NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

Second Quarter 2023/24 Statistical Bulletin

July to September 2023: Provisional Figures

NATIONAL STATISTICS

Contents

Key points

- There were 2,391 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during the second quarter of 2023/24; a decrease of ten percent on the previous quarter and down by eleven percent on the same period a year earlier. This comprised of 2,359 local, 31 major and one regionally significant application.

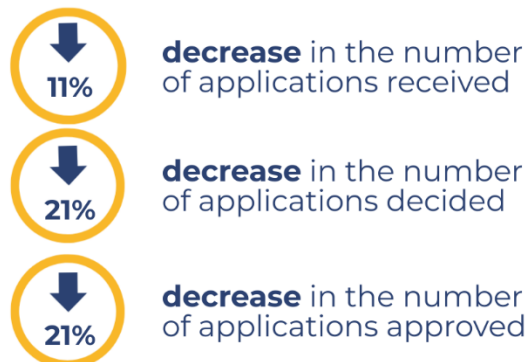- In the second quarter of 2023/24, 2,238 planning applications were decided, down by fifteen percent from the previous quarter and down by twenty-one percent from the same period a year earlier. Decisions were issued on 2,210 local and 28 major applications during the most recent quarter.

- The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first six months of 2023/24 was 19.2 weeks across all councils. This exceeds the 15 week target and represents an increase of 2.2 weeks from the same period a year earlier. Four of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first six months of 2023/24.

- The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first six months of 2023/24 was 34.7 weeks across all councils. This represents a decrease of 15.3 weeks compared with the same period a year earlier, moving closer to the 30 week target.

- The number of enforcement cases concluded and corresponding processing times are not presented in this report. This information will be published later and users will be notified when available.

Northern Ireland Planning Statistics Q2 2023/24

NISRA Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency / Gníomhaireacht Thuaisceart Éireann um Staitisticí agus Taighde

Department for Infrastructure An Roinn Bonneagair www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Overall planning applications

Applications received, decided & approved

	Received	Decided	Approved
Q2 2022/23	2,672	2,839	2,703
Q2 2023/24	2,391	2,238	2,142
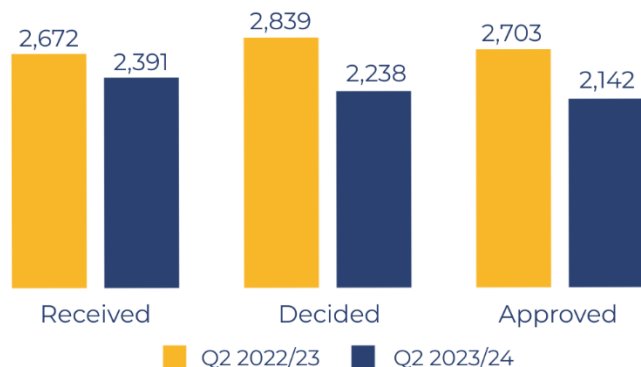
Q2 2022/23 ▉ Q2 2023/24 ▉

Comparing Q2 2023/24 with Q2 2022/23:

↓ **11%** **decrease** in the number of applications received

↓ **21%** **decrease** in the number of applications decided

↓ **21%** **decrease** in the number of applications approved

Applications received

A total of 2,391 planning applications were received during Q2 2023/24:

2,359 (99%) Local

31 (1%) Major

1 (<1%) Regionally significant

3 largest development types

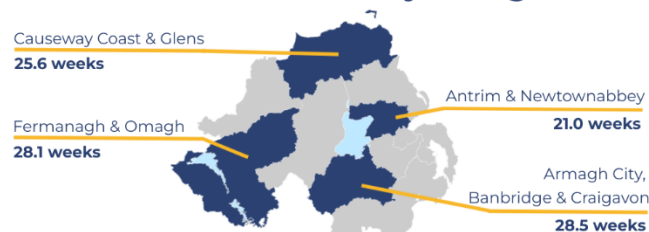Residential (65%)

Other* (12%)

Govt & Civic (7%)
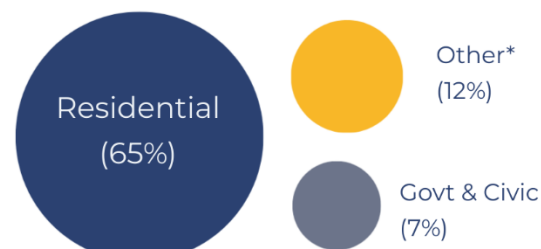
*Other includes work to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements & listed buildings

Planning statutory targets - April to September 2022 & 2023

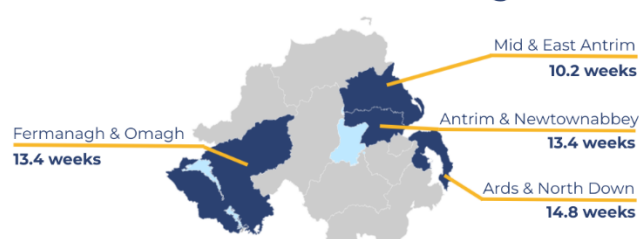### Average processing times (weeks) - major

Apr-Sep 2022	50.0
Apr-Sep 2023	34.7

Target: 30 weeks

Average processing times (weeks) - local

Apr-Sep 2022	17.0
Apr-Sep 2023	19.2

Target: 15 weeks

Councils within major target

Causeway Coast & Glens 25.6 weeks

Antrim & Newtownabbey 21.0 weeks

Fermanagh & Omagh 28.1 weeks

Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon 28.5 weeks

Councils within local target

Mid & East Antrim 10.2 weeks

Antrim & Newtownabbey 13.4 weeks

Fermanagh & Omagh 13.4 weeks

Ards & North Down 14.8 weeks

For further information please contact ASRB@nisra.gov.uk or view report at: www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-activity-statistics

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Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Second Quarter 2023/24 Statistical Bulletin

Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for councils and the Department for Infrastructure during the second quarter of 2023/24.

Quarterly figures for 2023/24 are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures, to be published in July 2024. Enforcement figures for 2022/23 remain provisional and will be subject to a further revision once the full suite of enforcement data is available.

The records of all planning applications from 1 April to 30 September 2023 were transferred in October 2023 from live databases. This included all live planning applications in the Northern Ireland and Mid Ulster Planning Portals. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB). Local councils and the Department were provided with their own headline planning statistics as part of the quality assurance process. Once validations were complete, a final extract was taken in November 2023.

Detailed notes on the background of NI Planning Statistics and user guidance for this publication can be found here.

Future releases

The next quarterly bulletin containing provisional planning data up to 31 December 2023 is planned for release in March 2024. The next annual report covering 2023/24 is planned for release in July 2024. See GOV.UK Release Calendar and upcoming statistical releases on the Department's website for future publication dates.

Northern Ireland regional planning IT systems

In 2022, two new planning portals were introduced; the Northern Ireland Planning Portal for 10 councils and the Department for Infrastructure, and the Mid Ulster planning portal. The transfer to the new planning portals will have impacted on planning activity and processing performance; this should be borne in mind and caution taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods. Data relating to the number of enforcements concluded and processing times for these is absent from this report. This will be published at a later date and users will be notified when available.

Alternative formats

This document may be made available in alternative formats, please contact us to discuss your requirements. Contact details are available on the cover page of this report.
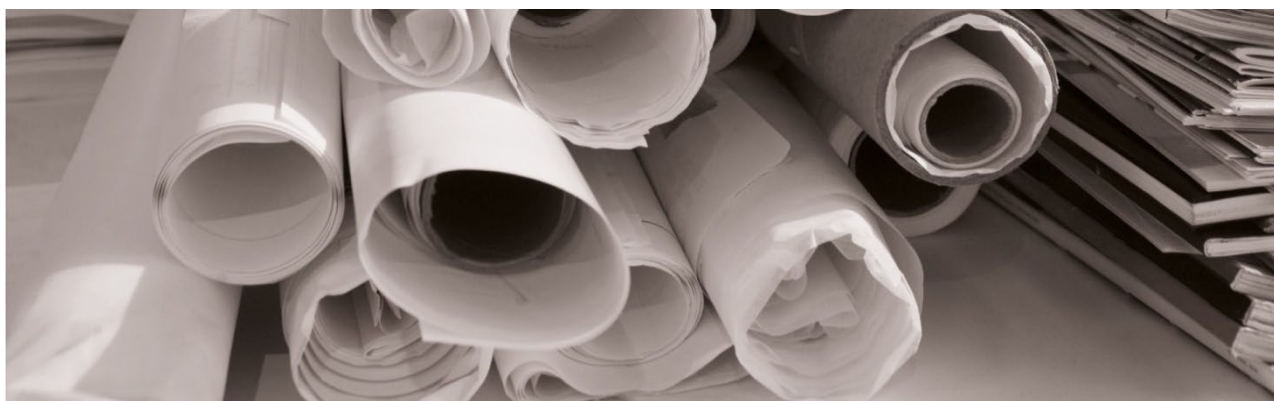
Chapter 1:

# Overall Northern Ireland planning activity

The volume of planning applications received in the second quarter of 2023/24 has decreased from the previous quarter and from the second quarter in 2022/23. For applications processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) the volume processed has also decreased from the previous quarter and the same period the previous year. The number of enforcement cases opened in the period July to September 2023 (Q2) decreased from the previous quarter and was similar to the same period a year earlier; the number of cases closed was lower than both the previous quarter and Q2 last year.

There have been some key events in recent years that will have impacted on planning activity and processing performance. These were the coronavirus pandemic with varying restrictions in place up until February 2022; the accessibility of the planning system for some users for a period during January and February 2022, and a significant change in IT planning systems with the development and implementation of two new planning systems in June and December 2022. All these factors should be borne in mind when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.

Applications received

The number of planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in Q2 2023/24 was 2,391; decreases of 10.0% on the previous quarter (2,657) and 10.5% on the same period a year earlier (2,672) (Figure 1.1). Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2.

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly, April 2013 to September 2023
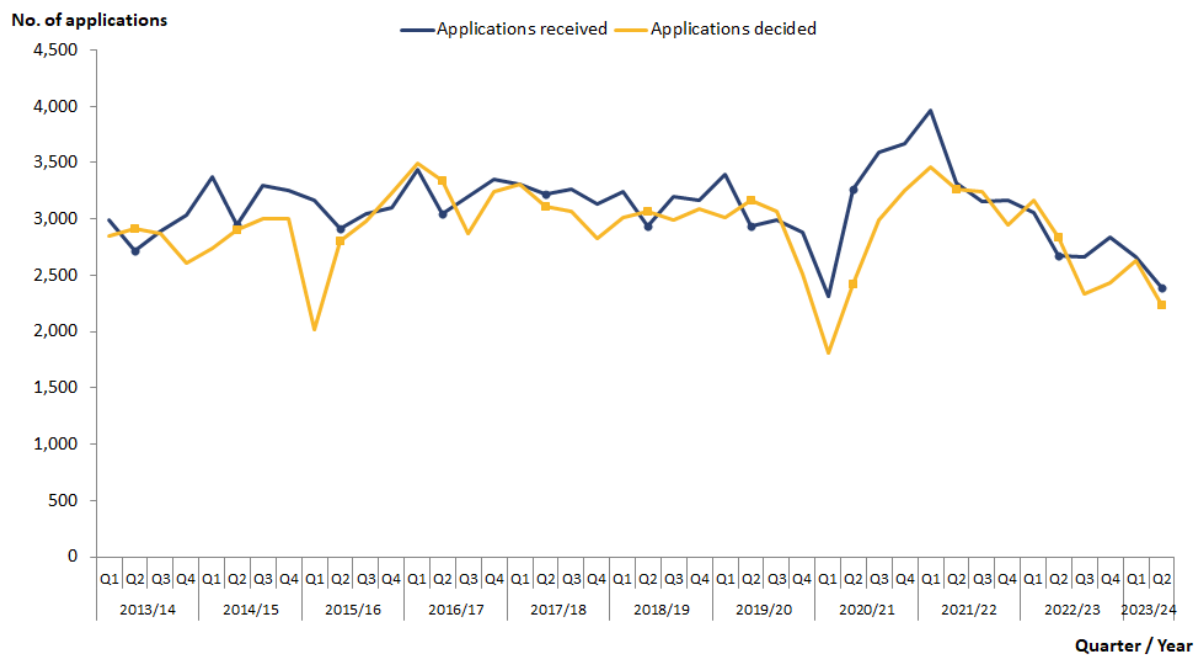
Nine councils reported a decrease in the number of planning applications received in Q2 2023/24 compared with the previous quarter, with the decrease greatest in Dery City and Strabane (-29.0%). Two councils reported an increase over the quarter with the increase greatest in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (6.6%).

Comparing Q2 in 2023/24 with the same period in 2022/23, nine of the eleven councils reported a decrease in the number of applications received, with the greatest percentage decrease reported by Ards and North Down (-21.2%). Two councils reported an increase over the year with the increase greatest in Causeway Coast and Glens (5.7%). (Figure 1.2).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, July to September 2022 & 2023
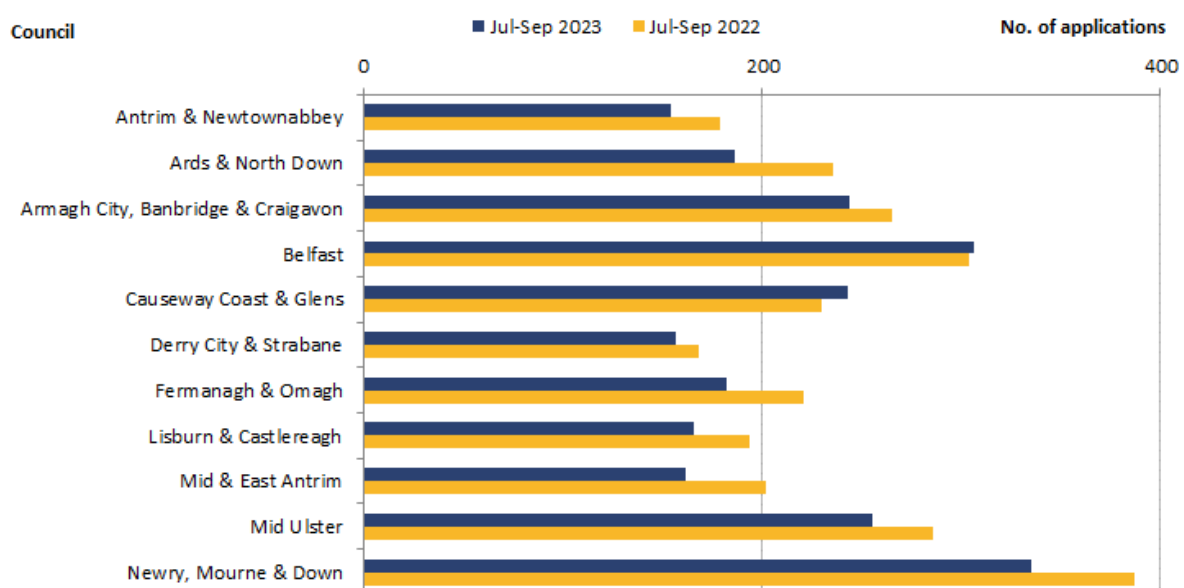
Applications decided

The number of planning decisions issued during Q2 2023/24 was 2,238; down by 15.0% on Q1 2023/24 (2,634) and down by 21.2% when compared with the same period a year earlier (2,839). Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2.

Comparing Q2 in 2023/24 with the same period in 2022/23, all eleven councils reported a decrease in the number of applications decided, with the largest decrease recorded in Newry, Mourne and Down (-37.8%). (Figure 1.3).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, July to September 2022 & 2023
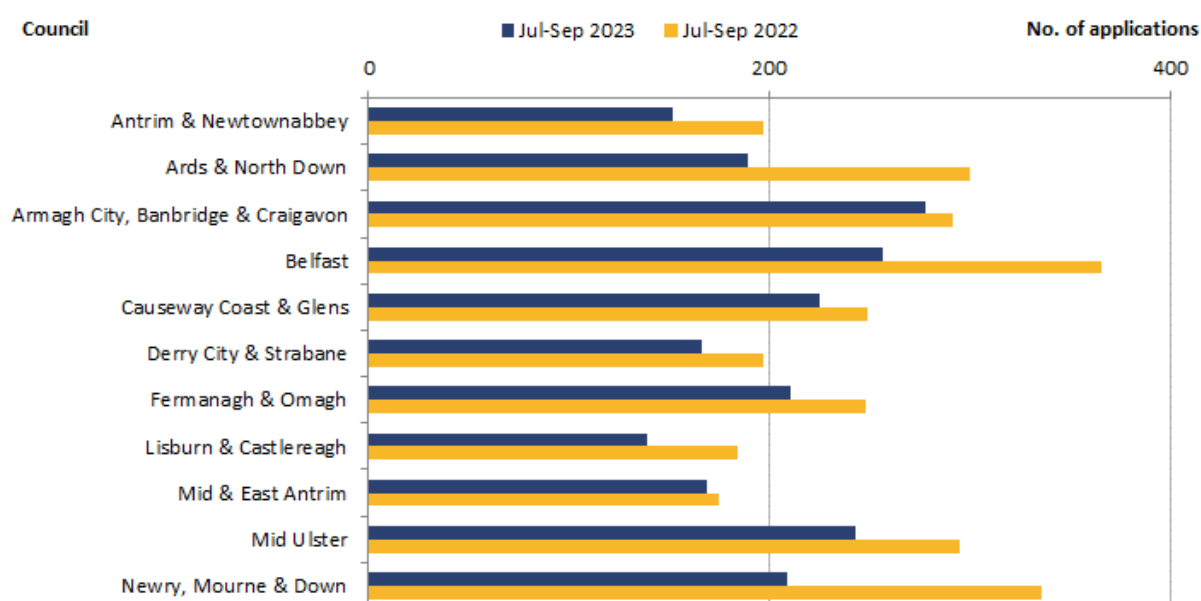
In Q2 2023/24, 132 applications were withdrawn; a decrease from both the previous quarter (143) and Q2 2022/23 (149).

Approval rates

The overall Northern Ireland approval rate for all planning applications was 95.7% in Q2 2023/24. This was lower than the previous quarter (96.3%) and higher than the same period a year earlier (95.2%). Refer to Table 1.1.

Approval rates varied across councils during Q2 2023/24, from 99.6% in Mid Ulster to 88.2% in Antrim and Newtownabbey. These rates are dependent on many factors and care should be taken in making any comparisons. Refer to Table 1.2.

Live applications

There were 8,034 live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of September 2023, similar to the end of June 2023 (8,013), and up from the count at the end of the September 2022 (7,636).

Approaching three in every ten live applications at the end of September 2023 were over one year old (29.0%); an increase from the proportion reported at the end of June 2023 (26.9%). Refer to Table 1.3.

Departmental activity

There were two applications received by the Department in Q2 2023/24. No applications were decided or withdrawn during this period. There were no applications received or decided by the department during either the previous quarter or Q2 2022/23. At the end of September 2023 there were 20 live Departmental applications; 17 out of 20 were in the planning system for over a year.

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

Of the five RSD applications live in the planning system at the end of September 2023, two have been progressed to ministerial recommendation but the 30 week period for recommendation / withdrawal has been exceeded. Of the remaining three awaiting ministerial recommendation, the 30 week period has been exceeded for one.

Development type

The majority of planning applications received and decided in NI are for residential development. Residential applications accounted for almost two-thirds (1,560; 65.2%) of applications received in Q2 2023/24, followed by 'Other' (275; 11.5%) and 'Government and Civic' (172; 7.2%). The top three development types decided in Q2 2023/24 were 'Residential' (1,432), 'Other' (296) and 'Government and Civic' (163). Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.

Renewable energy activity

Twenty renewable energy applications were received in Q2 2023/24; down from both the previous quarter (25) and the same period the previous year (28). Fourteen renewable energy applications were decided during Q2 2023/24; this compares to 19 in the previous quarter and 16 in the same period last year.

Chapter 2:

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. A total of 31 major planning applications were received in NI during Q2 2023/24; down from both the previous quarter (38) and the same period a year earlier (36). Refer to Table 3.1.

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to September 2023
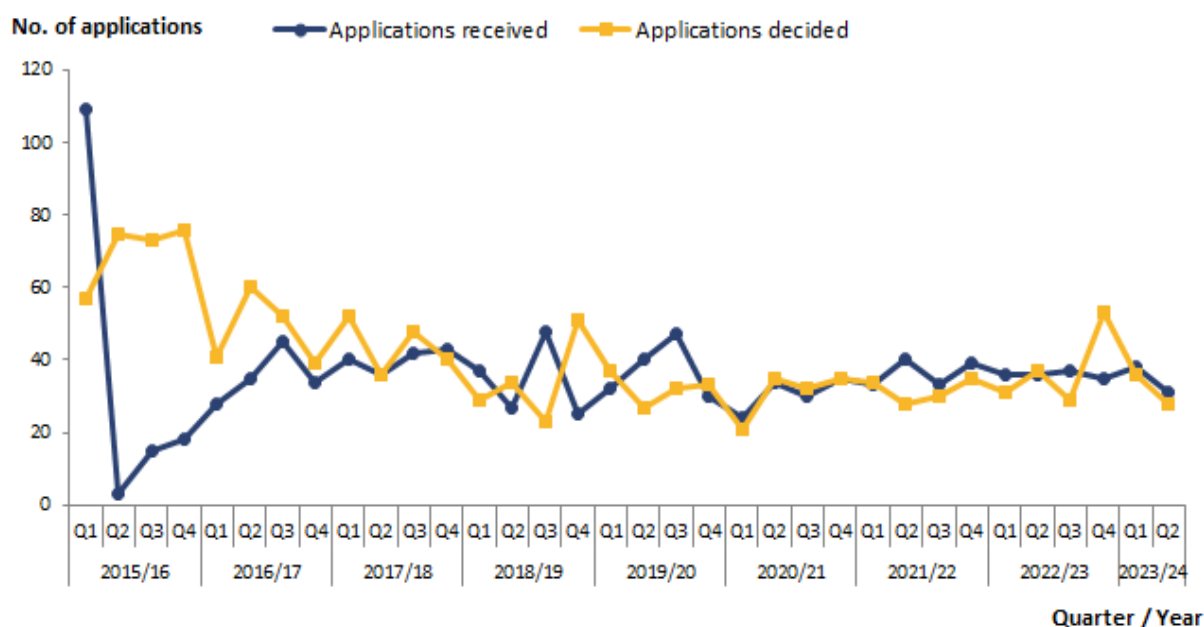
During Q2 2023/24, 28 major planning applications were decided; down from 36 decided in the previous quarter and from 37 decided during the second quarter of 2022/23 (Figure 3.1). The approval rate for major applications decided upon in NI during Q2 2023/24 was 100%. Refer to Tables 3.1, 3.2.

## Major planning applications statutory target

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

Figure 3.2 presents annual average processing times for major applications. The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first six months of 2023/24 was 34.7 weeks across all councils. This represents a decrease of 15.3 weeks compared with the same period in 2022/23 (50.0 weeks), moving closer to the 30 week target.

It is notable that the average processing time for Q2 2023/24 was 25.6 weeks; this is the lowest quarterly processing time for major applications since reporting started in 2015/16.

Fig 3.2 Major development average processing times by council, April to September 2022 & 2023
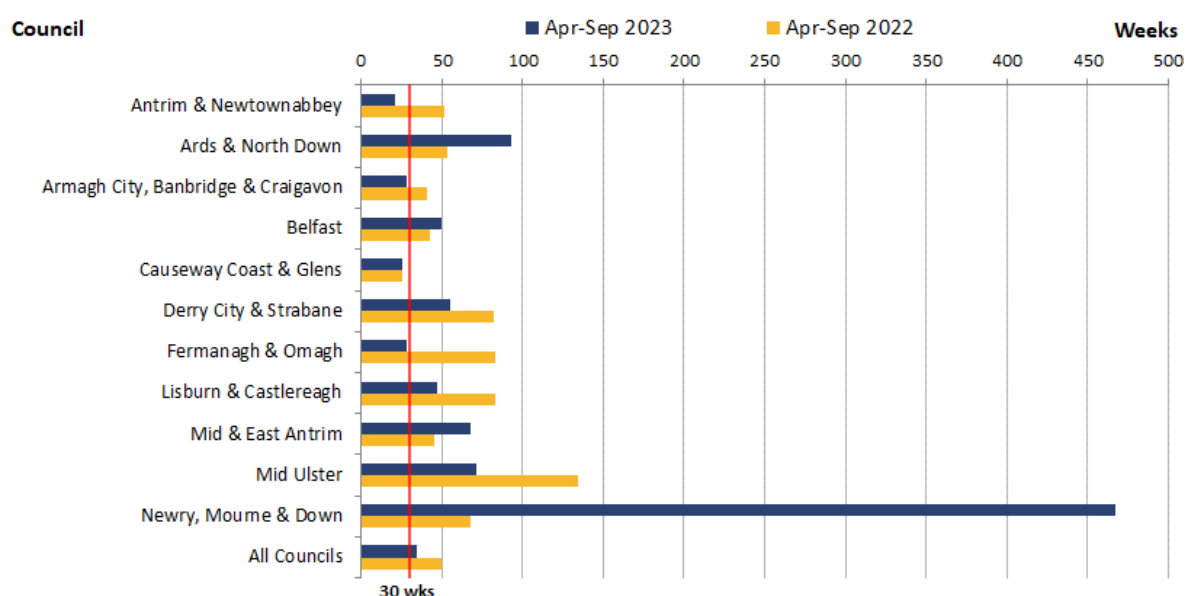
Note: Whilst Figure 3.2 has been provided for completeness, across councils there may be an insufficient number of major applications processed during the period reported to allow any meaningful assessment of their individual performance.

Refer to Table 3.2 for further information.
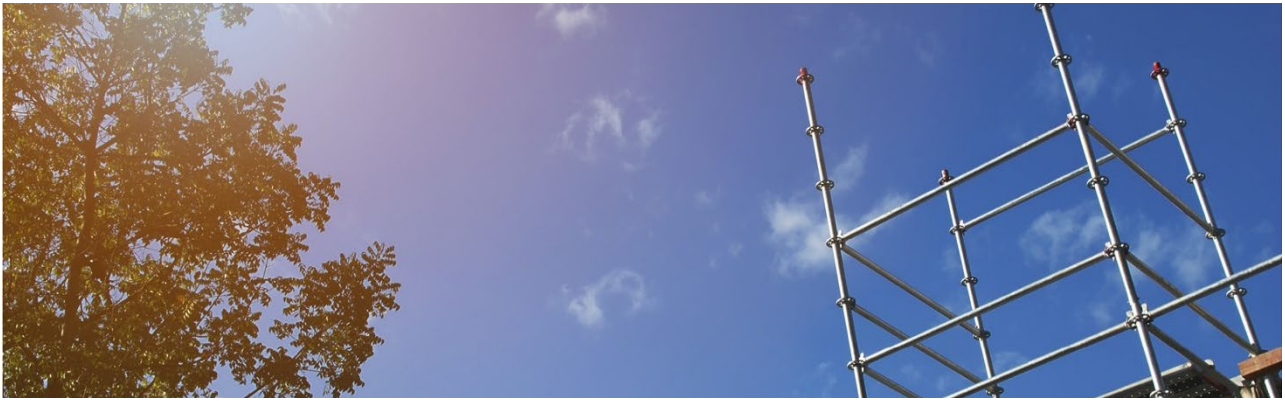
Chapter 3:

Local development planning applications

Local Development planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications and are largely determined by the councils. The number of local applications received in NI during Q2 2023/24 was 2,359; a decrease of 9.9% on the previous quarter (2,619) and down by 10.5% on the same the same period a year earlier (2,636). Refer to Table 4.1.

Fig 4.1 Local development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to September 2023
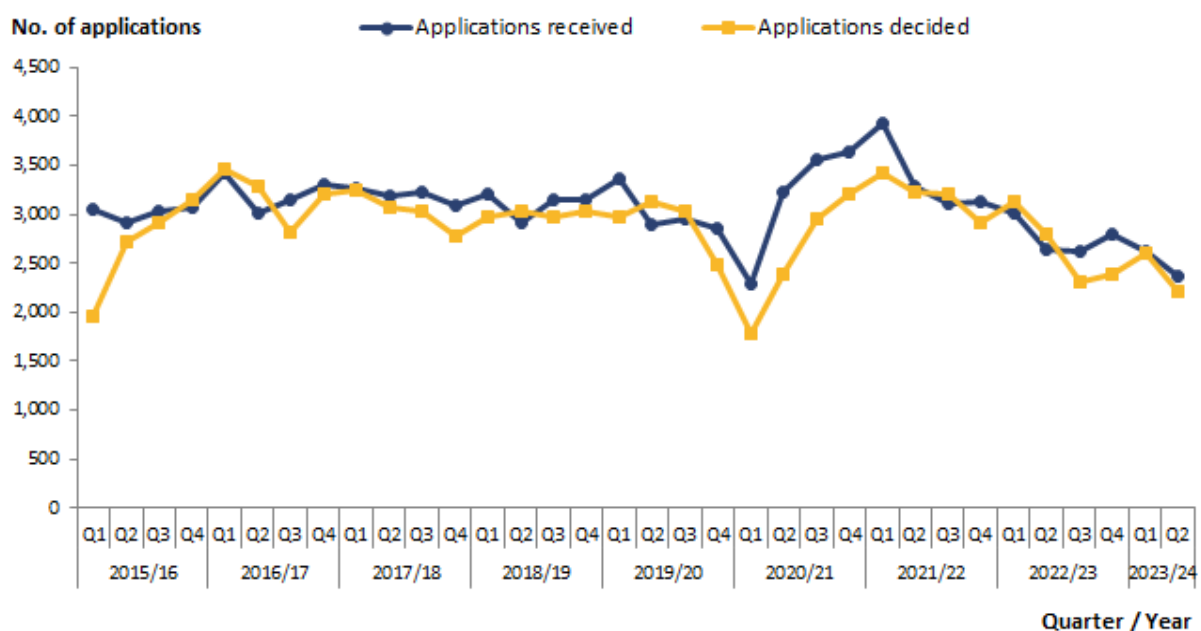
The number of local applications decided in Q2 2023/24 was 2,210; down by 14.9% on Q1 2023/24 (2,598) and down by 21.1% compared with the same period a year earlier (2,802); refer to Table 4.1. The overall Northern Ireland approval rate for local applications was 95.7% in Q2 2023/24; down from the rate reported for the previous quarter (96.3%) but up from the same period a year earlier (95.2%).

Local planning applications statutory target

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

The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first six months of 2023/24 was 19.2 weeks. This exceeds the statutory target of 15 weeks, and represents an increase of 2.2 weeks from the same period the previous year (17.0 weeks).

Four of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first six months of 2023/24: Mid and East Antrim (10.2 weeks), Antrim and Newtownabbey (13.4 weeks), Fermanagh and Omagh (13.4 weeks) and Ards and North Down (14.8 weeks) (Figure 4.1). Refer to Table 4.2.

Fig 4.2 Local development average processing times by council, April to September 2022 & 2023
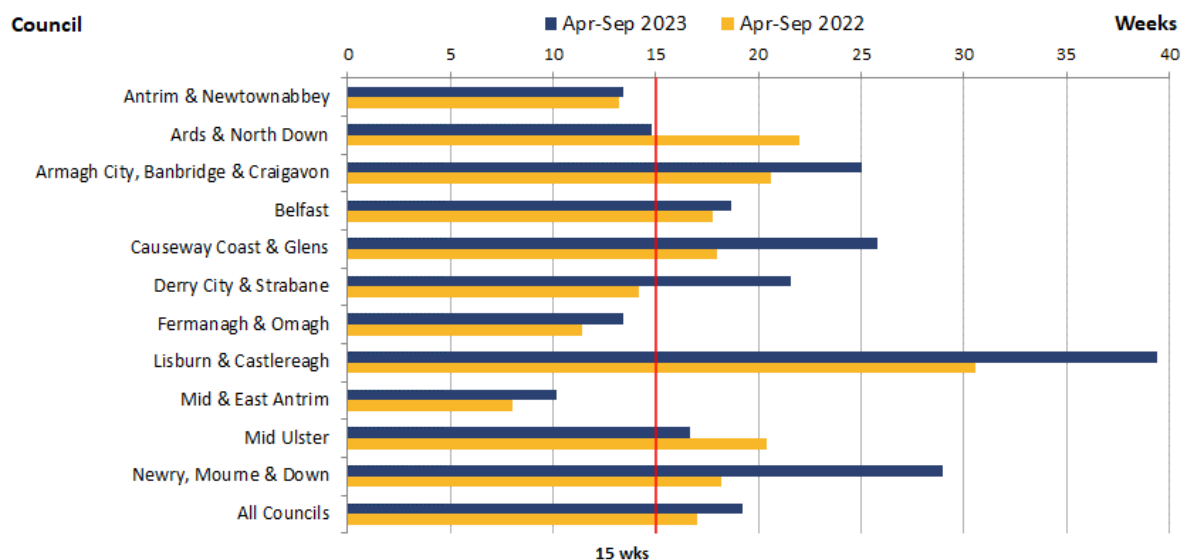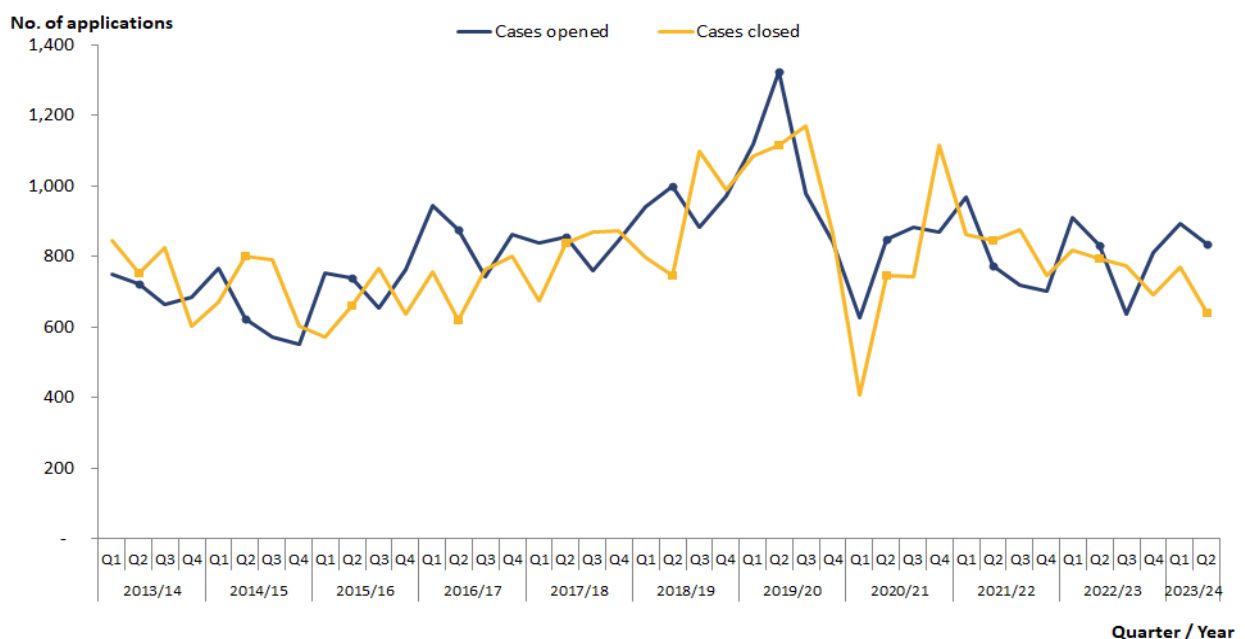
Chapter 4:

Enforcement activity

The number of enforcement cases opened in NI during the second quarter of 2023/24 was 836; down by 6.4% over the quarter (893) and similar to the same period a year earlier (832). Refer to Table 6.1.

Fig 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly from April 2013 to September 2023

The number of enforcement cases closed during Q2 2023/24 was 641; down by 16.8% over the quarter (770) and down by 19.2% from the same period a year earlier (793) (Figure 6.1).

The number of enforcement cases over two years old stood at 1,451 at the end of September 2023, accounting for 35.4% of all live cases. This compared with 36.1% of live cases at the end of June 2023 and 32.4% at the end of September 2022.

Refer to Tables and 6.1 and 6.4.

Enforcement cases statutory target

It is a statutory target that 70% of all enforcement cases dealt with by councils are progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.

The number of enforcement cases concluded and corresponding processing times (statutory target) is not presented in this report. This information will be published later and users will be notified when available.

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National Statistics status

The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics were accredited as National Statistics in December 2020, following an independent review by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). This means that the statistics comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled 'accredited official statistics'[1].

Our statistical practice is regulated by the OSR who sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

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[1] National Statics are accredited official statistics.