

# NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2016/17 THIRD QUARTERLY STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(October – December 2016: Provisional figures)



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## Contents:

Key points	3
Introduction	4
Overall NI Planning Activity	6
Department Activity	9
Major Development	11
Local Development	13
Development Type	15
Compliance & Enforcement	17
Renewable Energy	19
User Guidance	21

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## Key Points

- There were 3,209 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during October to December 2016 (Q3), an increase of 5% over both the previous quarter and the same period in 2015/16. This comprised 3,164 local, 44 major and 1 regionally significant development application.
- During Q3, 2,874 planning applications were decided, this was down by 14% over the latest quarter but by a lesser 4% on the previous year.
- The average processing time for major applications during the first nine months of the year was 70 weeks across all councils; up significantly from the 42 weeks reported for the equivalent nine month period in the previous year. This is currently forty weeks longer than the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks.
- The number of local planning applications received in NI during Q3 2016/17 was 3,164, an increase of over 4% on the same period last year. Across councils, Belfast City (412) and Newry, Mourne and Down (371) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q3.
- Across councils it took on average over 16 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2016, an improvement of 3 weeks on the same period last year (19 weeks). The shortest average processing time for local applications was 9 weeks in Mid and East Antrim, whilst the longest was 23 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down, although this was still an improvement of just over 9 weeks on the same period last year. Six of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target at the end of December 2016.
- The number of enforcement cases opened in NI during Q3 2016/17 was 742, an increase of 13% on the same period last year. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any third quarter since the start of the reported series (Q3 2009/10). Across the councils, Newry, Mourne and Down (126) opened the largest number of enforcement cases in Q3 followed by Belfast City (85).
- During April to December 2016, just over 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 4 percentage points on the equivalent period last year. Ten of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with highs of 95% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey and 89% in Causeway Coast and Glens.
- The NI approval rate for all planning applications for the quarter was 93%, a little lower than the rate a year earlier. Third quarter approval rates varied across councils from a high of 99% in Ards and North Down to a low of 80% in Newry, Mourne and Down.
- The 21 renewable energy applications received was by far the lowest Q3 figure since 2003/04 and the first time that single wind turbines, with only 5, did not represent the majority of such applications. At the end of December 2016 there were 198 live renewable energy applications, around 72% of these have been in the planning system for over a 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 third 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 third 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 finalised annual report for 2016/17 is due to be published in late June 2017.

The next quarterly release is due in September 2017. This will contain provisional planning data up to 30th June 2017 and will commence the quarterly reporting cycle for 2017/18.

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

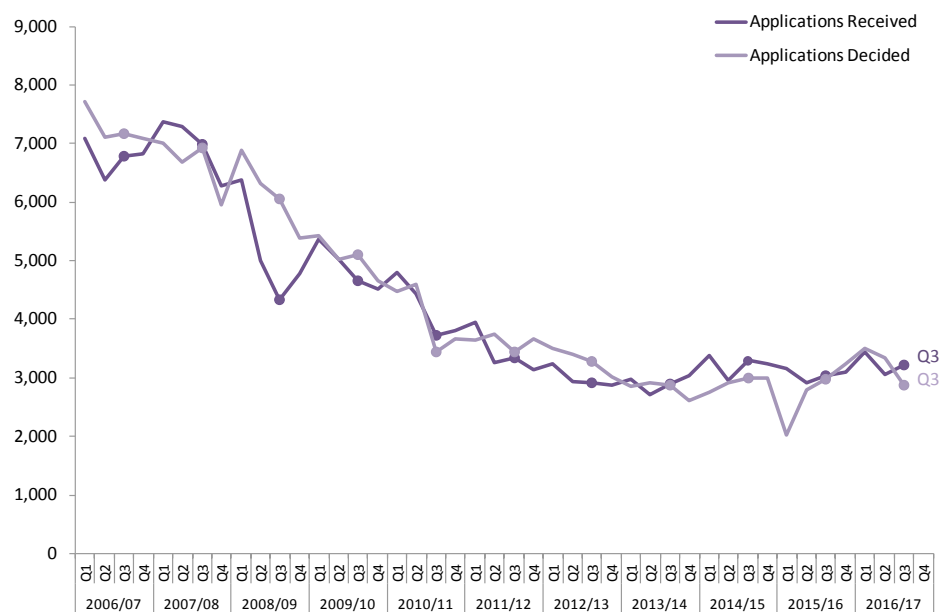
# 1. Overall NI Planning Activity

## Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period October to December 2016 (Q3), was **3,209**, an increase of 5.1% on the previous quarter (3,054) and up by 5.4% on the same period in 2015/16 (3,045).

The number of planning applications received each quarter has been fairly stable for the last six years with small changes quarter on quarter. Of the 3,209 applications received in Q3 2016/17, over three quarters were for full planning permission (76.2%).

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

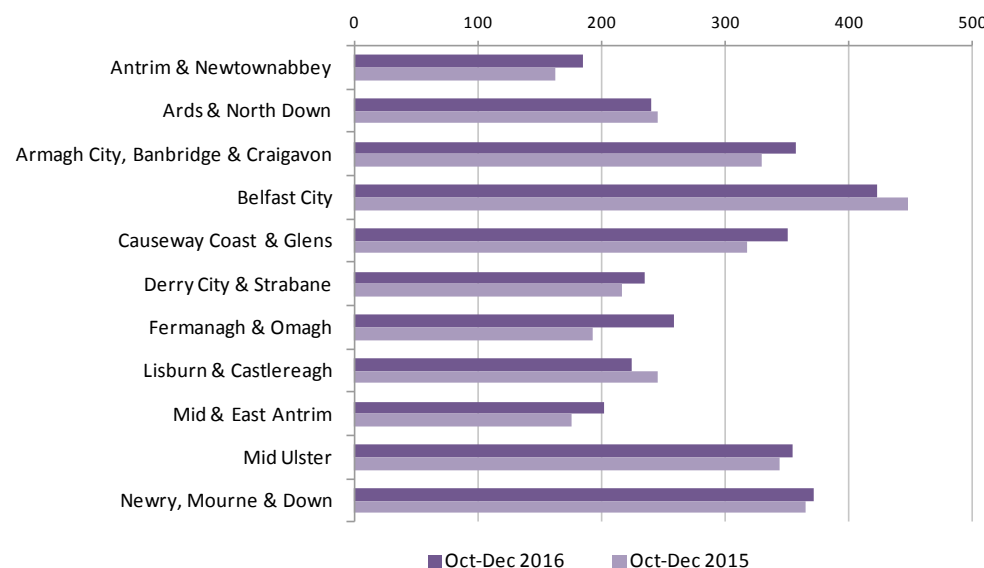


Across NI in Q3, there were 17.3 planning applications received per 10,000 population. This is a stark decline when compared to the third quarter series high of 51.9 applications received per 10,000 population in 2004/05.

In Q3, Belfast City council received the most (423) planning applications, followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (372); between them accounting for nearly a quarter (24.8%) of all applications received across NI. The councils receiving the least applications were Antrim and Newtownabbey (185) and Mid and East Antrim (202).

The volume of planning applications received in Q3 increased in eight of the eleven councils over the year with the largest increase, in percentage terms, occurring in Fermanagh and Omagh (+34.2%). Where decreases were recorded, the greatest of these was in Lisburn and Castlereagh (-8.2%).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q3 2015/16 & Q3 2016/17



At council level, Mid Ulster (24.6), Causeway Coast and Glens (24.5) and Fermanagh and Omagh (22.5) received the most planning applications per 10,000 population, whilst Belfast City (12.5) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (13.2) 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 October to December 2016 was **2,874**, representing a decrease of 13.9% over the previous quarter from 3,337 and a fall of 3.7% on the same period a year earlier (2,983). 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 since then have closely tracked applications received. This latest quarter the number of applications received has exceeded the number of planning decisions issued for the first time since Q3 2015/16. Just over three quarters of planning decisions in Q3 (76.9%) were for full planning permission.

In Q3 2016/17, **165** applications were **withdrawn**, over a quarter more (28.9%) when compared to the same period a year earlier (128). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

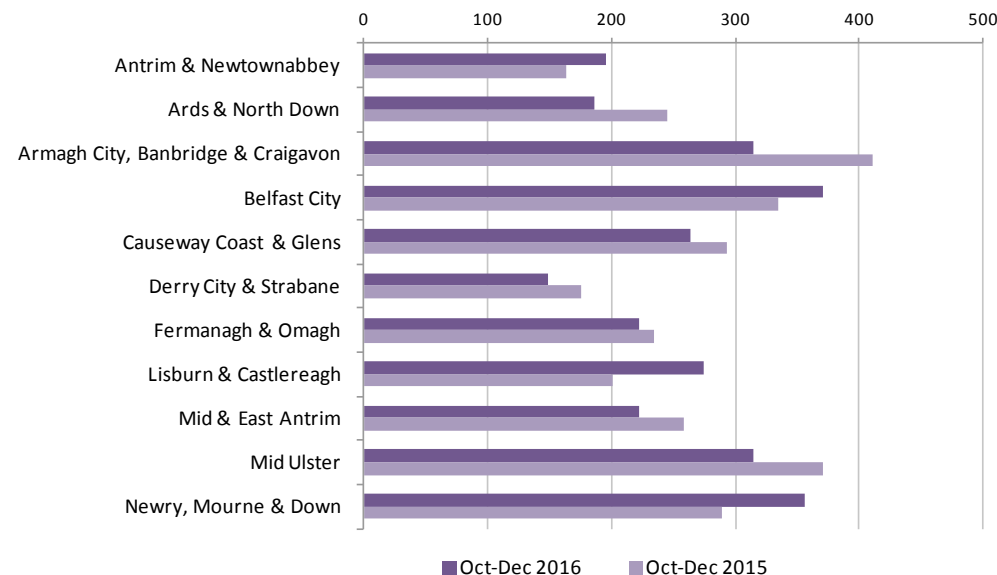
### Applications Decided by Council

The number of decisions issued in Q3 2016/17 varied across all councils when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. During the period, the largest changes over the year were in Lisburn and Castlereagh (275) up 36.8%, Newry, Mourne and Down (356) up 23.2% and Antrim and Newtownabbey (196) up 19.5%. The number of decisions issued fell over the year in seven of the councils with the greatest of these in Ards and North Down (186) down 24.1% and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (315) down 23.4%.

The number of planning applications decided across councils in Q3 ranged from a high of 371 in Belfast City to 149 in Derry City and Strabane.

Three of the eleven councils issued more decisions than they received during Q3, these were Lisburn and Castlereagh (+22.2%), Mid and East Antrim (+9.9%) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (+5.9%).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q3 2015/16 & Q3 2016/17



[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

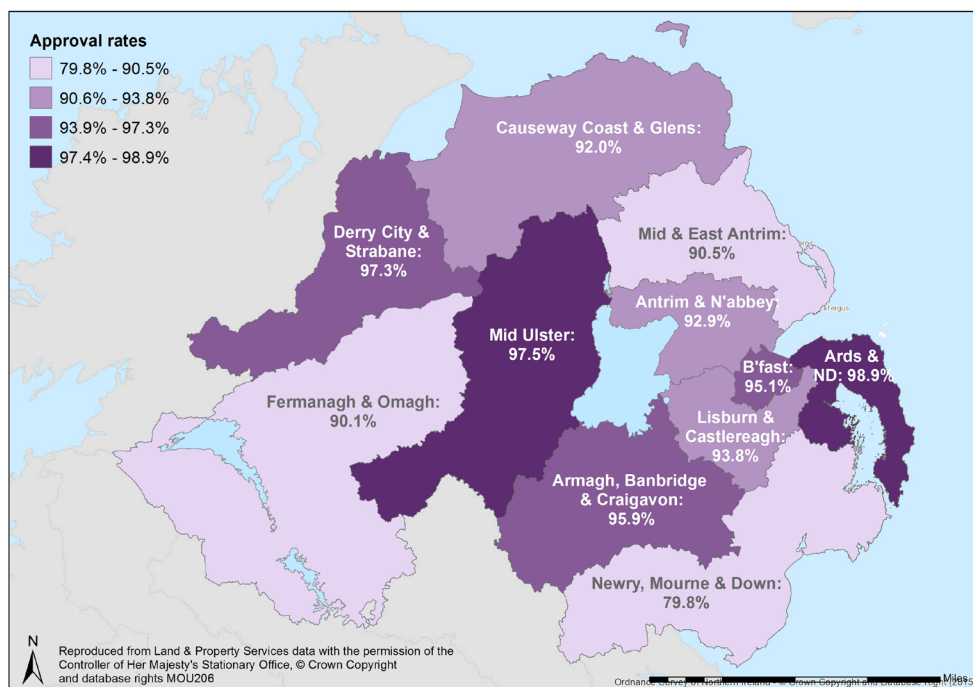
In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q3, they processed to decision or withdrawal 120 non material changes, 113 certificates of lawfulness and 111 discharge of conditions. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

## Approval Rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications for Q3 was **92.6%**, down by almost a full (0.9) percentage point over the quarter and a little over half (0.7) a percentage point when compared to the rate a year earlier.

In Q3, planning approval rates varied across councils from highs of 98.9% in Ards and North Down, 97.5% in Mid Ulster and 97.3% in Derry City and Strabane to a low of 79.8% in Newry, Mourne and Down. Four out of the eleven councils had an approval rate which was lower than the overall NI approval rate of 92.6%.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, Q3 2016/17



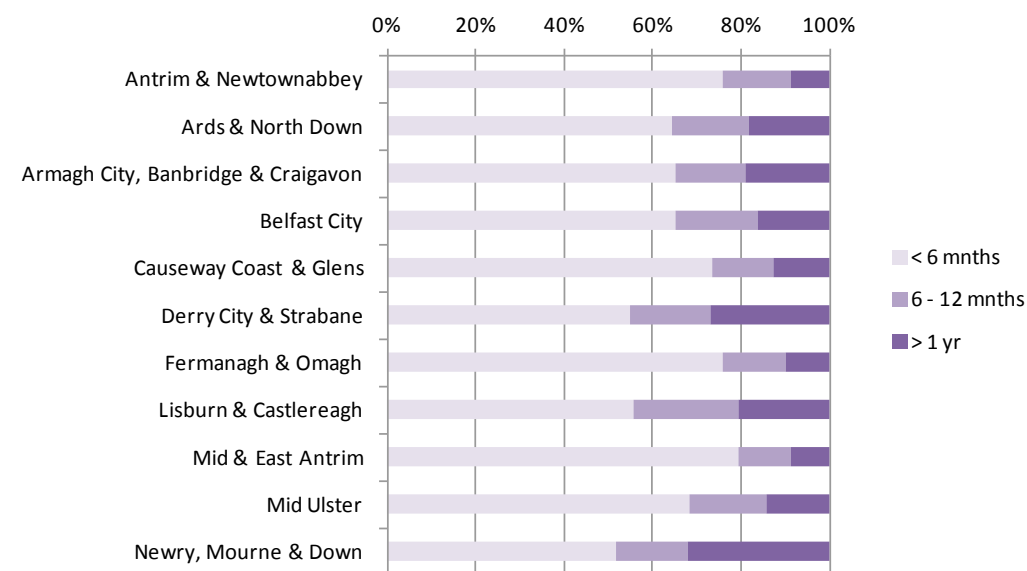
[Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

## Live applications

At the end of December 2016, there were **6,850** live applications in the planning system across NI, which although a small increase of 2.5% over the previous quarter (6,680), still represented the second lowest caseload figure since the transfer of planning powers in April 2015. Of these, 1,307 applications were in the planning system for over one year. In summary, nearly 1 out of every 5 live applications in the planning system was over one year old (19.1%); this was down 1.4 percentage points when compared to the end of September 2016. Over the last year, the proportion of live planning applications in the system for over a year has increased from 18.0% (1,378) to 19.1% (1,307).

[Refer to Table 1.3](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Dec 2016



The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of December 2016 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.5. Mid and East Antrim had the lowest proportion of cases over one year old (8.6%),



which equates to just over 1 in every 12 applications compared to Newry Mourne and Down where just under 1 in every 3 applications was over a year old (32.2%).

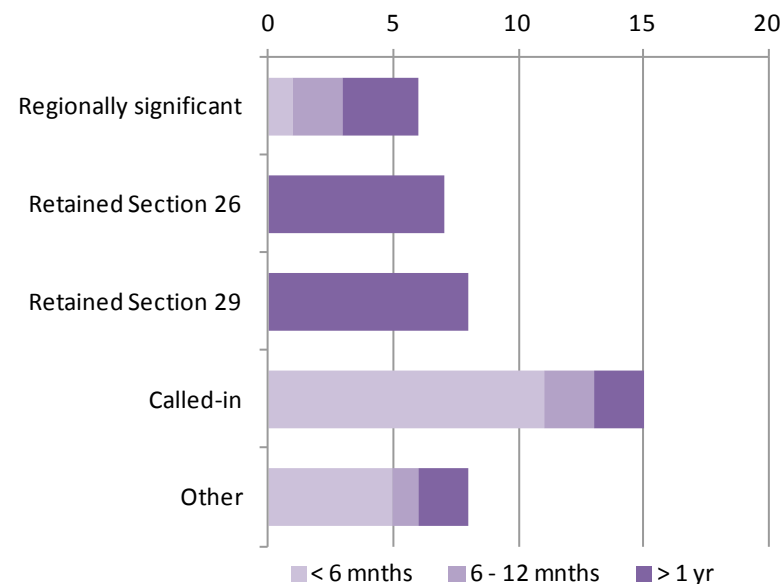
Over the last quarter, eight of the eleven councils reduced the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year, with the greatest changes in Newry, Mourne and Down (-4.0pp)<sup>1</sup> and Fermanagh and Omagh (3.5pp). The proportion of applications over a year slightly increased in three councils, although all by less than a single percentage point.

[Refer to Table 1.4](#)

## 2. Departmental Activity

At the end of December 2016, there were **6** ongoing **regionally significant development (RSD)** applications, **15 called-in**; **15 retained applications** and **8 other applications**<sup>2</sup>. Half of these applications (22 of 44) were in the system over a year.

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



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

<sup>1</sup> Percentage Point change (pp)

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

involve a substantial departure from a local development plan. During Q3, there was **1** new RSD application received.

[Refer to Table 2.2](#)

During Q3, the Department received **15** new applications; 1 regionally significant, 9 were called in and 5 other applications. This is 13 more than the previous quarter and 12 more than 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 31 December 2016, of the **6** 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 three 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 **4** applications during Q3, one less than the same quarter a year earlier. Two decisions were on **Retained Section 26** (*former Article 31*) applications, one was on a **Retained Section 29** (*former Non-Article 31*) and one was on a **called-in** application.

Two retained applications were withdrawn during Q3 (a Section 26 and a Section 29).

The average processing times during the first nine 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](#). They are not

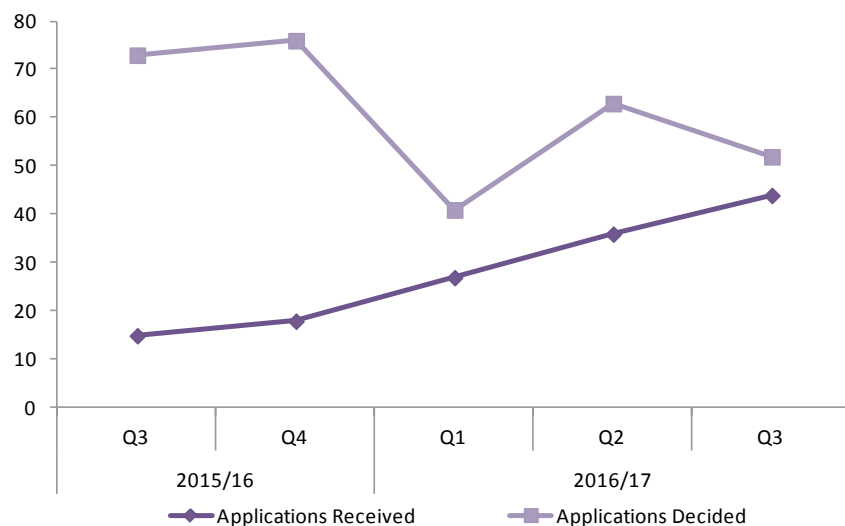
highlighted in this commentary due to the very small numbers of applications on which the times are based.

**NOTE:** In Section 2, processing times for 'Called-In' applications are calculated from the date the application was called in by the Department. This method is only used in Section 2 of the report in order to show Departmental processing performance. All other processing times reported in the publication are based on the date the application is made valid.

### 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. The number of **major** planning applications **received** in NI during Q3 2016/17 was **44**.

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, quarterly Sep 2015 – Dec 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. The impact of this requirement should be borne in mind when considering the longer term trend in major applications received.

Q2 2015/16 had the lowest number of major applications received across the whole series but this can be attributed to the new community

consultation requirement. From Q2 2015/16, the number of major applications received has steadily increased quarter on quarter with Q3 2016/17 reporting 44 across Northern Ireland, the highest number since Q1 2015/16.

Of the 44 major applications received in Q3, Belfast City (11) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (6) received the most.

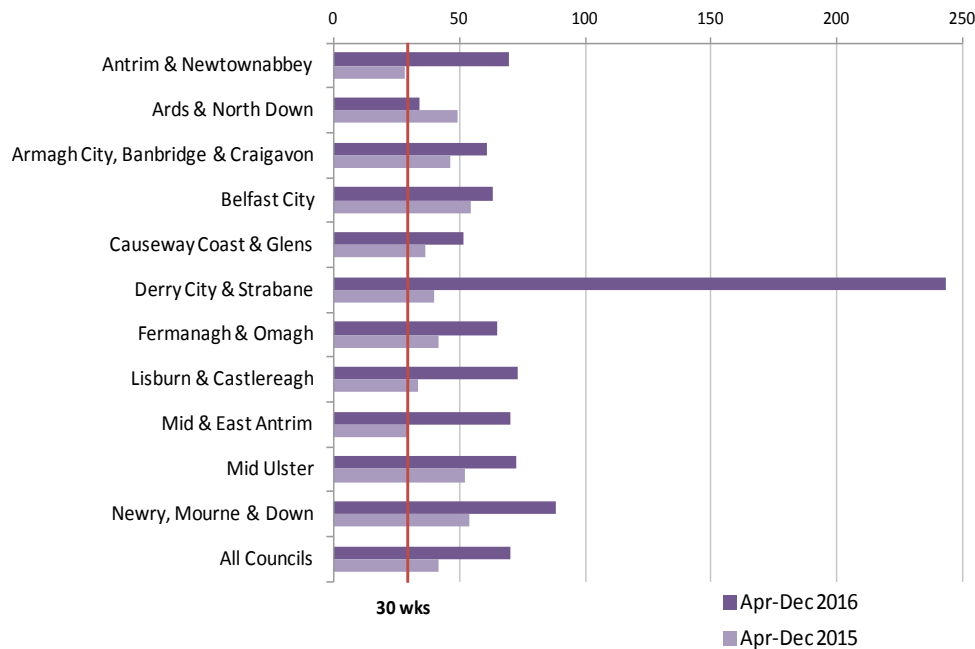
Over the quarter, **52 major** planning applications were **decided** and **5 withdrawn**. Since Q2 2015/16, the numbers of planning decisions issued have exceeded the numbers being received. At council level, Fermanagh and Omagh (10) issued most decisions on major applications followed by Belfast City (7) and Derry City and Strabane (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 December 2016), the **average processing time** to process **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **70.0 weeks** across all councils, up significantly from the 41.8 weeks reported in the same period last year. This is 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-Dec 2015 & 2016



It should be noted that even by the third quarter, the average processing times for some councils are based on less than 10 major applications. Only Belfast City (29) and Newry, Mourne and Down (23) have processed more than 20 major applications to decision or withdrawal to this point. It is important, therefore, to be aware of the increased variability in performance associated with small numbers when making comparisons across councils. During April to December 2016, three quarters of the major applications processed by Derry City and Strabane were legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) that had been in the system for a considerable amount of time. This council processed the highest proportion of legacy cases during this time and this has resulted in the lengthy average processing time reported.

Currently, only Ards and North Down is close to meeting the annual statutory 30 week processing target having markedly improved its year-to-date average processing time from 49.3 weeks last year to 34.2 weeks this year.

[Refer to Table 3.2](#)

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

It is interesting to note that the year to date (Apr-Dec 2016) average processing time for major applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (45.8 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (93.3 weeks).

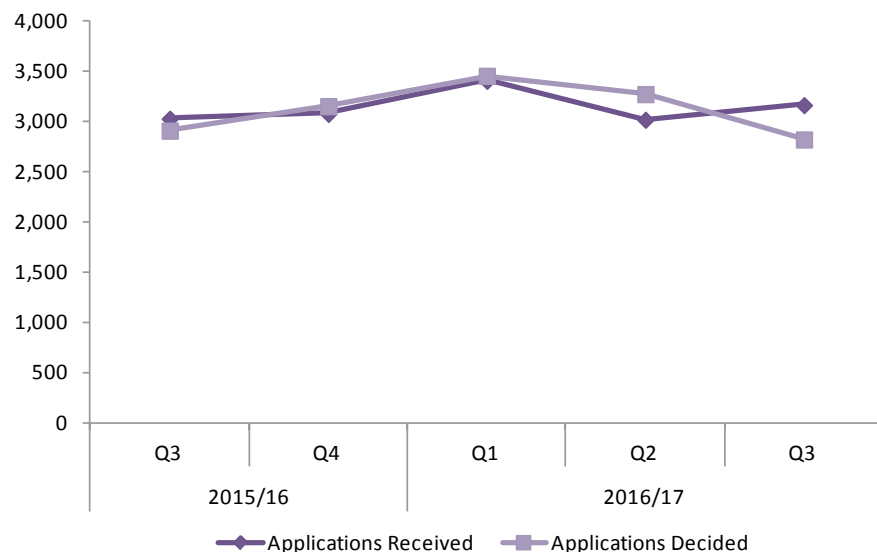
## 4. Local Development Planning Applications

**Local Development** planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications received and determined by a council. The number of **local** planning applications **received** in NI during Q3 2016/17 was **3,164** representing an increase of 4.8% from the 3,018 applications received in Q2. Over the last year, the number of local applications received has increased by a similar 4.5%.

Across councils, Belfast City (412) and Newry, Mourne and Down (371) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q3.

Eight of the eleven councils received more local applications in Q3 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 Fermanagh and Omagh (up from 193 to 258 applications) alongside other smaller increases.

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



The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q3 2016/17 was **2,822**, down by 3.0% 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 to Q2 2016/17 the volume of local applications decided exceeded the number of applications being received. This quarter, however, the number of decisions has dropped below the number of applications received and is the lowest number of decisions reported in any quarter since Q2 2015/16.

During Q3 2016/17, Belfast City (364), Newry Mourne and Down (352) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (313) issued the most local decisions across councils, partly reflecting the high volumes of such applications received.

Over the quarter, there were 160 local applications withdrawn across NI, this ranged from 30 applications withdrawn in Newry Mourne and Down to 5 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

[Refer to Table 4.1](#)

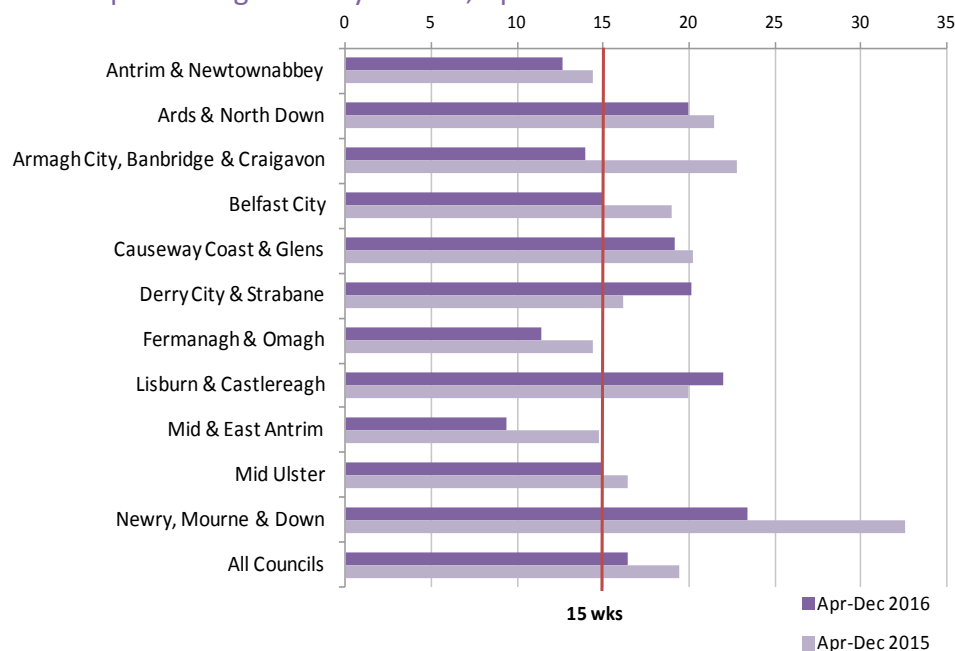
It is a statutory target for each council that their local development planning applications will be processed from the date valid to decision issued or withdrawal date within an average of 15 weeks.

During April to December 2016, the **average processing time** to bring **local** applications to decision or withdrawal was **16.4 weeks** across all councils,

an improvement of 3.0 weeks on the average time taken in the same period last year (19.4 weeks).

The shortest average processing time for local applications during the first nine months of 2016 was 9.4 weeks in Mid and East Antrim (based on 616 local applications decided and 20 withdrawn) whilst the longest was 23.4 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down (based on 1,383 local applications decided and 88 withdrawn). Six of the 11 councils, namely Mid and East Antrim (9.4), Fermanagh and Omagh (11.4), Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.6), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.0), Mid Ulster (14.9) and Belfast City (15.0) were within the 15 week target at the end of December 2016.

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



Notably, nine of the eleven councils improved their processing times for local applications during Apr-Dec 2016 when compared with the same

period last year, with Newry Mourne and Down and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon improving most, by around 9 weeks in each case.

[Refer to Table 4.2](#)

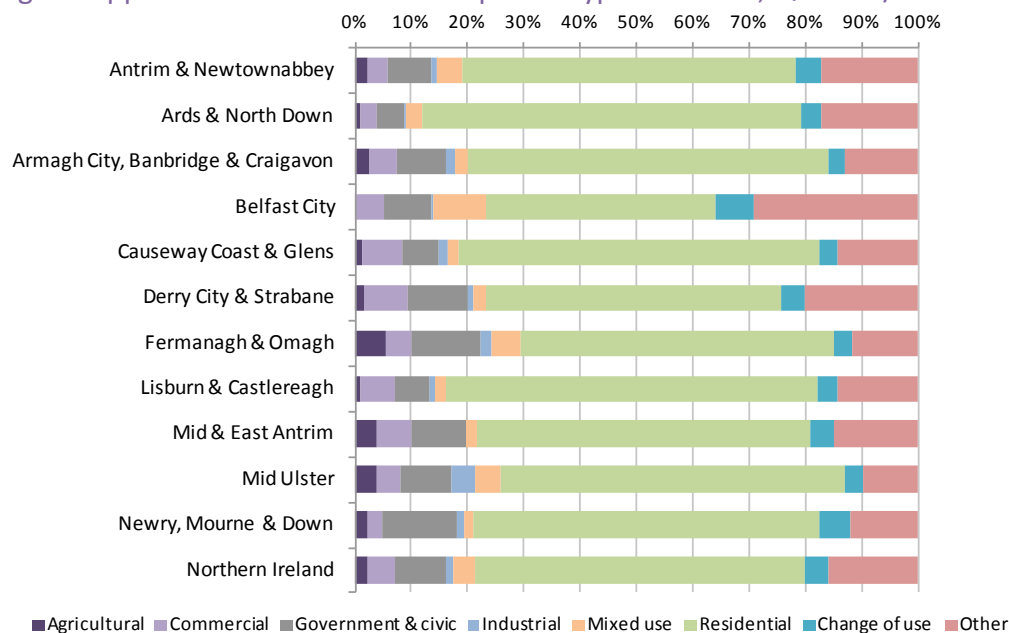
A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

It is interesting to note that the year to date (Apr-Dec 2016) processing time for local applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is just under 6 times shorter (15.0 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (87.0 weeks).

## 5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During Q3 2016/17, **residential** applications made up **58.5%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications received, very similar to the same period last year (58.9%). Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, Q3 2016/17



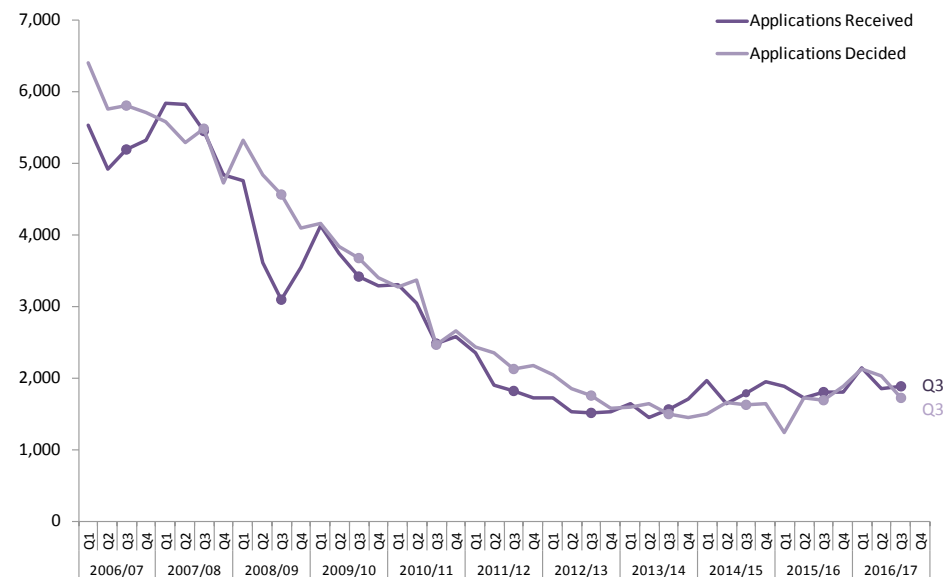
During Q3 2016/17, in Ards and North Down and Lisburn and Castlereagh nearly seven out of every ten applications received (67.1% and 66.2%) were for residential development, compared to just over four in every ten in Belfast City (40.9%).

Belfast City (29.1%) 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 5.4% in Q3 when compared to the same period a year earlier. This increase over the year was driven by increases of 4.6% in the number of 'Residential' applications received (up from 1,794 to 1,877) and 15.0% in 'Other' (up from 448 to 515).

[Refer to Table 5.1, 5.2](#)

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

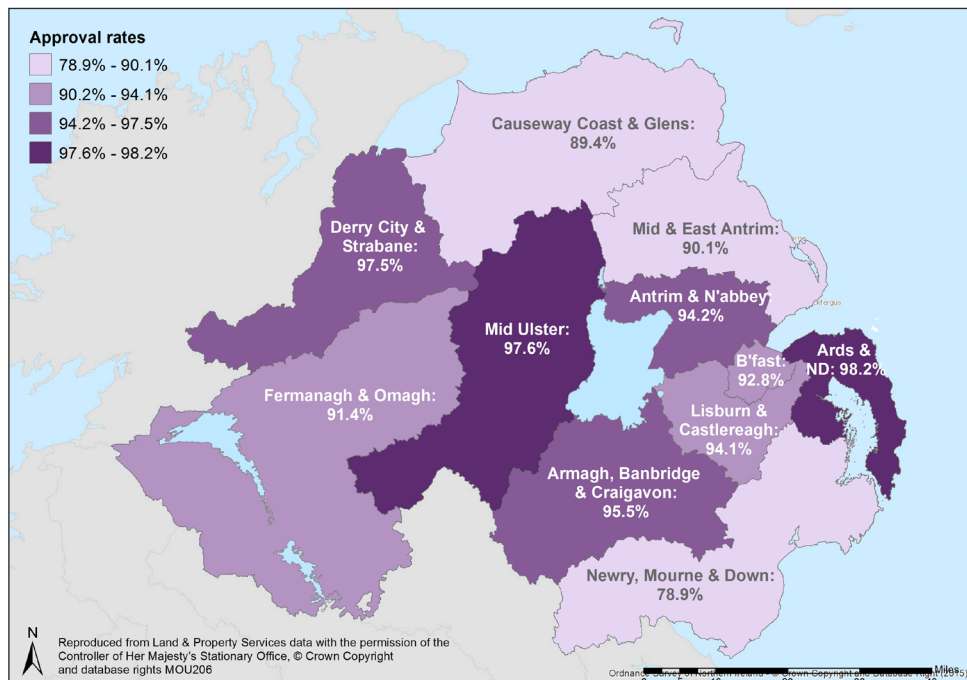


The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in total for Northern Ireland in Q3 was **1,877**, a small increase over the quarter of 1.6% but up over the year by 4.6%.

The number of **residential** planning applications **decided** in Q3 was **1,713**, a substantial fall of 15.6% over the quarter but still remaining slightly up over the year by 1.0%.

[Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council, Q3 2016/17



The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for residential planning applications in Q3 2016/17 was **91.9%**, lower than the rates for the previous quarter (94.3%) and the same period in the previous year (93.3%). Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils with highs of 98.2% in Ards and North Down, 97.6% in Mid Ulster and 97.5% in Derry City and Strabane down to 78.9% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Over the quarter, there were 79 residential applications withdrawn, one more than the previous quarter but 27.4% more than the same period last year (62).

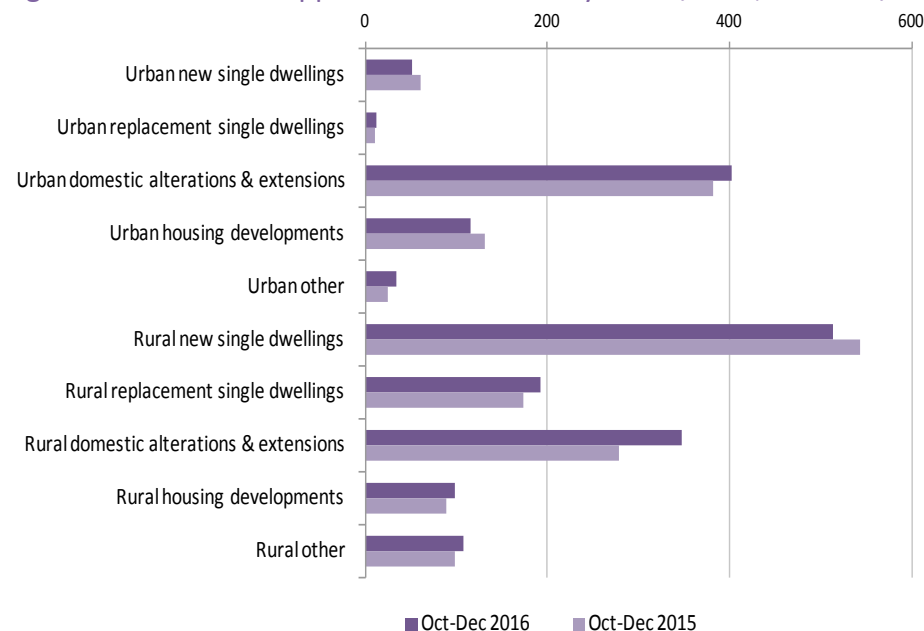
[Refer to Table 5.4](#)

Across urban areas (*in settlements greater than 5,000 population*), the number of residential applications received declined slightly over the latest

quarter (down 0.8%) but increased by 1.1% over the year. In rural areas within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was a small fall over the recent quarter of 2.5% but over the year there was a very significant increase of 28.3%. In the open countryside, increases were reported over both the quarter and year of 4.0% and 2.5% respectively.

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 while rural is a combination of settlements below 5,000 population and open countryside.

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, Q3 2016/17



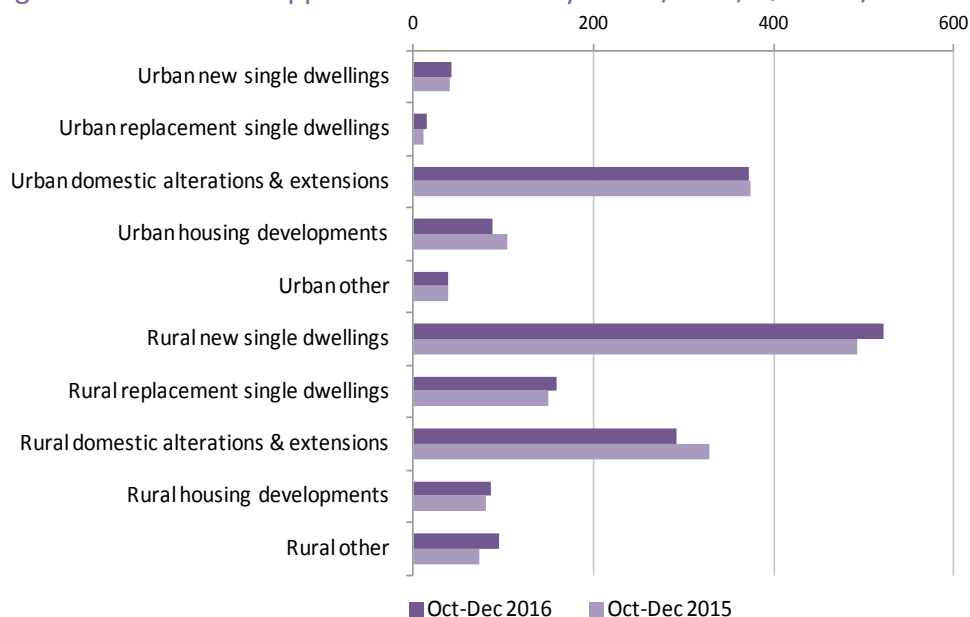
New single dwellings in rural areas and alterations/extensions in urban areas continue to dominate, together making up nearly half (48.9%) of all residential applications received during Q3 although this is a little lower than the position a year earlier (51.6%).



The increase over the year in the number of residential applications received was driven by the increase in the number of **domestic alterations and extensions**, up 13.5% from 661 to 750 applications when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. However, this increase was slightly offset by a fall of 6.6% in the number of applications for new single dwellings which fell from 605 to 565 over the year.

Decisions on residential applications slightly increased over the year by 1.0% (from 1,696 to 1,713), with the greatest increase (30 applications) recorded in the number of applications decided for **rural new single dwellings** which is in line with the volume of such applications received.

Fig 5.5 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q3 2016/17



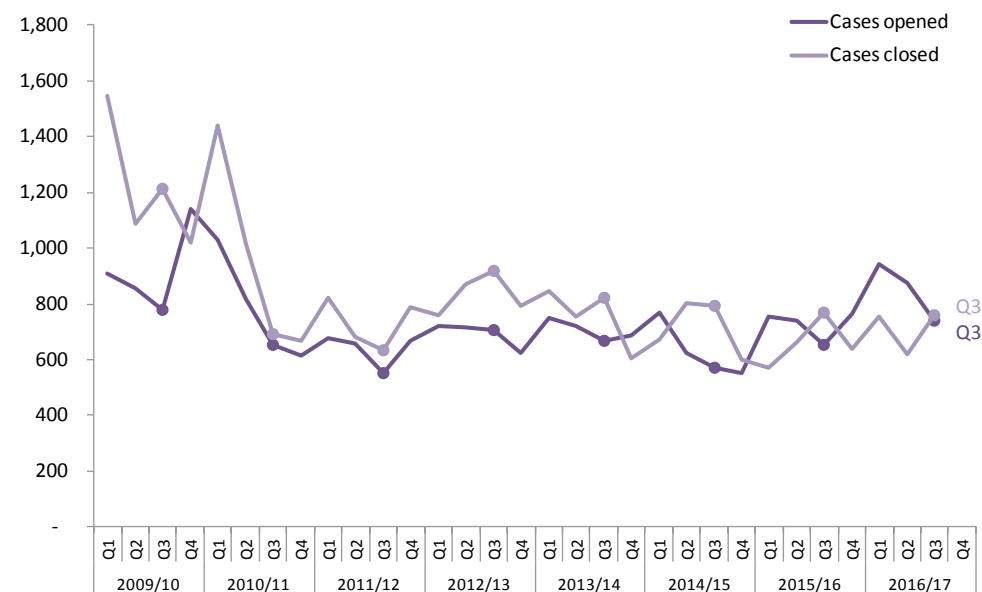
[Refer to Table 5.5](#)

## 6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during Q3 2016/17 was **742**, a fall of 15.2% over the previous quarter but still an increase of 13.3% on the same period last year. This is the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any third quarter since the start of the reported series (Q3 2009/10).

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q3 was **760**, an increase of 22.4% over the most recent quarter but slightly down over the year (-0.9%).

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



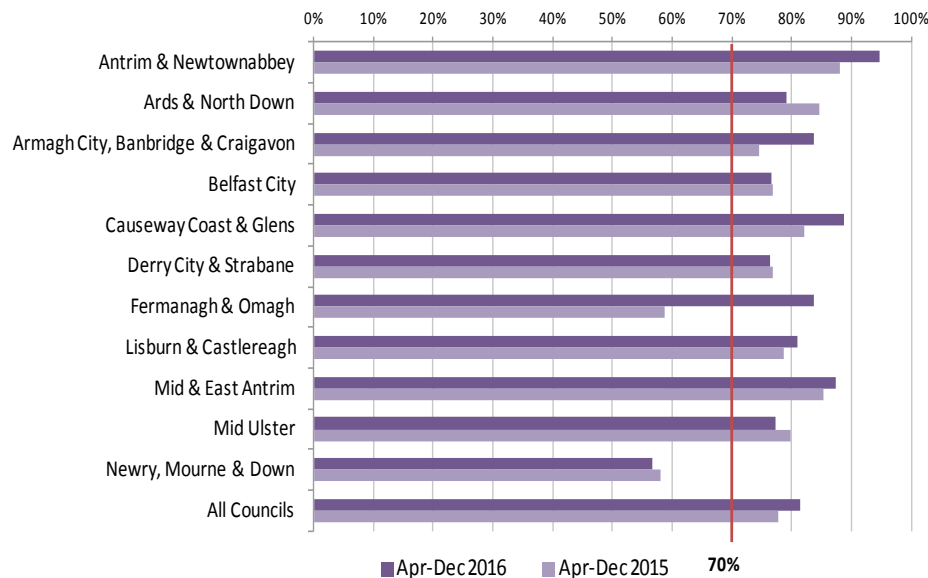
Across the councils, Newry, Mourne and Down (126) opened the largest number of enforcement cases in Q3 followed by Belfast City (85). Belfast City (113), Ards and North Down (91) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (87) closed the highest number of enforcement cases during the same period.

Of the **760** closed cases in Q3 2016/17, the main reason in just under a third of cases (32.0%) was that no breach had actually occurred while a further 30.5% 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-Dec 2015 & 2016



During April to December 2016, **81.5%** of enforcement cases across Northern Ireland were concluded within 39 weeks, 11.5 percentage points above the statutory target and an improvement of 3.8 percentage points on the equivalent period last year.

Ten of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with highs of 94.6% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey and 88.8% in Causeway Coast and Glens during the first nine months of 2016/17. Newry, Mourne and Down (56.7%), whilst currently below the annual target level, have recorded over a 10 percentage point improvement in their performance in the latest quarter (to 63.3%).

[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

During Q3 2016/17, there were **12 prosecutions** initiated, the same as Q2 2016/17. This represented 9 more than the same period a year earlier. Prosecutions dropped significantly between 2012/13 (145) and 2015/16 (23). However, the 2015/16 annual figure had already been exceeded in the first nine months of 2016/17 with 38 prosecutions initiated.

During the quarter, five of the eleven councils initiated prosecutions; with Mid Ulster (4) and Fermanagh and Omagh (3) initiating the most.

There were **10 convictions** during Q3, down one from Q2 2016/17 but up 7 on the same period a year earlier. The majority of convictions during Q3 were in Causeway Coast and Glens (4) and Ards and North Down (3).

[Refer to Table 6.3](#)

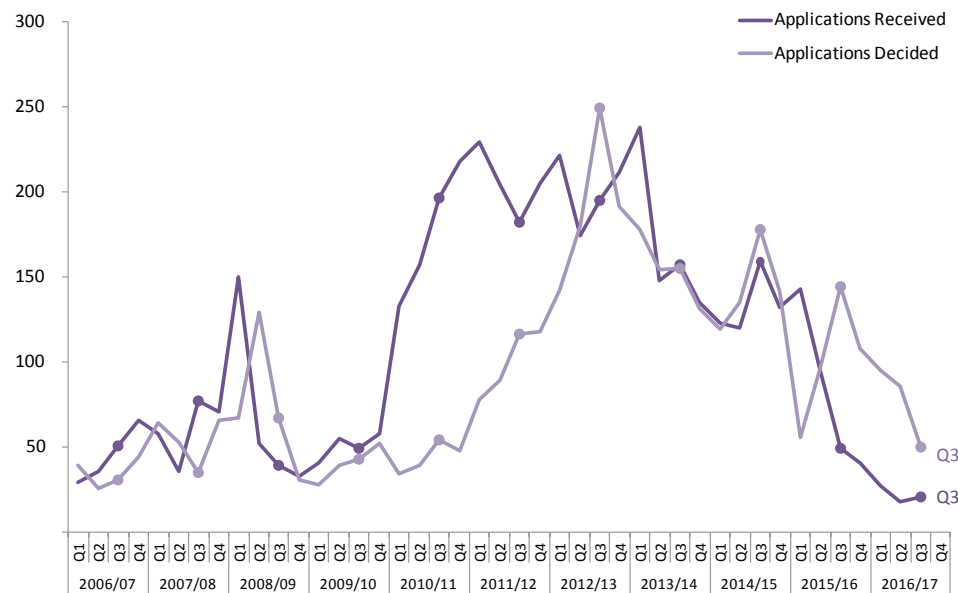
The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of December 2016 was **3,270**, over one-fifth (20.3%) more than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **826**, accounting for just over a quarter (25.3%) of all live cases. This proportion is half a percentage point higher than the last quarter but down by 1.7 percentage points on the same period a year earlier. 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 Q3 2016/17 was **21**, a fall from 49 for the same period a year earlier and by far the lowest Q3 figure since 2003/04 (10). The number of applications received during this quarter peaked in 2010/11 with 196 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.

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



The number of applications **decided** between October and December 2016 was **50**, a significant decrease from 86 in Q2 and 144 at the same point last year. During the first nine months of 2016/17, the average processing

time was 61.6 weeks across NI, nearly 13 weeks longer than the equivalent period last year (48.9 weeks).

In Q3, 8 of the renewable energy applications were for solar panels and a further 7 were related to biomass/anaerobic digesters. Only 5 applications were received for single wind turbines. Up until this quarter, single wind turbines had dominated renewable energy applications, albeit the number of applications had vastly reduced.

[Refer to Table 7.1, 7.2](#)

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by authority, Q3 2015/16 & Q3 2016/17

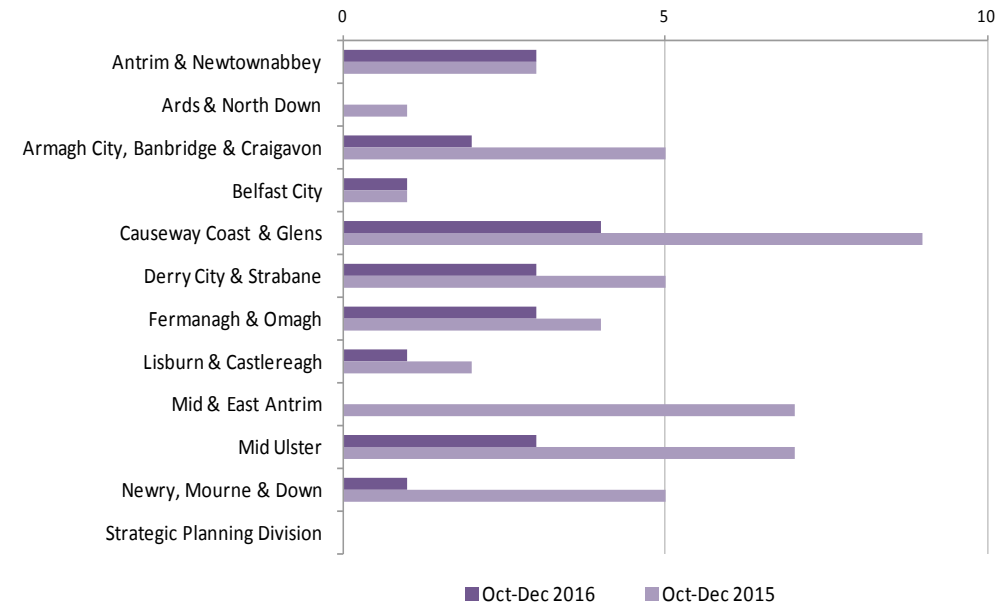
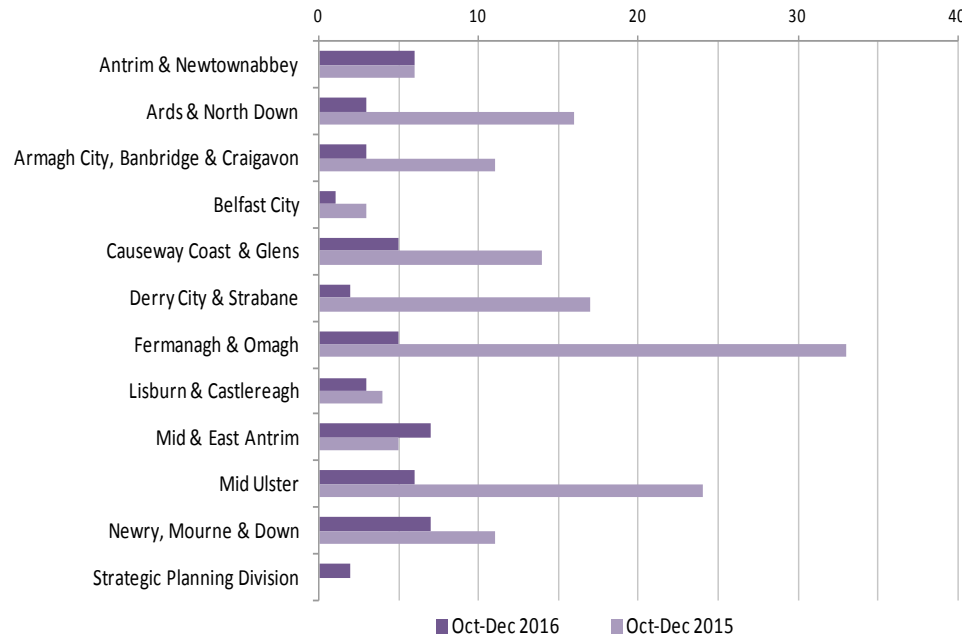


Figure 7.2 shows the spread across councils with Causeway Coast and Glens receiving the most renewable applications (4) closely followed by Antrim and Newtownabbey, Derry City and Strabane, Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster, all receiving 3.

Of the 50 decisions issued in Q3, the majority (39) were for single wind turbines. Mid and East Antrim and Newry, Mourne and Down issued the most decisions in Q3 2016/17, each issuing 7.

Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by authority, Q3 2015/16 & Q3 2016/17

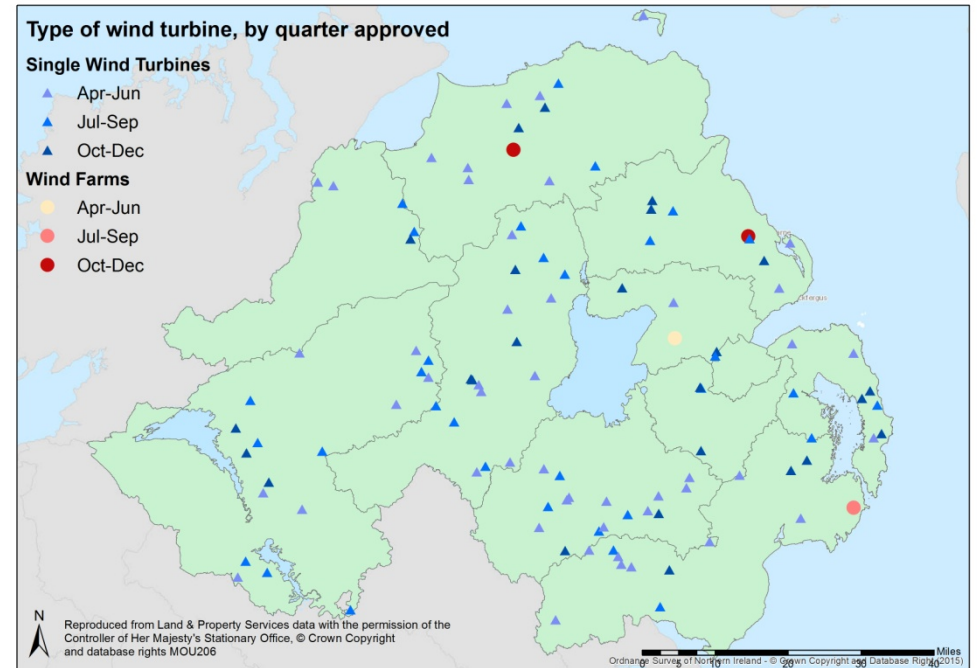


Twenty renewable energy applications were withdrawn during Q3, 3 fewer than the same period last year, with Newry, Mourne and Down (6) recording the most.

At the end of December 2016, there were **198 live renewable energy applications**, 71.7% of these have been in the planning system for over a year. These largely comprised of 122 single wind turbines, 26 biomass/anaerobic digesters, 20 wind farms, and 17 for hydroelectricity. The number of live renewable energy applications was down by almost one-fifth (19.8%) when compared with end of September 2016, although the proportion of applications in the system for over a year has risen slightly by just under 1 percentage point over the same period.

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **68.0% in Q3 2016/17**, the lowest Q3 approval rate of the series. Over the latest quarter the approval rate increased by 14.5 percentage points (from 53.5%), but fell by 4.9 percentage points from the 72.9% recorded at the same point a year earlier.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Apr-Dec 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016 were transferred in January 2017 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 February 2017. 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.

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

## 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 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 70<sup>th</sup> percentile of the sequence.

## Processing Times

The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The average processing time is the median. The median is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point in the middle of the sequence. The median is used because some planning applications can take several years to reach a decision. As a consequence, these extreme cases (outliers) 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-july-september-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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