

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2017/18 THIRD QUARTER STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(October - December 2017: Provisional figures)



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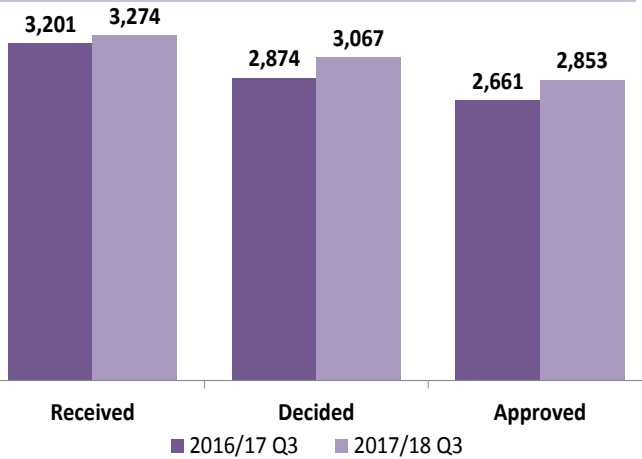
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NI Planning statistics Q3 2017/18

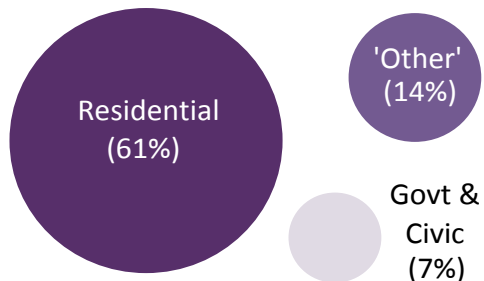
Overall planning applications



Received up by 2%

Decided and Approved up by 7%

3 largest development types



'Other' includes works to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements and listed buildings

Local planning applications

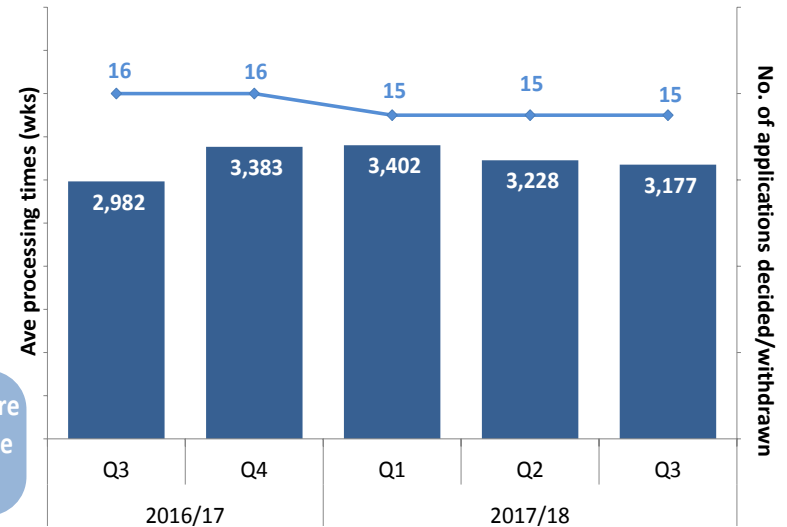
99% of received applications



Approved up by 7%

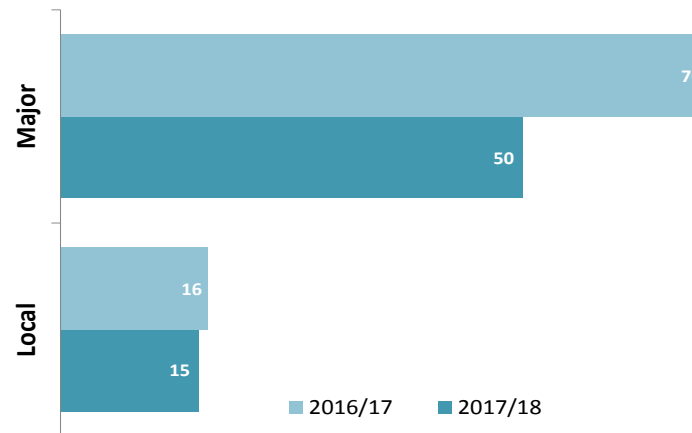
2017/18 Q3

Average processing times were a week shorter than the same period last year

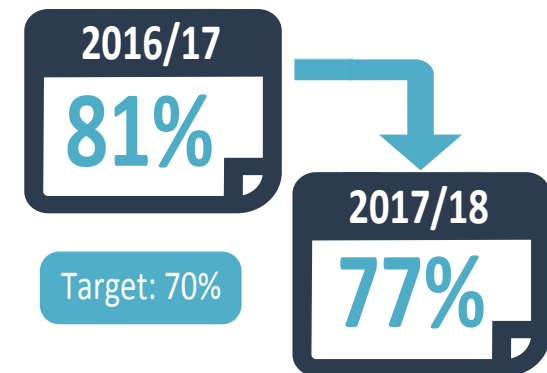


Planning statutory targets (Apr-Dec)

Major and Local average processing times (wks)



% of Enforcement cases concluded in 39 wks



Key Points

- There were 3,274 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during October to December 2017 (Q3), an increase of nearly 2% on the previous quarter (3,222) and up by just over 2% on the same period a year earlier (3,201). This comprised 3,232 local, 41 major and one regionally significant development application.
- During the third quarter of 2017/18, 3,067 planning applications were decided, a decrease of more than 1% over the previous quarter but an increase of nearly 7% when compared to the same period a year earlier.
- The average processing time for major applications during the first nine months of 2017/18 was just over 50 weeks across all councils; an improvement of nearly 20 weeks from the 70 weeks reported for the first nine months of 2016/17. This is 20 weeks longer than the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks.
- The number of local planning applications received was 3,232, an increase of over 1% when compared to the previous quarter and up by more than 2% on the same period a year earlier. Across councils, Belfast City (416), Newry, Mourne and Down (388) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (353) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q3.
- In the first nine months of 2017/18 it took, on average, just above 15 weeks across councils to process local applications to decision or withdrawal which was just over one week shorter than the same period last year. Six of the eleven councils were within the 15 week target during the first nine months of 2017/18. The shortest average processing time for local applications across councils was just below 10 weeks in Mid and East Antrim, whilst the longest was nearly 22 weeks in Lisburn and Castlereagh.
- The number of enforcement cases opened during Q3 in NI was 760, down by more than 11% on the previous quarter but up by over 2% when compared to the same period a year earlier. Across the councils, Antrim and Newtownabbey (106), Belfast City (96) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (89) opened the largest number of cases in Q3.
- In the first nine months of 2017/18, more than three quarters (77%) of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks. This was 7 percentage points above the statutory target and over 4 percentage points lower than the equivalent period last year. Nine of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with performance ranging from a high of 95% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey to 60% in Newry, Mourne and Down.
- The NI approval rate for all planning applications for the quarter was 93%, similar to the rates for the previous quarter and a year earlier. Third quarter approval rates varied across councils from 85% to 98%.

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 2017/18. 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 third quarter of 2017/18, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous years. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the year and changes over the last quarter. Please note that these quarterly figures for 2017/18 are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures being published in June 2018.

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 2017/18 is due to be published in late June 2018.

The next quarterly release is due in September 2018. This will contain provisional planning data up to 30th June 2018 and will commence the quarterly reporting cycle for 2018/19.

See [Gov.UK Release Calendar](#) for release dates of future publications.

1. Overall NI Planning Activity

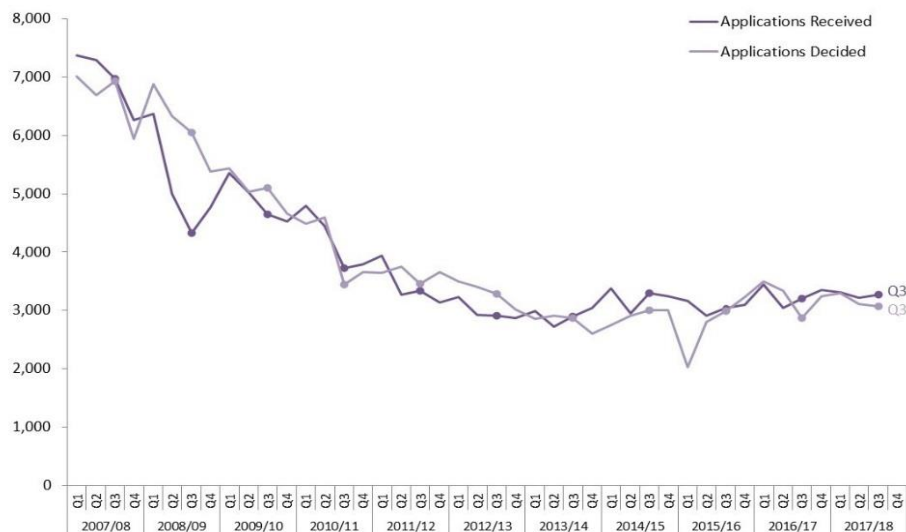
Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period October to December 2017 (Q3), was **3,274**, an increase of 1.6% on the previous quarter (3,222) and up by 2.3% on the same period a year earlier (3,201).

The number of planning applications received had generally been on the decline from its peak in 2004/05 up until 2013/14 when it reached its lowest level of the series. The series shows that the number of applications received has been fairly stable for the last six years with small changes quarter on quarter.

Of the 3,274 applications received in Q3 more than three quarters were for full planning permission (76.6%), similar to the position for the same period last year (76.3%).

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly from Apr 2007 - Dec 2017



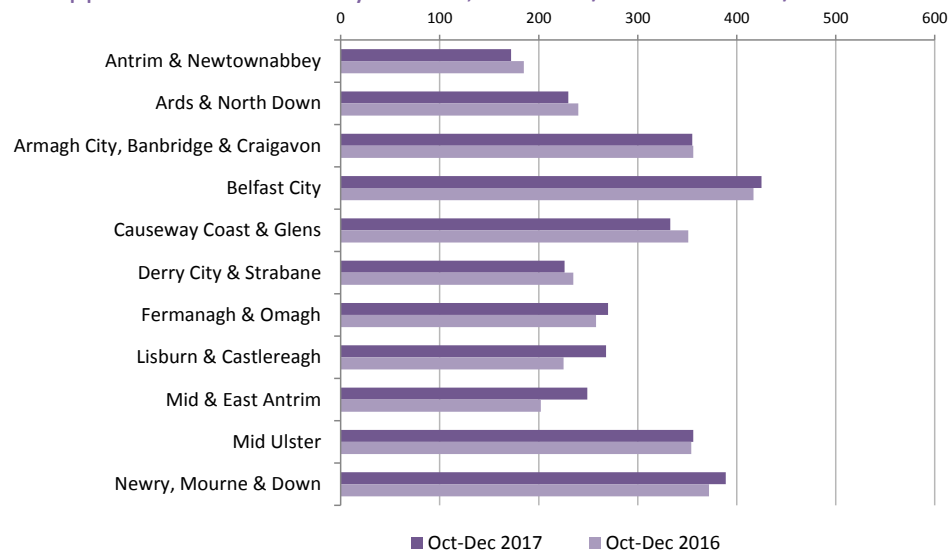
Across NI in Q3, there were 17.6 planning applications received per 10,000 population. This is a stark decline when compared to the 51.9 applications received per 10,000 population in the same quarter of 2004/05, the highest Q3 figure received in the entire series.

Applications Received by Council

In Q3, Belfast City council received the most (425) planning applications, followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (389) and Mid Ulster (356); between them accounting for over a third (35.7%) of all applications received across NI, which was similar to the position a year earlier. The councils receiving the lowest number of applications were Antrim and Newtownabbey (172), Derry City and Strabane (226) and Ards and North Down (230).

The volume of planning applications received in Q3 increased in six of the eleven councils when compared with the same quarter a year earlier. The greatest increases over the year in percentage terms occurred in Mid and East Antrim (23.3%) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (19.1%). Five of the eleven councils recorded decreases over the quarter and the year. The largest percentage changes over the year occurred in Antrim and Newtownabbey (-7.0%) and Causeway Coast and Glens (-5.1%).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q3 2016/17 & Q3 2017/18



At council level, Mid Ulster (24.5), Fermanagh and Omagh (23.3) and Causeway Coast and Glens (23.2) received the most planning applications per 10,000 population, whilst Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.2), Belfast City (12.5) and Ards and North Down (14.4) 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 2017 was **3,067**, representing a decrease of 1.4% over the most recent quarter but an increase 6.7% when compared to the same period a year earlier (2,874).

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 for most part closely tracked the number of applications received.

Just over three quarters of planning decisions in Q3 (76.1%) were for full planning permission, similar to the proportion last year (76.9%).

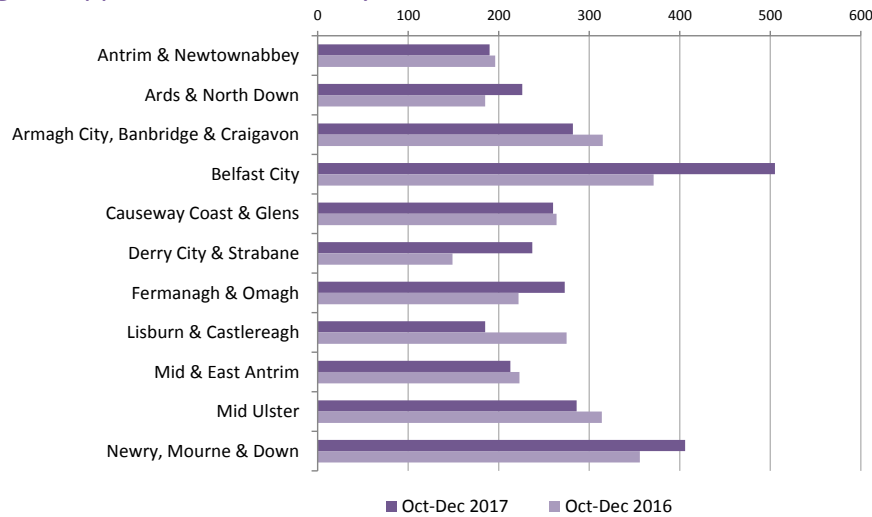
In Q3 2017/18, **159** applications were **withdrawn**, two application more than the previous quarter but a decrease of 3.6% compared to the same period the previous year (165). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

Applications Decided by Council

Across councils in Q3, the highest number of decisions were issued from Belfast City (505) Newry, Mourne and Down (406) and Mid Ulster (286), which was the same as the position last quarter and the similar to the same period last year. Lisburn and Castlereagh (185) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (190) issued the least.

The number of planning decisions issued across councils in Q3 2017/18 varied when compared to the same period a year earlier, with six of the eleven councils reporting decreases over the year. The greatest decreases over the year in percentage terms occurred in Lisburn and Castlereagh (-32.7%) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (-10.5%). The remaining five councils reported increases over the same period with the greatest percentage increases being recorded in Derry City and Strabane (59.1%) and Belfast City (36.1%).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q3 2016/17 & Q3 2017/18



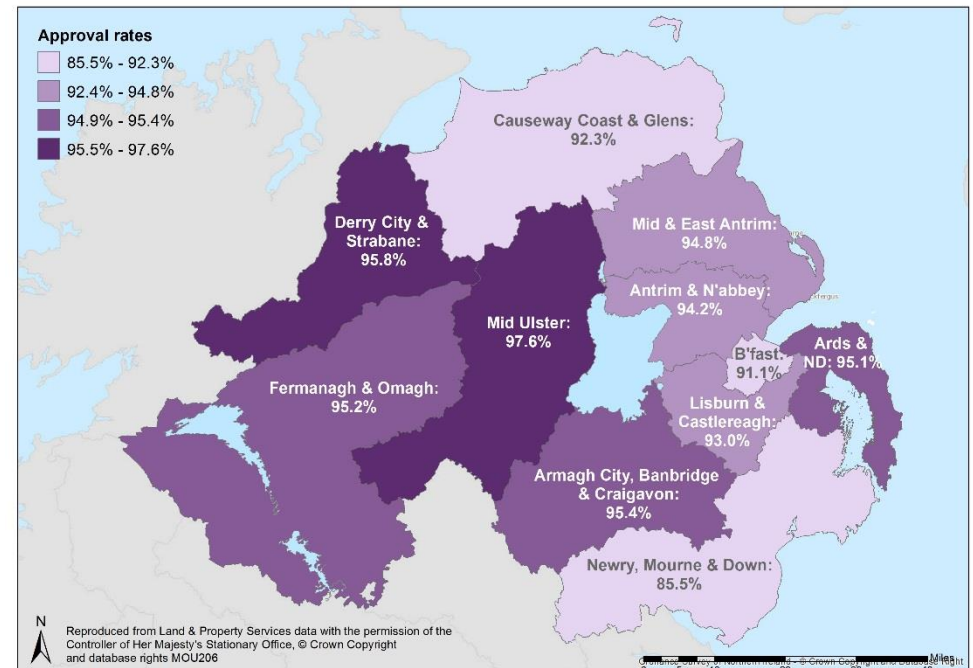
Five of the eleven councils issued more decisions than they received during Q3 2017/18, the greatest of these in percentage terms were Belfast City (+18.8%), Antrim and Newtownabbey (+10.5%) and Derry City and Strabane (4.9%). [Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q3 2017/18, they processed to decision or withdrawal 165 discharge of conditions, 119 non material changes and 94 certificates of lawfulness. When compared to the same quarter a year earlier the numbers processed in these areas increased by 9.2%. 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 2017/18 was **93.0%**, which was similar to the rates for the previous quarter (93.7%) and the same quarter a year earlier (92.6%). Seven out of the eleven councils had an approval rate which was higher than the overall NI approval rate in Q3 2017/18.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, Q3 2017/18



Planning approval rates varied across councils during Q3 2017/18 from highs of 97.6% in Mid Ulster and 95.8% in Derry City and Strabane to lows of 85.5% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

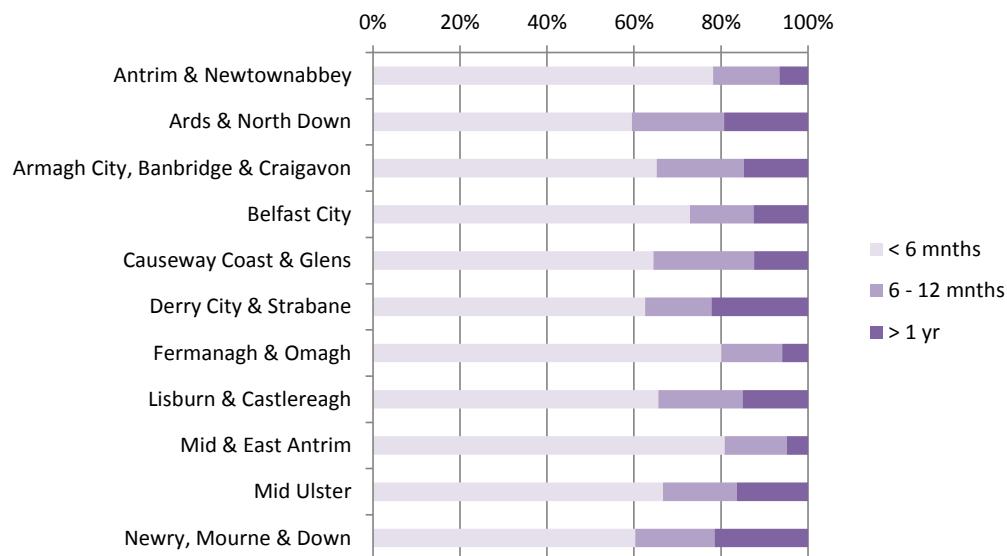
Five councils reported a decreased approval rate when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. The most notable declines were in Belfast City (down by 4.1 percentage points) and Ards and North Down (down by 3.8 percentage points). [Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

Live applications

At the end of December 2017, there were **6,585 live applications** in the planning system across NI, a decrease of 4.1% over the year from 6,867 at the end of December 2016. Just over 15% of live applications in the planning system at the end of December 2017 was over one year old (1,005); this was down nearly four percentage points when compared to the end of December 2016 (1,317: 19.2%). [Refer to Table 1.3](#)

Over the last year, eight of the eleven councils reduced the proportion of live cases that are in the system for over a year, with the greatest change in Newry, Mourne and Down (-10.9pp). The proportion of applications over a year increased in three councils, with the greatest of these increases in Mid Ulster (+2.0pp). [Refer to Table 1.4](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Dec 2017

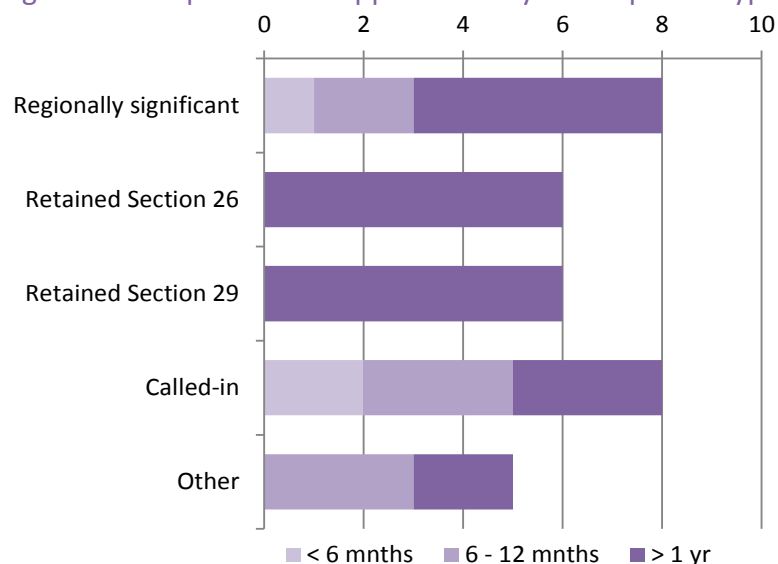


The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of December 2017 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.5. Mid and East Antrim had the lowest proportion of cases over one year old (4.9%), followed by Fermanagh and Omagh (5.9%) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (6.6%). Derry City and Strabane had the largest proportion of applications in the system for over a year (22.2%) followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (21.5%) and Ards and North Down (19.3%).

2. Departmental Activity

At the end of December 2017, there were **eight** ongoing **regionally significant development** (RSD) applications, **eight called-in**; **12 retained applications** and **five other applications**, which include Conservation Area Consents, Variation of Conditions and Reserved Matters. Two-thirds of these applications (22 of 33) were in the system over a year.

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end Dec 17



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 Q3 2017/18, the Department received three new applications; 1 RSD application and 2 Called-In, this was three more than the previous quarter and 12 less than the same period a year earlier. [Refer to Table 2.2](#)

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 2017, of the **eight** RSD applications that were live in the planning system, four were not subject to Pre-Application Discussions and therefore will not fall under the remit of the target. Of the remaining four applications, one was received this quarter and one towards the end of the previous financial year that are still being processed while the other two, due to the requirement for further environmental information (FEI), have had target dates extended. These 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 **four** applications during the third quarter of 2017/18, three more than the previous quarter and the same as a year earlier. These decisions were on one **Retained Section 26** (former Article 31), one **Retained Section 29** (former non-Article 31), and two **“Other”** applications. There were no applications withdrawn during Q3 2017/18.

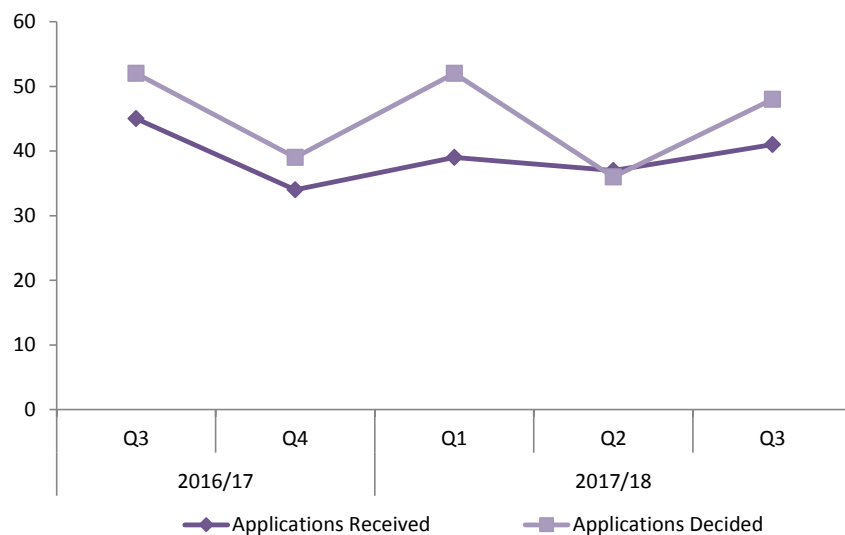
The average processing times during the first nine months of the year for the different application types which were processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal are reported in [Table 2.1](#). Processing times are not highlighted in this commentary due to the very small numbers of applications 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 2017/18 was **41**.

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, quarterly Oct 2016 – Dec 2017



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

Q3 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 steadily increased quarter on quarter with Q3

2016/17 reporting 45 across Northern Ireland, the highest number since Q2 2015/16. The number of major applications received in the latest four quarters may indicate a levelling off, with 41 received in the latest quarter. Of these applications, across councils, Belfast City (nine) and Mid Ulster (eight) received the most.

Over the quarter, **48 major** planning applications were **decided** and **one** was **withdrawn**. At council level, Fermanagh and Omagh (eight) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (seven) issued most decisions on major applications.

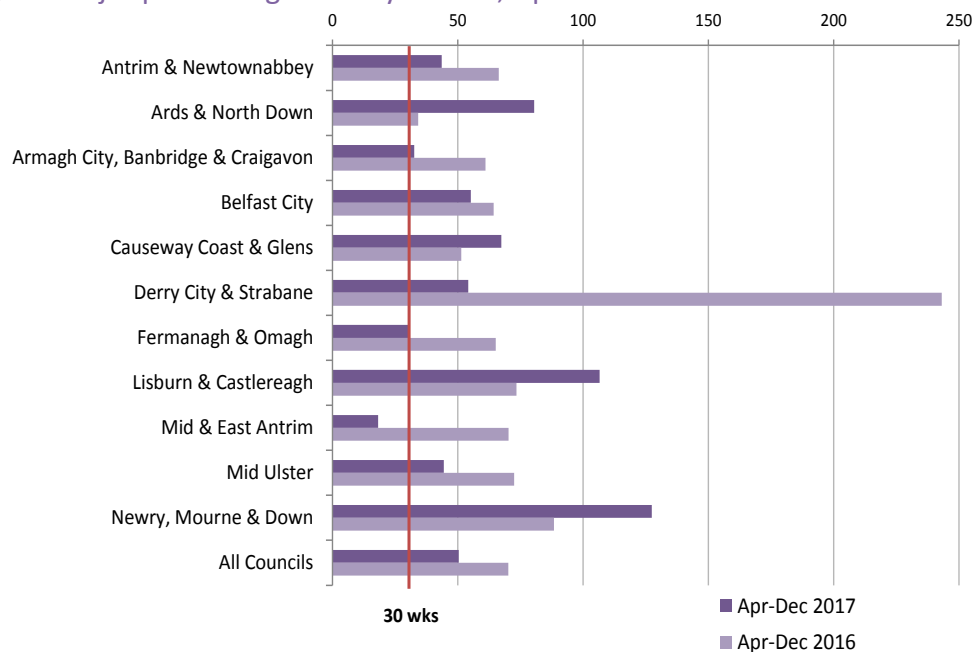
[Refer to Table 3.1](#)

In Q3 2017/18 the number of planning decisions reached on major applications (48) exceeded the number of major applications received for the same period (41).

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 year to date processing times for major applications. During this period (April to December 2017), the **average processing time** to process **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **50.4 weeks** across all councils, an improvement of nearly 20 weeks from the 70.2 weeks reported for the same period last year. However, this is still just over 20 weeks longer than the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks.

Fig 3.2 Major processing times by council, Apr-Dec 2016 & 2017



Whilst Fig 3.2 has been provided for completeness, the majority of councils have not processed a sufficient number of major applications during the first nine months of the current and previous year to allow any meaningful assessment of their individual performance. For three of the councils processing times are based on less than 10 major applications. Belfast City (24) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (18) have processed to decision or withdrawal the most major applications during the first nine months of 2017/18.

Comparison against the target and across councils will become more robust as we reach the year end. With that in mind, it is still worth noting that during the first nine months of the year, one of the councils are processing major applications within the 30 week average target time and two others are very close to meeting the target.

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.

[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 of interest that the year to date (Apr-Dec 2017) average processing time for major applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is more than 5 times shorter (39.8 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (201.6 weeks).

Across Northern Ireland in Q3 2017/18, 91.7% of major planning applications decided upon were approved, which represented an increase of 1.3 pp over the last year. Ten councils issued decisions on major applications during the third quarter of the year. In seven out of the ten, 100% of major applications decided upon were approved.

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 2017/18 was **3,232**, an increase of 1.5% when compared to the previous quarter (3,185) and up by 2.4% on the same period a year earlier (3,155).

Across councils, Belfast City (416), Newry, Mourne and Down (388) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (353) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q3. This was very similar to the position a year earlier.

In six of the eleven councils, the number of local applications received in Q3 2017/18 was higher than during the same period a year earlier. The increase over the year is largely attributable to the increases in Mid and East Antrim and Lisburn and Castlereagh (both +43 applications).

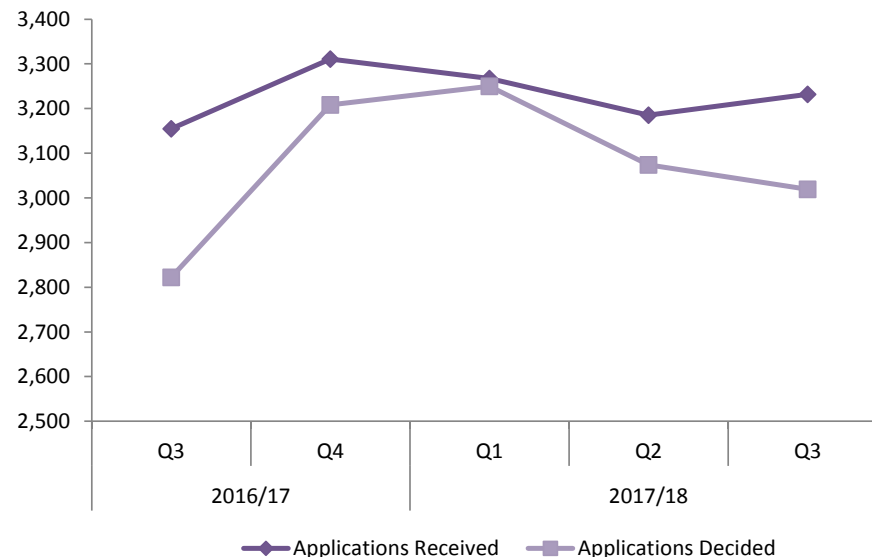
The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q3 2017/18 was **3,019**, a decrease of 1.8% over the quarter but up by 7.0% when compared to the same period a year earlier. Much of the increase over the year is driven by increases in Belfast City (+136 applications), Derry City and Strabane (+93) alongside other smaller increases. The increase over the year was slightly offset with Lisburn and Castlereagh receiving 92 fewer applications.

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, the number of applications decided each year increased considerably narrowing the gap significantly between the numbers received and the numbers decided.

In Q4 2015/16, the number of applications decided exceeded the number received for the first time in the series and this continued to be the

situation in the first two quarters of 2016/17. Since then the number of applications received has been higher quarter on quarter than the number of decisions issued with the latest quarter being 7.1% higher - see Fig 4.1.

Fig 4.1 Local applications, quarterly Oct 2016 – Dec 2017



During Q3 2017/18, Belfast City (500), Newry, Mourne and Down (401), and Mid Ulster (281) issued the most local decisions across councils, which generally reflects the high volumes of such applications received.

Over the quarter, there were 158 local applications withdrawn across NI, this ranged from 25 applications withdrawn in Causeway Coast and Glens to six in Mid and East Antrim.

[Refer to Table 4.1](#)

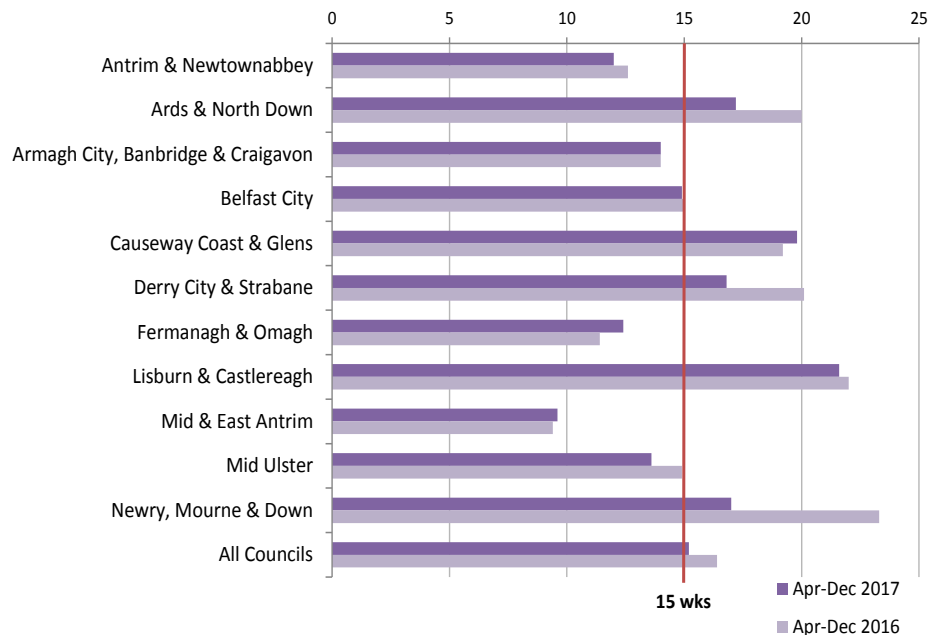
It is a statutory target for each council that their local development planning applications will be processed from the date valid to decision issued or withdrawal date within an average of 15 weeks.

During April to December 2017, the **average processing time** to bring **local** applications to decision or withdrawal was **15.2 weeks** across all councils, just over a week shorter than the average time taken in the same period last year (16.4 weeks).

The shortest average processing time for local applications during the first nine months of 2017/18 was 9.6 weeks in Mid and East Antrim (based on 628 local applications decided and 17 withdrawn) whilst the longest was 21.6 weeks in Lisburn and Castlereagh (based on 728 local applications decided and 39 withdrawn).

Six of the 11 councils, namely Mid and East Antrim (9.6), Antrim and Newtownabbey (12.0), Fermanagh and Omagh (12.4), Mid Ulster (13.6), Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.0) and Belfast City (14.9) were within the 15 week target at the end of December 2017.

Fig 4.2 Local processing times by council, Apr-Dec 2016 & 2017



Local processing times in seven of the eleven councils decreased during April to December 2017 when compared to the same period a year earlier, with the most notable change being achieved in Newry, Mourne and Down which improved its performance by more than six weeks from 23.3 weeks in to 17.0 weeks.

[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](#).

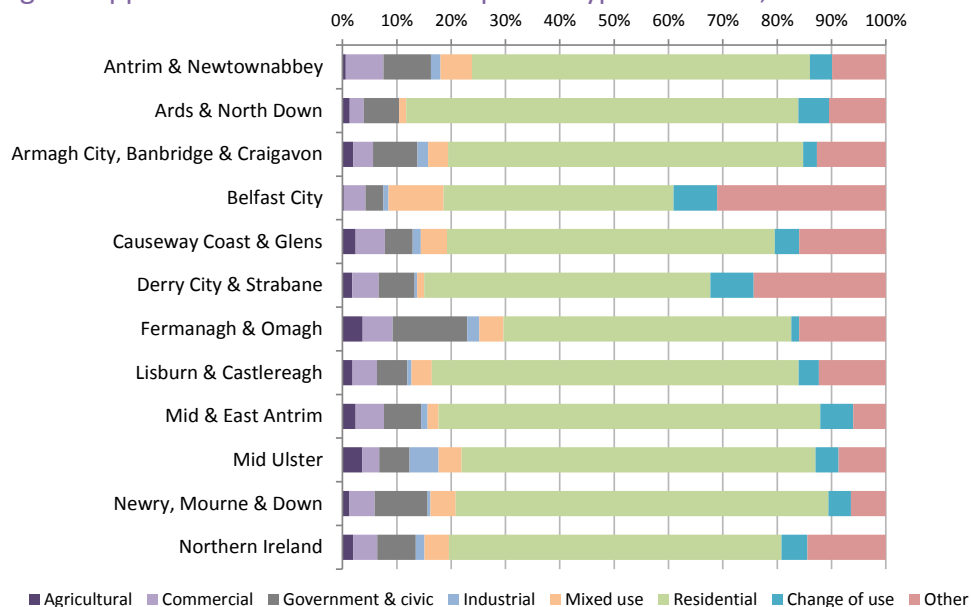
It is worth noting that the processing time for local applications in the first nine months of 2017/18 which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is nearly 10 times shorter (14.8 weeks) and within the processing target time of 15 weeks when compared to those which had already been partially processed by the Department (147.2 weeks).

Across Northern Ireland, 93.0% of local planning applications decided upon were approved in Q3, similar to the rate for the equivalent period last year (92.6%).

5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During Q3 2017/18, **residential** applications made up **61.2%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications received, up by 2.6pp from the same period last year (58.6%). Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, Oct-Dec 2017



During Q3 2017/18, in Ards and North Down nearly three quarters of applications received (72.2%) were for residential development, compared to just over two fifths in Belfast City (42.4%).

Belfast City (31.1%) and Derry City and Strabane (24.3%) 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.

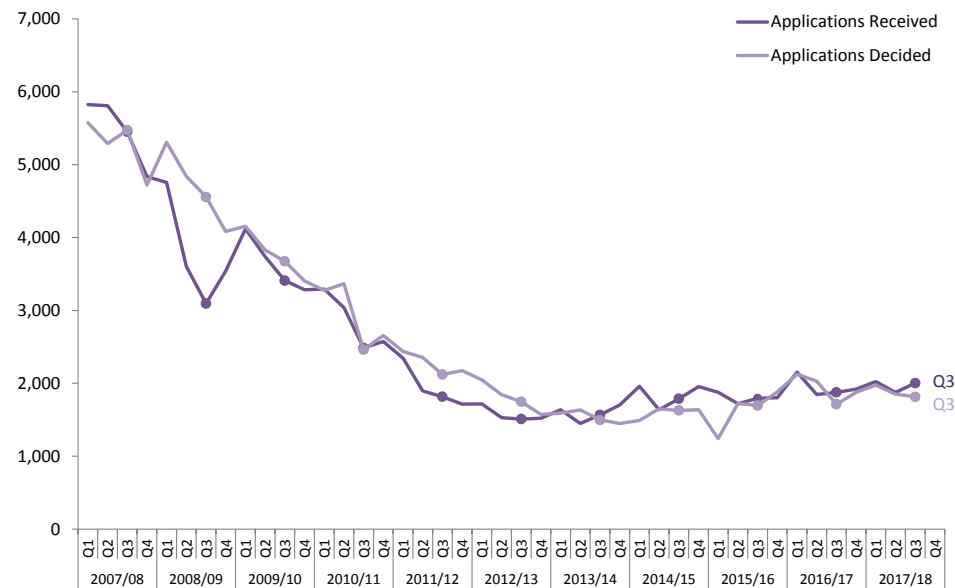
At NI level, the overall number of planning applications received increased by 2.3% in Q3 when compared to the same period a year earlier, whereas residential applications increased by 6.8% (from 1,875 to 2,003). Over the last year the increase in the number of residential applications received has driven an increase in the overall number of applications received. However, falls in the number of government and civic (-57) and 'other' (-39) applications over the same period slightly offset the overall increase.

[Refer to Table 5.1, 5.2](#)

Residential applications

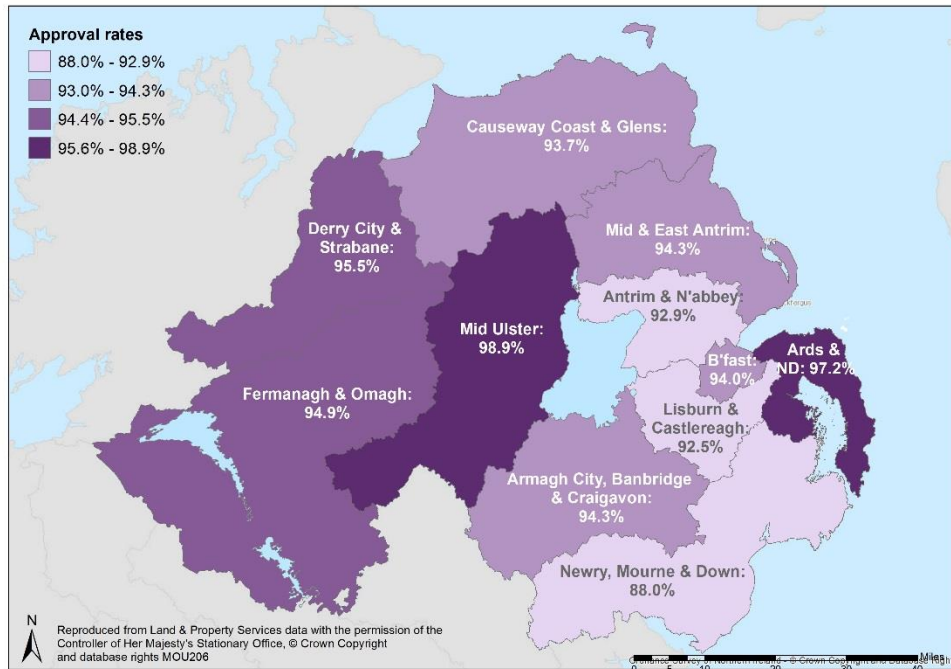
The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in total for Northern Ireland in Q3 2017/18 was **2,003**, an increase over both the previous quarter and year of 6.8%.

Fig 5.2 NI Residential applications, quarterly from Apr 2007 to Dec 2017



[Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council Oct-Dec 2017



The Northern Ireland approval rate for residential planning applications in Q3 2017/18 was **93.9%**, slightly higher than the rates for the previous quarter (93.7%) and up nearly 2 pp on the same period last year (91.9%).

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in Q3 with highs of 98.9% in Mid Ulster and 97.2% in Ards and North Down to 88.0% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

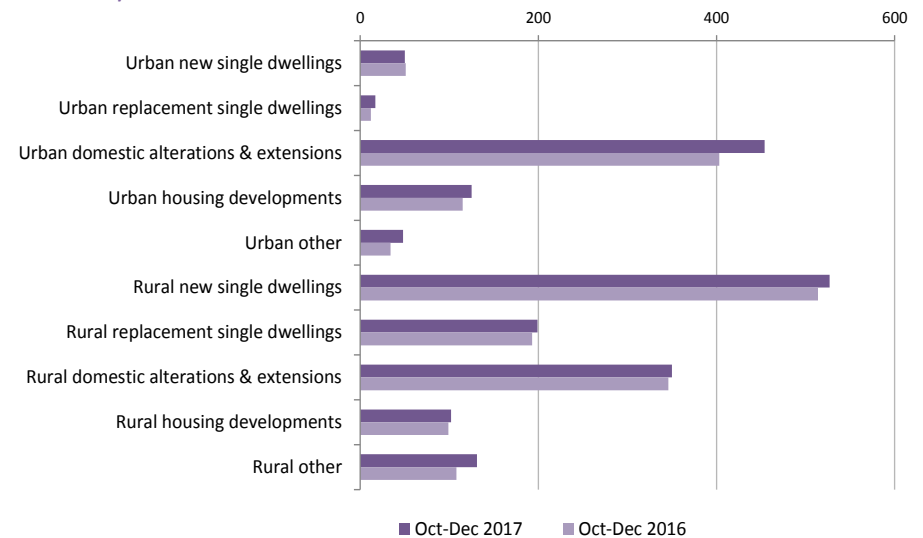
Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in six of the eleven councils over the greatest percentage point increase over the year in Newry, Mourne and Down (from 78.8% to 88.0%).

During Q3, there were 90 residential applications withdrawn, 18 more than the numbers withdrawn in the previous quarter (72) and 11 fewer than the same period a year earlier (79). [Refer to Table 5.4](#)

Across urban areas (*in settlements greater than 5,000 population*), the number of residential applications received in Q3 increased by 14.9% when compared to the same period last year and 12.8% over the latest quarter. In rural areas within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was a decrease over the year (-4.3%) but an increase over the quarter (5.7%). In the open countryside, residential applications were similar to those received in the previous quarter (2.4% increase) and up over the year (5.7%).

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 & Q3 2017/18



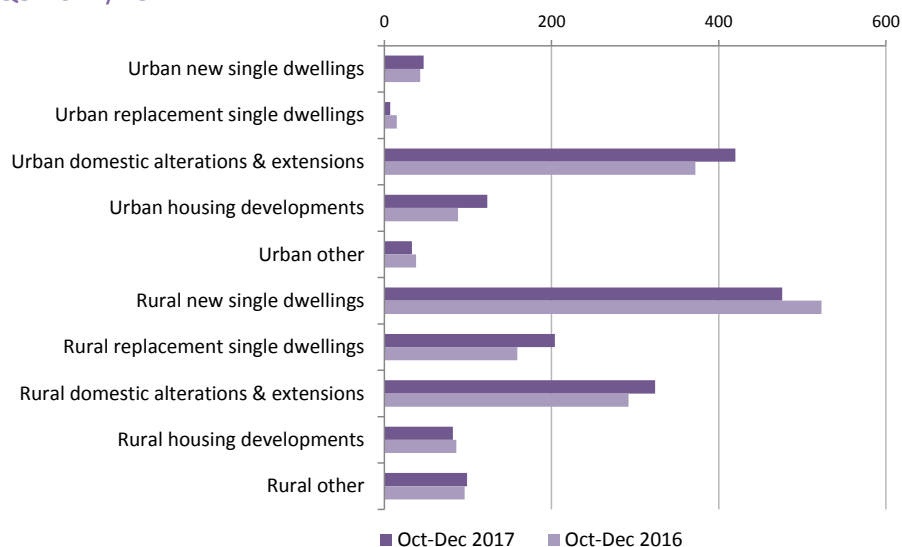
New single dwellings in rural areas (527) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (454) continue to dominate, together making up nearly half of (49.0%) of all residential applications received during Q3.

The increase over the year in the number of residential applications received (6.8%) was partly driven by the increase in the number of **urban domestic alterations and extensions**, up 12.7% from 403 to 454 applications.

offset by a decrease in the number of decisions issued for **rural new single dwellings** (-47 applications).

[Refer to Table 5.5](#)

Fig 5.5 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q3 2016/17 & Q3 2017/18



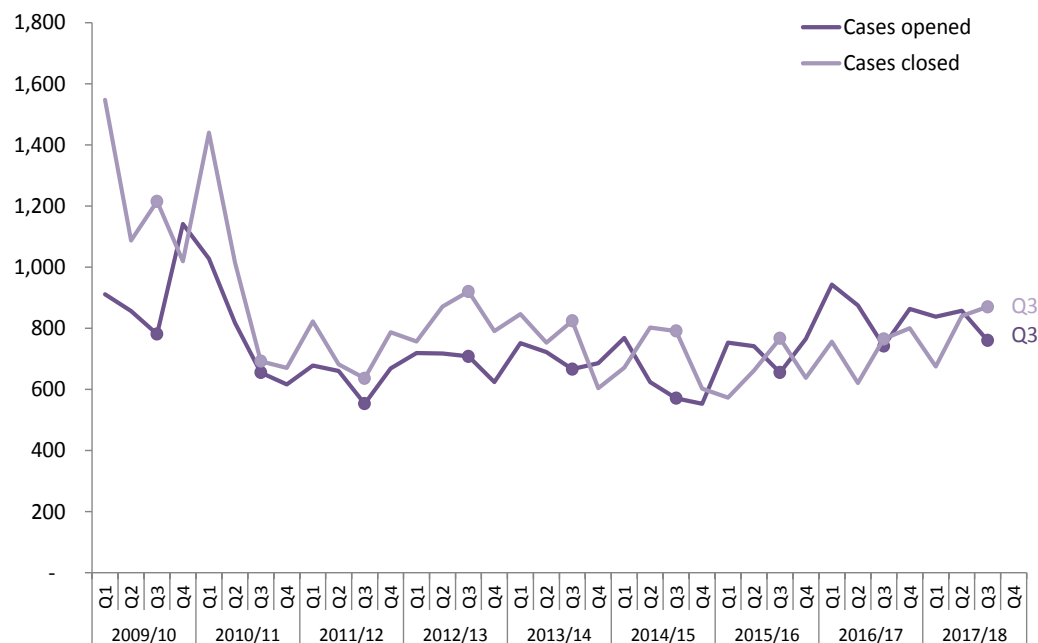
Decisions on residential applications increased over the year by 6.0% (from 1,712 to 1,815), with the largest increases recorded in the number of applications decided for **urban domestic alterations and extensions** (up 48 applications), **rural replacement single dwellings** (up 45 applications), **urban housing developments** (up 35 applications) and **rural domestic alterations and extensions** (up 32 applications). This increase was slightly

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during Q3 of 2017/18 was **760**, a decrease of 11.3% over the previous quarter and an increase of 2.4% when compared to the same period a year earlier. Q3 2017/18 recorded the second highest number of enforcement cases opened in any third quarter across the full series with the highest Q3 figure recorded in 2009/10 (781).

Across the councils, Antrim and Newtownabbey (106), Belfast City (96) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (89) opened the largest number of cases in Q3, whilst Mid and East Antrim (36) and Mid Ulster (43) opened the least amount of cases.

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly Apr 2009-Dec 2017



The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q3 2017/18 was **870**, an increase of 3.6% on the previous quarter and 13.7% on the same quarter of the previous year. This figure was also the highest number of enforcement cases closed in any third quarter since 2012/13 (920).

Belfast City (152), Ards and North Down (118) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (107) closed the highest number of cases in the third quarter of 2017/18 whilst Mid and East Antrim (30), Mid Ulster (40) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (45) closed the least.

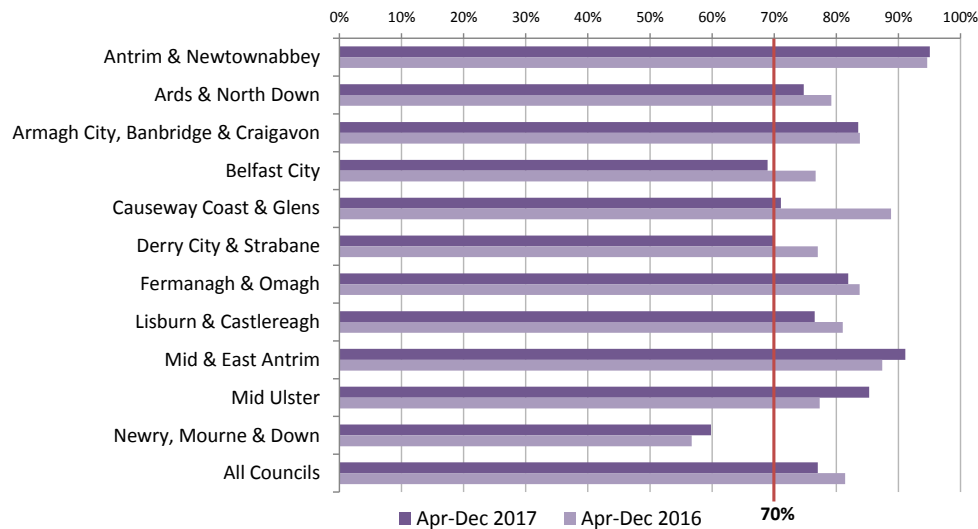
Of the **870** enforcement cases closed in Q3 2017/18, the two main reasons accounting for over three fifths of cases were that no breach had actually occurred (34.7%) and that cases had been remedied or resolved (27.4%).

[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.**

In the first nine months of 2017/18, across Northern Ireland **more than three quarters (77.0%)** of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks. This was 7.0 percentage points above the statutory target and 4.4 percentage points lower than the equivalent period last year.

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, Apr – Dec 2016 & 2017



In the first nine months of 2017/18 nine of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with highs of 95.1% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey followed by Mid and East Antrim (91.1%) and Mid Ulster (85.3%). Belfast City is currently just below the target level (68.9%) whilst Newry, Mourne and Down (59.8%) remain in a similar position when compared to the same period last year.

[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

During Q3 2017/18, there were **three prosecutions** initiated, 11 less than the number initiated a quarter earlier and nine less than the equivalent quarter of the previous year. This represents the lowest number of prosecutions initiated in any quarter across the series, however this is not a new low as this number has occurred three times previously in the series.

Between October and December Fermanagh and Omagh initiated two prosecutions while Causeway, Coast and Glens initiated one. There were

three convictions during the same period, with two recorded in Lisburn and Castlereagh and one in Mid Ulster.

[Refer to Table 6.3](#)

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of December 2017 was **3,394**, 4.1% more than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **861**, accounting for a quarter (25.4%) of all live cases. The proportion of live enforcement cases in the planning system for more than two years, which although remaining relatively static since 2014/15, does show a very slight downward trend.

[Refer to Table 6.4](#)

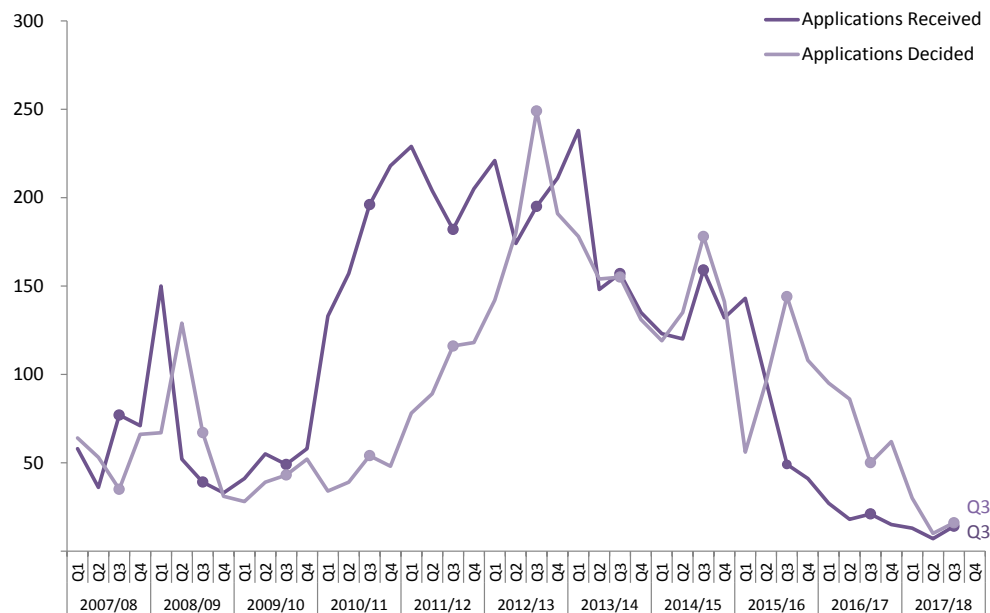
Across the councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the largest number of live cases at the end of December 2017 (825) and the highest proportion in the system for over 2 years (41.1%). Mid and East Antrim had the lowest number of cases (136) with 8.8% of them being in the system for over 2 years. The number of live enforcement cases increased over the year in six of the eleven councils, with the greatest percentage increases in Mid and East Antrim (24.8%) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (22.8%).

[Refer to Table 6.5](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in Q3 2017/18 was **14**, the lowest third quarter figure since 2003/04 (10), and this represented a decrease of a third in received applications from the same period a year earlier (21). The number of applications received during October to December peaked in 2010/11 with 196 applications. It is likely that the high levels at this time were driven by the NI Executive's targets for electricity consumption from renewable sources, with a target of 20% to be achieved by 2015, and 40% by 2020. This continuing sharp decline in recent years (a **92.9%** decrease from Q3 peak of 196 to 14 applications in Q3 2017/18) 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 2007 – Dec 2017

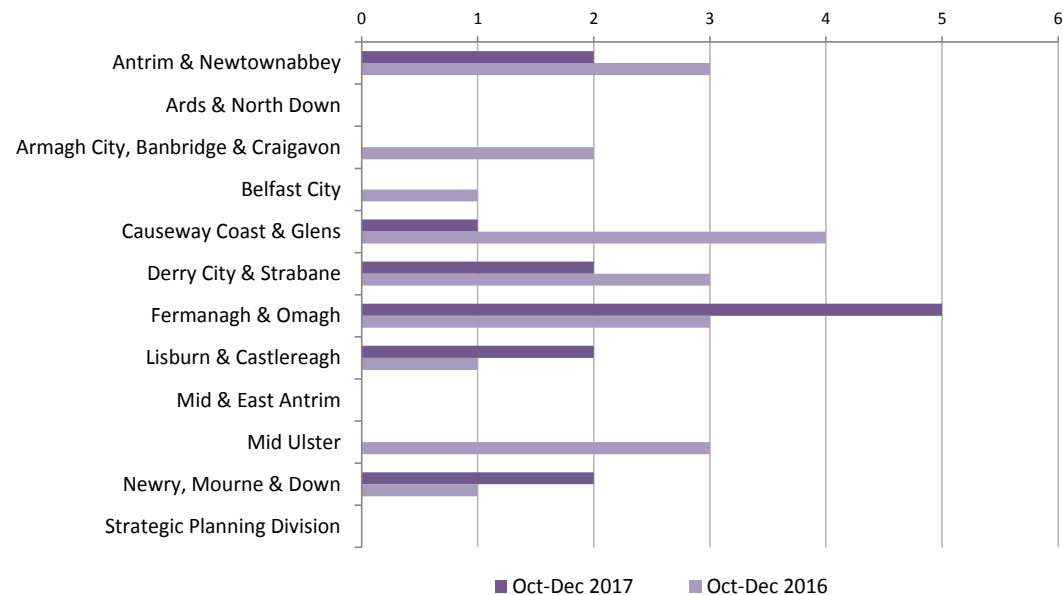


The number of applications **decided** between October and December 2017 was **16**, a decrease of over two thirds (68.0%) when compared to the previous year (50) and down by **93.6%** when compared to the series third quarter peak of 249 applications decided in Q3 of 2012/13.

During the third quarter of 2017/18, the average processing time for these applications was 60.2 weeks across NI, nearly 22 weeks shorter than the equivalent quarter last year (82.0 weeks).

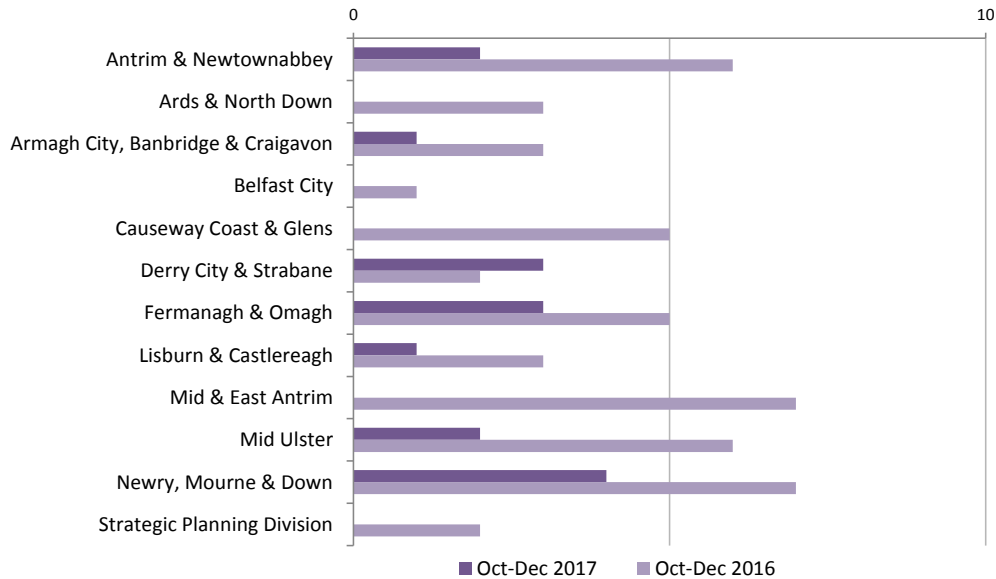
Up until last year, single wind turbines had dominated renewable energy applications. In Q3 of 2017/18 half (seven of 14) applications received were for single wind turbines, with the year to date position at 44.1% (15 of 34) of applications being for single wind turbines. [Refer to Table 7.1, 7.2](#)

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by authority, Q3 2016/17 & Q3 2017/18



Of the 16 decisions issued in the third quarter of 2017/18, half (8) were for single wind turbines. This is a marked decrease from the 50 decisions issued in the same period a year earlier with 39 being for single wind turbines – see Figure 7.3 for the full breakdown.

Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by authority, Q3 2016/17 & Q3 2017/18

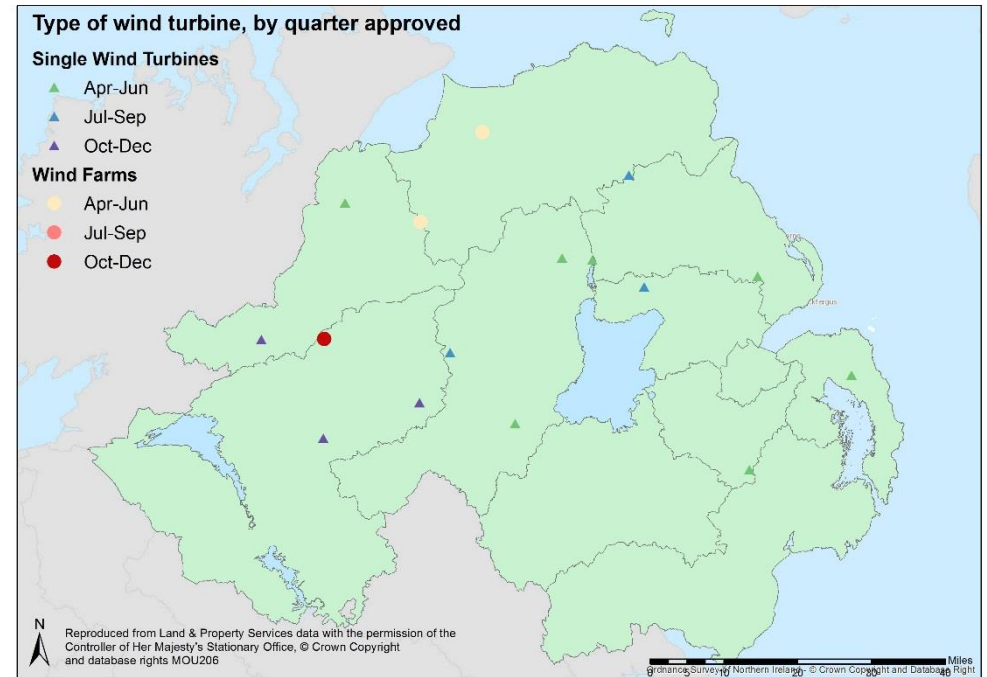


Four renewable energy applications were withdrawn during Q3, 16 fewer than the same period last year.

At the end of December 2017, there were **98 live renewable energy applications**, with two thirds of these (66.3%) being in the planning system for over a year. These largely comprised of 49 single wind turbines, 17 wind farms, 15 biomass/anaerobic digesters, and 12 for hydroelectricity. The number of live renewable energy applications was down by over a half (51.2%) when compared with the end of December 2016 (201 live applications), while the proportion of applications in the system for over a year has decreased by over 5 percentage points (71.6%).

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **56.3% in Q3 of 2017/18**. This figure is down by 11.8 percentage points from the 68.0% recorded at the same point a year earlier.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Q1 - Q3 2017/18



[Refer to Table 7.3, 7.4](#)

Interactive maps have been developed for renewable energy planning applications by the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Sharing (NINIS) team. These maps are held on the [\(NINIS\) website](#) and direct links can be found below:

- [Single Wind Turbines](#)
- [Wind Farms](#)
- [Solar Farms](#)

User Guidance

Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1st April 2017 to 31st December 2017 were transferred in January 2018 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 2018. Quarterly data for 2017/18 are regarded as provisional and will remain this status until the annual report for 2017/18 is published in June 2018.

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 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 Q3 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>

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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