apr 2006 – Jun 2016

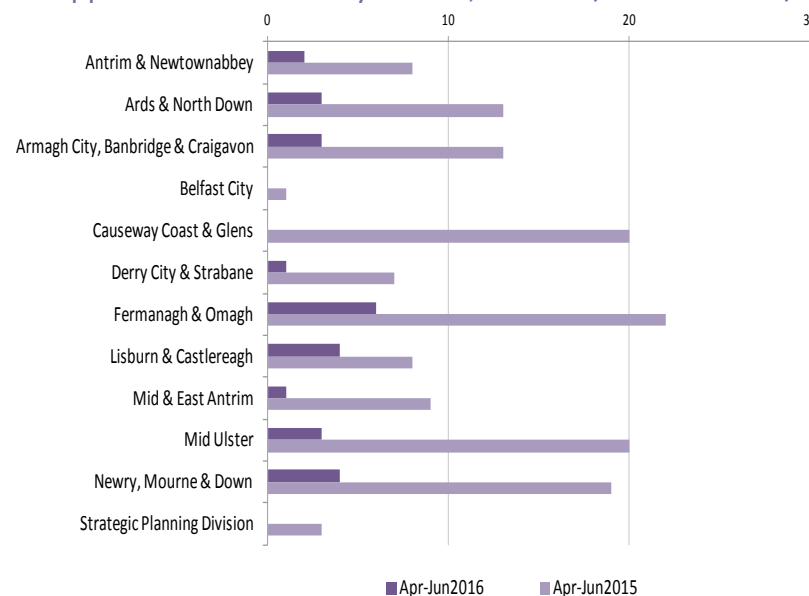


The number of applications **decided** between April and June 2016 was **95**, a significant increase of 69.6% when compared to the same period last year (56). During this period, the average processing time was 54.4 weeks

across NI, over 6 weeks longer than the equivalent quarter last year (47.9 weeks).

In Q1, nearly half of all renewable energy applications were for single wind turbines (13 of 27). Although single wind turbines continue to dominate renewable energy applications, the number of applications being received is vastly reduced, falling from 114 in Q1 last year to 13 in Q1 2016/17.

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by council, Q1 2015/16 & Q1 2016/17

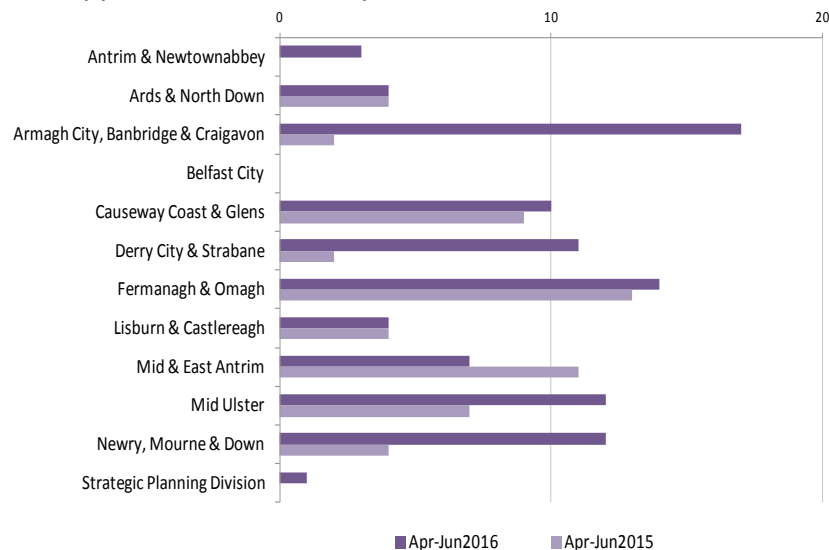


[Refer to Table 7.1, 7.2](#)

Figures 7.2 shows the spread across councils with Fermanagh and Omagh (6), Lisburn and Castlereagh (4) and Newry, Mourne and Down (4) receiving the most renewable energy applications in Q1 2016/17.

Of the 95 decisions issued in Q1, the majority (73) were for single wind turbines. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (17) and Fermanagh and Omagh (14) issued the most decisions.

Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by council, Q1 2015/16 & Q1 2016/17

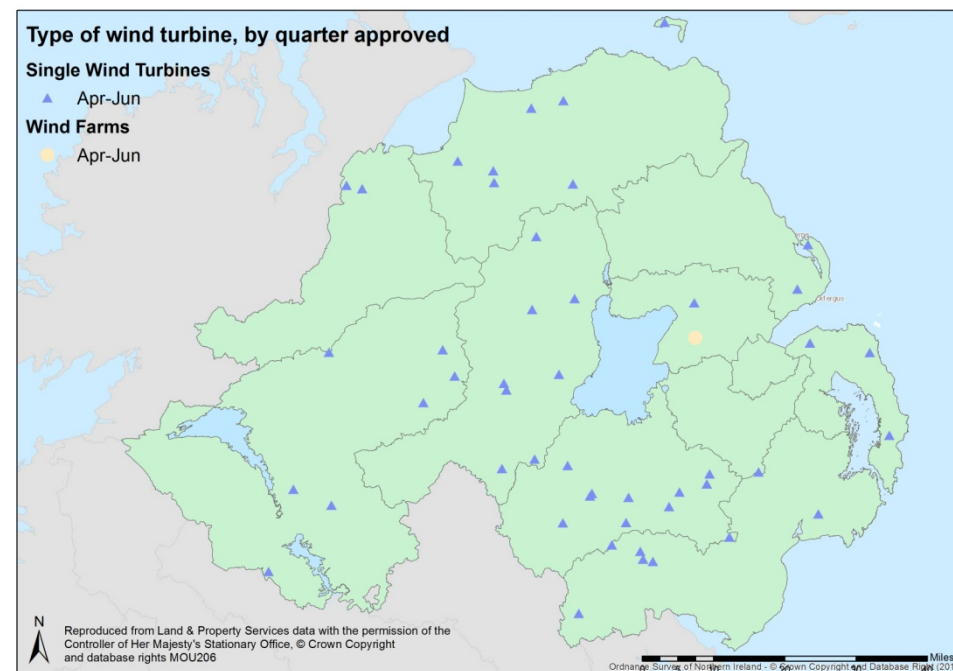


Twenty-six renewable energy applications were withdrawn during Q1, over three times as many compared to the same quarter last year, with Causeway Coast and Glens (6), Fermanagh and Omagh (4) and Newry Mourne and Down (4) recording the most.

At the end of June 2016, there were **356 live renewable energy applications**, mainly comprising 266 single wind turbines, 26 wind farms and 23 for hydroelectricity. The number of live renewable energy applications was down by just over a fifth (20.5%) over the quarter when compared with end of March 2016.

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **72.6%** in Q1 2016/17, down by over 20 percentage points from the 92.9% recorded at the same point a year earlier.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Q1 2016/17



[Refer to Table 7.3, 7.4](#)

Work is currently underway to develop interactive maps for renewable energy planning applications. The maps will be held on the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Sharing ([NINIS website](#)) and a direct link to them will be included in future reports.

User Guidance

Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1st April 2016 to 30th June 2016 were transferred in July 2016 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) which involved quality checks and inspection of coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils were provided with their own headline planning statistics before the release of this publication as part of the quality assurance process. On completion of ASRB and council validation, a final extract was taken in August 2016. Please note the quarterly data for 2015/16 are now finalised and will not be subject to further scheduled updates. Quarterly data for 2016/17 are regarded as provisional and will remain this status until the annual report for 2016/17 is published in June 2017.

Users should be aware that quite a number of structural changes have been made to the Planning Portal and associated processes, in order to comply with new planning legislation and it will inevitably take time for the new validation procedures to become properly embedded. It is considered, however, that these finalised annual figures have now reconciled any data issues that were highlighted during the course of the transitional year (2015/16).

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

Note that a new classification hierarchy of development for planning application came into effect on 1st April 2014, on an administrative basis, with the introduction of the following new categories – regionally significant, major and local development. The hierarchy was subsequently placed on a statutory basis in line with the transfer of planning functions to the new district councils on 1st April 2015. It should be noted that there

are some differences between the initial administrative hierarchy classifications in place from 1st April 2014 and the final classifications set out in the Planning (Development Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (S.R.2015 No.71).

Regionally significant developments (RSD) are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or involve a substantial departure from a local development plan. Applications for these development proposals will be submitted to and determined by the Department. However, the thresholds for RSD may mean that applications which may have previously been dealt with by the Department will now be classified as major development and thus determined by the relevant council. Like major applications, RSD proposals will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

Major developments have important economic, social and environmental implications for a council area. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils under the new planning system and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

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

Departmental activity

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

Retained Section 29 (former non Article 31) applications are those being dealt with by the Department's Strategic Planning Division which were close to determination at 1 April 2015 and which were retained for determination as if the Department had called them in under Section 29 of the Planning Act (NI) 2015.

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

Appeals

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

Enforcement Activity

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

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

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

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

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

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

Processing Times

The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The average processing

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

Geographical Classification

The method of classifying the urban and rural marker has been updated to reflect the latest NISRA guidance using the 2015 Settlement limits:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/settlement15-guidance.pdf>

This method is preferred to the previous method as it more accurately considers which of the 8 Settlement bands 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.

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

Note on Exclusions:

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs), either proposed or existing, have not been included in the Official Statistics bulletin since 2012/13. These are not actually applications for planning permission. A council will issue a CLUD if it is satisfied that a particular development is lawful within the provisions of planning legislation. Examples include proposed extensions, which fall within the provisions of the Planning

(General Permitted Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 for permitted development and do not require planning permission, or uses that have become lawful due to the length of time they have been in existence.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

While applications for planning permission and other consents were included in the operational statistics produced prior to transfer, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) were excluded. In the interests of consistency TPOs will also be excluded from the new operational statistics.

Non Material Changes (NMCs)

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

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

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

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs)

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

Discharge of Conditions (DCs)

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

Further Information

Information and statistics for the other devolved administrations and Republic of Ireland can be found at the following links.

England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-applications-statistics>

Scotland:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning>

Wales:

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/planningstats/development-management-quarterly-survey/?lang=en>

Republic of Ireland:

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

Building Control (LPS Starts and completions):

<https://www.dfpni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/new-dwelling-statistics>

Housing bulletin DSD:

<https://www.dsdni.gov.uk/topics/dsd-statistics-and-research-housing/housing-statistics>

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-housing-bulletin-january-march-2016>

Appendix 1 – Definitions

The Statistical Categories referred to in Section 5 and Excel Table 5.1 are defined below.

Agricultural

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

Commercial

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

Government and Civic

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

Industrial and Manufacturing

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

Mixed Development

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

Residential

These include housing developments (incorporating a mixture of house types and apartments), purpose built apartment developments, sheltered housing schemes, single dwellings including dwellings on farms, holiday chalets, caravans and mobile homes, alteration, extension or improvement of existing dwellings, residential homes or nursing homes, hotels or motels.

Change of Use

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

Other types of application

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

The application types referred to in Excel Table 5.6 are defined below.

Outline permission

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

Full permission

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

Approval of Reserved Matters

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

Consent to Display an Advertisement

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

Listed Building Consent

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

Conservation Area Consent

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

Hazardous Substances Consent

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

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