NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

Third Quarter 2023/24 Statistical Bulletin

October to December 2023: Provisional Figures

Contents

Key points

- There were 2,525 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during the third quarter of 2023/24; an increase of six percent on the previous quarter and down by five percent on the same period a year earlier. This comprised of 2,487 local and 38 major applications.

- In the third quarter of 2023/24, 2,461 planning applications were decided, an increase of ten percent from the previous quarter and up by over five percent from the same period a year earlier. Decisions were issued on 2,420 local and 41 major applications during the most recent quarter.

- The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2023/24 was 20.4 weeks across all councils. This exceeds the 15 week target and represents an increase of 2.4 weeks from the same period a year earlier. Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first nine months of 2023/24.

- The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first nine months of 2023/24 was 44.2 weeks across all councils. While exceeding the 30 week target, this represents a decrease of 16.2 weeks compared with the same period a year earlier.

- 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.
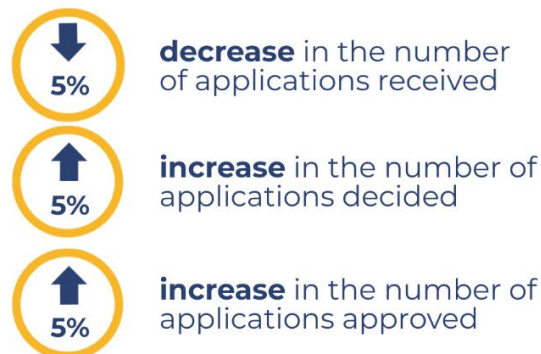
Northern Ireland Planning Statistics Q3 2023/24

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

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

Overall planning applications

Applications received, decided & approved

Received: 2,660 / 2,525
Decided: 2,335 / 2,461
Approved: 2,219 / 2,341

Q3 2022/23 ■ Q3 2023/24

Comparing Q3 2023/24 with Q3 2022/23:

↓ 5% **decrease** in the number of applications received

↑ 5% **increase** in the number of applications decided

↑ 5% **increase** in the number of applications approved

Applications received

A total of 2,525 planning applications were received during Q3 2023/24:

2,487 (98%) Local

38 (2%) Major

0 (0%) Regionally significant
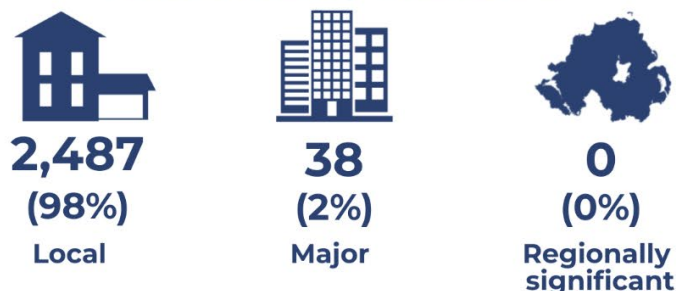
3 largest development types

Residential (61%)

Other* (11%)

Govt & Civic (9%)
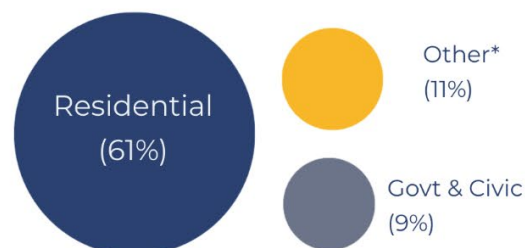
*Other includes work to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements & listed buildings

Planning statutory targets - April to December 2022 & 2023

Average processing times (weeks) - major

Apr-Dec 2022: 60.4
Apr-Dec 2023: 44.2

Target: 30 weeks

Average processing times (weeks) - local

Apr-Dec 2022: 18.0
Apr-Dec 2023: 20.4

Target: 15 weeks

Councils within major target

Fermanagh & Omagh
26.4 weeks

Antrim & Newtownabbey
20.7 weeks

Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon
27.4 weeks

Councils within local target

Fermanagh & Omagh
13.4 weeks

Mid & East Antrim
10.0 weeks

Antrim & Newtownabbey
13.0 weeks

Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Third 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 third 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 also 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 31 December 2023 were transferred in January 2024 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 February 2024.

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

Future releases

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 later and users will be notified when available.

Alternative formats

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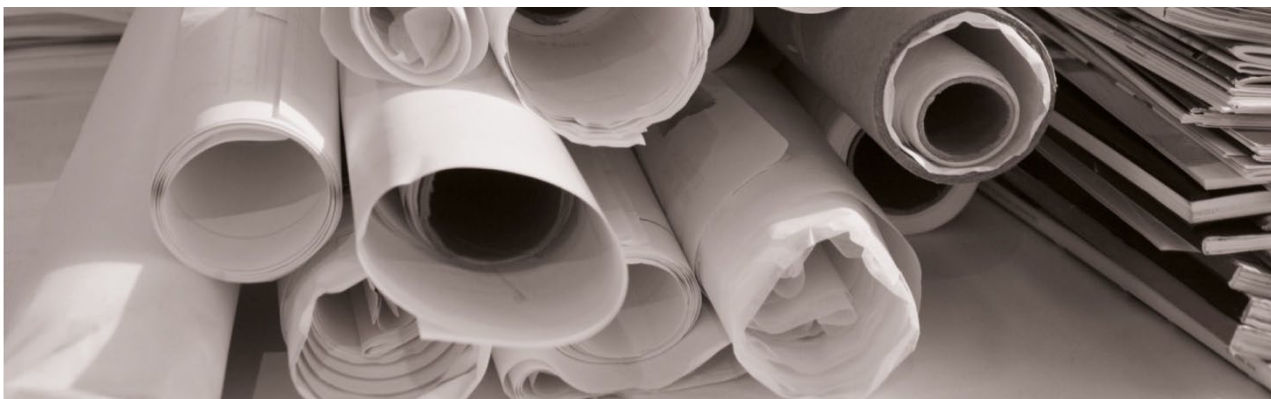
Chapter 1:

Overall Northern Ireland planning activity

The volume of planning applications received in the third quarter of 2023/24 has increased from the previous quarter and decreased from the level recorded in the third quarter of 2022/23. For applications processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) the volume processed has increased from the previous quarter and the same period the previous year. The number of enforcement cases opened in the third quarter of 2023/24 decreased from the previous quarter and was similar to the same period a year earlier; the number of cases closed was higher than the previous quarter but lower than Q3 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 Q3 2023/24 was 2,525; and increase of 5.8% on the previous quarter (2,386) and a decrease of 5.1% on the same period a year earlier (2,660) (Figure 1.1). Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2.

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly, April 2013 to December 2023
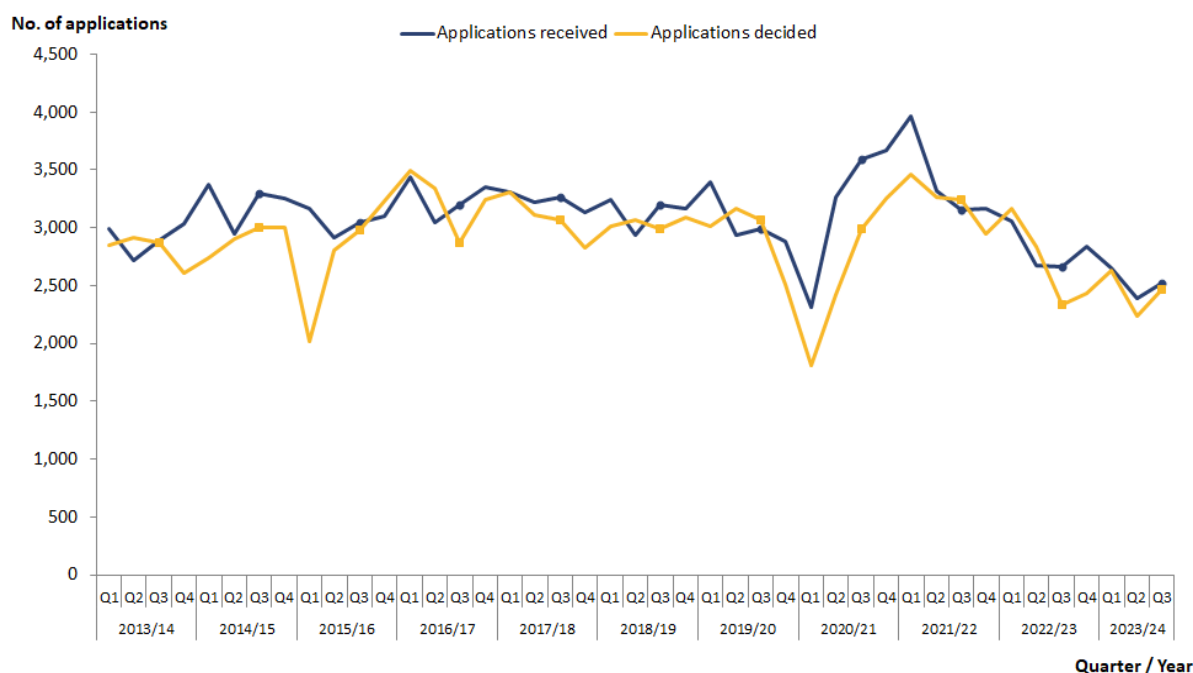
Six councils reported an increase in the number of planning applications received in Q3 2023/24 compared with the previous quarter, with the greatest percentage increase in Mid and East Antrim (27.8%). Five councils reported a decrease over the quarter with the decrease greatest in Newry, Mourne and Down (-11.4%).

Comparing Q3 in 2023/24 with the same period in 2022/23, seven of the eleven councils reported a decrease in the number of applications received, with the greatest percentage decreases reported by Ards and North Down, and Fermanagh and Omagh (both -20.0%). Four councils reported an increase over the year with the increase greatest in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (23.0%). (Figure 1.2).

## Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, October to December 2022 & 2023
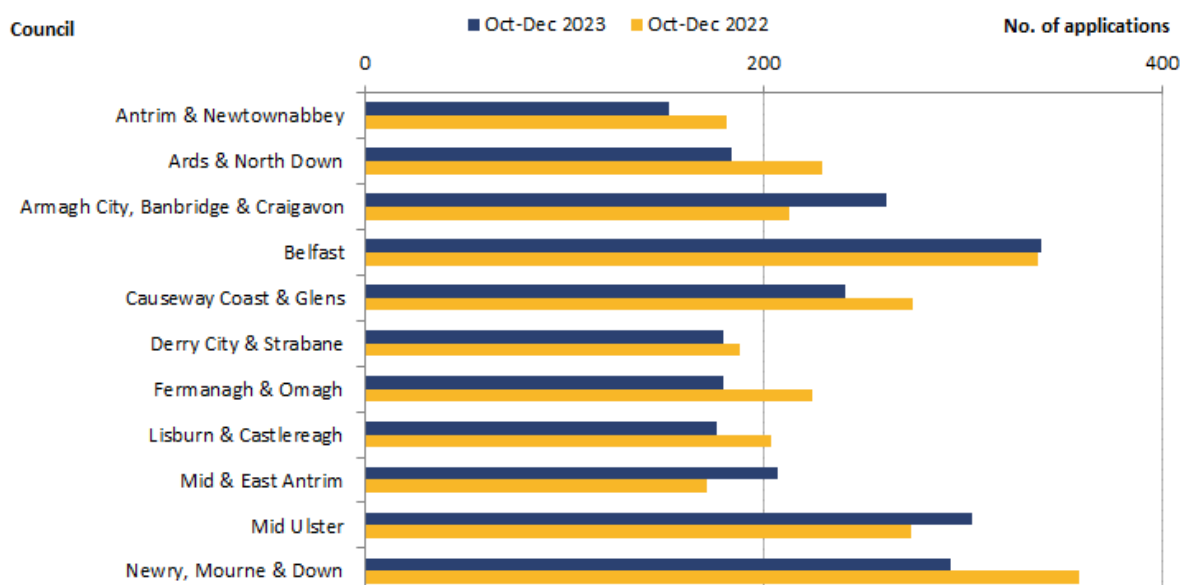
Applications decided

The number of planning decisions issued during Q3 2023/24 was 2,461; an increase of 9.9% on Q2 2023/24 (2,240) and up by 5.4% when compared with the same period a year earlier (2,335). Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2.

Comparing Q3 in 2023/24 with the same period in 2022/23, six of the eleven councils reported an increase in the number of applications decided, with the largest increase recorded in Belfast (41.7%). While one council was unchanged over the year, four councils reported a decrease, with the percentage decrease greatest in Newry, Mourne and Down (-19.2%) (Figure 1.3).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, October to December 2022 & 2023
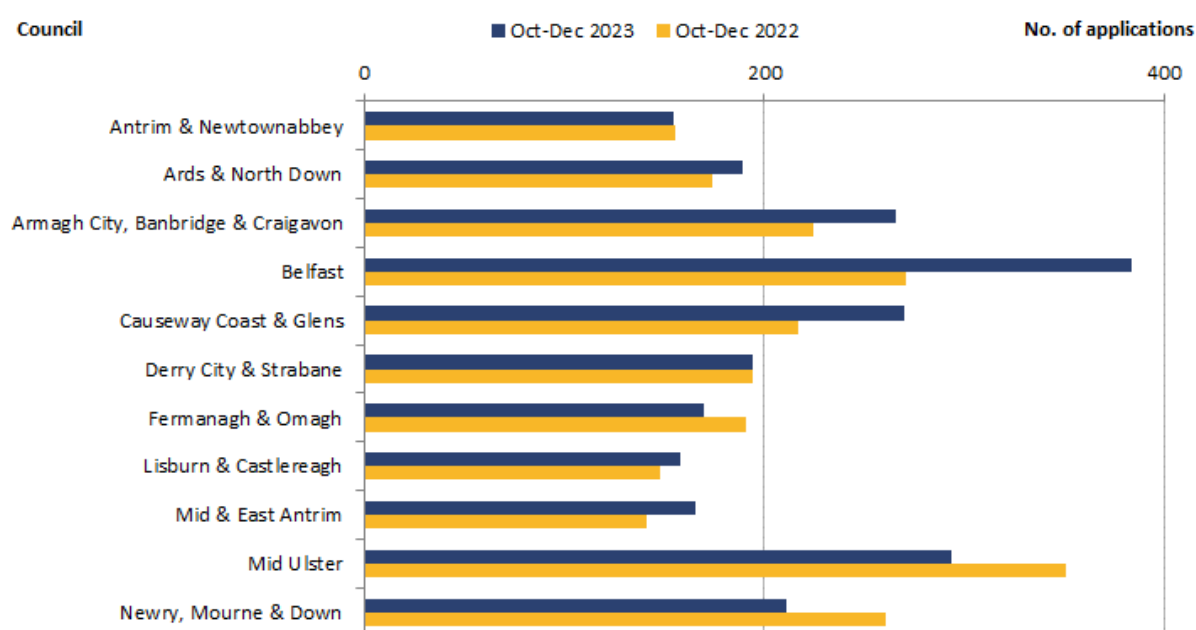
In Q3 2023/24, 155 applications were withdrawn: an increase from both the previous quarter (132) and Q3 2022/23 (138).

Approval rates

The overall Northern Ireland approval rate for all planning applications was 95.1% in Q3 2023/24. This was lower than the previous quarter (95.8%) and similar to the same period a year earlier (95.0%). Refer to Table 1.1.

Approval rates varied across councils during Q3 2023/24, from 99.3% in Mid Ulster to 88.6% in Lisburn and Castlereagh. 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 7,940 live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of December 2023, down from the end of September 2023 (8,031), and up from the count at the end of the December 2022 (7,823).

Approaching three in every ten live applications at the end of December 2023 were over one year old (28.7%); a small decrease from the proportion reported at the end of September 2023 (29.0%). Refer to Table 1.3.

Departmental activity

There were four applications received by the Department in Q3 2023/24, twice as many as in the previous quarter (2); none were received in Q3 2022/23. Four applications were decided during the most recent quarter, compared with none decided in the previous quarter, and six decided in Q3 2022/23. No departmental applications have been withdrawn since Q1 2022/23. At the end of December 2023 there were 21 live Departmental applications; 13 out of 21 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 December 2023, three have been progressed to ministerial recommendation but the 30 week period for recommendation/withdrawal has been exceeded. Of the remaining two awaiting ministerial recommendation, the 30 week period has been exceeded for one of them.

Development type

Most planning applications received and decided in NI are for residential development. Residential applications accounted for over three-fifths (1,538; 60.9%) of applications received in Q3 2023/24, followed by 'Other' (282; 11.2%) and 'Government and Civic' (226; 9.0%). The top three development types decided in Q3 2023/24 were 'Residential' (1,540), 'Other' (311) and 'Government and Civic' (217). Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.

Renewable energy activity

Forty-one renewable energy applications were received in Q3 2023/24; up from both the previous quarter (21) and the same period the previous year (34). Twenty renewable energy applications were decided during Q3 2023/24; this compares to 15 in the previous quarter and 24 in the same period last year.

Chapter 2:

Major development planning applications

Major Developments have important economic, social, and environmental implications. Most major applications are multiple housing, commercial, and government and civic types of development. A total of 38 major planning applications were received in NI during Q3 2023/24; up from both the previous quarter (33) and the same period a year earlier (37). Refer to Table 3.1.

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to December 2023
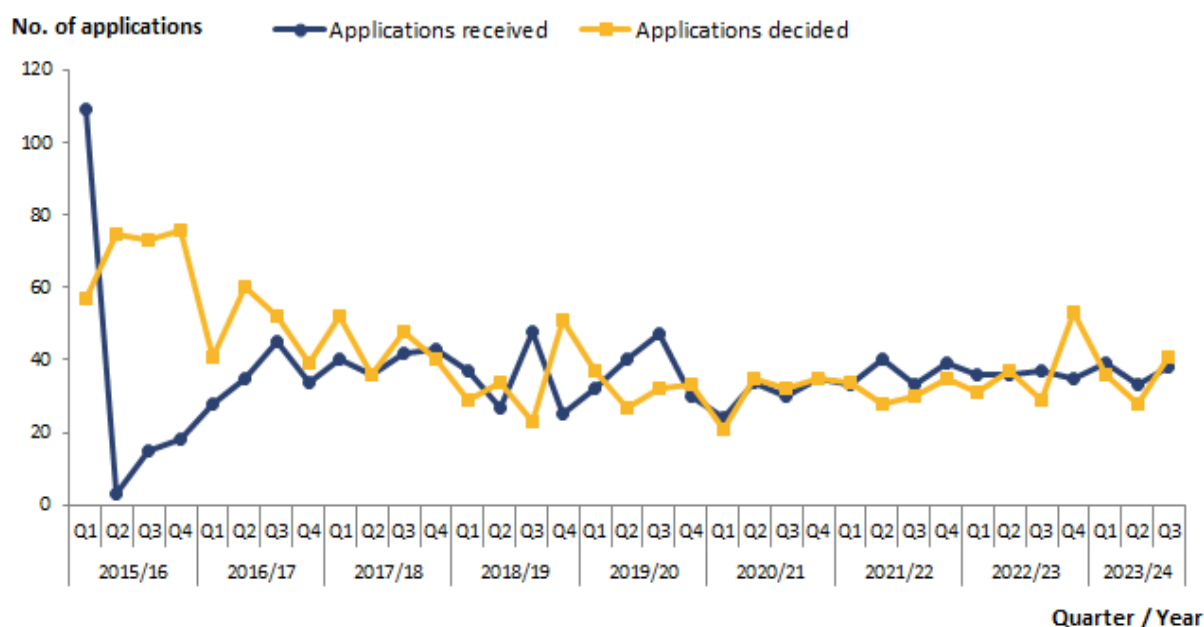
During Q3 2023/24, 41 major planning applications were decided; up from 28 decided in the previous quarter and from 29 decided during the third quarter of 2022/23 (Figure 3.1). The approval rate for major applications decided upon in NI during Q3 2023/24 was 97.6%. Refer to Tables 3.1, 3.2.

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 nine months of 2023/24 was 44.2 weeks across all councils. While exceeding the 30 week target, this represents a decrease of 16.2 weeks compared with the same period in 2022/23 (60.4 weeks).

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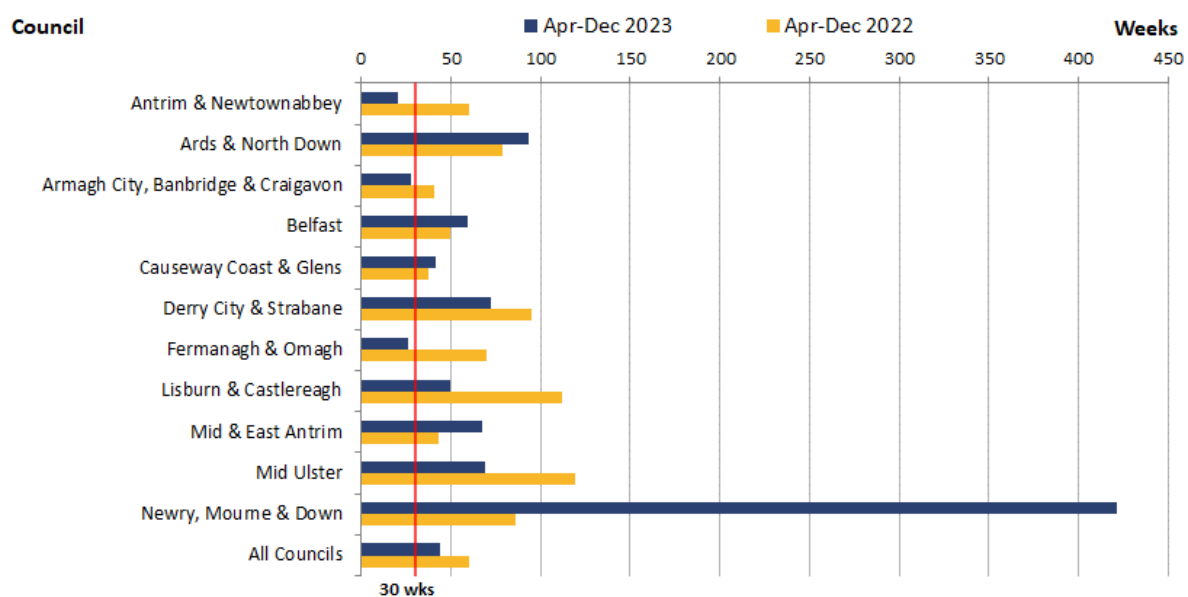
Note: Whilst Figure 3.2 has been provided for completeness, across councils there may be an insufficient number of major applications processed during the period reported to allow any meaningful assessment of their individual performance.

Refer to Table 3.2 for further information.
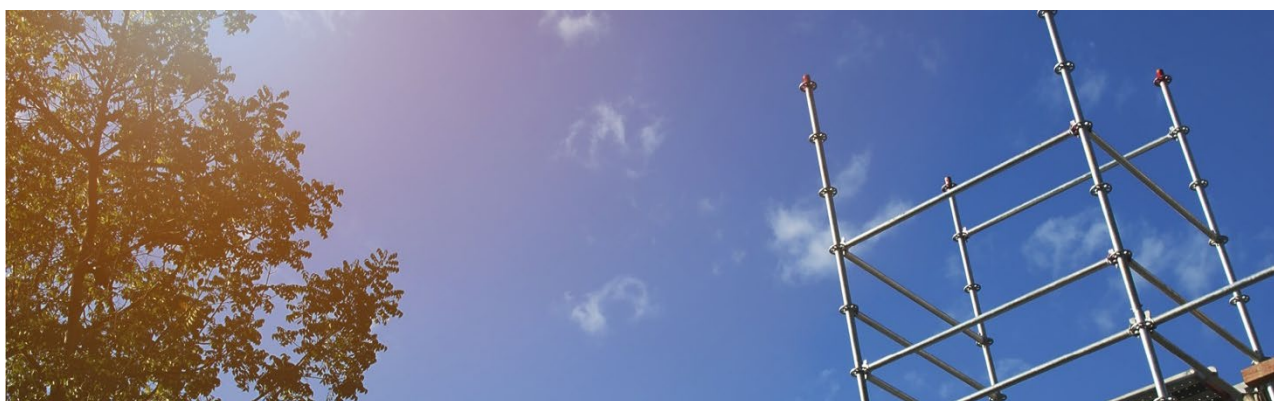
Chapter 3:

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 Q3 2023/24 was 2,487; an increase of 5.7% on the previous quarter (2,352) and down by 5.2% on the same the same period a year earlier (2,623). Refer to Table 4.1.

Fig 4.1 Local development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to December 2023
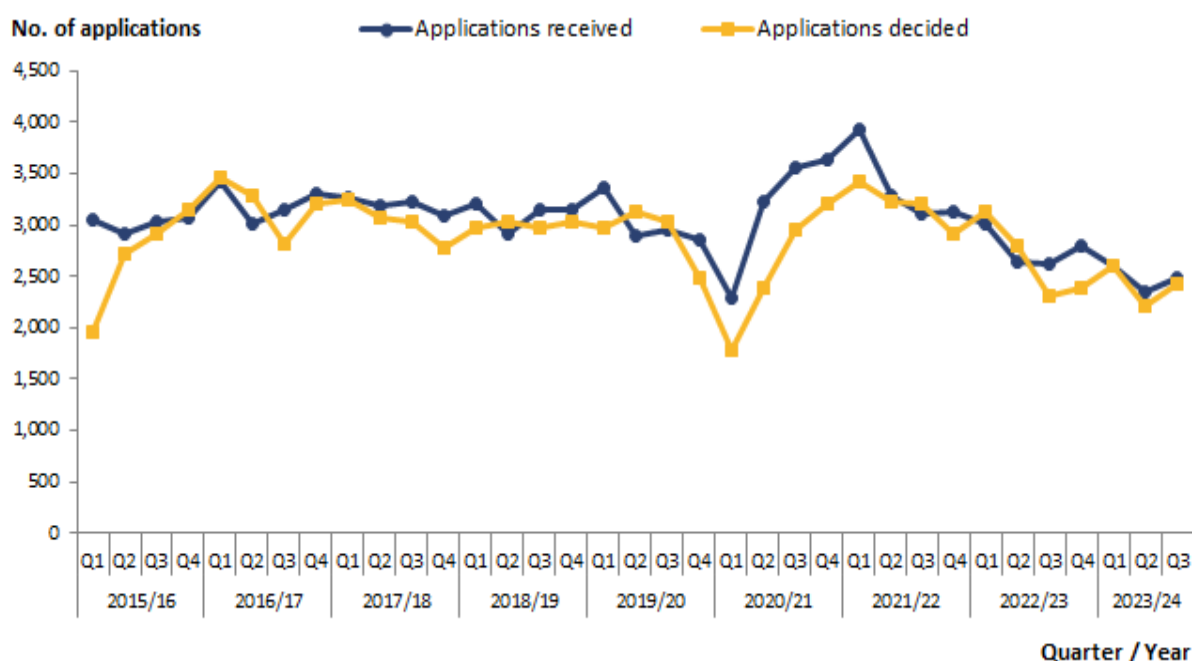
The number of local applications decided in Q3 2023/24 was 2,420; up by 9.4% on Q2 2023/24 (2,212) and an increase of 5.0% compared with the same period a year earlier (2,305); refer to Table 4.1. The overall Northern Ireland approval rate for local applications was 95.1% in Q3 2023/24; down from the rate reported for the previous quarter (95.7%) and similar to the same period a year earlier (95.0%).

## 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 nine months of 2023/24 was 20.4 weeks. This exceeds the statutory target of 15 weeks, and represents an increase of 2.4 weeks from the same period the previous year (18.0 weeks).

Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first nine months of 2023/24: Mid and East Antrim (10.0 weeks), Antrim and Newtownabbey (13.0 weeks) and Fermanagh and Omagh (13.4 weeks) (Figure 4.1). Refer to Table 4.2.

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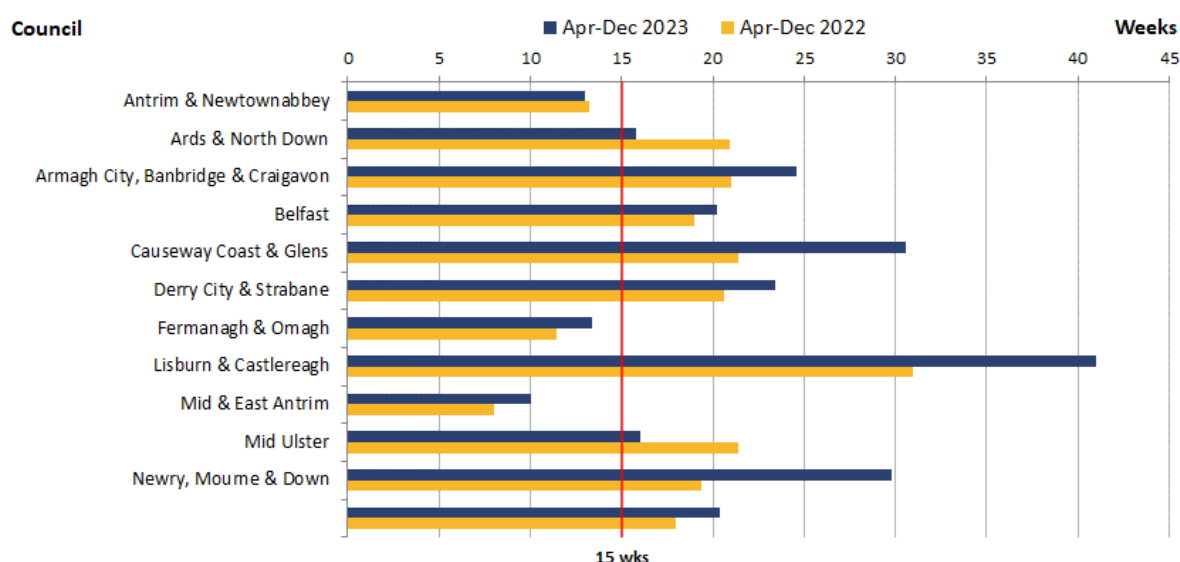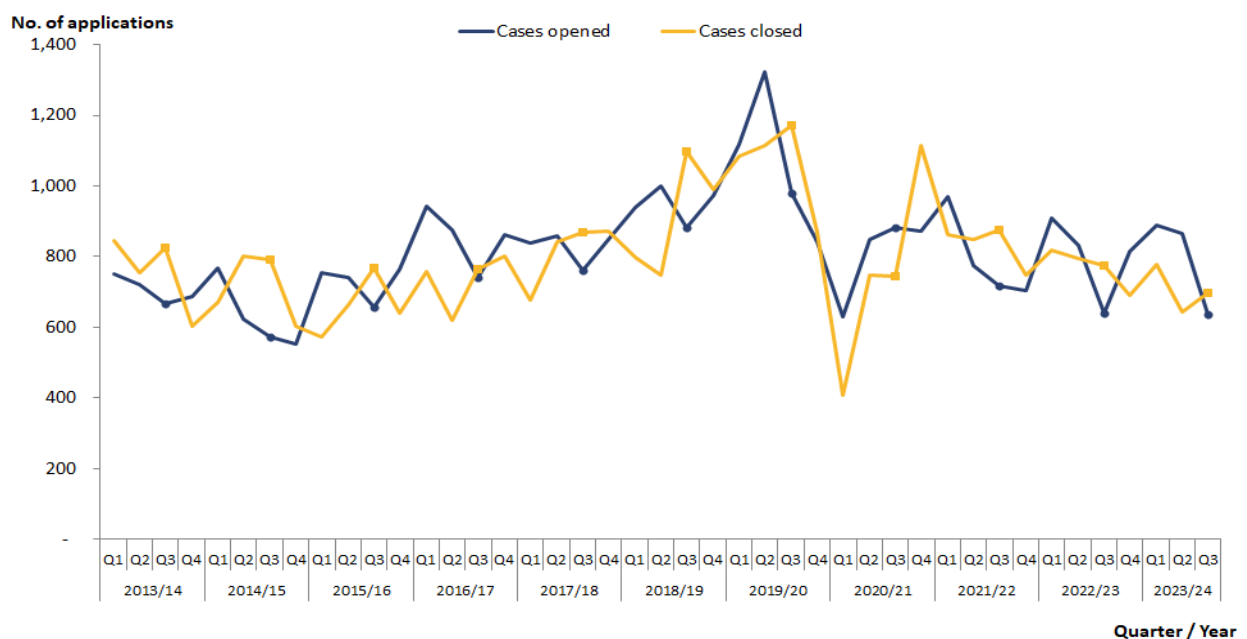
Chapter 4:

Enforcement activity

The number of enforcement cases opened in NI during the third quarter of 2023/24 was 636; down by 26.4% over the quarter (864) and very similar to the same period a year earlier (638). Refer to Table 6.1.

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

The number of enforcement cases closed during Q3 2023/24 was 698; up by 8.4% over the quarter (644) and down by 9.9% from the same period a year earlier (775) (Figure 6.1).

The number of enforcement cases over two years old stood at 1,495 at the end of December 2023, accounting for 36.9% of all live cases. This compared with 35.2% of live cases at the end of September 2023 and 34.4% at the end of December 2022.

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 Statistics are accredited official statistics.