

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2016/17 SECOND QUARTERLY STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(July – September 2016: Provisional figures)



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Key Points

- There were 3,058 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during July to September 2016 (Q2), a decrease of 11% over the previous quarter but up by 5% on the same quarter in 2015/16. This comprised 3,021 local development and 37 major development applications. No new regionally significant development applications were received in the second quarter.
- During Q2, 3,324 planning applications were decided, this was down by nearly 5% over the latest quarter but up by almost one-fifth (19%) on the previous year. Since the final quarter of 2015/16, the number of applications decided has exceeded the number of applications being received.
- The average processing time for major applications during the first six months of the year was just above 70 weeks across all councils; up significantly from the 40 weeks reported for the equivalent six month period in the previous year. This is currently over forty weeks longer than the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks.
- The number of local planning applications received in NI during Q2 2016/17 was 3,021, an increase of nearly 4% on the same period last year. Across councils, Belfast City (471), Causeway Coast and Glens (329) and Newry, Mourne and Down (324) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q2.
- In NI, across councils it took on average around 16 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal during the first six months of 2016, an improvement of more than 2 weeks on the same period last year (19). The shortest average processing time for local applications across councils during this period was below 9 weeks in Mid and East Antrim whilst the longest was 24 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down but whose performance continues to improve. Six of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target during the first six months of 2016.
- The number of enforcement cases opened in NI during Q2 2016/17 was 880, an increase of nearly 19% on the same period last year. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in this quarter since the start of the reported series (2009/10). Across councils, Causeway Coast and Glens (156), Antrim and Newtownabbey (137) and Belfast City (125) opened the largest number of enforcement cases during the quarter.
- During April to September 2016, around four in every five (81%) enforcement cases across NI were concluded within 39 weeks, which was over 11 percentage points above the statutory target and an improvement of more than 5 percentage points on the equivalent period last year. Ten of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with highs of 94% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey and 90% in Mid and East Antrim.
- The NI approval rate for all planning applications for the quarter was 93%, just over 1 percentage point lower than the rate a year earlier. Second quarter approval rates varied across councils from nearly 100% in Mid Ulster to 89% in Derry City and Strabane.
- The number of renewable energy applications received was the lowest second quarter figure in over ten years (since 2004/05). Of the 18 applications received in this quarter, over half were for single wind turbines. During the first six months of 2016/17, the average processing time was nearly 60 weeks across NI, over 15 weeks longer than the equivalent 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 second 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 second 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 March 2017. This will contain planning data up to 31st December 2016 (i.e. for Q3 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>.

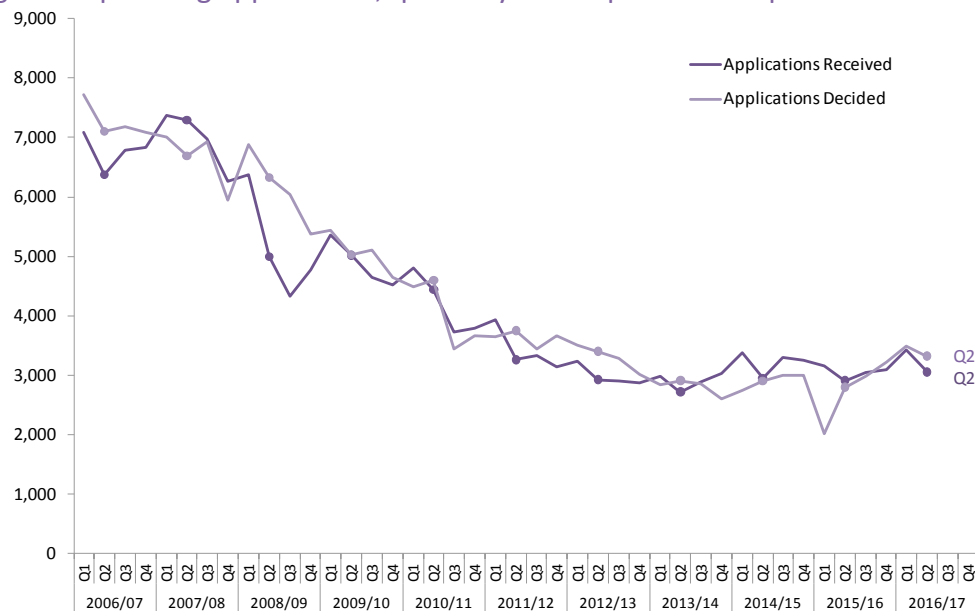
1. Overall NI Planning Activity

Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period July to September 2016 (Q2), was **3,058**, a decrease of 11.0% on the previous quarter (3,435) but up by 5.0% on the same period in 2015/16 (2,913).

When compared to the same quarter in earlier years, Q2 2016/17 had the highest number of planning applications received since Q2 2011/12 (3,264), having followed a general downward trend from the full series peak of 10,924 received in Q1 2005/06. Of the 3,058 applications received in Q2 2016/17, nearly three quarters were for full planning permission (74.4%).

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

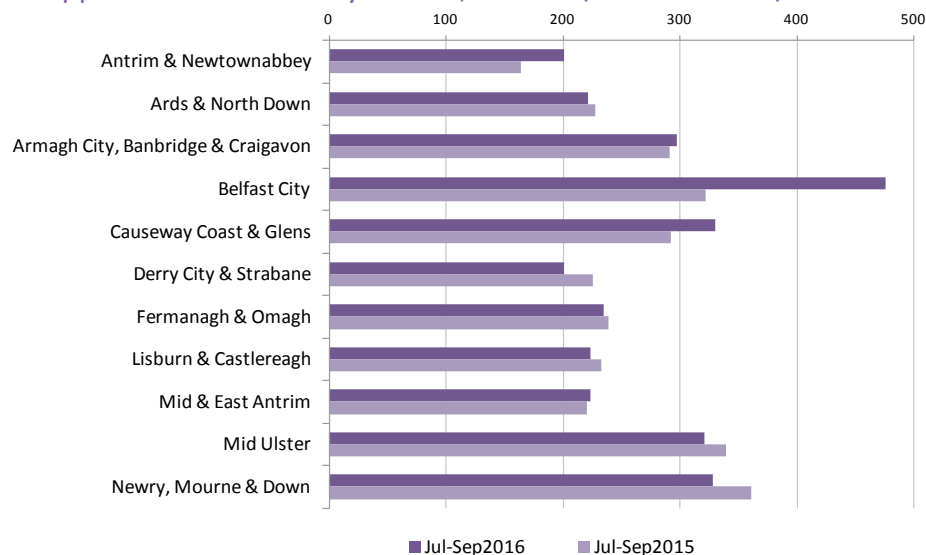


Across NI in Q2, there were 16.5 planning applications received per 10,000 population. This is a stark decline when compared to the 48.7 applications received per 10,000 population in the same quarter of 2004/05.

In Q2, Belfast City council received the most (476) planning applications, followed by Causeway, Coast and Glens (330) and Newry, Mourne and Down (328); between them accounting for nearly two fifths (37.1%) of all applications received across NI. The councils receiving the least applications were Antrim and Newtownabbey (201), Derry City and Strabane (201) and Ards and North Down (221).

The volume of planning applications received in Q2 increased in five of the eleven councils over the year with the largest increases in percentage terms occurring in Belfast City (+47.8%), Antrim and Newtownabbey (+22.6%) and Causeway, Coast and Glens (+13.0%). The reason for the large change in Belfast City was that applications received in the same quarter last year (322) were the lowest reported since Q1 2015/16; the current Q2 figure (476) although being the highest in the series is just slightly up on previous quarters. Where decreases were recorded, the greatest were in Derry City and Strabane (-10.7%) and Newry, Mourne and Down (-9.1%).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q2 2015/16 & Q2 2016/17



At council level, Causeway Coast and Glens (23.1), Mid Ulster (22.3) and Fermanagh and Omagh (20.4) received the most planning applications per 10,000 population, whilst Derry and Strabane (13.4) and Ards and North Down (13.9) received the least. The supporting Excel table provides activity per head of population for each district council.

[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

Applications Decided

The number of planning decisions **issued** during July to September 2016 was **3,324**, representing decrease of 4.8% over the quarter but a very significant increase of 18.7% on the same period a year earlier (2,801). 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 closely tracked applications received up to quarter 3 2015/16. Since then the number of applications decided each quarter has been greater than

the number received. Just over three quarters (76.2%) were for full planning permission.

In Q2 2016/17, **168** applications were **withdrawn**, just over two fifths more (41.2%) when compared to the same period a year earlier (119). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

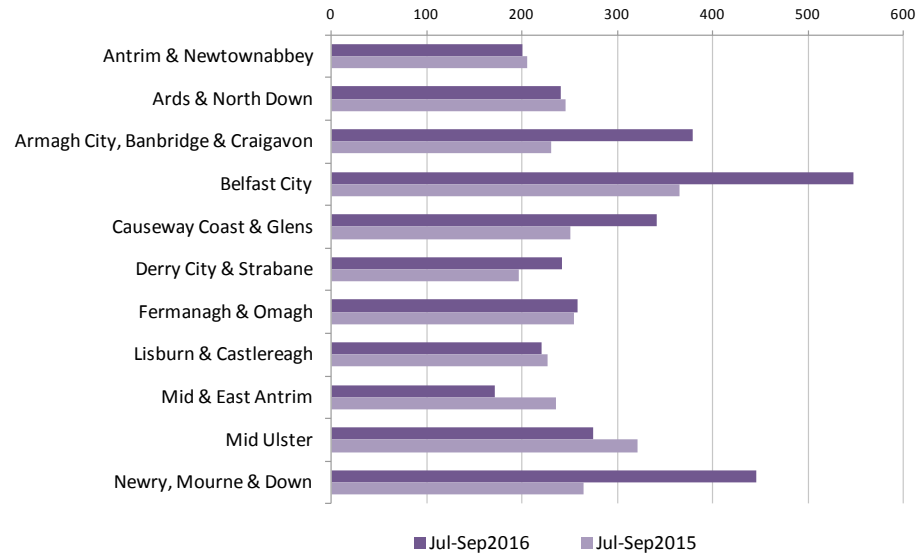
Applications Decided by Council

The number of decisions issued in Q2 2016/17 varied across all councils when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. During the period there were significant increases in Newry, Mourne and Down (446) up 68.9% over the year, Armagh, City and Banbridge (379) up 64.8% and Belfast city (547) up 49.9%. The number of decisions issued fell over the year in Mid and East Antrim (172) down 27.1% and Mid Ulster (274) down 14.6%.

The number of planning applications decided across councils in Q2 ranged from a high of 547 in Belfast City to 172 in Mid & East Antrim.

Seven of the eleven councils issued more decisions than they received during Q2 with Newry, Mourne and Down (+36.0%) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (+27.6%) reporting the greatest differences.

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q2 2015/16 & Q2 2016/17



[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

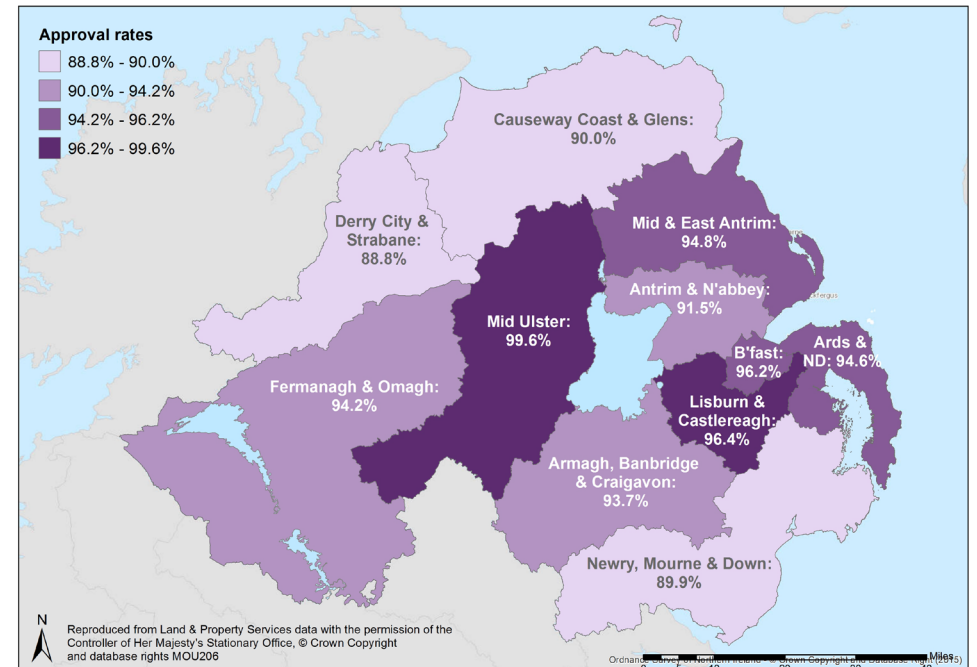
In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q2, they processed to decision or withdrawal 135 certificates of lawfulness, 114 non material changes and 108 discharge of conditions. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

Approval Rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications for Q2 was **93.5%**, down by 1 percentage point over the quarter and by 1.4 percentage points when compared to the rate a year earlier.

In Q2, planning approval rates varied across councils from highs of 99.6% in Mid Ulster and 96.4% in Lisburn and Castlereagh to a low of 88.8% in Derry City and Strabane. Four out of the eleven councils had an approval rate which was lower than the overall NI approval rate of 93.5%.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, Q2 2016/17



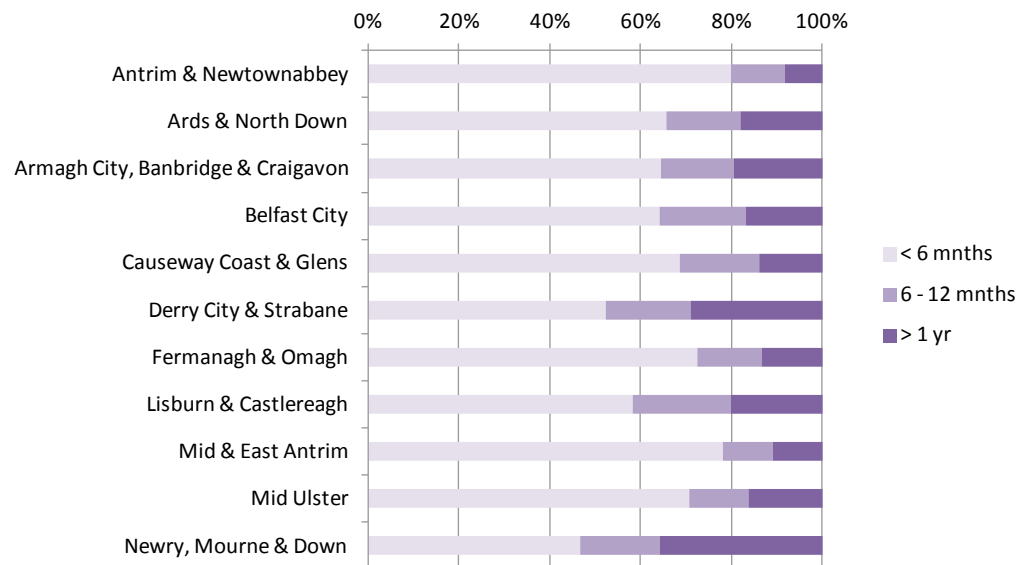
[Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

Live applications

At the end of September 2016, there were **6,687** live applications in the planning system across NI, the lowest number since the transfer of planning powers in April 2015. Of these, 1,369 applications were in the planning system for over one year. In summary, just over 1 out of every 5 live applications in the planning system was over one year old; this was similar to the end of June 2016, but 4.4 percentage points higher than the same point last year. Over the last year, the proportion of live planning applications in the system for over a year increased from 16.1% (1,238) to 20.5% (1,369) of all live applications.

[Refer to Table 1.3](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Sep 2016



The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of September 2016 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.4. Antrim and Newtownabbey had the lowest proportion of cases over one year old (8.2%), which equates to just under 1 in every 12 applications compared to Newry Mourne and Down where over 1 in every 3 applications was over a year old (35.9%).

Over the last quarter, seven of the eleven councils reduced the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year, with the greatest changes in Causeway Coast and Glens (-3.4pp) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (-2.7 pp)¹. The proportion of applications over a year increased in four councils with the greatest increases in Ards and North Down (+3.6pp) and Newry Mourne and Down (+3.4pp).

[Refer to Table 1.4](#)

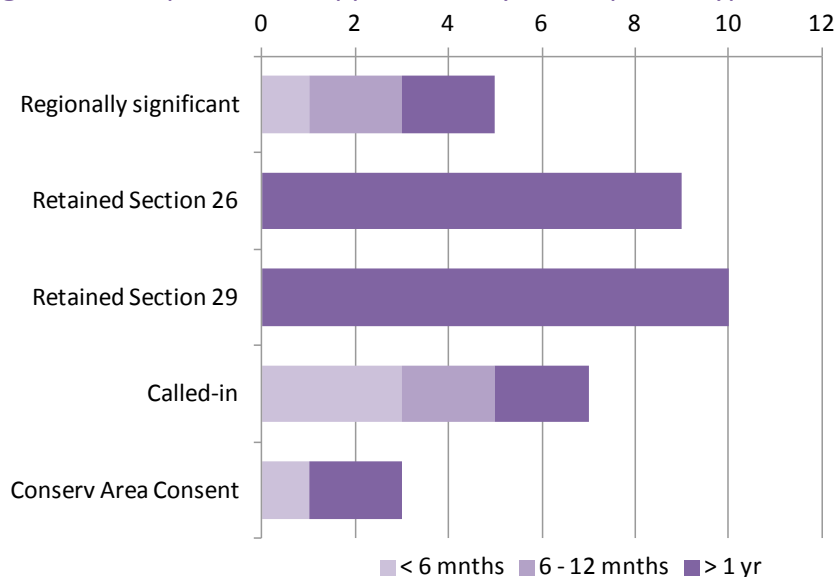
¹ Percentage Point change (pp)

2. Departmental Activity

At the end of September 2016, there were **5 ongoing regionally significant development (RSD) applications**, **7 called-in**; **3 conservation area consents** (i.e. consent to demolish); and **19 retained applications**. Seventy-four percent of live applications (25 of 34) at the end of September 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 Q2, there were no new RSD applications received.

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end Sep 16



[Refer to Table 2.2](#)

During Q2, the Department received 2 new applications (both called-in). This is the same as both the number received in the last quarter and 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 September 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 will be assessed in future reports once they have been decided or withdrawn, alongside any new applications which may come into scope.

The Department reached **decisions** on **3** applications during Q2, two less than the number decided a year earlier. The 3 decisions were **Retained Section 26** (*former Article 31*) applications. These are major applications being processed by the Department as Article 31 as a decision had not been issued before the 1st April 2015.

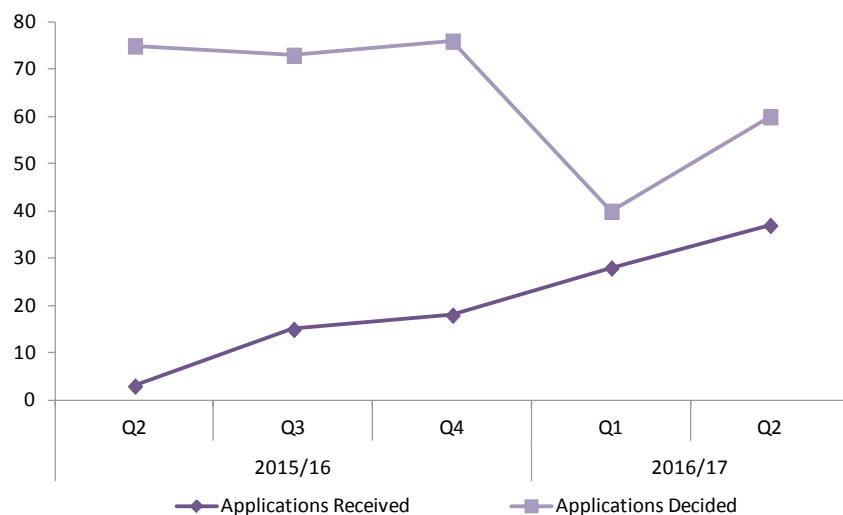
There were no applications withdrawn during Q2.

The average processing times during the first six months of the year for the different application types which were processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal are reported in [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 Q2 2016/17 was **37**.

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, quarterly Jun 2015 – Sep 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 is likely to have been related to the significant drop in the number of major applications received in Q2 2015/16 (3) compared to Q1 2015/16 (109). It is also likely that Q1 2015/16 was atypically high with major applications potentially being submitted ahead of the new process coming into effect.

Q2 2015/16 had the lowest number of major applications received across the whole series. From Q2 2015/16, the number of major applications received has steadily increased quarter on quarter with Q2 2016/17 reporting 37 across Northern Ireland.

Of the 37 major applications received in Q2, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (7) and Belfast City (5) received the most.

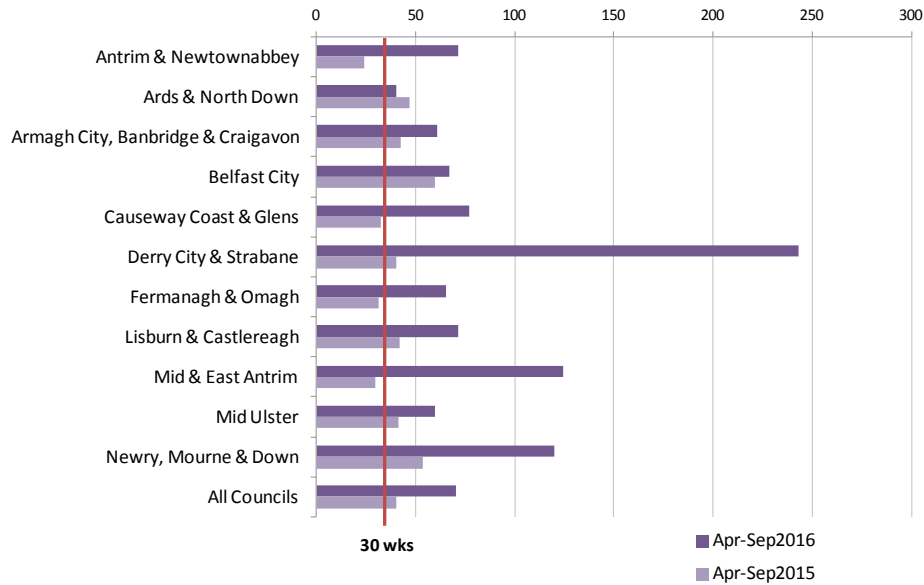
Over the quarter, **60 major** planning applications were **decided** and **6 withdrawn**. Since Q2 2015/16, the numbers of planning decisions issued have exceeded the numbers being received. Belfast City (14) issued most decisions on major applications followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (9) and Fermanagh and Omagh (7).

[Refer to Table 3.1](#)

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

Figure 3.2 provides the year to date processing times for major applications. During this period (April to September 2016), the **average processing time** to process **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **70.4 weeks** across all councils, up significantly from the 40.0 weeks reported in the same period last year. This is over forty weeks longer than the statutory processing time target which is an average of 30 weeks.

Fig 3.2 Major processing times by council, Apr-Sep 2015 & 2016



It is interesting to note that the year to date (Apr-Sep 2016) average processing time for major applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (46.1 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (89.6 weeks).

Whilst Fig 3.2 has been provided for completeness, none of the councils had processed a sufficient number of major applications during the first six months of 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. With that caveat in mind, it is still worth noting that, at this point, none of the councils are on track to meet the statutory 30 week processing target.

[Refer to Table 3.2](#)

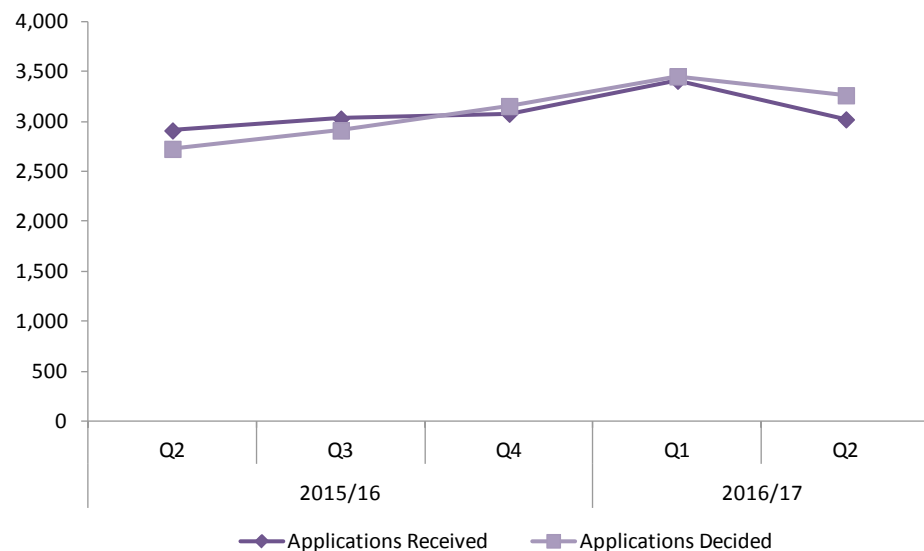
A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

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 Q2 2016/17 was **3,021** representing a fall of 11.3% from the 3,407 applications received in Q1. Over the last year, however, the number of local applications received increased by 3.8%.

Across councils, Belfast City (471), Causeway Coast and Glens (329) and Newry, Mourne and Down (324) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q2. Four of the eleven councils received more local applications in Q2 compared to the same period last year. The increase in the number of local applications over the year is largely attributable to the increase recorded in Belfast City (up from 322 to 471 applications).

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



The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q2 2016/17 was **3,262**, up by a notable 19.7% when compared to the same period a year earlier.

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. From Q4 2015/16 onwards the volume of local applications decided has continued to exceed the number of applications being received.

During Q2 2016/17, Belfast City (533), Newry Mourne and Down (437) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (374) issued the most local decisions across councils, partly reflecting the high volumes of such applications received.

Over the quarter, there were 161 local applications withdrawn across NI, this ranged from 30 applications withdrawn in Newry Mourne and Down to 4 in both Antrim and Newtownabbey and Mid and East Antrim.

[Refer to Table 4.1](#)

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

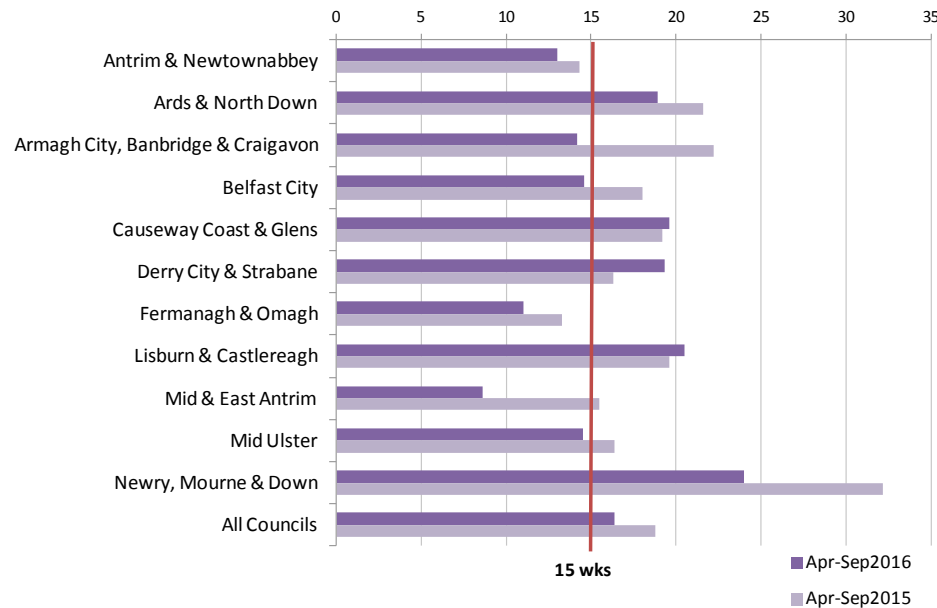
During April to September 2016, the **average processing time** to bring **local** applications to decision or withdrawal was **16.4 weeks** across all councils, an improvement of 2.4 weeks on the average time taken in the same period last year (18.8).

The shortest average processing time for local applications during the first six months of 2016 was 8.6 weeks in Mid and East Antrim (based on 395 local applications decided and 11 withdrawn) whilst the longest was 24.0 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down (based on 1,030 local applications decided and 59 withdrawn). Six of the 11 councils, namely Mid and East Antrim (8.6), Fermanagh and Omagh (11.0), Antrim and Newtownabbey (13.0), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.2), Mid Ulster (14.5) and Belfast City (14.6) were within the 15 week target at the mid-point of the year.

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 year to date (Apr-Sep 2016) processing time for local applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is over 5 times shorter (14.8 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (78.9 weeks).

Fig 4.2 Local processing times by council, Apr-Sep 2015 & 2016



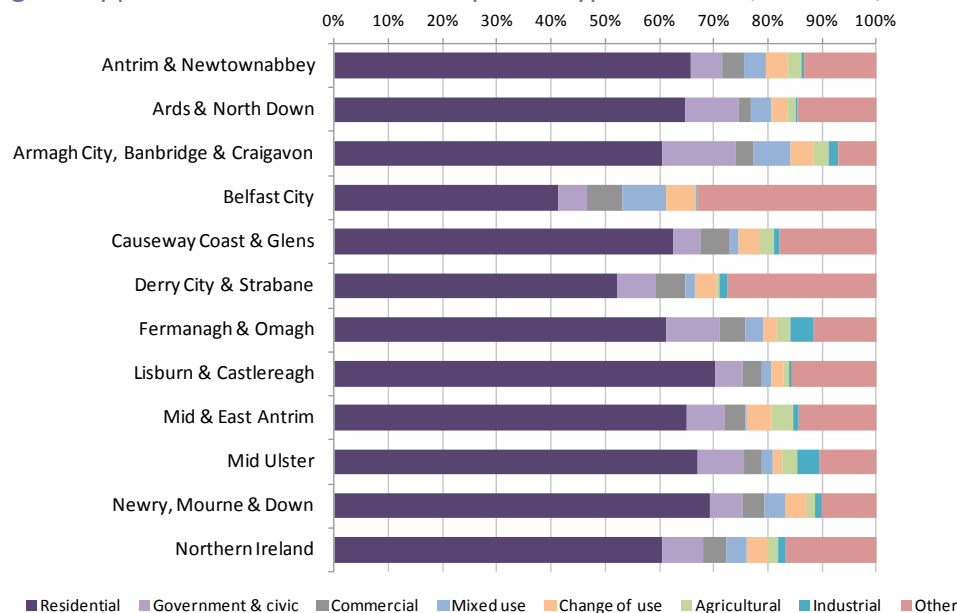
Notably, eight of the eleven councils improved their processing times for local applications during Apr-Sep 2016 when compared with the same period last year, with Newry Mourne and Down improving most on their first quarter performance.

[Refer to Table 4.2](#)

5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development and this has continued in Q2 2016/17. **Residential** applications received during Q2 made up **60.6%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications, up a little from the 59.0% reported for same period last year. Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, Q2 2016/17



In Lisburn and Castlereagh and in Newry Mourne and Down, seven out of every ten applications received (70.4% and 69.2%) were for residential development, compared to just over four in every ten in Belfast City (41.4%).

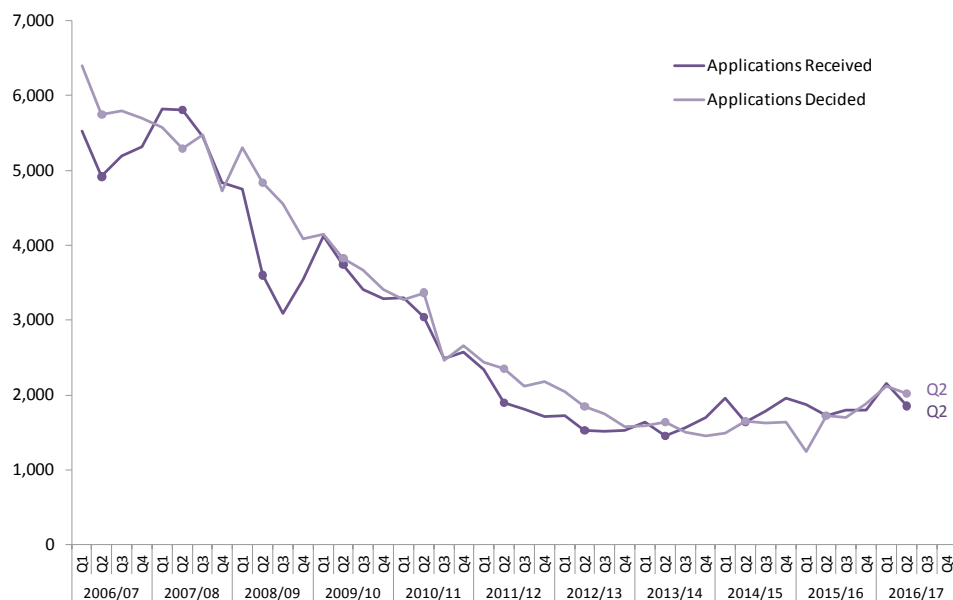
Belfast City (33.0%) and Derry City and Strabane (27.4%) both receive a much higher proportion of applications in the 'Other' category. See Appendix 1 – 'Definitions' for a description of the types of applications included in these categories.

At NI level, the overall number of planning applications increased by 5.0% in Q2 when compared to the same period a year earlier. This increase over the year was driven by increases of 7.7% in the number of 'Residential' applications received (up from 1,720 to 1,853), 19.3% in 'Other' (up from 429 to 512) and 55.3% in 'Mixed Use' (up from 76 to 118).

These increases were slightly offset by a marked drop of almost one third (32.5%) in the number of 'Government and Civic' applications received (down from 338 to 228), which in turn was largely caused by the sharp decline in renewable energy applications over this period (refer to Section 7 for more details).

[Refer to Table 5.1, 5.2](#)

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

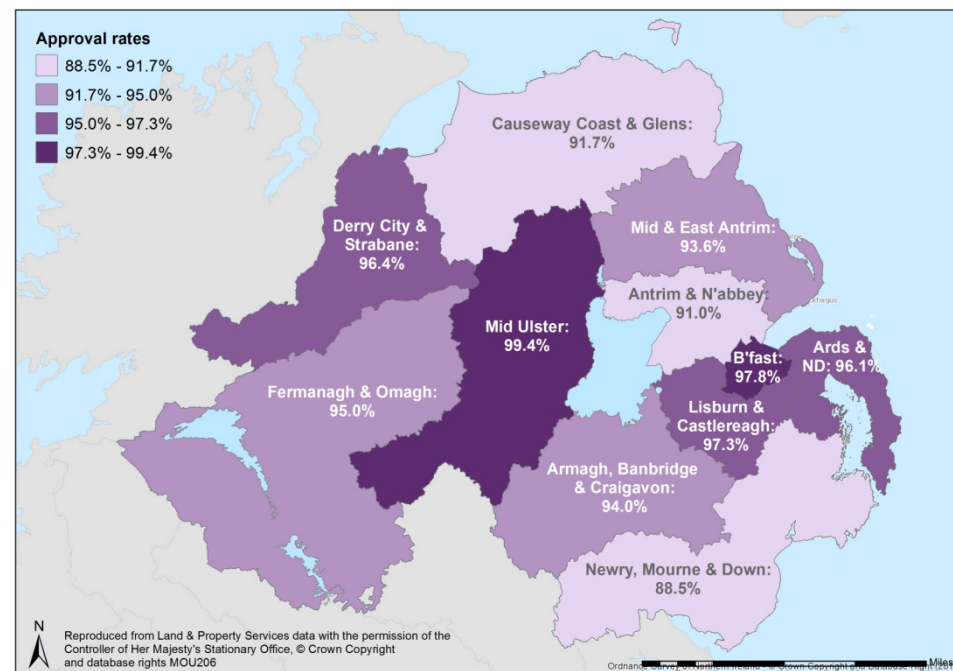


The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in total for Northern Ireland in Q2 was **1,853**, a decrease over the quarter of 13.8% but up over the year by 7.7%. Q2 2016/17 reports the highest number of residential planning applications received in any Q2 quarter since 2011/12 (1,896).

The number of **residential** planning applications **decided** in Q2 was **2,022**, a fall of 4.8% over the quarter but an increase of 17.4% on the same period last year. The number of decisions issued between July and September 2016 is the highest for this period in any year since Q2 2011/12 (2,354).

[Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council, Q2 2016/17



The **Northern Ireland** approval rate for residential planning applications in Q2 2016/17 was **94.3%**, lower than the rate for the previous quarter (94.7%) and same period in the previous year (95.1%). Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils with highs of 99.4% in Mid Ulster, 97.8% in Belfast City and 97.3% in Lisburn and Castlereagh down to 88.5% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Over the quarter, there were 78 residential applications withdrawn, 6.8% more than the previous quarter (73) and 39.3% more than the same period last year (56).

[Refer to Table 5.4](#)

Across urban areas (*in settlements greater than 5,000 population*), the number of residential applications received declined over the latest quarter by 17.0% but increased by 10.2% over the year. This was similar in rural areas within settlements of less than 5,000 population (down by 10.9% over the quarter and up by 14.5% over the year), and in the open countryside (down by 12.3% over the quarter and up by 4.8% over the year).

Fig 5.4 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications received. Urban is based on areas with settlements greater than 5,000 population and rural is a combination of settlements below 5,000 population and open countryside.

New single dwellings in rural areas and alterations/extensions in urban areas continue to dominate, together making up over half (50.9%) of all residential applications received during Q2 which is similar to the position a year earlier.

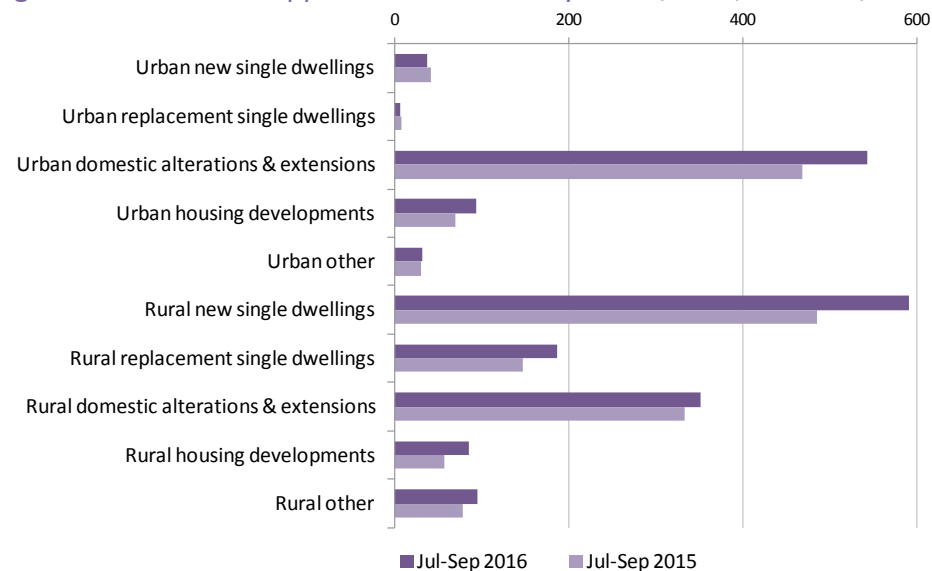
Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, Q2 2016/17



The largest increase in the number of residential applications received was in **urban domestic alterations and extensions**, up 12.8% from 367 to 414 applications when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. Overall, residential applications were up across the board.

Decisions on residential applications increased over the year by 17.4% (from 1,722 to 2,022), with the greatest increases recorded in the number of applications decided for **rural new single dwellings** and **urban domestic alterations and extensions** which are in line with the volume of applications received.

Fig 5.5 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q2 2016/17



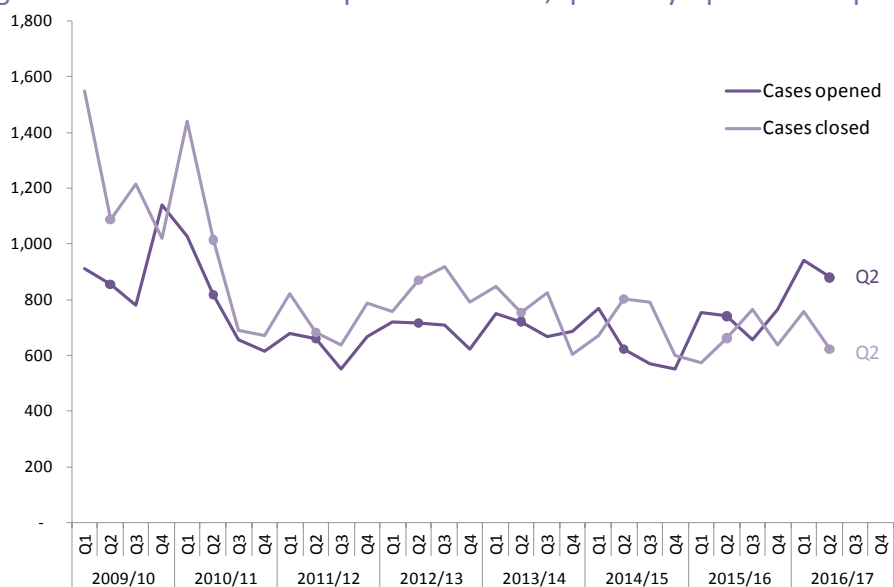
[Refer to Table 5.5](#)

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during Q2 2016/17 was **880**, a fall of 6.6% over the quarter but an increase of 18.8% on the same period last year. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any second quarter since the start of the reported series (2009/10).

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q2 was **623**, this was down over the most recent quarter by 17.6% and over the year by a lesser 5.9%.

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



Across the councils, Causeway Coast and Glens (156), Antrim and Newtownabbey (137) and Belfast City (125) opened the largest number of enforcement cases in Q2. These councils also closed the highest number of

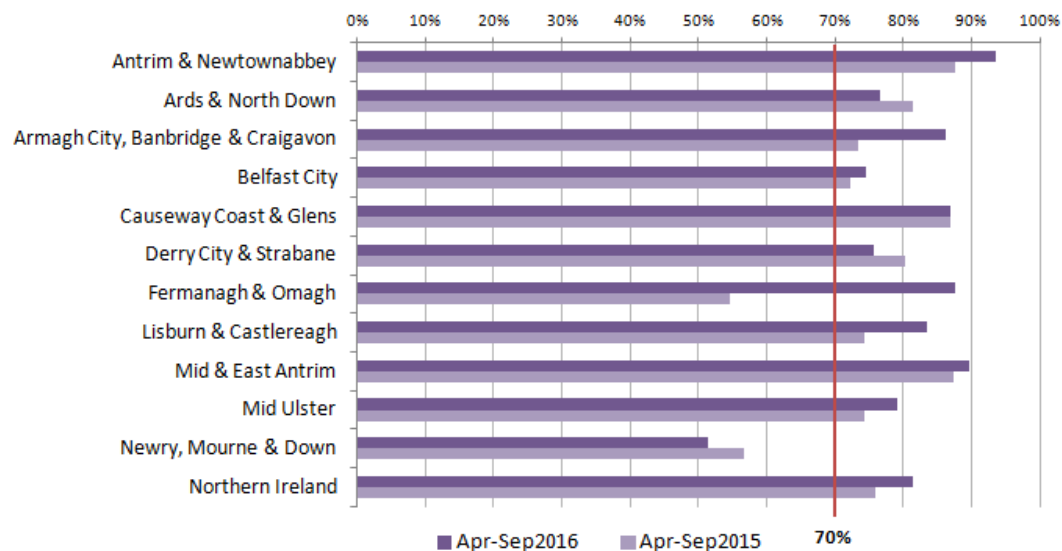
enforcement cases during the period; Antrim and Newtownabbey (87), Causeway Coast and Glens (80) and Belfast City (78).

Of the **623** closed cases in Q2 2016/17, the main reason in over a third of cases (36.0%) was that no breach had actually occurred while a further 25.5% 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, Apr-Sep 2015 & 2016



During April to September 2016, **81.4%** of enforcement cases across Northern Ireland were concluded within 39 weeks, 11.4 percentage points above the statutory target and an improvement of 5.4 percentage points on the equivalent period last year.

Ten of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with highs of 93.5% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey and 89.7% in Mid and East Antrim during the first six months of 2016/17 (Apr-Sep). Newry, Mourne and Down (51.3%) are currently below the target level.

[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

During Q2 2016/17, there were **12 prosecutions** initiated, similar to Q1 2016/17 but double the number compared to the same period a year earlier. Prosecutions dropped significantly between 2012/13 (145) and 2014/15 (35). There were 23 prosecutions in all of 2015/16, this has been exceeded in the first six months of 2016/17 (25).

During the quarter, five of the eleven councils initiated prosecutions; with Fermanagh and Omagh (6) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (3) initiating the most.

There were **11 convictions** during Q2, up from 7 in Q1 2016/17 and 4 in the same period a year earlier. The majority of convictions during Q2 were in Lisburn and Castlereagh (5) and Mid Ulster (4).

[Refer to Table 6.3](#)

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of September 2016 was **3,290**, 16.3% more than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **813**, accounting for nearly a quarter (24.7%) of all live cases. This proportion is 1.3 percentage points lower than the last quarter and considerably lower than the 32.0% reported at end of June

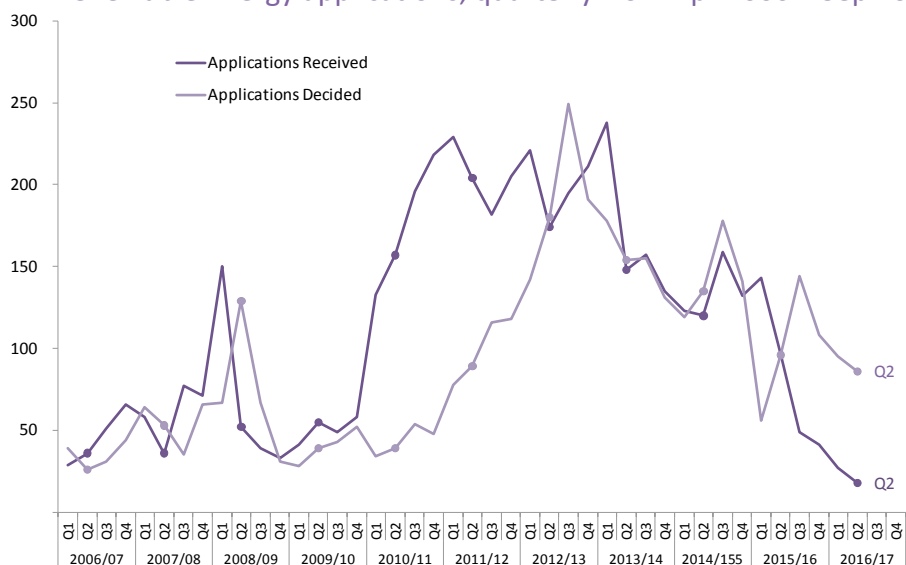
2013. The proportion of live enforcement cases in the planning system for more than two years has remained relatively static since Q1 2014/15.

[Refer to Table 6.4](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in Q2 2016/17 was **18**, by far the lowest Q2 figure since 2004/05 (11). The number of applications received during July–September peaked in 2011/12 with 204 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 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 quarter, renewable energy applications received fell from 27 to 18, while over the year the fall was much more marked from 96 to 18.

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



The number of applications **decided** between July to September 2016 was **86**, a decrease from 95 in Q1 and 96 at the same point last year. During the first six months of 2016 (Apr-Sep), the average processing time was

59.4 weeks across NI, over 15 weeks longer than the equivalent period last year (44.2 weeks).

In Q2, over half of all renewable energy applications were for single wind turbines (10 of 18). Although single wind turbines continue to dominate renewable energy applications, the number of applications being received is vastly reduced, falling from 83 in Q2 last year to 10 in Q2 2016/17.

[Refer to Table 7.1, 7.2](#)

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by council, Q2 2015/16 & Q2 2016/17

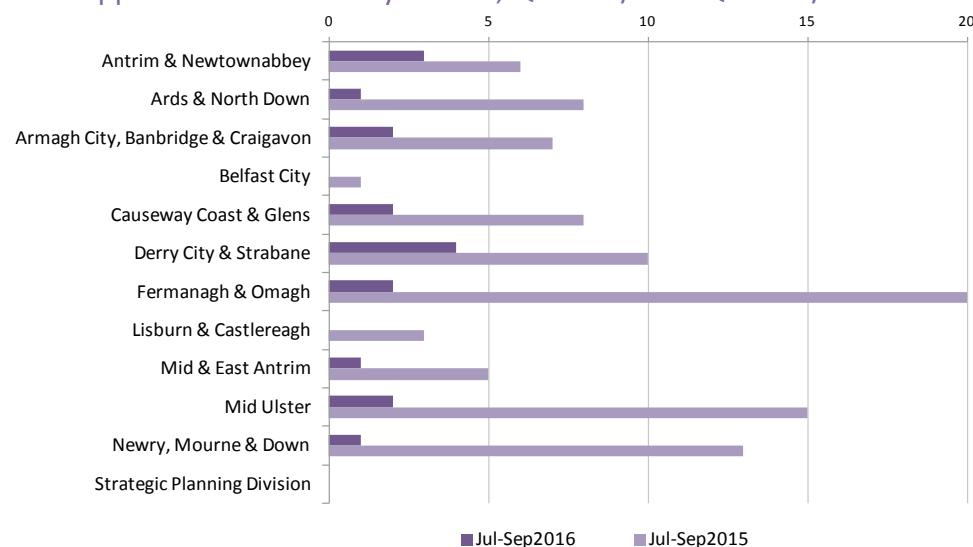
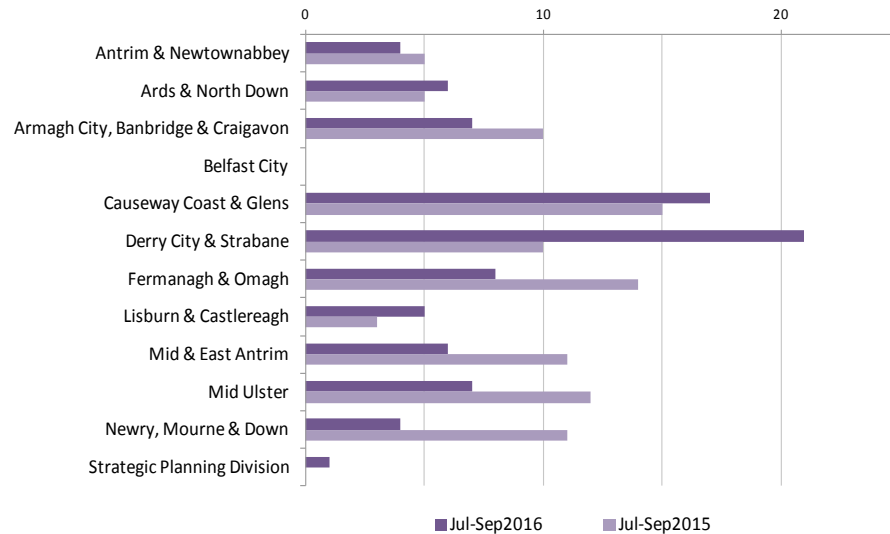


Figure 7.2 shows the spread across councils with Derry City and Strabane (4) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (3) receiving the most renewable energy applications in Q2 2016/17.

Of the 86 decisions issued in Q2, the majority (69) were for single wind turbines. Derry City and Strabane (21) and Causeway Coast and Glens (17) issued the most decisions.

Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by council, Q2 2015/16 & Q2 2016/17



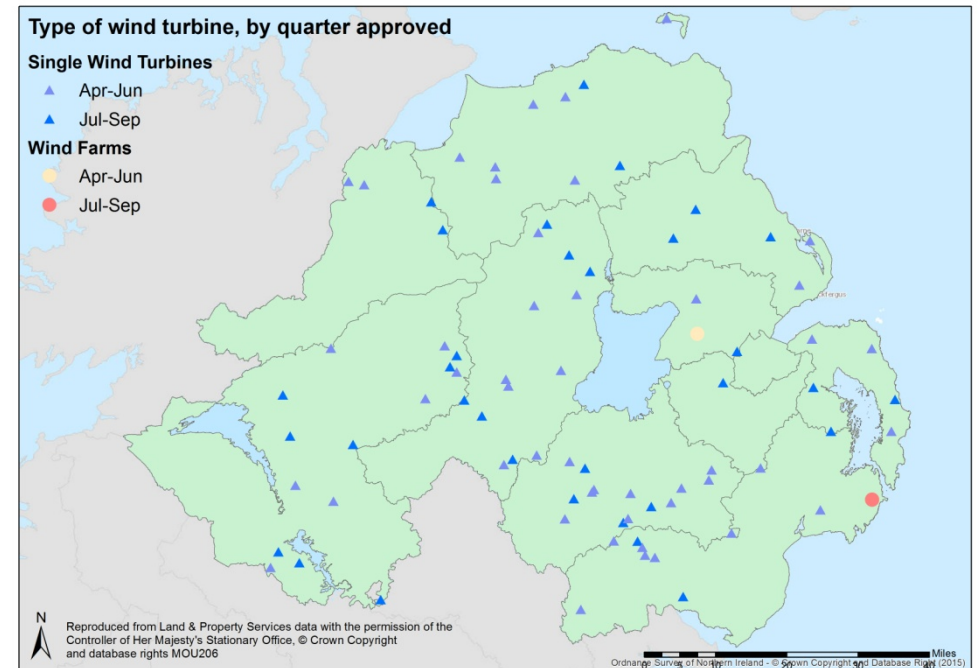
Forty renewable energy applications were withdrawn during Q2, nearly double the number when compared to the same quarter last year, with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (6), Mid Ulster (6) and Newry, Mourne and Down (6) recording the most. This is the first time in the series that the number of withdrawn applications (40) was higher than the number received (18).

At the end of September 2016, there were **251 live renewable energy applications**, mainly comprising 174 single wind turbines, 25 wind farms, 22 biomass/anaerobic digesters and 20 for hydroelectricity. The number of live renewable energy applications was down by 30.1% over the quarter when compared with end of June 2016, although the proportion of applications in the system for over a year has risen by 6.2 percentage points (from 64.3% to 70.5%) over the same period.

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **53.5% in Q2 2016/17**, the lowest quarterly approval rate of the series. Over the latest quarter the approval rate dropped by 19.1 percentage points (from

72.6%), and it fell by 31.9 percentage points from the 85.4% recorded at the same point a year earlier.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Apr-Sep 2016



[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 September 2016 were transferred in October 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 November 2016. 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 these to become properly embedded.

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

Note that a new classification hierarchy of development for planning 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. Presently the mid-point of the application polygon is used to assign urban and rural bandings.

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

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' (>=5,000 people) and 'Rural settlements' (<5,000 people) together.

From 2015/16 the Urban/Rural data reported in this bulletin is based on the recommended NISRA definition. To obtain rural figures in line with the

NISRA definition users should add 'Rural Settlements' and 'Countryside' together.

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

Note on Exclusions:

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

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

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

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

Non Material Changes (NMCs)

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

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

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

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs)

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

Discharge of Conditions (DCs)

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

Further Information

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

England:

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

Scotland:

<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.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/new-dwelling-statistics>

Housing bulletin DSD:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing-statistics>

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-housing-bulletin-april-june-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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