

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

SECOND QUARTER 2019/20 STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(July – September 2019: Provisional figures)



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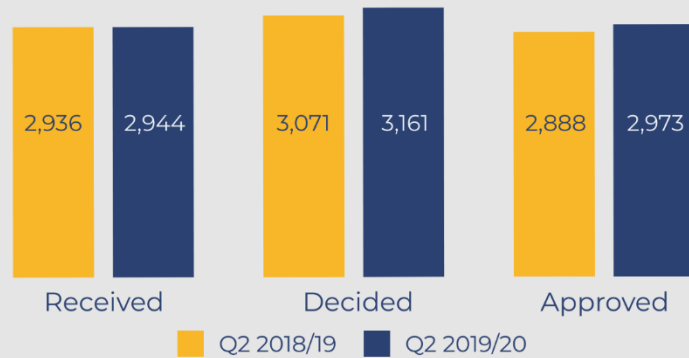
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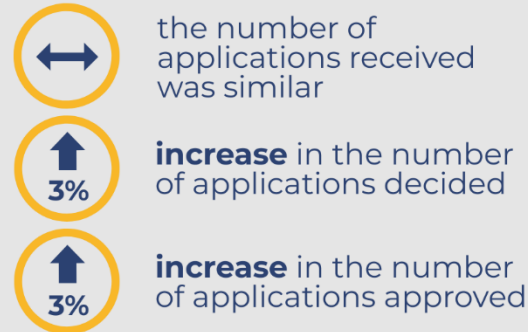
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Overall planning applications

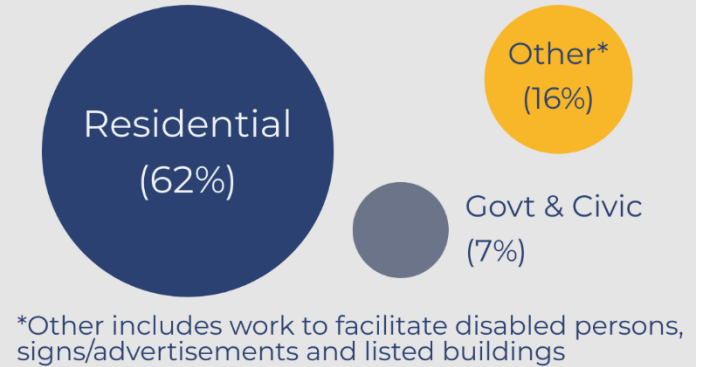
Applications received/decided/approved



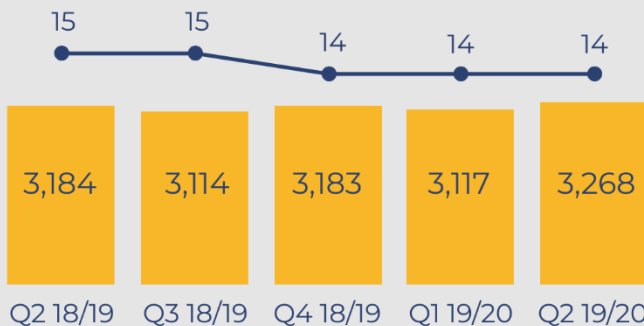
Comparing Q2 2019/20 with Q2 2018/19:



3 largest development types (received)

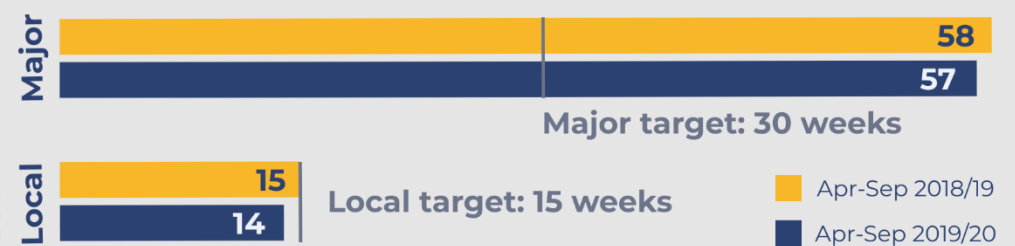


Local planning applications

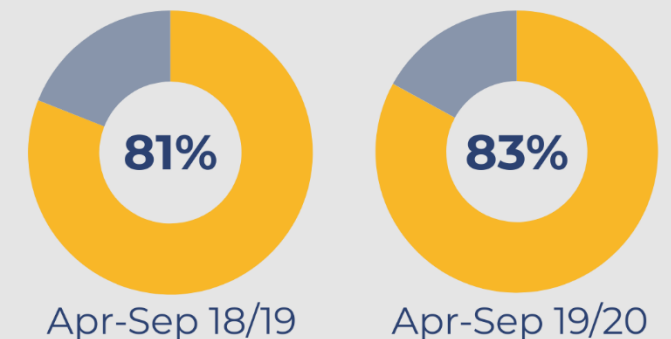


Planning statutory targets (Apr-Sep)

Major & local average processing times (weeks)



% of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks (target: 70%)



Key Points

- There were 2,944 planning applications received in Northern Ireland during the second quarter of 2019/20; a decrease of over 13% on the previous quarter and similar to the figure reported for the same period a year earlier. This comprised 2,907 local and 37 major applications.
- In the second quarter of 2019/20, 3,161 planning applications were decided upon; up by 5% on the previous quarter and 3% on the same period a year earlier. Decisions were issued on 3,133 local, 27 major and one regionally significant planning application during the second quarter of 2019/20.
- In the first six months of 2019/20 it took, on average, 13.8 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal. This was within the 15 week target and represented an improvement of 1.2 weeks from the same period a year earlier. Eight of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after two quarters of 2019/20.
- The average processing time for major applications during the first six months of 2019/20 was 57.4 weeks across all councils. This represents a small improvement of 0.5 weeks compared with the same point in 2018/19, but is still considerably higher than the 30 week target.
- Across councils, over four-fifths (83%) of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first six months of 2019/20. This meets the statutory target of 70% and represents an increase from the figure reported for the same period a year earlier (81%). Individually, 10 of the 11 councils were within the 39 week target at the end of the second quarter of 2019/20.

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 2019/20. Note that from the 8th May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of the Environment to the Department for Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental re-organisation.

Whilst the bulletin and accompanying tables report data for the second quarter of 2019/20, 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 2019/20 are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures, to be published in June / July 2020.

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 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 three 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 detail and further analysis 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 2015/16 and 2014/15 when the new classification hierarchy was first administratively implemented. It was decided, therefore, that 2015/16, when the classification hierarchy was given full legal effect, would be the base year for future comparisons of major and local development activity. As such, back-comparisons at council level for these application types are not possible.

(ii) 'Discharge of conditions' - whilst forming part of a council's workload, these are not planning applications per se and hence should be excluded from the assessment of target processing performance. This led to some further revisions from the previously released first quarter 2015/16 results. However, whilst there were some small changes to activity volumes, their exclusion did not materially affect average processing times across the vast majority of councils. See 'User Guidance' for further detail on excluded planning activity. Table 9.1, in the accompanying bulletin tables, provides volumes and processing times for all such 'non-application' workload.

(iii) Legacy versus new council activity – in order to provide additional context around council performance, two additional analyses have been included in the companion tables. Table 8.1 shows the volume of legacy work which each council inherited on 1st April 2015 and to what extent it has since been reducing, while Table 8.2 splits out processing performance for major and local development into legacy versus new council applications. These tables will be retained until the legacy applications become a negligible part of overall council workload.

Future Releases

The next quarterly release is due in March 2020. This will contain planning data up to 31st December 2019 (i.e. for Q3 2019/20).

The next annual report covering 2019/20 is planned for release in June / July 2020.

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

Other information

The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics is undergoing an assessment by the Office of Statistics Regulation. More details on this assessment, including how and when feedback can be provided, can be found at: <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/osr/what-we-do/assessment/current-future-assessments/assessment-of-northern-ireland-planning-statistics/>

The first edition of the Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework, providing data for 2018/19, was published on 19th September 2019. The statistical bulletin and accompanying Excel tables can be found at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-monitoring-framework>.

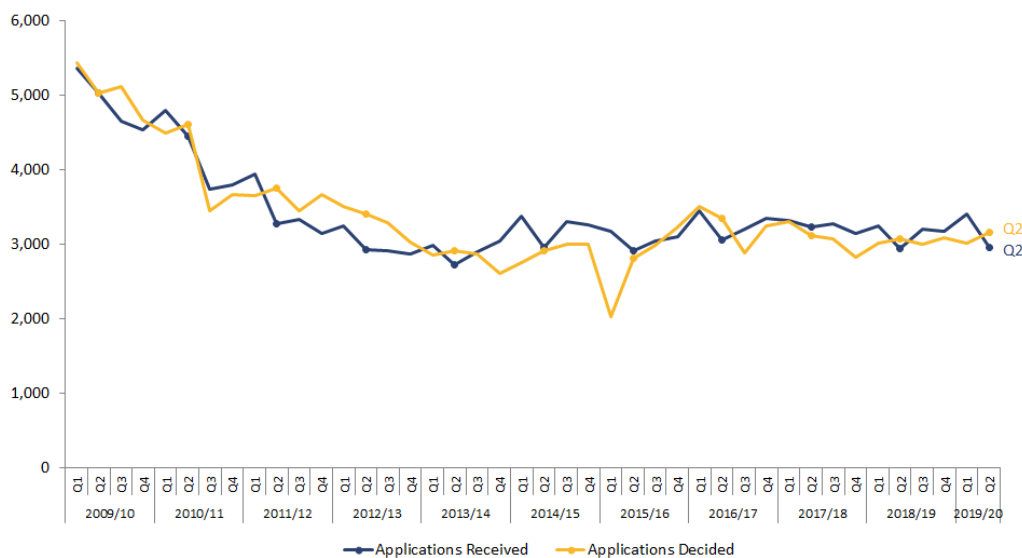
1. Overall NI Planning Activity

Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period July to September 2019 (Q2 2019/20) was **2,944**; a decrease of 13.5% on the previous quarter (3,402) and similar to the number received during the same period a year earlier (2,936).

The number of planning applications received generally declined between its peak in 2004/05 and 2013/14, when it reached its lowest level of the series. Over the last eight years, the number of applications received has been fairly stable, although the change in Q2 2019/20 was the largest quarter-on-quarter change since Q2 2011/12.

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly Apr 2009 – Sep 2019

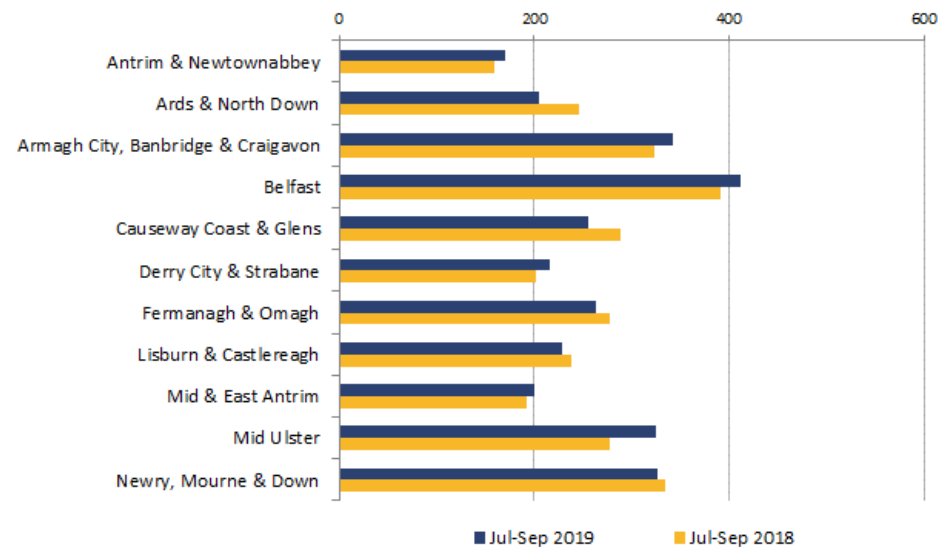


Of the 2,944 applications received in Q2 2019/20, almost three-quarters were for full planning permission (74.4%); a small decrease from the proportion reported for the same period a year earlier (75.2%).

In Q2 2019/20, the number of planning applications received varied across councils, ranging from 411 in Belfast (accounting for 14.0% of all applications received across NI), to 170 in Antrim and Newtownabbey (5.8% of all applications received).

The volume of planning applications received in Q2 2019/20 increased in six of the 11 councils, when compared with the same period in 2018/19. The largest increase occurred in Mid Ulster (16.9%). Five councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest occurring in Ards and North Down (-16.7%).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q2 2018/19 & Q2 2019/20



[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2, 5.6.](#)

Applications Decided

The number of planning **decisions issued** during Q2 2019/20 was **3,161**; an increase of 5.0% from the previous quarter (3,011) and 2.9% from the same period a year earlier (3,071). This also represents the highest number of decisions issued in any quarter since Q1 2017/18. Over three-quarters of planning decisions in Q2 2019/20 (76.7%) were for full planning permission.

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning authority to councils, the level of decisions issued dropped sharply, before quickly recovering in subsequent quarters. Since Q3 2016/17 the number of applications received has generally exceeded the number decided each quarter, although the opposite was true in Q2 2019/20 (Figure 1.1).

In Q2 2019/20, **138** applications were **withdrawn**; a decrease of 6.1% over the quarter (147) and 8.6% from the same period the previous year (151). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

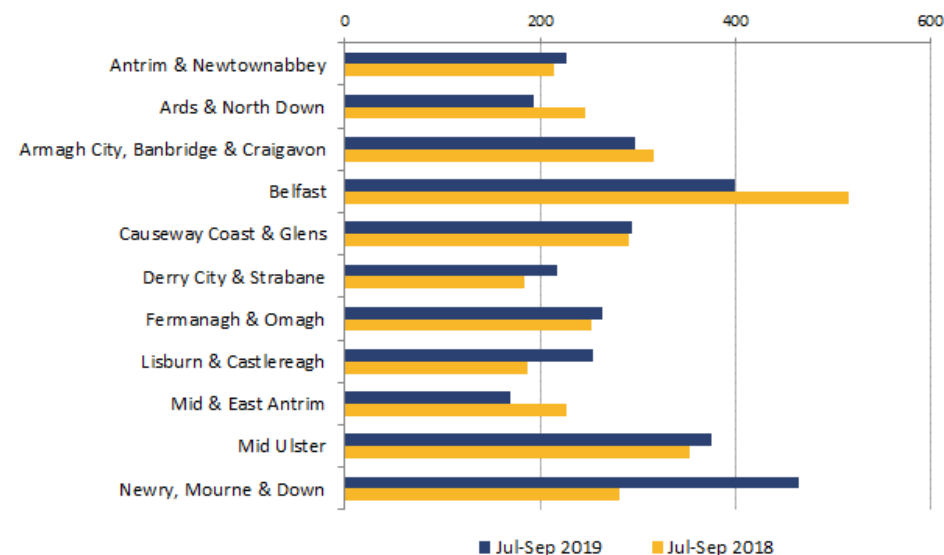
Across councils the number of decisions issued in Q2 2019/20 ranged from 465 in Newry, Mourne and Down (accounting for 14.7% of all decisions across NI), to 170 in Mid and East Antrim (5.4% of all decisions).

Seven of the 11 councils issued more decisions during Q2 2019/20 than during the same period a year earlier, with the increase greatest in Newry, Mourne and Down (65.5%). Four councils reported decreases in the number of decisions issued over the year, with the largest decrease, in percentage terms, occurring in Mid and East Antrim (-25.1%).

In six councils, the number of decisions issued exceeded the number of applications received during Q2 2019/20. This difference was greatest in Newry, Mourne and Down, where 42.6% more decisions were issued

compared with the number of applications received. [Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2, 5.6.](#)

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q2 2018/19 & Q2 2019/20

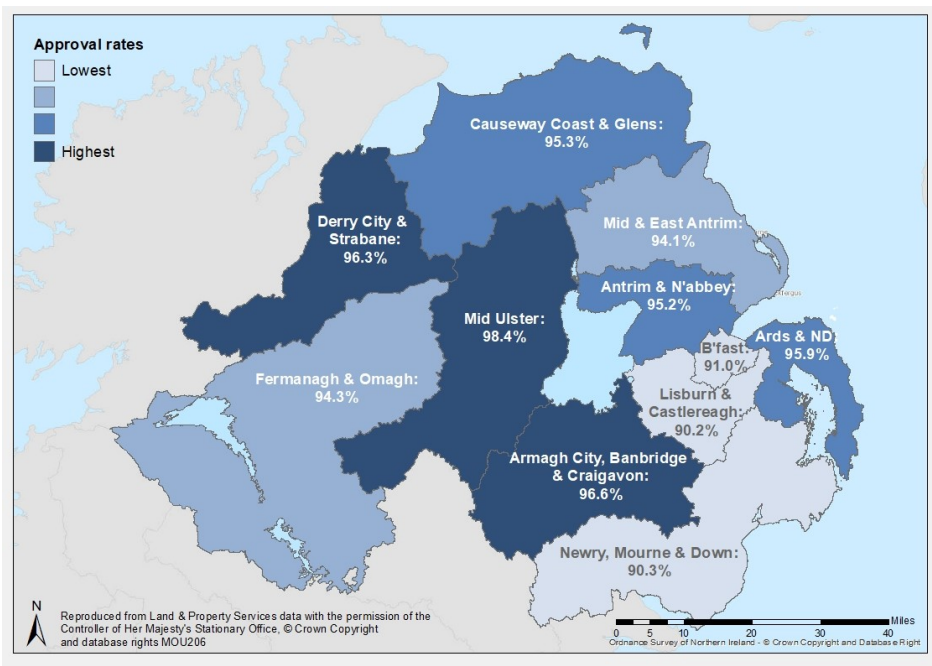


In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q2 2019/20, they processed to decision or withdrawal: 242 certificates of lawfulness; 235 discharge of conditions; and 119 non-material changes. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

Approval Rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications was **94.1%** in Q2 2019/20; an increase from the previous quarter (93.1%), and similar to the rate reported for the same period a year earlier (94.0%). Approval rates varied across councils during Q2 2019/20, from 98.4% in Mid Ulster to 90.2% in Lisburn and Castlereagh. These rates are dependent on many factors and care should be taken in making any comparisons.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, Q2 2019/20



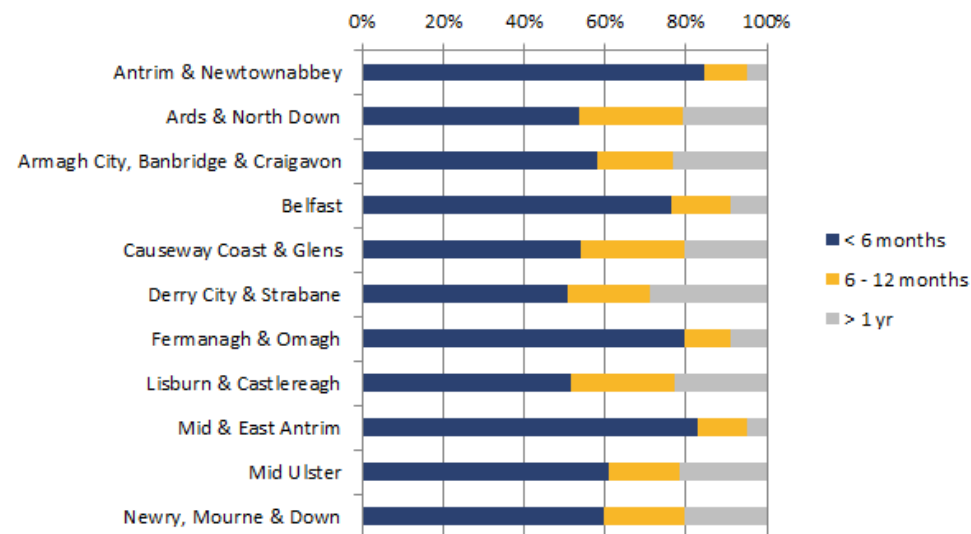
Six of the 11 councils reported a decreased approval rate when compared with the same quarter a year earlier, with the largest decrease occurring in Lisburn and Castlereagh (down from 95.2% to 90.2%). The remaining five councils reported an increased approval rate over the year, with Newry, Mourne and Down reporting the largest increase (up from 85.4% to 90.3%). [Refer to Table 1.2.](#)

Live applications

There were **6,335** live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of September 2019; a decrease of 2.0% from 6,467 at the end of September 2018, and the lowest end-of-quarter live count since Q4 2013/14. Almost one-fifth of all live applications in the planning system at the end of September 2019 were over one year old (1,217; 19.2%); an

increase from the proportion reported for the end of September 2018 (1,185; 18.3%). [Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council and length of time in the planning system at end of Sep 2019



As Figure 1.5 shows, the proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of September 2019 varies across councils, ranging from 28.7% in Derry City and Strabane to 4.7% in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Compared with the same point last year, five councils reduced the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year, with the greatest decrease occurring in Newry, Mourne and Down (down from 26.2% to 20.3%). The proportion of live cases in the system for over a year increased in five councils, with Derry City and Strabane reporting the greatest increase (up from 20.1% to 28.7%). In Mid Ulster 21.5% of live cases were in the system for over a year at the end of September 2019; the same proportion as reported for the end of September 2018. [Refer to Table 1.4.](#)

2. Departmental Activity

During Q2 2019/20, the Department **received three** applications; two **called-in** and one **other**¹ application. This compares with two applications received by the Department during the same period a year earlier.

The Department reached **decisions on three** applications during Q2 2019/20; **one regionally significant** and **two other** applications. This compares with no decisions made on Departmental applications during the same period a year earlier. In addition, **two** Departmental applications were **withdrawn** during Q2 2019/20; **one regionally significant** and **one called-in** application.

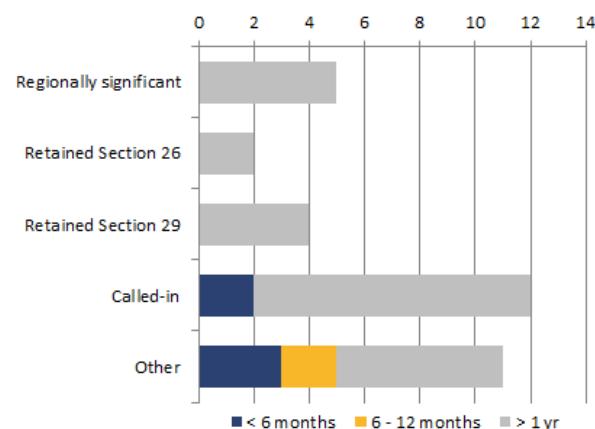
Overall, the average processing time for the five applications processed to a decision or withdrawal by the Department in Q2 2019/20 was 80.6 weeks. It is important to bear in mind the low number of applications processed when considering this average processing time.

At the end of September 2019, there were: **five ongoing regionally significant development (RSD)** applications; **six retained** applications; **12 called-in** applications; and **11 other** applications. Almost four-fifths of these applications (27 of 34) were in the system over a year (Figure 2.1). [Refer to Tables 2.1, 2.2.](#)

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.

¹ 'Other' applications include Conservation Area Consents, Variation of Conditions and Reserved Matters.

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type and length of time in the planning system at end of Sep 2019



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 weeks².

No RSD applications were progressed to Ministerial Recommendation during the first six months of 2019/20. One RSD application was withdrawn during this period. However, as this application had been progressed to Ministerial Recommendation prior to 2019/20, it falls outside the scope of the target. Of the five RSD applications live on the planning system at the end of September 2019, four have already been progressed to Ministerial Recommendation prior to 2019/20. The 30 week period for recommendation/withdrawal has been exceeded for the remaining application and progress on it, and any other new RSD applications received, will continue to be assessed in future reports.

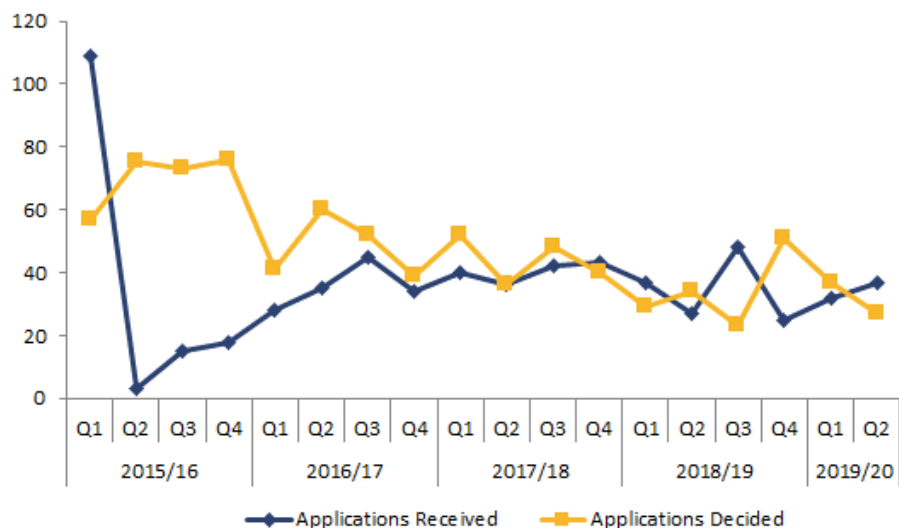
² From Q1 2019/20 this revised target replaces the previous Departmental target.

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 Q2 2019/20 was **37**; an increase of five applications over the quarter (32) and up 10 applications compared with the same period a year earlier (27).

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, quarterly Apr 2015 – Sep 2019



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.

Q2 2015/16 had the lowest number of major applications received across the whole series but this can be attributed to the new community consultation requirement. From Q2 2015/16, the number of major applications received steadily increased quarter on quarter until Q3 2016/17. Since then, the number of major applications received each quarter suggests something of a levelling out, although there has been some fluctuations across the most recent 12-month period.

Across councils, the number of major applications received in Q2 2019/20 was highest in Belfast (nine).

During Q2 2019/20, **27 major** planning applications were **decided**; a decrease of 10 applications over the quarter (37) and seven applications over the year (34). **Two major** applications were **withdrawn** during the most recent quarter.

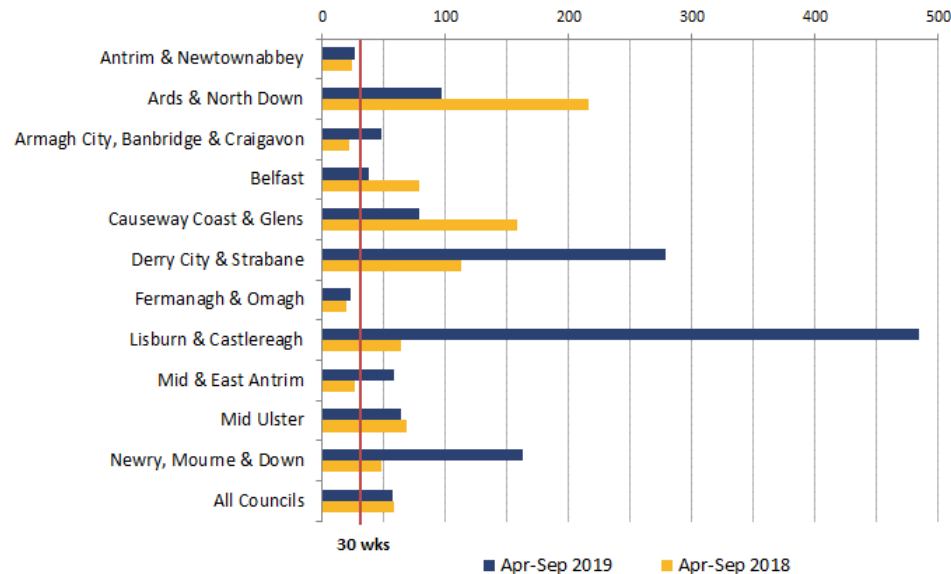
Ten of the 11 councils issued decisions on major applications during Q2 2019/20, with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, and Belfast issuing the most (five each).

[Refer to Tables 3.1, 3.2.](#)

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 the first six months of 2019/20, the **average processing time** for **major** applications brought to a decision or withdrawal was **57.4 weeks** across all councils. This represents a small improvement compared with the same point a year ago (down 0.5 weeks from 57.9 weeks), but is still considerably higher than the 30 week target.

Fig 3.2 Major development average processing times by council, Apr – Sep 2018 & 2019



Whilst Figure 3.2 has been provided for completeness, across councils there was an insufficient number of major applications processed to decision or withdrawal during the first two quarters of both the current

and previous year to allow any meaningful assessment of their individual performance. Comparison against the target and across councils will become more robust as the year progresses, with more applications being processed. With this in mind, two councils processed major applications within the 30 week target time during the first six months of 2019/20: Fermanagh and Omagh (an average of 23.4 weeks); and Antrim and Newtownabbey (an average of 26.2 weeks). Both of these councils processed a total of three applications over this period.

[Refer to Table 3.2.](#)

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

Across Northern Ireland in Q2 2019/20, **92.6%** of major planning applications decided upon were **approved**. Ten councils issued decisions on major applications during this period; in eight of these, 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 Q2 2019/20 was **2,907**; a decrease of 13.7% on the previous quarter (3,370) and similar to the number received during the same period a year earlier (2,909).

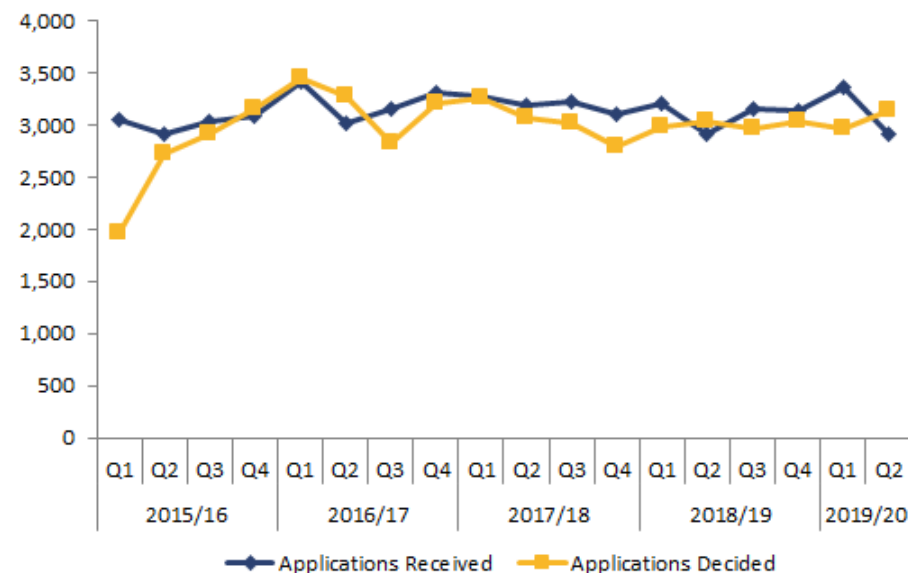
Across councils the number of local applications received during Q2 2019/20 ranged from 402 in Belfast to 166 in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Six councils reported an increase in the number of local applications received in Q2 2019/20 compared with the same period a year earlier, with the largest increase recorded in Mid Ulster (17.5%). Five councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest occurring in Ards and North Down (-17.6%).

The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q2 2019/20 was **3,133**; an increase of 5.4% from the previous quarter (2,973) and 3.2% from the same period a year earlier (3,037).

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils, the number of local applications received was considerably higher than the number of decisions made. In 2016/17 this gap narrowed considerably. Since Q3 2016/17 the number of applications received has generally exceeded the number decided; the opposite was true in Q2 2019/20 (Figure 4.1).

Fig 4.1 Local development applications, quarterly Apr 2015 – Sep 2019



During Q2 2019/20, the number of local planning decisions issued across councils ranged from 463 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 166 in Mid and East Antrim.

Seven councils issued more decisions on local applications during Q2 2019/20 than they did during the same period a year earlier, with the greatest increase reported for Newry, Mourne and Down (64.8%). Four councils reported decreases over the year, with the largest, in percentage terms, occurring in Mid and East Antrim (-26.5%).

Over the quarter, 135 local applications were withdrawn across NI; the lowest quarterly total reported since Q4 2015/16. Across councils, the number of local applications withdrawn in Q2 2019/20 ranged from 22 in Causeway Coast and Glens to four in Ards and North Down.

[Refer to Tables 4.1, 4.2.](#)

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.

Figure 4.2 provides year-to-date processing times for local applications. During the first six months of 2019/20 the **average processing time** for **local** applications brought to decision or withdrawal was **13.8 weeks** across all councils, within the statutory target of 15 weeks. This represents an improvement of 1.2 weeks compared with the same period last year (15.0 weeks).

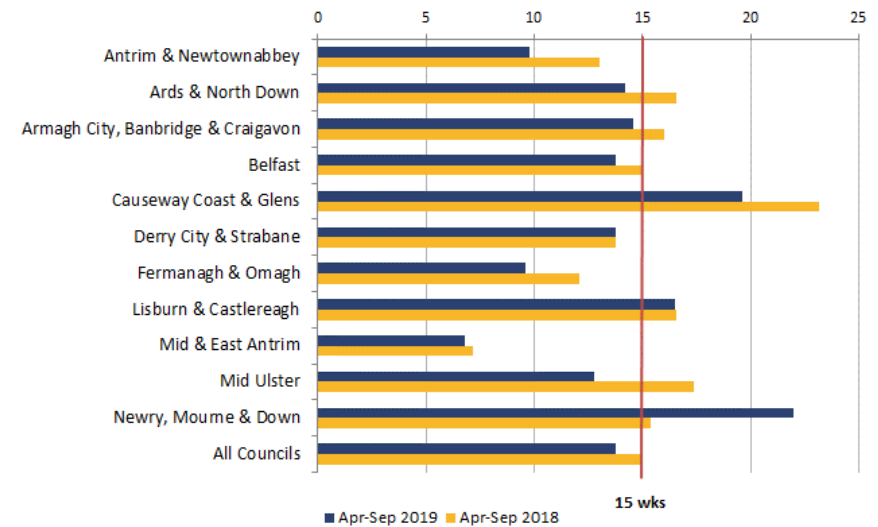
Across the councils, average processing times for local applications during April to September 2019 ranged from 6.8 weeks in Mid and East Antrim to 22.0 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Eight of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target during the first six months of 2019/20: Mid and East Antrim (6.8 weeks); Fermanagh and Omagh (9.6 weeks); Antrim and Newtownabbey (9.8 weeks); Mid Ulster (12.8 weeks); Belfast (13.8 weeks); Derry City and Strabane (13.8 weeks); Ards and North Down (14.2 weeks); and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.6 weeks).

Nine councils reduced their average processing times for local applications during April to September 2019, compared with the same period a year earlier. The improvement was greatest Mid Ulster (down 4.6 weeks, from 17.4 to 12.8 weeks). Over the same period, average processing times for local applications increased in Newry, Mourne and Down (up 6.6 weeks from 15.4 to 22.0 weeks) and were unchanged in Derry City and Strabane (13.8 weeks).

[Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local development average processing times by council, Apr – Sep 2018 & 2019



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](#).

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for **local** applications was **94.1%** in Q2 2019/20; an increase from the previous quarter (93.1%), and similar to the rate reported for the same period a year earlier (94.0%). Across councils, approval rates for local applications in Q2 2019/20 ranged from 98.4% in Mid Ulster to 90.3% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During Q2 2019/20, **residential** applications accounted for **61.7%** of all planning applications received in NI; an increase from the proportion reported for Q2 2018/19 (60.8%).

Residential was the most commonly received application type in all councils in Q2 2019/20. The proportion of all applications received that were residential ranged from 71.9% in Lisburn and Castlereagh to 40.6% in Belfast.

Belfast (28.2%) and Derry City and Strabane (27.3%) received a higher proportion of applications categorised as 'other' in Q2 2019/20, compared with the other councils. See Appendix 1 – 'Definitions' for a description of the types of applications included in this category.

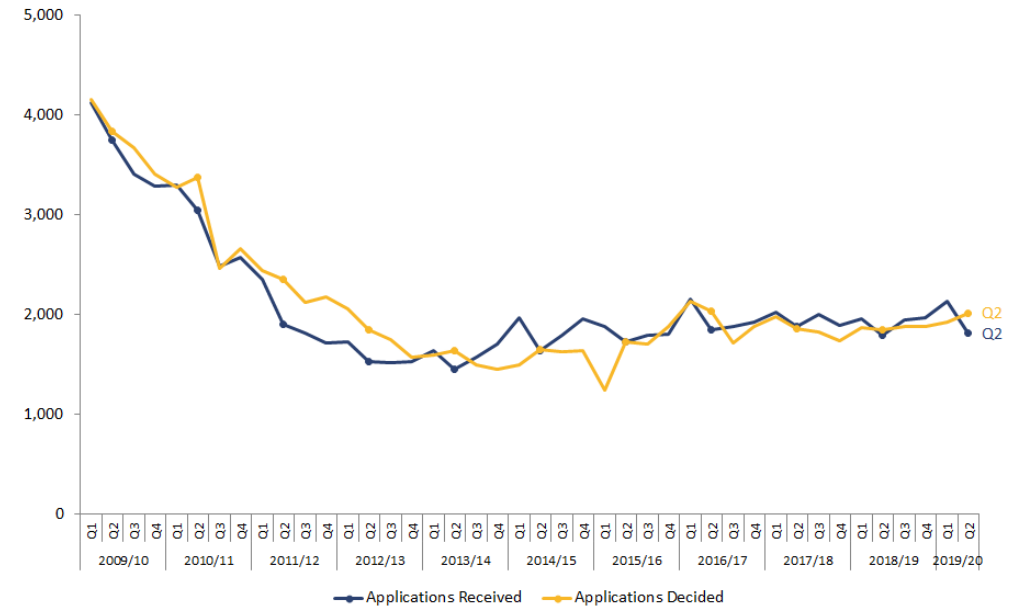
[Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.](#)

Residential applications

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in NI during Q2 2019/20 was **1,816**; a decrease of 14.8% over the quarter (2,132) but a 1.8% increase from the same period a year earlier (1,784).

During Q2 2019/20, **2,010 residential** planning applications were **decided** upon in NI; an increase of 4.8% on the previous quarter (1,918) and up 8.8% on the same period a year earlier (1,848). This also represents the highest number of decisions on residential applications reported for any quarter since Q2 2016/17.

Fig 5.1 NI Residential applications, quarterly Apr 2009 – Sep 2019

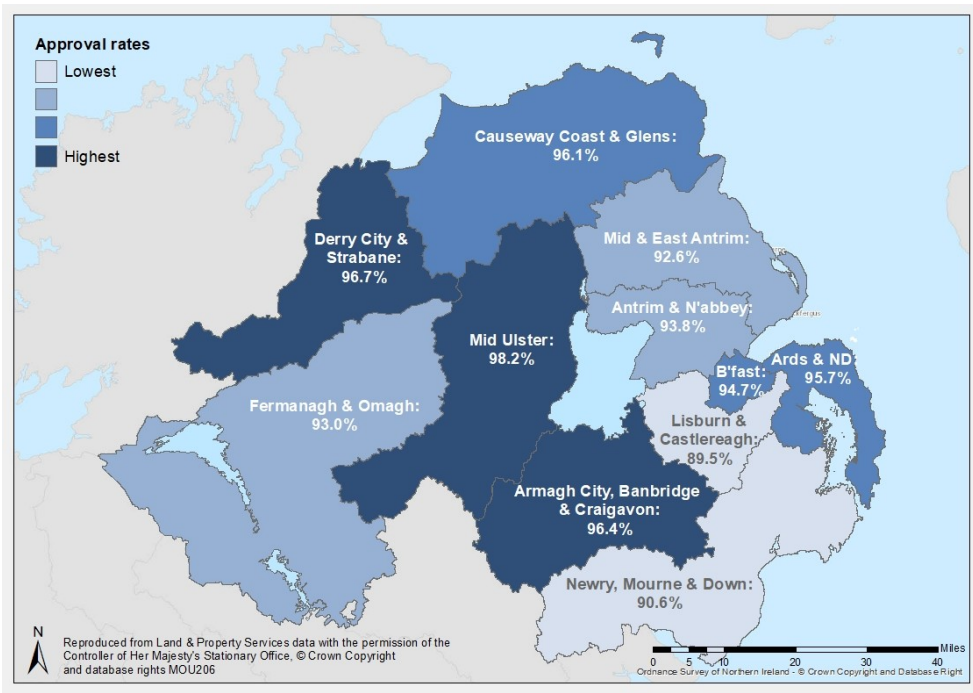


[Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for residential planning applications was **94.2%** in Q2 2019/20; an increase from the previous quarter (93.1%), but down slightly from the corresponding period a year earlier (94.6%).

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in Q2 2019/20, ranging from 98.2% in Mid Ulster to 89.5% in Lisburn and Castlereagh (Figure 5.2).

Fig 5.2 Residential approval rates by council, Q2 2019/20



Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in four councils between Q2 2018/19 and Q2 2019/20. The largest increase over this period was in Newry, Mourne and Down (up from 83.6% to 90.6%).

Approval rates declined in seven councils over the year, with the largest decrease occurring in Lisburn and Castlereagh (down from 94.1% to 89.5%).

During Q2 2019/20, 73 residential applications were withdrawn across NI; a decrease on the previous quarter (84) and on the same period a year earlier (77).

[Refer to Table 5.4.](#)

Residential applications – Urban, Rural and Open Countryside

Across urban areas (*settlements greater than or equal to 5,000 population*), the number of residential applications received in Q2 2019/20 was 584; a decrease of 21.6% from the previous quarter (745) and 6.0% from the same period a year earlier (621).

In rural settlements (*those with a population less than 5,000*), 204 residential applications were received in Q2 2019/20; a decrease of 20.6% from the previous quarter (257) and 11.3% from the same period a year earlier (230).

In the open countryside (*outside population settlements*), the number of residential applications received in Q2 2019/20 (1,028) was a decrease over the quarter (from 1,130; -9.0%) but an increase from the same period a year earlier (from 933; 10.2%).

Residential applications – Urban and Rural

Figure 5.3 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications received in Q2 2018/19 and Q2 2019/20. Urban is based on areas with settlements greater than 5,000 population while rural is a combination of settlements below 5,000 population and the open countryside.

Fig 5.3 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, Q2 2018/19 & Q2 2019/20



New single dwellings in rural areas (509) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (387) continue to be the most common types of residential application, together accounting for almost half (49.3%) of all residential applications received during Q2 2019/20; similar to the position in Q2 2018/19 (49.5%).

The increase over the year in the number of residential applications received (1.8%) was driven in large part by increases in the number of applications received in rural areas for domestic alterations and extensions

(up 10.1%; from 317 to 349) and new single dwellings (up 8.1% from 471 to 509).

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q2 2018/19 & Q2 2019/20

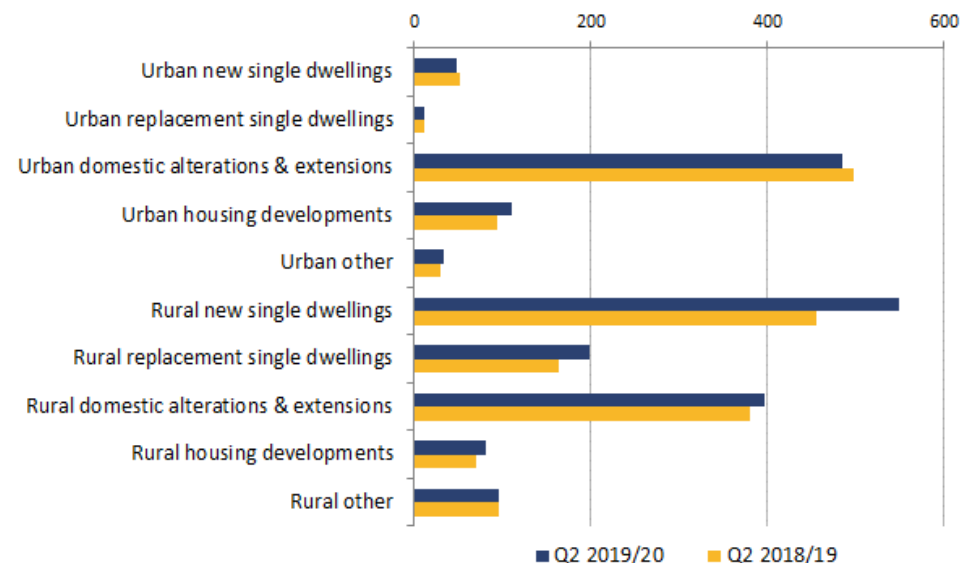


Figure 5.4 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications decided in Q2 2018/19 and Q2 2019/20. The overall increase in the number of residential applications decided over the year (8.8%) was driven in large part by increases in the number of decisions for both replacement (up 21.3%; from 164 to 199) and new (up 20.7%; from 455 to 549) single dwellings in rural areas.

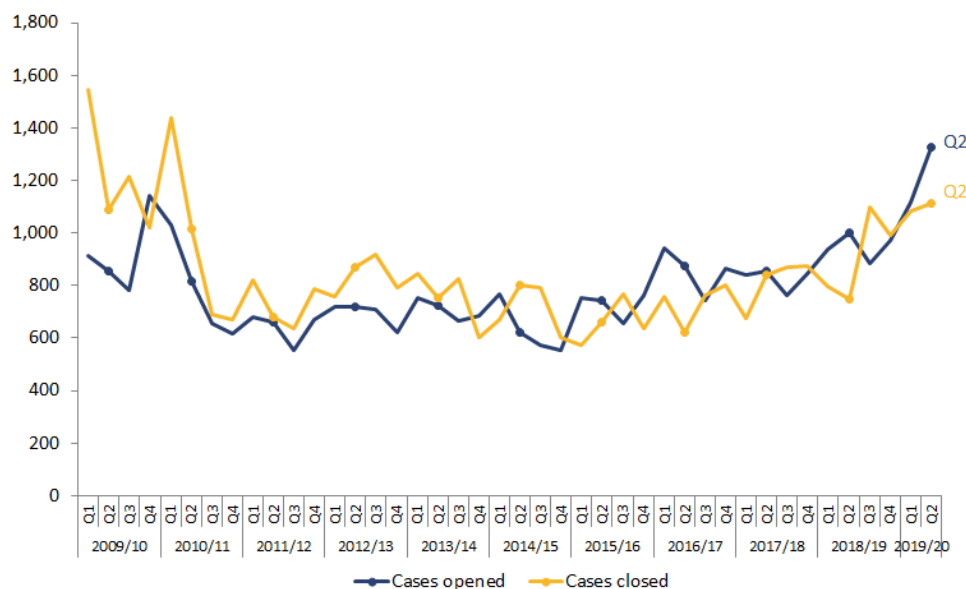
[Refer to Table 5.5.](#)

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during Q2 2019/20 was **1,326**; an increase of 18.7% from the previous quarter (1,117) and up 32.5% from the same period a year earlier (1,001). The 1,326 cases opened in Q2 2019/20 was the highest quarterly figure reported over the entire time series presented in Figure 6.1 (Q1 2009/10 to Q2 2019/20).

Across the councils, the number of enforcement cases opened in Q2 2019/20 ranged from 324 in Belfast to 47 in Mid Ulster. Nine of the 11 councils reported increases in the volume of enforcement cases opened in Q2 2019/20 compared with the same period a year earlier. The increase was greatest in Belfast, where the number of cases opened increased by 86.2% over the year (from 174 to 324).

Fig 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly, Apr 2009 – Sep 2019



The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q2 2019/20 was **1,114**; an increase of 2.7% from the previous quarter (1,085) and up 49.3% compared with the same period a year earlier (746). The 1,114 cases closed in Q2 2019/20 was the highest quarterly figure reported since Q1 2010/11.

The number of cases closed in Q2 2019/20 varied across councils, ranging from 233 in Belfast to 54 in Derry City and Strabane. Nine of the 11 councils reported increases in the volume of enforcement cases closed in Q2 2019/20 compared with same period a year earlier. This increase was greatest in Newry Mourne and Down, where the number of cases closed in Q2 2019/20 (116) was almost nine times higher than the number closed during Q2 2018/19 (13).

The most common reasons for enforcement cases closing in Q2 2019/20 were that the cases had been remedied or resolved (35.9%) or that no breach had actually occurred (29.7%). Together these accounted for almost two-thirds (731; 65.6%) of the 1,114 cases closed during Q2.

[Refer to Tables 6.1, 6.2.](#)

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.

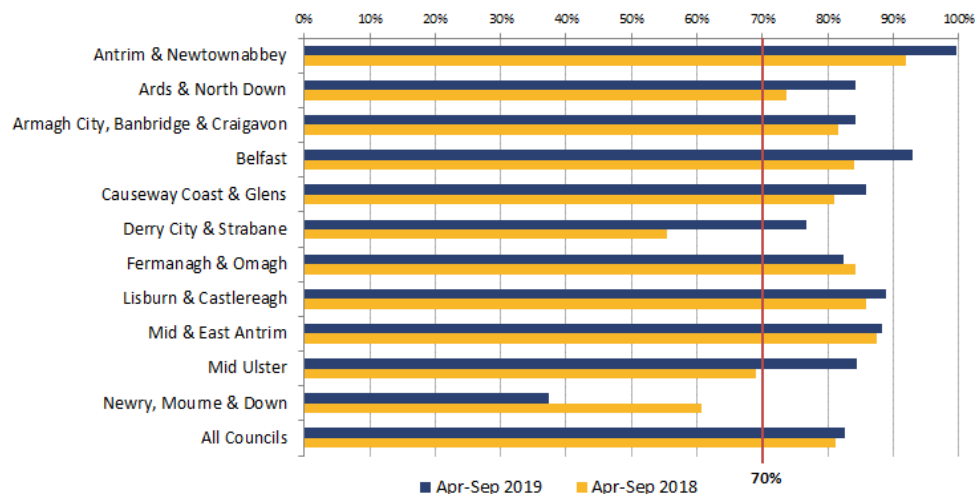
Across Northern Ireland, **over four-fifths (82.6%)** of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first six months of 2019/20 (April to September 2019). This meets the statutory target and is higher than the rate for same period in the previous year (81.3%).

During the first six months of 2019/20, 10 of the 11 councils were within the 39 week target, with a high of 99.7% recorded in Antrim and Newtownabbey. Nine councils improved the proportion of enforcement

cases concluded within 39 weeks compared with the first six months of the previous year, most notably in Derry City and Strabane (up from 55.4% to 76.8%).

[Refer to Table 6.2.](#)

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, Apr – Sep 2018 & 2019



During Q2 2019/20, there were **18 prosecutions** initiated across NI; a small increase over the quarter (from 15) and over the year (from 17). Five councils initiated prosecutions during the most recent quarter, with Fermanagh and Omagh initiating the most (seven).

There were **eight convictions** across NI during Q2 2019/20, with a high of five reported in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

[Refer to Tables 6.1 and 6.3.](#)

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of September 2019 was **3,789**; an increase over the quarter (5.9%; from 3,577) and similar to the number reported for the same point in the previous year (3,775).

The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **1,049** at the end of September 2019, accounting for 27.7% of all live cases. This compares with 29.6% of all live cases at the end of June 2019 and 27.1% of live cases at the end of September 2018.

[Refer to Table 6.4.](#)

Across councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest number of live cases at the end of September 2019 (1,011), with 47.0% of these in the system for over 2 years; the highest proportion across all councils. Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of live cases (126) at this point and 13.5% of these were in the system for over 2 years.

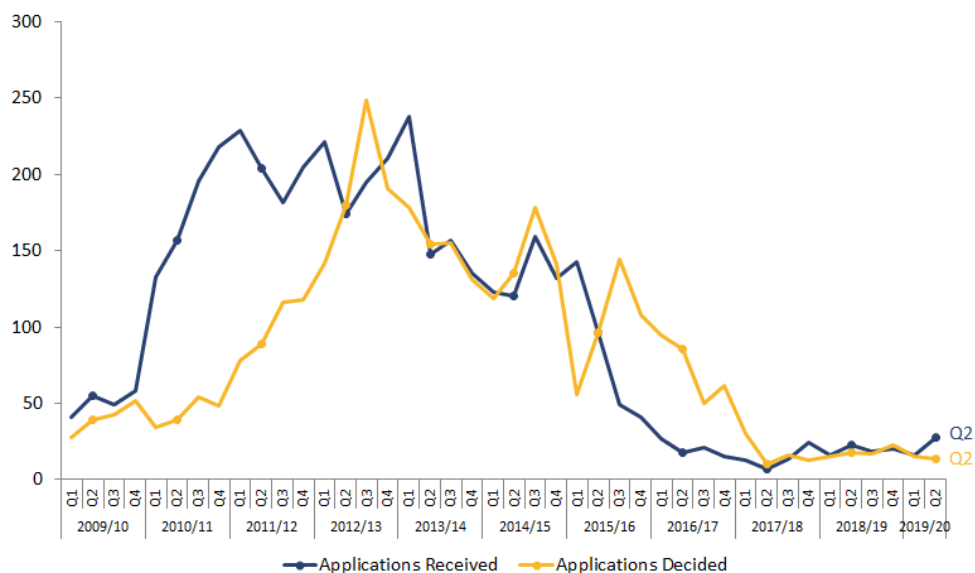
The number of live enforcement cases decreased in seven of the 11 councils between the end of September 2018 and the end of September 2019. This decrease was greatest, in percentage terms, in Mid and East Antrim (-30.8%; down by 56 enforcements). In the remaining four councils, the number of live enforcements cases increased over this period, with the greatest increase evident in Belfast (51.0%; up by 179 enforcements).

[Refer to Table 6.5.](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in Q2 2019/20 was **28**, an increase of five from the same period in the previous year (23). The number of applications received during July to September peaked in 2011/12 at 204. 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. The sharp decline in recent years (an **86.3%** decrease from 204 applications in Q2 2011/12 to 28 applications in Q2 2019/20) 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, Apr 2009 – Sep 2019



The number of renewable energy applications **decided** during Q2 2019/20 was **14**, a decrease from 18 reported for Q2 2018/19. The 14 applications received in Q2 2019/20 represents a 92.2% decrease from the series’

second quarter peak of 180 applications decided in 2012/13. Two renewable energy applications were withdrawn during Q2 2019/20. During this period, the average time taken for a renewable energy application to be brought to decision or withdrawal was 43.6 weeks across NI; an increase of 20.8 weeks over the quarter (from 22.8 weeks) and 11.2 weeks over the year (from 32.4 weeks).

Single wind turbines continue to be the most common renewable energy application, accounting for 22 out of 28 applications received during Q2 2019/20. In addition, eight of the 14 renewable energy decisions issued in Q2 2019/20 were for single wind turbines.

[Refer to Tables 7.1, 7.2.](#)

Figure 7.2 shows the distribution of received renewable energy applications across the different planning authorities, with Fermanagh and Omagh (10) receiving the most in Q2 2019/20.

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by authority, Q2 2018/19 & Q2 2019/20

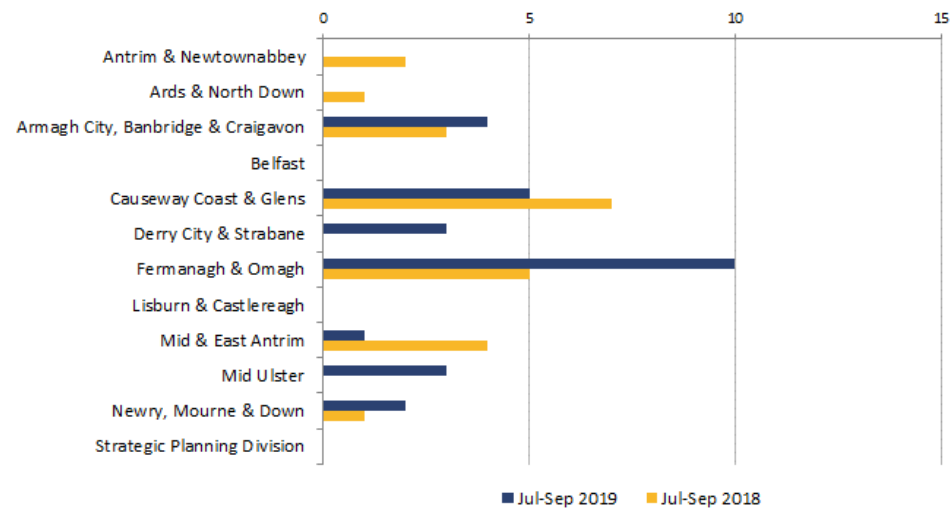
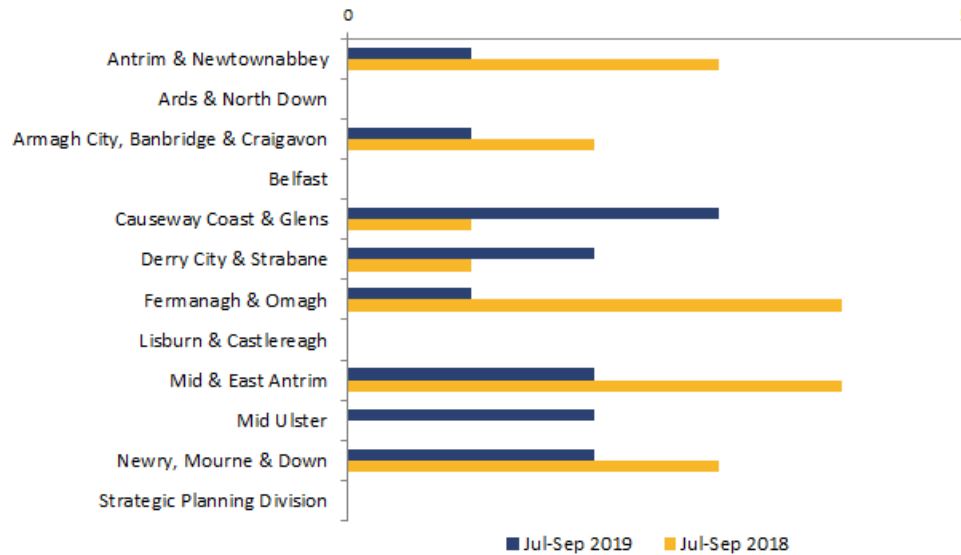


Figure 7.3 shows that the number of renewable energy planning decisions issued across planning authorities was highest in Causeway Coast and Glens (three) in Q2 2019/20.

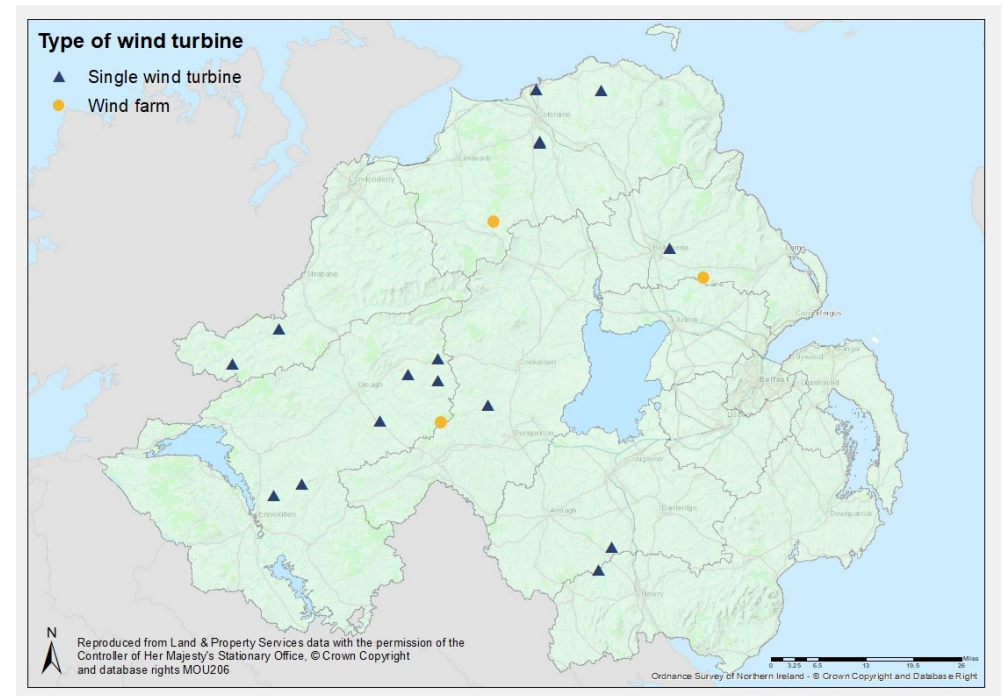
Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by authority, Q2 2018/19 & Q2 2019/20



At the end of September 2019, there were **104 live renewable energy applications**. Approximately two-thirds (69 of 104) were for single wind turbines. Of these 104 live applications, 44.2% were in the planning system for over a year; a decrease from the proportion reported for the same point in 2018 (45.5%).

The **NI approval rate** for renewable energy applications was **85.7%** in Q2 2019/20, i.e. 12 out of 14 decisions issued during this period were approvals.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Apr – Sep 2019



[Refer to Tables 7.3, 7.4.](#)

User Guidance

Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1st April 2019 to 30th September 2019 were transferred in October 2019 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) which involved quality checks and inspection of coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils were provided with their own headline planning statistics before the release of this publication as part of the quality assurance process. On completion of ASRB and council validation, a final extract was taken in November 2019. Quarterly data for 2019/20 are regarded as provisional and will retain this status until the annual report for 2019/20 is published in June / July 2020.

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 applications 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. 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) can inflate the mean to the extent 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:

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/settlement-15-guidance.pdf>.

This method is preferred to the previous method as it more accurately considers which of the eight settlement bands (A-H) fall into mainly urban or rural areas. The limitation of the previous method was that all settlement bands were classified as urban. Under the new method it is recognised that smaller settlements are more rural than urban in character and should be distinguished as such. Presently the mid-point of the application polygon is used to assign urban and rural bandings.

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

In line with NISRA guidance, the following definitions have been used in this report:

- Urban settlements - settlements with a population greater than or equal to 5,000 (bands A-E);
- Rural settlements - settlements with a population less than 5,000 (bands F, G and part of H); and
- Rural countryside - the open countryside which falls outside population settlements (part of band H).

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' and 'rural settlements' together.

To obtain rural figures in line with the NISRA definition users should add 'rural settlements' and 'rural 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 England, the other devolved administrations and Republic of Ireland, as well as other relevant NISRA statistics, can be found at the following links:

England:

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

Scotland:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications>

Wales:

<https://gov.wales/planning-services-performance>

Republic of Ireland:

<http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/construction/>

Northern Ireland:

Building Control (LPS Starts and completions):

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

Housing Bulletin, Department for Communities:

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

Appendix 1 – Definitions

The Statistical Categories referred to in Section 5 and Excel Tables 5.1 and 5.2 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; and ‘hard infrastructure’ facilities such as roads, water mains, water treatment works, trunk sewers, waste water treatment works and natural gas pipelines. This 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

These include: factories; warehousing; light and general industrial floor space; quarries; sand and gravel extraction; and fuel depots.

Mixed Use

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; and 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

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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