



Northern Ireland  
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um Staitisticí agus Taighde



Department for  
**Infrastructure**

An Roinn

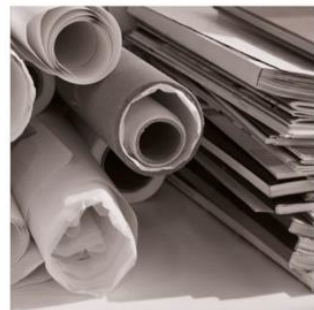
**Bonneagair**

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# NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

## Second Quarter 2021/22 Statistical Bulletin

### July to September 2021: Provisional Figures



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### **National Statistics status**

National Statistics status means that the statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). It is the Department for Infrastructure's responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics were designated as National Statistics in December 2020, following a full assessment of compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

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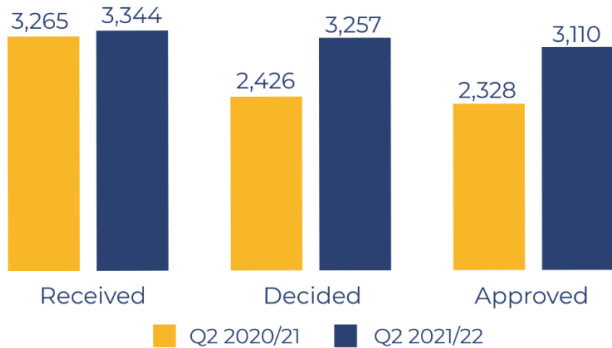
## Key points

- **Planning activity and processing performance in 2020/21 and the first half of 2021/22 were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. This should be borne in mind and caution should be taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.**
- There were 3,344 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during the second quarter of 2021/22; a decrease of nearly sixteen percent on the previous quarter but up by over two percent on the same period a year earlier. This comprised 3,305 local and 39 major applications.
- In the second quarter of 2021/22, 3,257 planning applications were decided upon; down by nearly six percent over the quarter but up by over one-third from the same period a year earlier. Decisions were issued on 3,229 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 2021/22 was 16.0 weeks across all councils. This exceeds the 15 week target and represents a decrease of 2.4 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 2021/22.
- The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first six months of 2021/22 was 56.4 weeks across all councils. This represents a decrease of 13.8 weeks compared with the same period a year earlier but is still considerably higher than the 30 week target.
- Across councils over 72% of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first six months of 2021/22. This meets the statutory target of 70% and represents an increase from the rate reported for the same period in 2020/21 (69%). Individually, eight of the 11 councils were within target after the first six months of 2021/22.

Planning activity and processing performance during 2020/21 and the first six months of 2021/22 were impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. This should be borne in mind when interpreting these figures or making comparisons with other periods.

## Overall planning applications

### Applications received, decided & approved

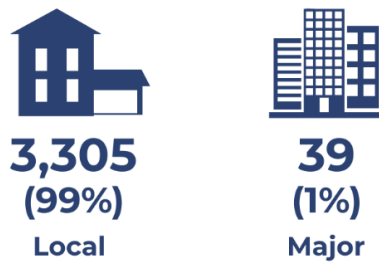


### Comparing Q2 2021/22 with Q2 2020/21:

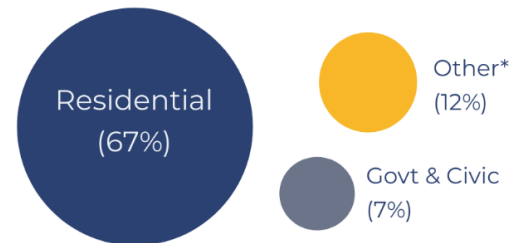


## Applications received Q2 2021/22

A total of **3,344** planning applications were received during Q2 2021/22:



### 3 largest development types



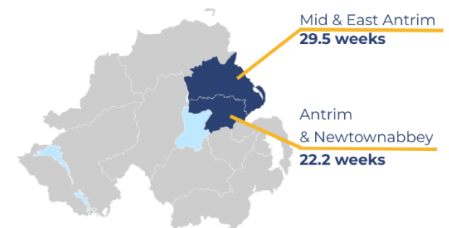
\*Other includes work to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements & listed buildings

## Planning statutory targets April - September 2020 and 2021

### Average processing times (weeks) - major



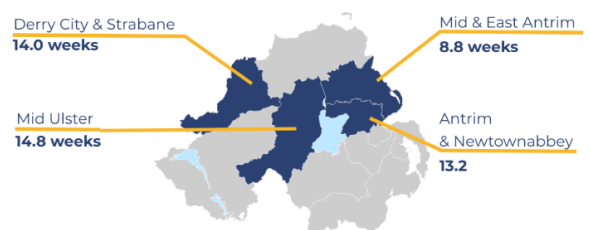
### Councils within major target



### Average processing times (weeks) - local



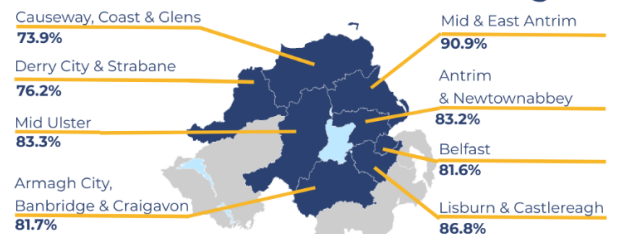
### Councils within local target



### % of enforcement cases concluded within 39 weeks



### Councils within enforcement target



# Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: Second Quarter 2021/22 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 2021/22. Note that from 8 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 2021/22, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous periods. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the last quarter and year. Please note that these quarterly figures for 2021/22 are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures, to be published in July 2022.

## 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 largely have responsibility for this planning function.

Planning applications for development categorised as being either major development or local development are largely 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. 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 12 planning authorities).

The Department continues to have responsibility for the provision and publication of 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 were a number of significant 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 a quantitative corporate business plan target.

All of the information underlying the charts and graphs featured in this bulletin are included in [accompanying data 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 data 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 data 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 data tables. [Table 8.1](#) shows the volume of legacy work which each council inherited on 1 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 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 2022. This will contain provisional planning data up to 31 December 2021. The next annual report covering 2021/22 is planned for release in July 2022. See [GOV.UK](#) Release Calendar and [upcoming statistical releases](#) on the Department's website for future publication dates.

## National Statistics designation

Between November 2019 and March 2020, the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics underwent an assessment by the Office for Statistics Regulation. A [report](#) detailing the findings of this assessment was published in May 2020.

The assessment report identified four requirements which, once met, enabled the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics to be designated as new National Statistics. Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) has published [an action plan](#), detailing how and by when these requirements were met. This includes a forward work plan which outlines scheduled work and further developments over the coming years, and this will be updated on an ongoing basis.

In [December 2020](#), the UK Statistics Authority Regulatory Committee confirmed National Statistics designation for the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics. This designation means that the statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

## New Northern Ireland regional planning IT system

The Department and 10 councils have been working collaboratively on the configuration of a new Regional Planning IT System with an external provider. It is expected that the new system go live in 2022. Relevant updates on the development of this new system and any potential impacts on statistical reporting will be included within future NI Planning Statistics publications. However, at this stage of the project it is still too early to include any further information on potential impacts to NI Planning Statistics.

Alongside this one council has chosen to move forward independently and develop their own system. ASRB have held initial discussions with this council and will continue to engage to try and ensure that this system continues to meet the existing requirements of the NI Planning Statistics. Again, it is too early to include any further information on potential impacts to NI Planning Statistics but any relevant updates will be included within future publications.



## Planning Monitoring Framework

The [Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework 2020/21](#) was published at the beginning of December 2021. The next edition of this report, with data for 2021/22, is planned for publication in winter 2022.

## Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

This bulletin and the accompanying [data tables](#) present data for the period 1 July 2021 to 30 September 2021.

Restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic commenced on 12 March 2020 with the start of the delay phase, before lockdown was applied on 23 March 2020. Although lockdown was gradually eased from May 2020, varying levels of restrictions have continued to be in place up to September 2021.

Planning activity and processing performance has been impacted by these restrictions but there does appear to be a return to pre-pandemic activity. The volume of planning applications received and processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn), and enforcement cases opened, closed and concluded, were lowest during the first quarter of 2020/21, before increasing in subsequent quarters. Overall, the number of applications received in 2020/21 exceeded the total recorded for the previous year. However, despite increases in the latter three quarters, the number of applications processed and enforcement activity for the year as a whole were at much lower levels compared with 2019/20. Levels of activity have been higher in the first half of 2021/22, when compared to the same period in 2020/21. Therefore caution should be taken when interpreting figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.

The ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic will continue to be assessed in future Northern Ireland Planning Statistics reports.

The data for this report were collected while staff in planning authorities had restricted access to their offices. Whilst this may present some challenge, there are no concerns that the quality of data presented in this report have been adversely affected.



# Chapter 1: Overall Northern Ireland planning activity

## Chapter 1: Overall NI planning activity

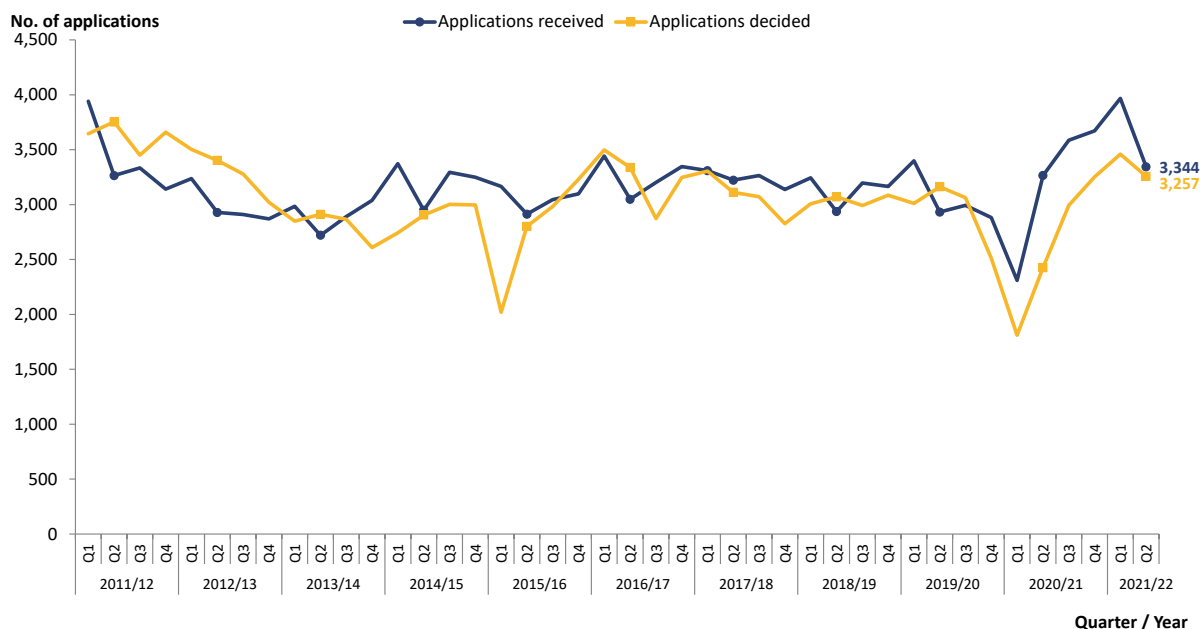
The volume of planning applications received and processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) have decreased from the previous quarter but remain higher than the levels that were recorded during the same period the previous year, when the effects of the coronavirus and associated restrictions were most significant.

The pandemic continues to impact planning activity and processing performance which is evident from the information presented in this report (for the first six months of 2021/22) and feedback received from planning authorities. The level of this impact, from the information reported, appears to be easing and planning activity is beginning to return to pre pandemic levels. Caution should however continue to be taken 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 the period July to September 2021 (Q2) was 3,344; a decrease of 15.7% on the previous quarter (3,967) but up by 2.4% on the same period a year earlier (3,265). This represents the highest number of applications received in any second quarter since Q2 2010/11 ([Figure 1.1](#)). [Refer to Table 1.1](#).

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly, April 2011 to September 2021



During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of applications received was 2,309. This was the lowest number received in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. The following four quarters recorded consecutive increases peaking in Q1 2021/22 followed with a fall in Q2 2021/22.

Just over three-quarters of the planning applications received in Q2 2021/22 were for full planning permission (75.9%); similar to the proportions reported for earlier quarters.

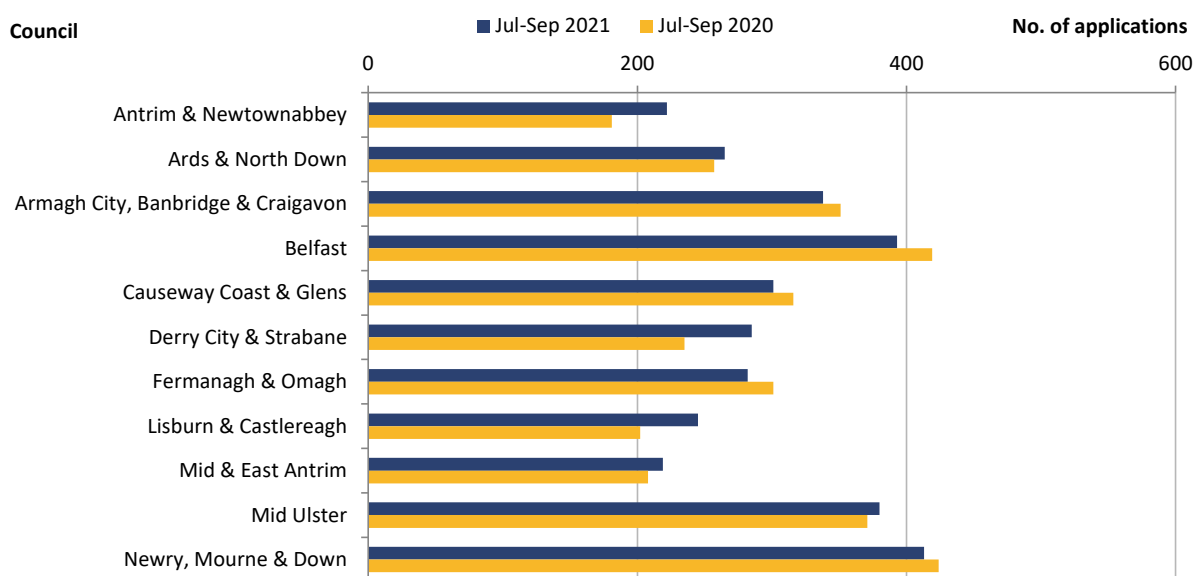
In Q2 2021/22, the number of planning applications received varied across councils, ranging from 413 in Newry, Mourne and Down (accounting for 12.4% of all applications received across NI) to 219 in Mid and East Antrim (6.5% of all applications received).

Ten councils reported a decrease in the number of planning applications received in Q2 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter, with the percentage decrease greatest in Mid and East Antrim (-26.3%). In Derry City and Strabane the number of applications received in Q2 2021/22 was up slightly over the quarter by 3.3%.

Over the year, 6 councils reported an increase in the number of applications received, with the highest percentage increase in Antrim and Newtownabbey (22.7%). Five councils reported a decrease in the number of applications received over the year with the greatest percentage decrease reported on Fermanagh and Omagh (-6.3%) ([Figure 1.2](#)).

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

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, July to September 2020 & 2021



## Applications decided

The number of planning **decisions issued** during Q2 2021/22 was **3,257**; down by 5.8% on Q1 2020/21 (3,459) but up by over one-third (34.3%) when compared with the same period a year earlier (2,426) ([Figure 1.1](#)).

Nearly four-fifths of planning decisions in Q2 2021/22 (79.0%) were for full planning permission; this was up over the quarter from 77.1% and up over the same period a year earlier (76.7%).

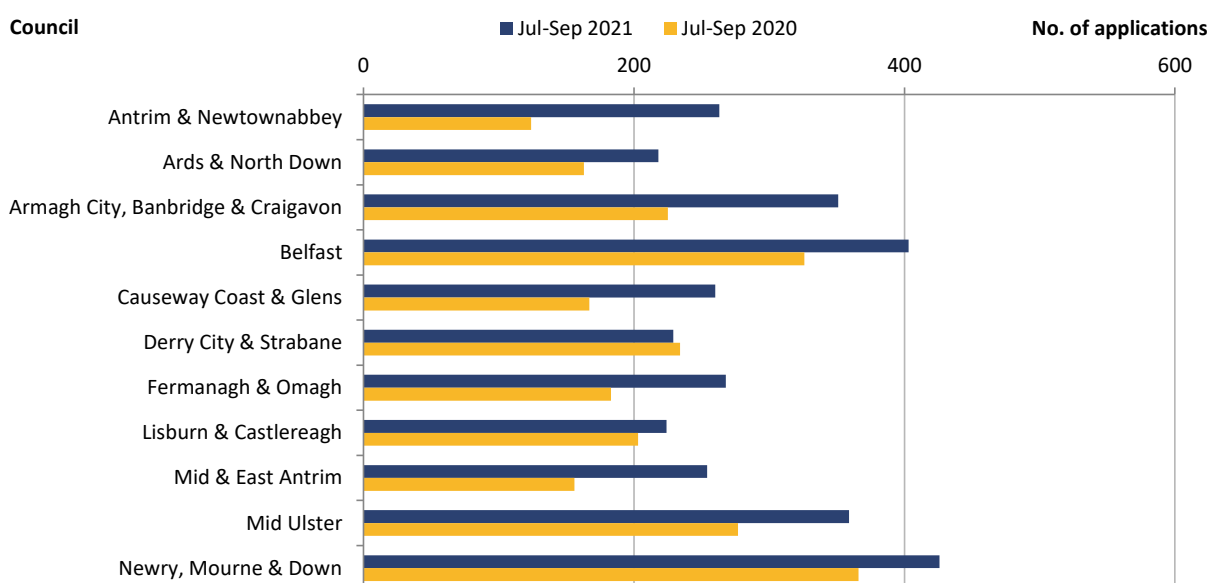
Across councils the number of decisions issued during Q2 2021/22 ranged from 426 in Newry, Mourne and Down (accounting for 13.1% of all decisions across NI) to 218 in Ards and North Down (6.7% of all decisions).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of applications decided was 1,811. This was the lowest number decided in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. During the following four quarters, however, there were consecutive increases in the number of applications decided, with the 3,459 decided in Q1 2021/22 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q1 2016/17. There number of decisions issued during the latest quarter (Q2 2021/22) declined to 3,257. [Refer to Table 1.1.](#)

Eight of the 11 councils reported a decrease in the number of applications decided in Q2 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter, with the percentage decrease greatest in Ards and North Down (25.3%). The number of decisions issued increased over the quarter in three councils, with the largest increase reported in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (20.2%).

Over the year, ten councils reported an increase in the number of applications decided, with the highest percentage increase recorded in Antrim and Newtownabbey (112.1%). Derry City and Strabane reported a 2.1% decrease over the year. [\(Figure 1.3\).](#)

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, July to September 2020 & 2021



The number of applications received exceeded the number of decisions issued in six out of the 11 councils during Q2 2021/22.

In Q2 2021/22, **150** applications were **withdrawn**; a decrease of 3.8% on the previous quarter (156) but up by 38.9% when compared with the same period a year earlier (108).

Overall, the number of applications processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) in Q2 2021/22 was 3,407; a decrease of 5.8% from Q1 2021/22 (3,615) but up by over one-third (34.5%) when compared with the same period a year earlier (2,534).

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

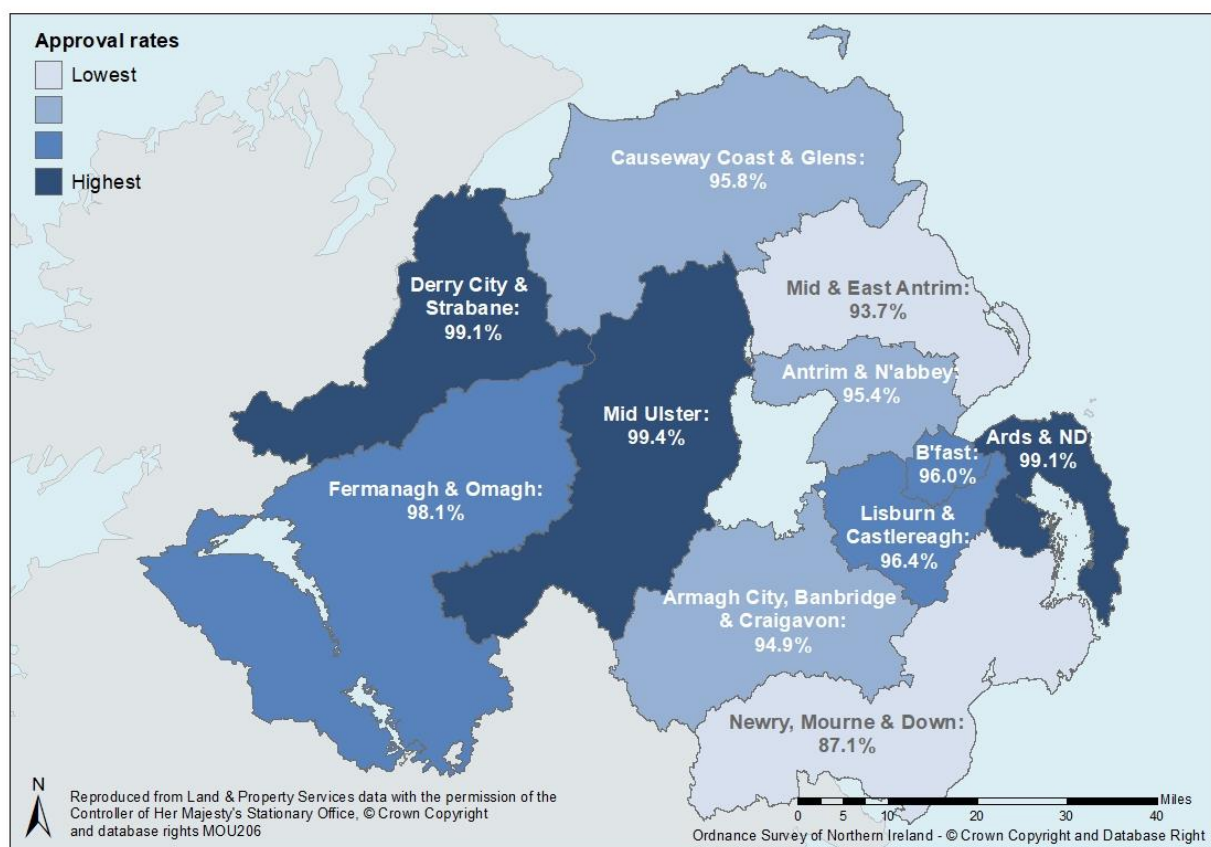
In addition to processing applications, planning authorities deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q2 2021/22 they processed to decision or withdrawal: 269 certificates of lawfulness; 234 discharge of conditions; 108 non-material changes; and 67 tree preservation orders. 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 **95.5%** in Q2 2021/22; similar to the rates reported for the previous quarter (94.8%) and for the same period a year earlier (96.0%). [Refer to Table 1.1](#).

Approval rates varied across councils during Q2 2021/22, from 99.4% in Mid Ulster to 87.1% in Newry, Mourne and Down ([Figure 1.4](#)). These rates are dependent on many factors and care should be taken in making any comparisons.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, July to September 2021



Eight councils reported an increase in approval rate when compared with the same period a year earlier (Q2 2020/21), with the largest increase occurring in Lisburn and Castlereagh (up from 91.6% to 96.4%). Approval rates decreased over the year in the remaining three councils, with Newry, Mourne and Down (down from 96.2% to 87.1%) reporting the largest decrease. [Refer to Table 1.2](#).

## Live applications

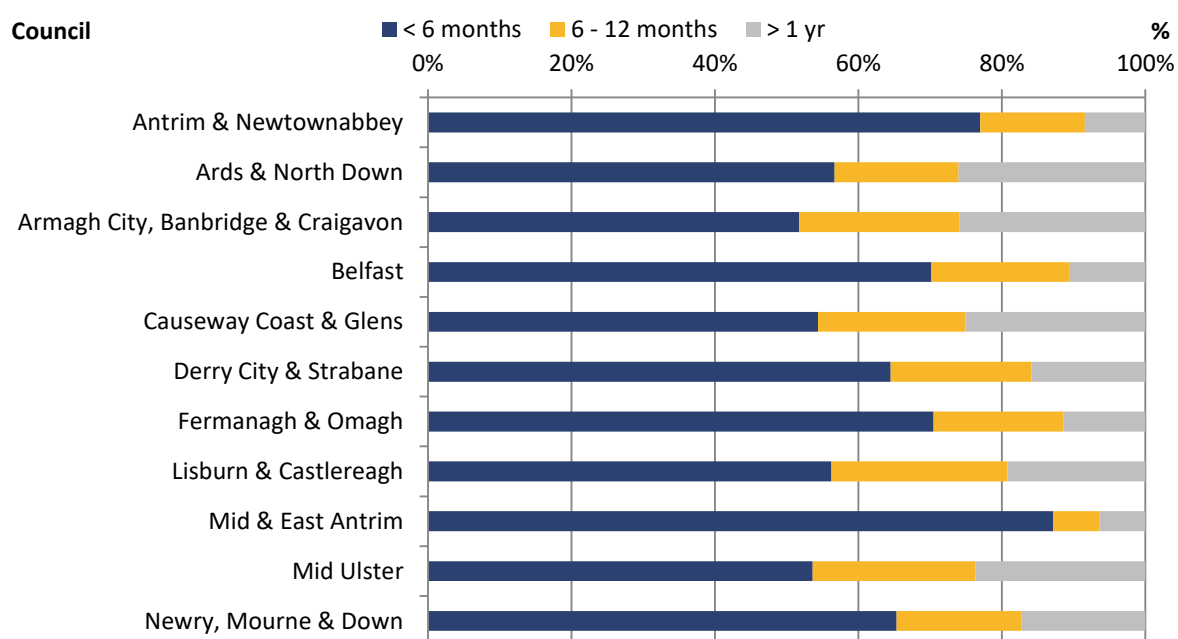
There were 8,467 live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of September 2021; an increase of 12.4% from 7,532 at the end of September 2020, but a decrease of 0.7% from 8,530 at the end of the previous quarter. The live count at the end of September 2021 is the second highest end-of-quarter live count since March 2012, the highest being the end of the previous quarter.

An increase in the live count is due to fewer applications being processed, i.e. decided or withdrawn, compared with applications received over a given period. The increase in the live count over the year suggests that the coronavirus pandemic and resulting restrictions have had a greater impact on the ability of planning authorities to process applications, alongside the high volume of applications being received in recent quarters.

Under one-fifth of all live applications in the planning system at the end of September 2021 were over one year old (19.4%); a slight decrease from the proportion reported for the end of September 2020 (20.5%). [Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of September 2021 varied across councils, ranging from 26.0% in Ards and North Down to 6.4% in Mid and East Antrim ([Figure 1.5](#)).

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council & time in the planning system at end of September 2021



Comparing the end of September 2021 with the same point a year earlier, the proportion of live cases in the system for over a year increased across 6 councils, with the increase greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey (up from 3.8% to 8.5%). The remaining five councils are reported a decrease in the proportion of live cases over the year with the decrease greatest in Derry City and Strabane (down from 24.0% to 15.9%). [Refer to Table 1.4.](#)



## Chapter 2: Departmental activity



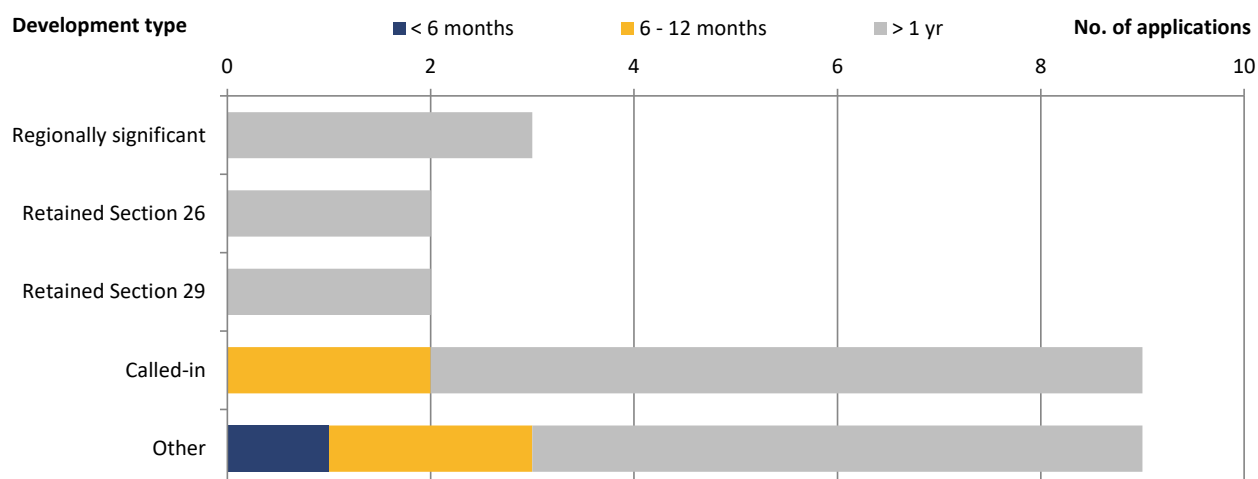
## Chapter 2: Departmental activity

### Departmental planning activity

During Q2 2021/22 there was one application received by the Department. No applications were received during the previous quarter or the same period a year earlier. The Department reached **decisions** on **two** applications during the second quarter of 2021/22; both of these were decisions on 'called in' applications. Both decisions were approvals. This compares to six decisions during the previous quarter and two decisions during the same period a year earlier, also all approvals. There was no applications **withdrawn** during Q2 2021/22.

At the end of September 2021 there were 25 live Departmental applications: **three** ongoing RSD applications; **four retained** applications; **9 called-in** applications; and **9 other** applications. The vast majority of these applications (20 out of 25) were in the planning system for over a year at the end of September 2021 ([Figure 2.1](#)). [Refer to Tables 2.1, 2.2.](#)

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type & time in system at 30 September 2021



### Departmental target

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.



**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 three RSD applications live on the planning system at the end of September 2021, one had already been progressed to Ministerial recommendation prior to Q2 2021/22. One was progressed to Ministerial recommendation in Q2 2021/22 but the 30 week period for recommendation / withdrawal had already been exceeded. The 30 week period for recommendation / withdrawal has also already been exceeded for the final remaining application.

Progress on these applications, and any new RSD applications received, will continue to be assessed in future reports.



# Chapter 3: Major development planning applications

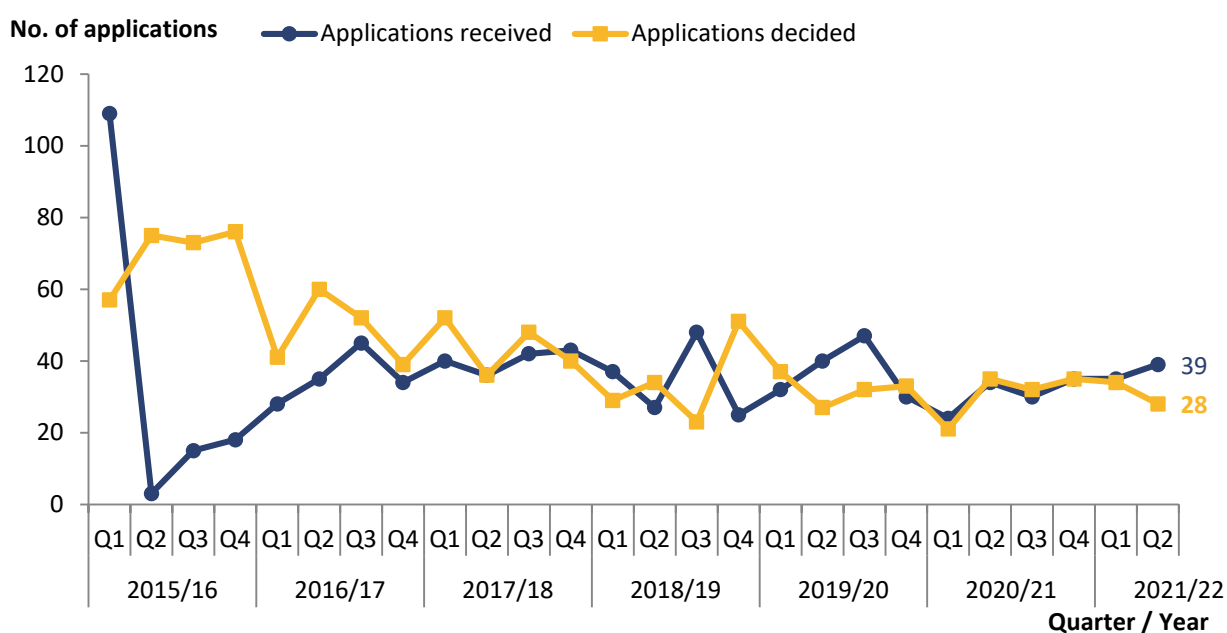
## Chapter 3: Major development planning applications

**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.

### Major applications received

A total of **39 major** planning applications were **received** in NI during Q2 2021/22; up from the previous quarter (35) and from the same period a year earlier (34) ([Figure 3.1](#)).

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to September 2021



From 1 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, particularly when considering quarterly data.

Q2 2015/16 had the lowest number of major applications received across the whole series but this can be attributed to the introduction of the 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, with some quarterly fluctuations over the last four years.

From 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has subsequently been extended until 31 March 2022<sup>1</sup>.

All eleven councils received major planning applications during the second quarter of 2021/22, with Belfast receiving the most (13).

### Major applications decided

During Q2 2021/22, **28 major** planning applications were **decided**; down from 34 in the previous quarter and the 35 decided during the second quarter of 2020/21 ([Figure 3.1](#)). There were no major applications **withdrawn** during the Q2 2021/22.

Nine councils issued decisions on major applications during Q2 2021/22, with Mid Ulster issuing the most (five).

Twenty-five of the 27 major applications decided upon in NI during Q2 2021/22 were approved, meaning the overall approval rate was 92.6%. Of the nine councils that issued decisions on major applications during the quarter; in seven of these, 100% of the major applications decided upon were approved. [Refer to Tables 3.1, 3.2.](#)

### Major planning applications statutory target



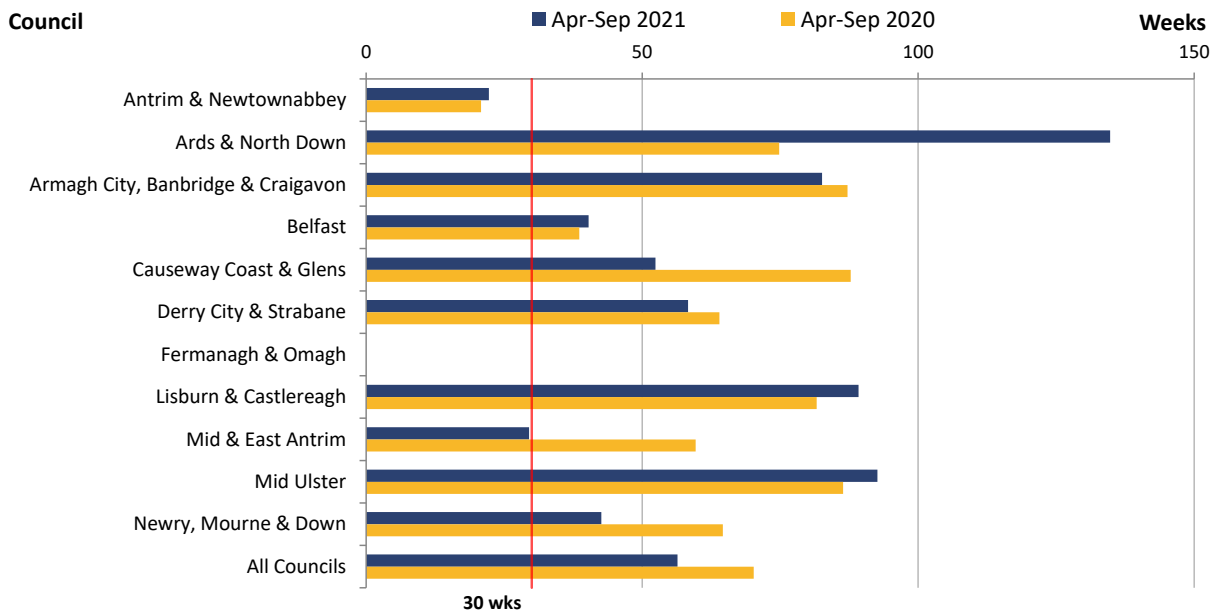
**It is a statutory target for each council that major development planning applications will be processed from the date valid to decision issued or withdrawal date within an average of 30 weeks.**

[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 **2021/22** was **56.4 weeks** across all councils. This represents a decrease of 13.8 weeks compared with the same period in 2020/21 (70.2 weeks) and is considerably higher than the 30 week target.

Whilst [Figure 3.2](#) below has been provided for completeness, across councils there was an insufficient number of major applications processed to decision or withdrawal during the first six months 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 were within the 30 week target time in the first six months of 2021/22, Antrim and Newtownabbey (with an average of 22.2 weeks across 5 applications) and Mid and East Antrim (with an average of 29.5 weeks across 6 applications).

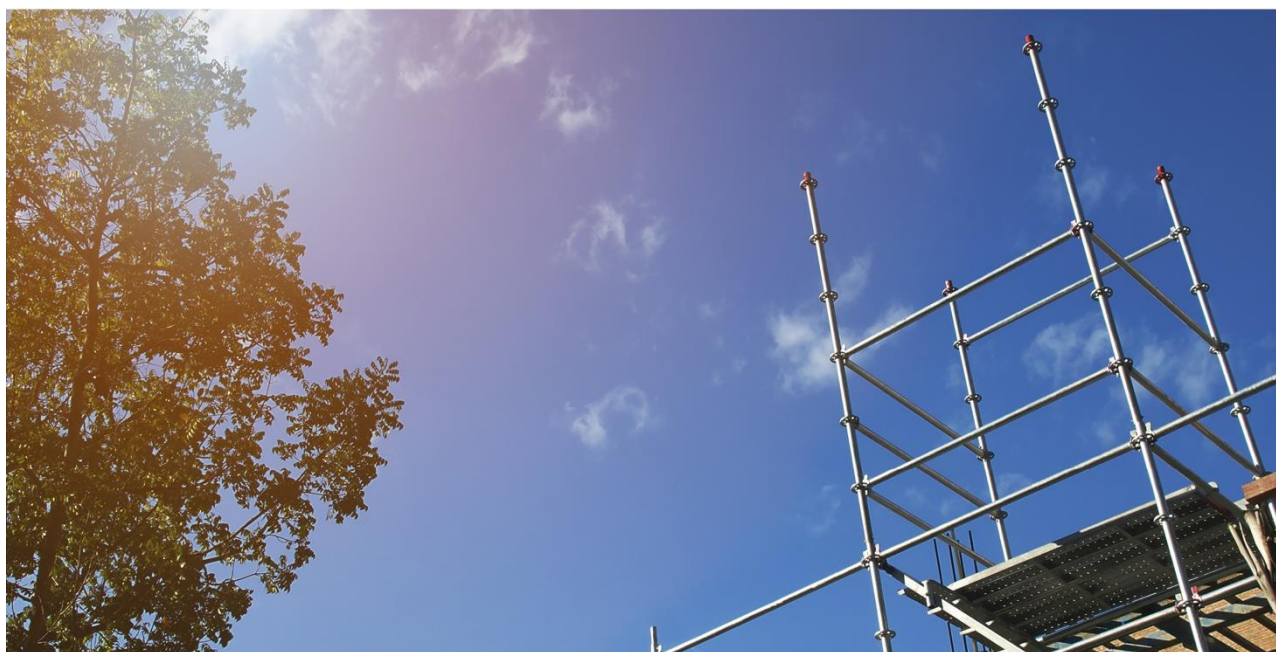
<sup>1</sup> For more information, see the [Departmental website](#).

Fig 3.2 Major development average processing times by council, April to September 2020 & 2021



[Refer to Table 3.2 for further information.](#)

A 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](#).



# Chapter 4: Local development planning applications

## Chapter 4: 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 2021/22 was **3,305**; a decrease of 15.9% on the previous quarter (3,932) but up by 2.3% on the same the same period a year earlier (3,231) ([Figure 4.1](#)).

### Local applications received

In Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of local applications received was 2,284. This was the lowest number received in any quarter since the transfer of planning powers. During the following four quarters there were consecutive increases in the number of local applications received, with the 3,932 received in Q1 2021/22 the highest quarterly total since transfer. [Refer to Table 4.1.](#)

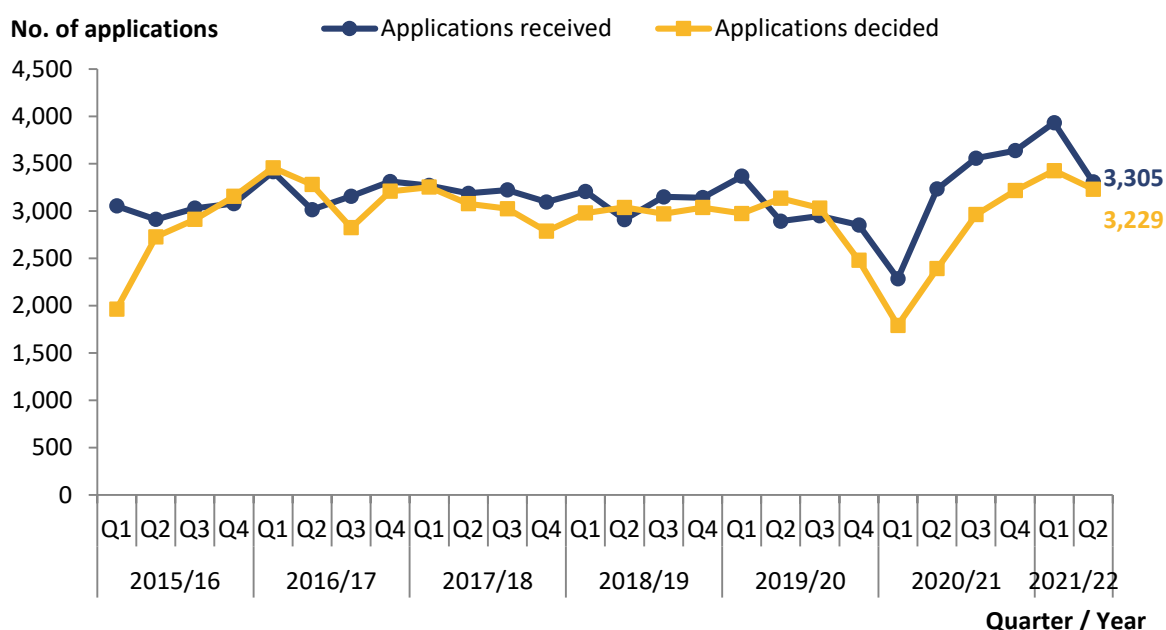
Across councils the number of local applications received during Q2 2021/22 ranged from 411 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 217 in Mid and East Antrim.

Ten councils reported a decrease in the number of local applications received in Q2 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter. The decrease in percentage terms was greatest in Mid and East Antrim, where the number of local applications received was down by over one quarter (25.9%). Over the same period Derry City and Strabane reported a slight increase of 2.6% in the number of local applications received.

Over the year, six councils reported an increase in the number of local applications received, with the largest percentage increase reported in Antrim and Newtownabbey increasing by nearly one quarter (24.2%). Five councils reported a decline over the same period, with the largest percentage decrease reported in Fermanagh and Omagh (-7.3%).



Fig 4.1 Local development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to September 2021



### Local applications decided

The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q2 2021/22 was **3,229**; down by 5.7% on Q1 2021/22 (3,425) but up by over one-third (35.0%) compared with the same period a year earlier (2,391). Refer to [Figure 4.1](#).

In Q1 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils, the number of local applications received was much higher than the number of decisions made. In 2016/17 this gap narrowed substantially. From Q3 2016/17 the number of local applications received has generally exceeded the number decided. Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic the gap between the numbers received and decided has been wider than any quarter since Q1 2015/16, suggesting that the pandemic and resulting restrictions have had a greater impact on the ability of planning authorities to issue decisions on local applications. During the most recent quarter (Q2 2021/22) the gap between the number of applications received (3,305) and decisions made (3,229) lessened considerably ([Figure 4.1](#)).

During the second quarter of 2021/22 the number of local planning decisions issued across councils ranged from 426 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 217 in Ards and North Down.

Eight of the 11 councils reported a decrease in the number of local applications decided in Q2 2021/22 compared with the previous quarter, with the decrease greatest in percentage terms in Ards and North Down (-24.9%). In the remaining three councils the number of decisions issued on local applications increased over the same period, with the greatest increase in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (up 20.8%).

Over the year ten of the 11 councils reported an increase in the number of local applications decided, with the increase greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey (111.4%).

In Q2 2021/21, **150** local applications were **withdrawn**; a decrease of 3.8% on the previous quarter (156) but an increase of more than two-fifths (42.9%) when compared with the same period a year earlier (105).

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for **local** applications was **95.5%** in Q2 2021/22; this was similar to the rates reported for the previous quarter (94.8%) and the same period a year earlier (95.9%).

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

### 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 2021/22 was **16.0 weeks** across all councils. This exceeds the statutory target of 15 weeks but represents a decrease of 2.4 weeks from the same period a year earlier (18.4 weeks). Nine of the 11 Councils show a decrease from the same period a year earlier.

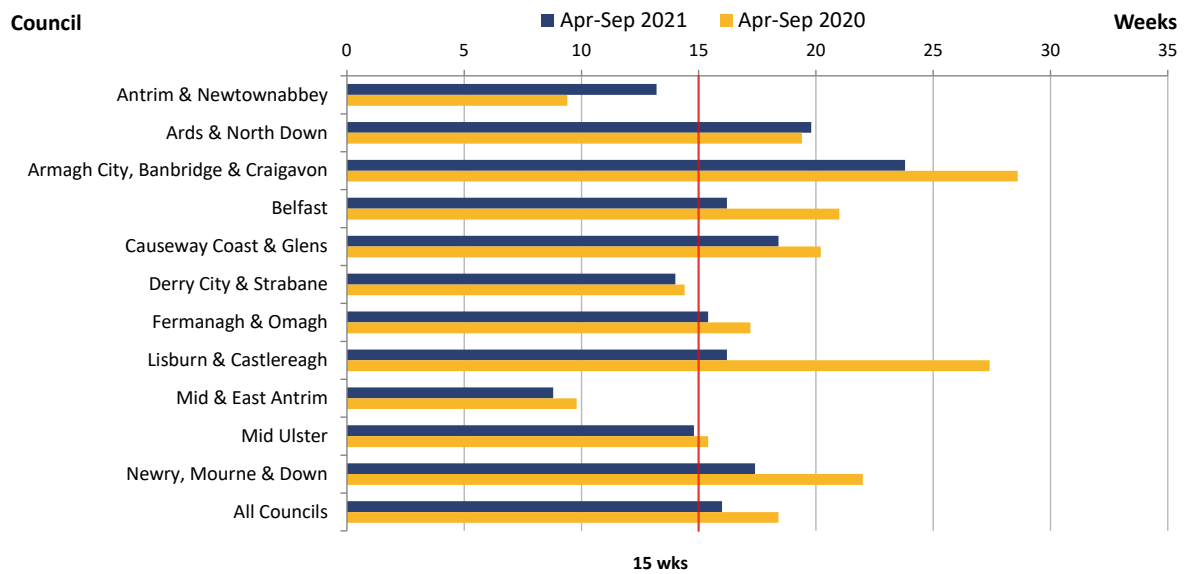
The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the most recent quarter (Q2 2021/22) was 16.3 weeks, up slightly over the quarter from 15.8 weeks, however, an improvement on figures reported for each of the four quarters during 2020/21. This may be an indication that the councils' ability to process local applications due to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions put in place is improving. However, it is worth noting in seven of the 11 councils the average processing time for local applications increased during July to September 2021, compared with the previous quarter (April to July 2021).

Four of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first six months of 2021/22: Mid and East Antrim (8.8 weeks); Antrim and Newtownabbey (13.2 weeks); Derry City and Strabane (14.0 weeks) and Mid Ulster (14.8 weeks).

When considering change over the year, in seven of the 11 councils processing times during July to September 2021 were lower than they were for the same period a year earlier.

[Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local development average processing times by council, April to September 2020 & 2021



A 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](#).



# Chapter 5: Development type

## Chapter 5: Development type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During Q2 2021/22, **residential** applications accounted for **two-thirds (66.5%)** of all planning applications received in NI; a decrease on the proportions reported for the previous quarter (69.1%) and the same period a year earlier (67.8%).

Residential applications accounted for the majority of applications received in each council during the second quarter of 2021/22; ranging from nearly three-quarters (74.6%) in Newry, Mourne and Down to half (50.1%) in Belfast.

The overall number of planning applications received during Q2 2021/22 was 3,344; an increase of 2.4% on the same period a year earlier (3,265). The number of applications received increased across a number of development types over this period with exception of 'industrial' (down 18.4%). Over the quarter the number of applications received decreased (-15.7%), this was largely driven by the decline in residential applications received (down 18.9%; from 2,743 to 2,225).

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

Consistent with previous quarters, a higher proportion of applications received in Derry City and Strabane (26.0%) and Belfast (22.9%) were categorised as 'other'<sup>2</sup> in Q2 2021/22, compared with the other councils. See [Appendix 1 – Definitions](#) for a description of the types of applications included in this category.

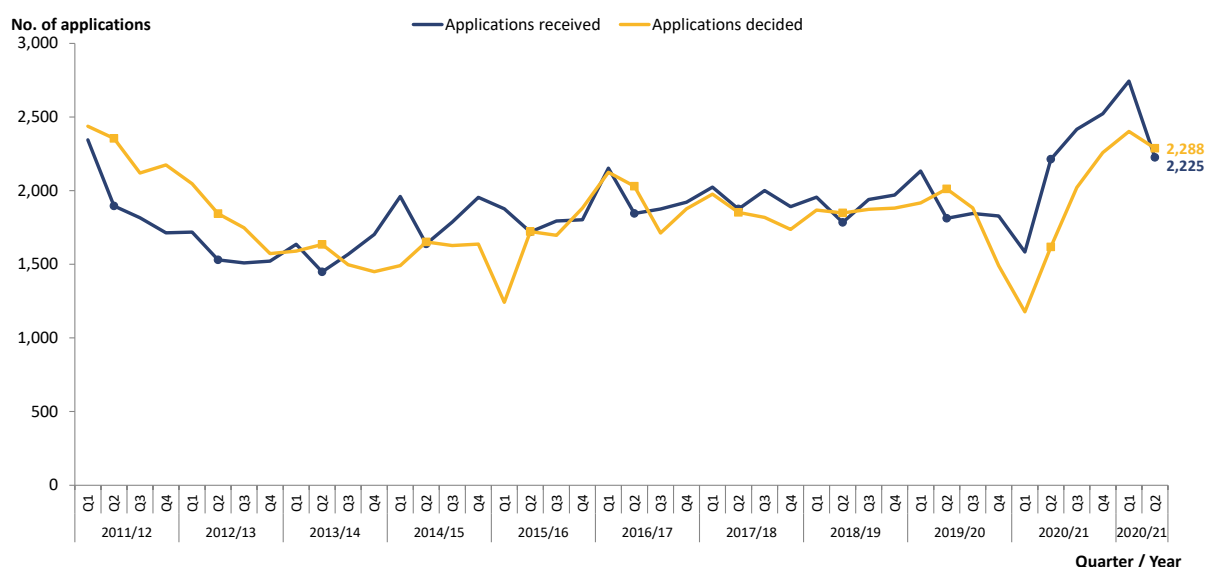
### Residential applications received

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in NI during Q2 2021/22 was **2,225**; a decrease of 18.9% over the quarter (2,743) but similar to the same period a year earlier (2,213). [See Figure 5.1.](#)

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<sup>2</sup> See [Appendix 1 – Definitions](#) for a description of the types of applications included in this category

Fig 5.1 NI Residential applications, quarterly, April 2010 to September 2021



In Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of residential applications received was 1,583; the lowest number received in any quarter since Q3 2013/14. During the following four quarters (from Q2 2020/21) there were consecutive increases in the number of residential applications received, with the 2,743 received in Q1 2021/22 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q2 2010/11. Q2 2021/22 reports a substantial decrease from the Q1 peak but is still high in the context of the time series. [Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

### Residential applications decided

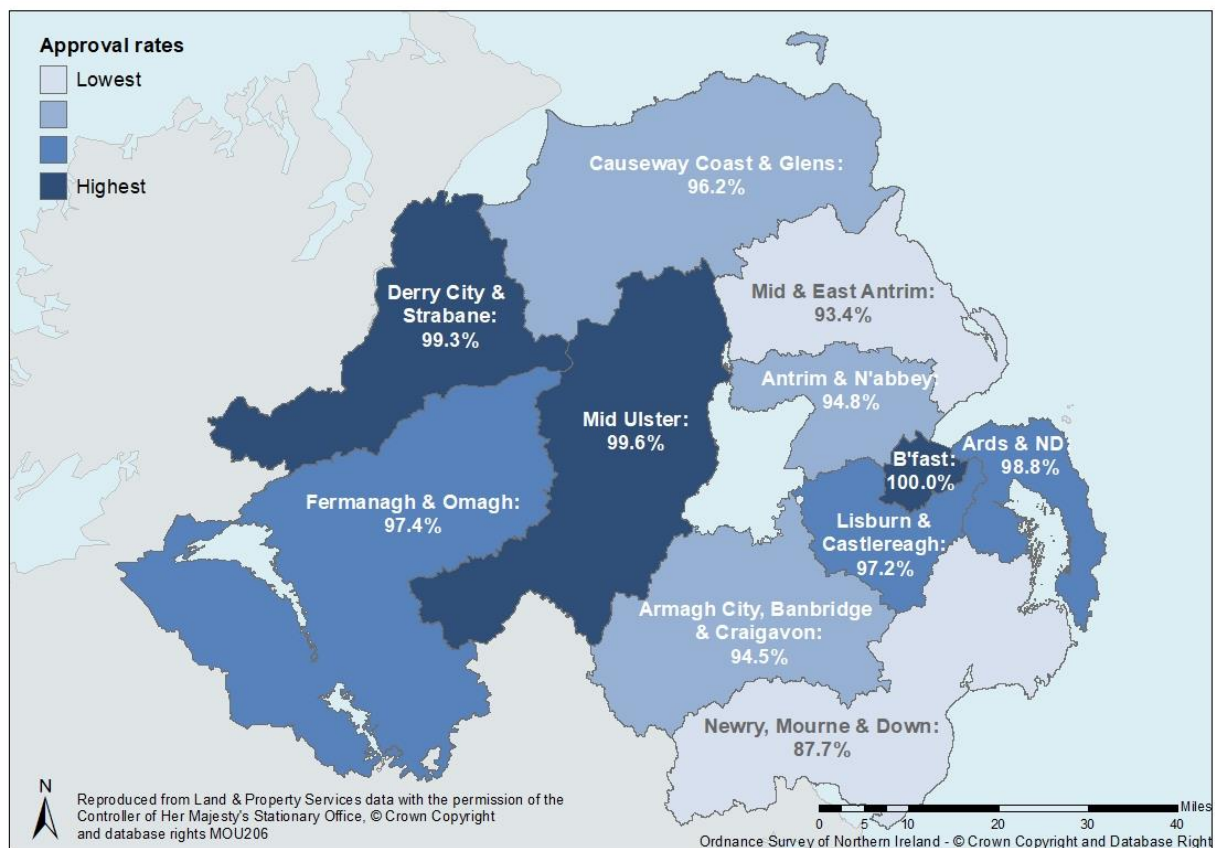
There were **2,288 residential** planning applications **decided** during the second quarter of 2021/22; a decrease of 4.7% over the quarter (2,402) but 41.4% more than the same period the previous year (1,618). [See Figure 5.1.](#)

In Q1 2020/21, decisions were issued on 1,177 residential planning applications; the lowest number of decisions issued in any quarter since the series began in April 2002. Consecutive increases in the number of residential applications decided were recorded during the following four quarters, with the 2,402 decisions issued in Q1 2021/22 the highest number reported for any quarter since Q1 2011/12. [Refer to Table 5.3.](#)

The **Northern Ireland approval rate** for **residential** planning applications was **95.9%** in Q2 2021/22; similar to the rates for previous quarter (95.3%) and same period a year earlier (96.4%).

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in the most recent quarter, ranging from 100.0% in Belfast to 87.7% in Newry, Mourne and Down ([Figure 5.2](#)).

Fig 5.2 Residential approval rates by council, July to September 2021



Approval rates for residential planning applications increased in six councils over the year, with the largest increase occurring in Lisburn and Castlereagh (up from 91.2% to 86.3%). Five councils reported a decline in residential approval rates over the same period with the greatest of these reported in Newry, Mourne and Down (down from 95.9% to 87.7%).

During Q2 2021/22, 95 residential applications were withdrawn across NI; similar to the previous quarter (98) but an increase over the year (68).

[Refer to Tables 5.3 and 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 2021/22 was 697; a decrease from the previous quarter (down 28.9%; from 980) and the same period a year earlier (down 5.0%; from 734).

In rural areas, within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was a decrease in the number of residential applications received in Q2 2021/22 (293) compared with the previous quarter (down 14.8%; from 344) but up when compared with the same period a year earlier (up 23.1%; from 238).

In the open countryside (outside population settlements), the number of residential applications received in Q2 2021/22 (1,235) also decreased over the quarter (down 13.0%; from 1,419) and the year (down 0.5%; from 1,241).

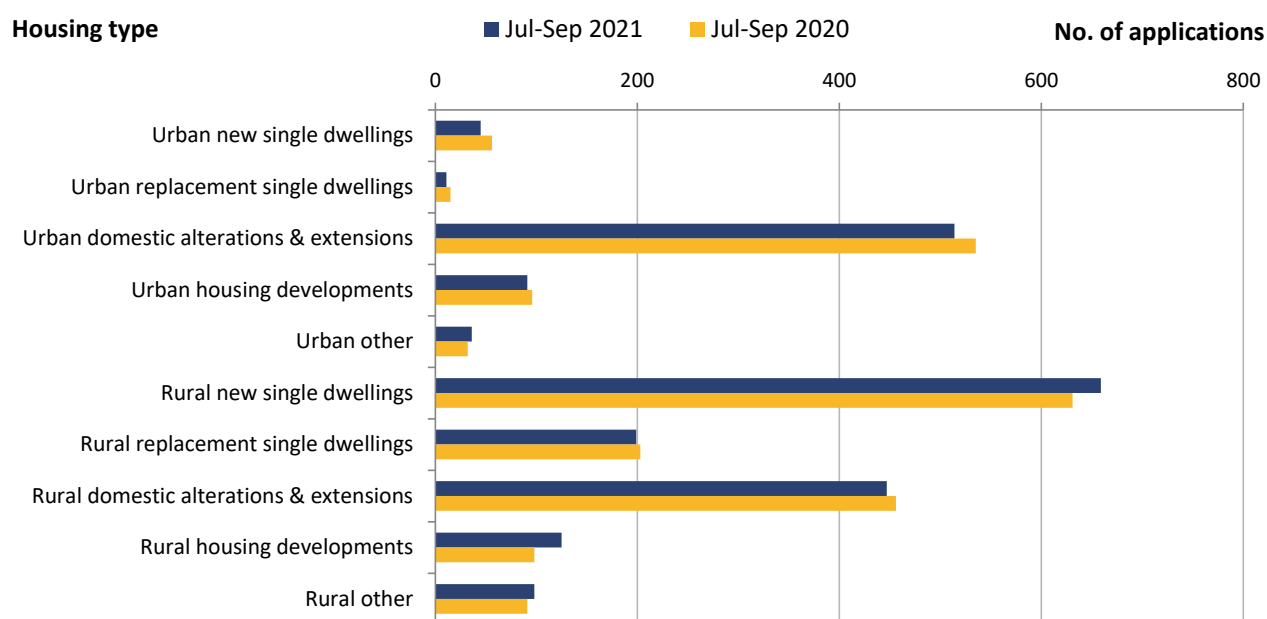
### Residential applications – urban and rural

[Figure 5.3](#) shows the number of residential applications received in the second quarter of both 2020/21 and 2021/22, broken down by urban and rural housing type. 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.

New single dwellings in rural areas (659) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (514) continue to be the most common types of residential application, together accounting for over half (52.7%) of all residential applications received during the second quarter of 2021/22.

Over the year in the number of residential applications received were similar when compared to the same period a year earlier. Small increases and decreases were reported across all housing types, see [Figure 5.3](#).

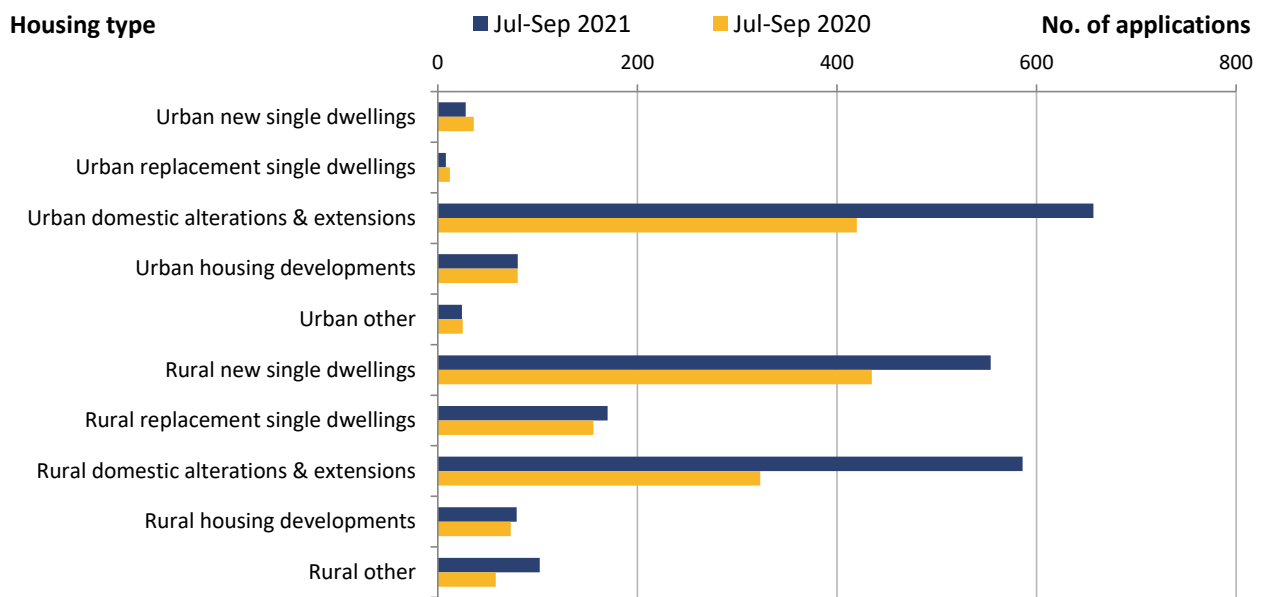
**Fig 5.3 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, July to September 2020 & 2021**

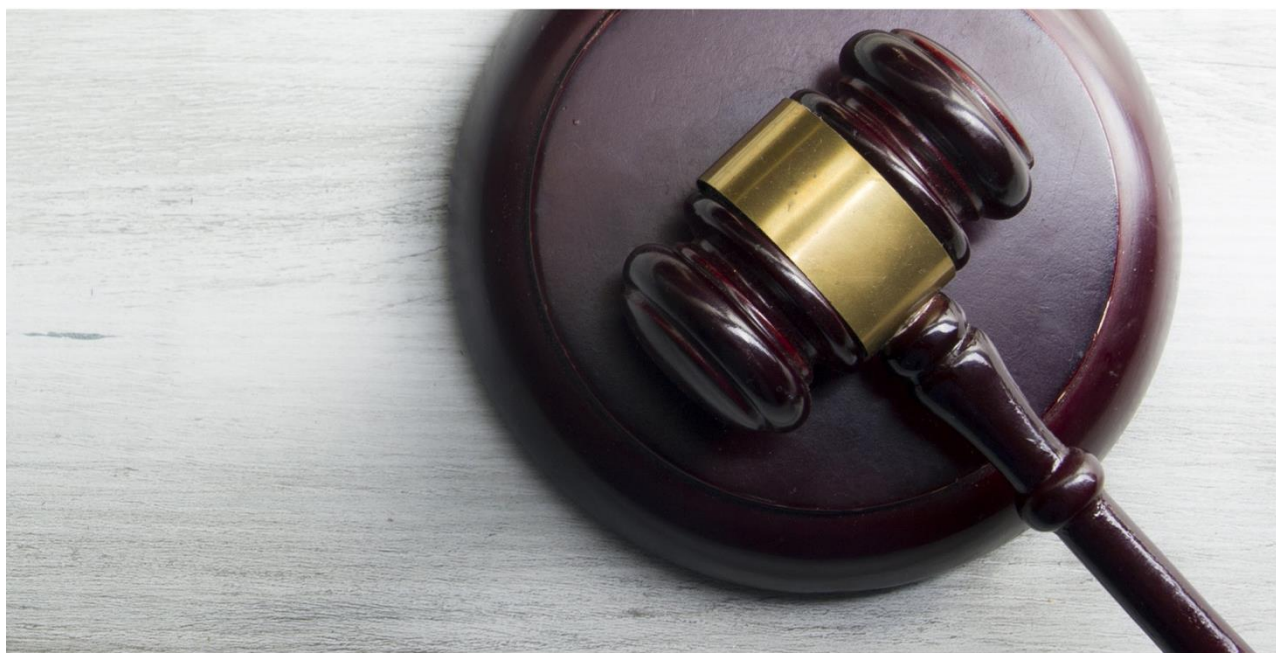


The overall increase in the number of residential applications decided between Q2 2020/21 and Q2 2021/22 (41.4%), was driven in large part by increases in the number of decisions issued on domestic alterations and extensions in both rural (up 81.4%; from 323 to 586) and urban areas (up 56.4%; from 420 to 657) and new single dwellings in rural areas (up 27.4%; from 435 to 554). [Refer to Table 5.5](#) and [Figure 5.4](#).



Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, July to September 2020 & 2021





# Chapter 6: Compliance and enforcement activity

## Chapter 6: Compliance and enforcement activity

### Enforcement cases

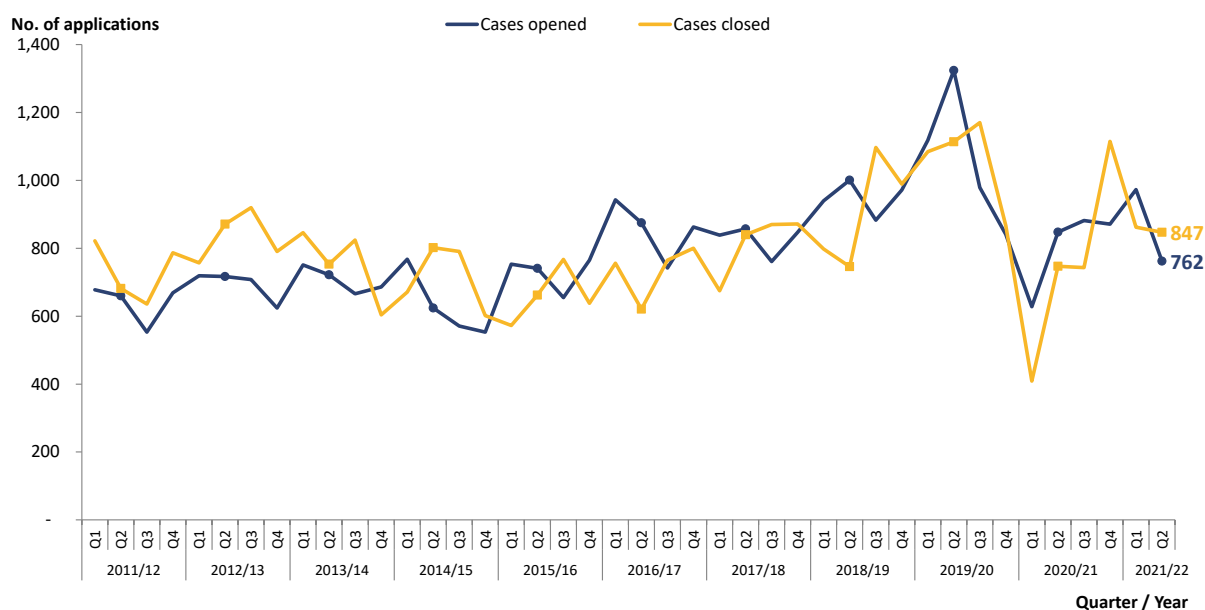
The number of **enforcement cases opened** in NI during the second quarter of 2021/22 was **762**; down by 21.7% over the quarter (973) and down by 10.1% from the same period a year earlier (848) ([Figure 6.1](#)).

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, 628 enforcement cases were opened; the lowest number opened in any quarter since Q4 2014/15. The levels recorded over the last five quarters have all exceeded this, with Q1 2021/22 being the highest number opened in any quarter since Q3 2019/20. [Refer to Table 6.1.](#)

Across the councils, the number of enforcement cases opened in Q2 2021/22 ranged from 121 in Newry, Mourne and Down to 39 in Derry City and Strabane. The number of enforcement cases opened decreased in seven of the 11 councils between Q2 2020/21 and the same period a year later, with the decrease greatest in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (down 35.9%; from 131 to 84). Three councils reported an increase over the year in the number of enforcement cases opened, with Causeway, Coast and Glens reporting the greatest increase in percentage terms (up 26.6%; from 64 to 81). Derry City and Strabane reported no change over the year with 39 enforcements opened in both periods.

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q2 2021/22 was **847**; down by 1.7% over the quarter (862) but up by 13.4% from the same period a year earlier (747) ([Figure 6.1](#)).

Fig 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly from April 2010 to September 2021



The number of cases closed in Q2 2021/22 varied across councils, ranging from 153 in Belfast to 20 in Derry City and Strabane. Five of the 11 councils reported an increase in the

number of enforcement cases closed in Q2 2021/22 compared with the same period a year earlier. This increase was greatest in Antrim and Newtownabbey, where the number of cases closed increased from 15 to 116. Six councils reported a decrease in the number of cases closed with the greatest of these in percentage terms in Derry City and Strabane (-50.0%; down from 40 to 20).

The most common reasons for enforcement cases closing in Q2 2021/22 were that no breach had actually occurred (34.5%) or that the case had been remedied or resolved (23.1%). Together these accounted for nearly three-fifths (488; 57.6%) of the 847 cases closed during the quarter.

A total of **828 enforcement cases** were **concluded**<sup>3</sup> during the second quarter of 2021/22; a decrease of 5.6% from the previous quarter (877) but up by 9.8% from the same period a year earlier (754). Across councils, the number of cases concluded during Q2 2021/22 ranged from 156 in Belfast to 18 in Derry City and Strabane.

Three councils recorded increases in the number of enforcement cases concluded in Q2 2021/22 compared with the previous year, with the greatest increase occurring in Antrim and Newtownabbey, up from 17 to 107. Seven councils reported a decline in the number of enforcement cases concluded over the year with the largest decline reported in Mid Ulster (down 58.7%; from 63 to 26).

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

During Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, 394 cases were concluded. Consecutive increases in the number concluded were recorded during the following three quarters, with quarterly decreases reported in the last two quarters in the series.

### 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.**

Across all councils, **72.3%** enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks during the first six months of 2021/22, meeting the statutory target of 70%. This represents an increase from the rate reported for the first six months of 2020/21 (68.7%) and may indicate that the impacts of coronavirus pandemic on councils' ability to progress enforcement cases to conclusion is lessening.

Performance against the target was most affected during Q1 2020/21, the first full quarter impacted by the restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic, when less than two-thirds (59.6%) of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks across all

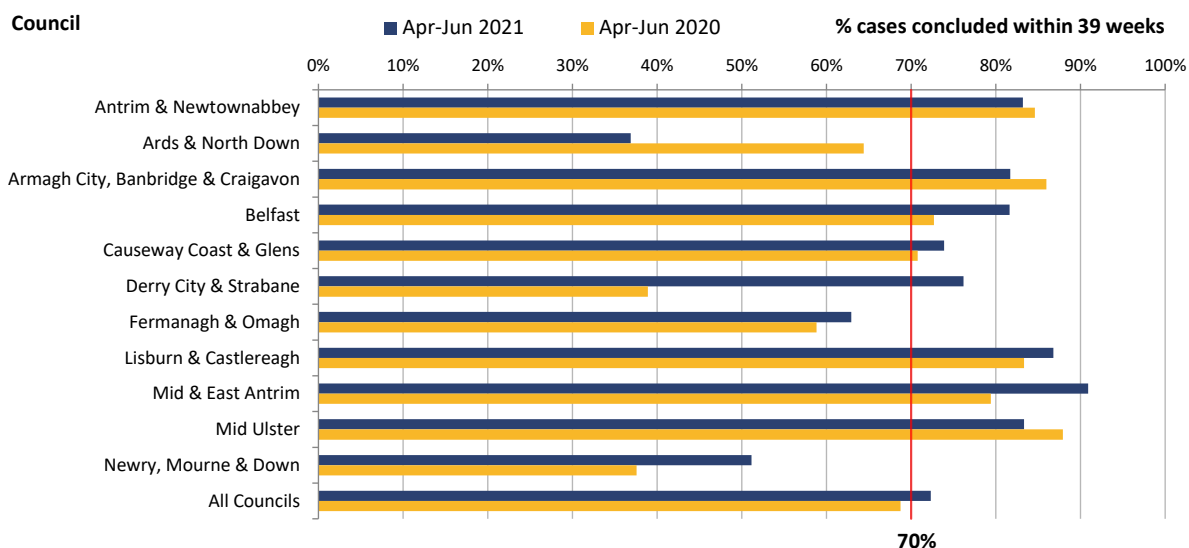
<sup>3</sup> Refer to [User Guidance – Enforcement activity](#) for definitions of closed and concluded enforcement cases.

councils. This has improved in the latest five quarters with the target being achieved overall in four out of the last five quarterly periods.

During the first six months of 2021/22 eight of the 11 councils were meeting the statutory target ([Figure 6.2](#)).

[Refer to Table 6.2.](#)

Fig 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, April to September 2020 & 2021



The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of September 2021 was **3,855**; the fourth highest end of quarter figure since live enforcement cases were first recorded in 2012/13. The three higher figures have all come in the past year. This suggests that the coronavirus pandemic and resulting restrictions continues to impact enforcement activity.

Examining the last six quarters in more detail, however, reveals that the number of live enforcement cases increased during the first three quarters of 2020/21, as the number of cases opened exceeded the number closed, reaching a peak of 4,074 live cases at the end of December 2020. In the quarters that followed the number of live cases have fluctuated, with the live number reducing to 3,855 at the end of September 2021. In Q2 2021/22 the number of enforcement cases opened (762) was lower than the number closed (847), therefore reducing the live load in the latest quarter.

The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **1,206** at the end of September 2021, accounting for 31.3% of all live cases. This compared with 27.8% of live cases at the end of September 2020.

[Refer to Tables and 6.1 and 6.4.](#)

Across councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the highest number of live cases at the end of September 2021 (834), with almost one-half (47.6%) of these in the system for over two years.

Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of live cases (94) at the end of September 2021, with 17.0% of these in the system for over two years.

The number of live enforcement cases decreased in seven of the 11 councils between the end of September 2020 and the end of September 2021. The decrease was greatest in Belfast, where the number of live cases decreased by 42.7% over the year (from 483 to 277).

The overall decrease in the enforcement live count recorded across the year was offset by increases reported in the remaining four councils, with the greatest of these reported in Mid Ulster (up 35.6%; from 202 to 274).

[Refer to Table 6.5.](#)

### **Compliance activity**

There were 11 prosecutions initiated during Q2 2021/22, across four councils, with Causeway Coast and Glens initiating the most (four).

During the second quarter of 2021/22, there were three convictions across NI. Three councils recorded convictions during this period.

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



# Chapter 7: Renewable energy activity

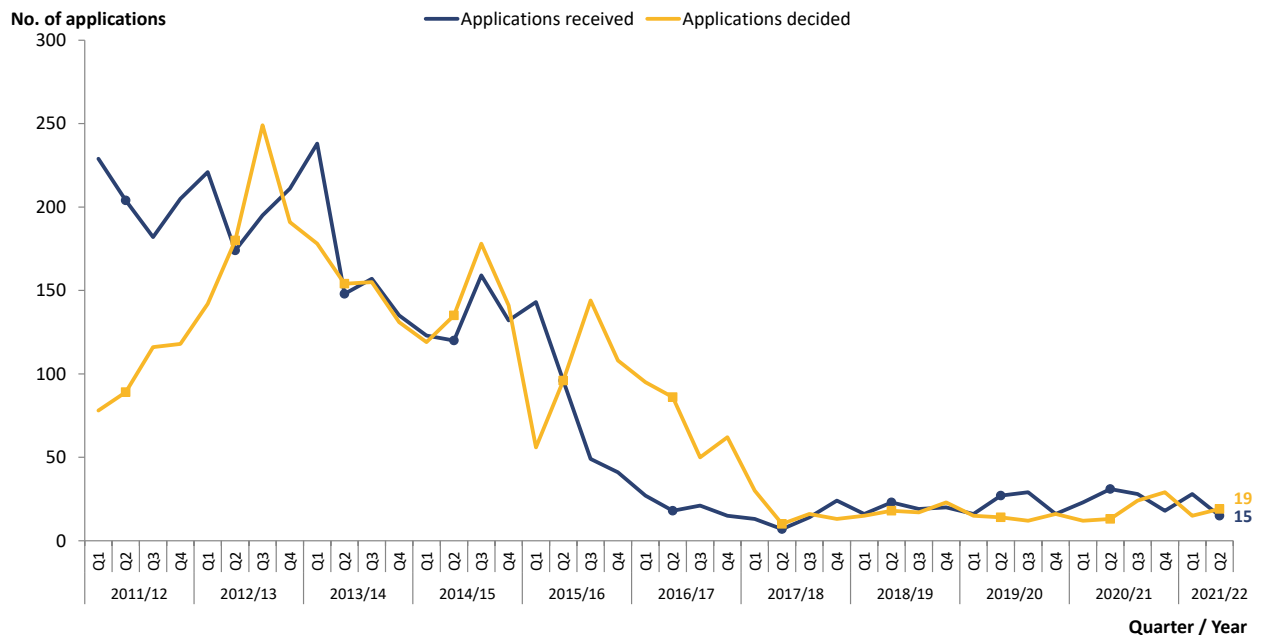
## Chapter 7: Renewable energy (RE) activity

### Renewable energy applications received

**Fifteen renewable energy** applications were **received** in Q2 2021/22; a decrease of 16 applications compared with the same period the previous year (31).

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 (a **92.6%** decrease from 204 applications in Q2 2011/12 to 15 applications in Q2 2021/22) 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 ([Figure 7.1](#)).

Fig 7.1 Renewable Energy applications, quarterly from April 2011 to September 2021



### Renewable energy applications decided

The number of renewable energy applications **decided** during Q2 2021/22 was **19**; six more than reported for the same period a year earlier (13) but a **89.4%** decrease from the series’ second quarter peak of 180 applications decided in 2012/13 ([Figure 7.1](#)). **Five** renewable energy applications were **withdrawn** during Q2 2021/22. [Refer to Table 7.1.](#)

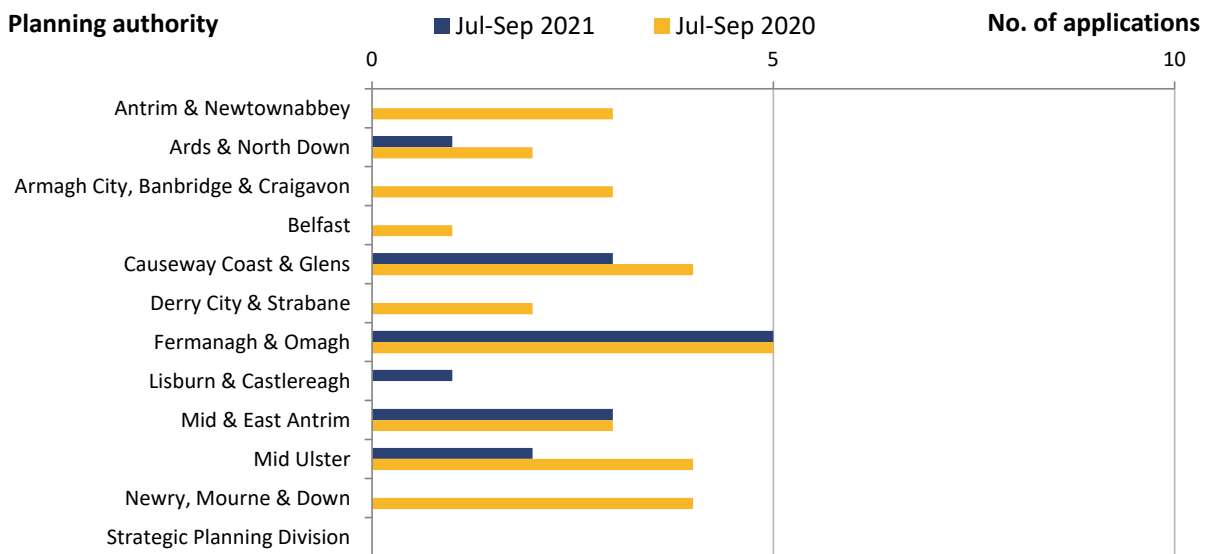
The average processing time for the 19 renewable energy applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the second quarter of 2021/22 was 44.6 weeks across NI; this represented a slight decrease over the latest quarter (from 45.2 weeks) but an increase on the figure reported for the same period a year earlier (36.0 weeks).



Single wind turbines continue to be the most common renewable energy application, accounting for 13 out of 15 applications received during Q2 2021/22. In addition, 17 of the 19 renewable energy decisions issued during the most recent quarter were for single wind turbines. [Refer to Table 7.2.](#)

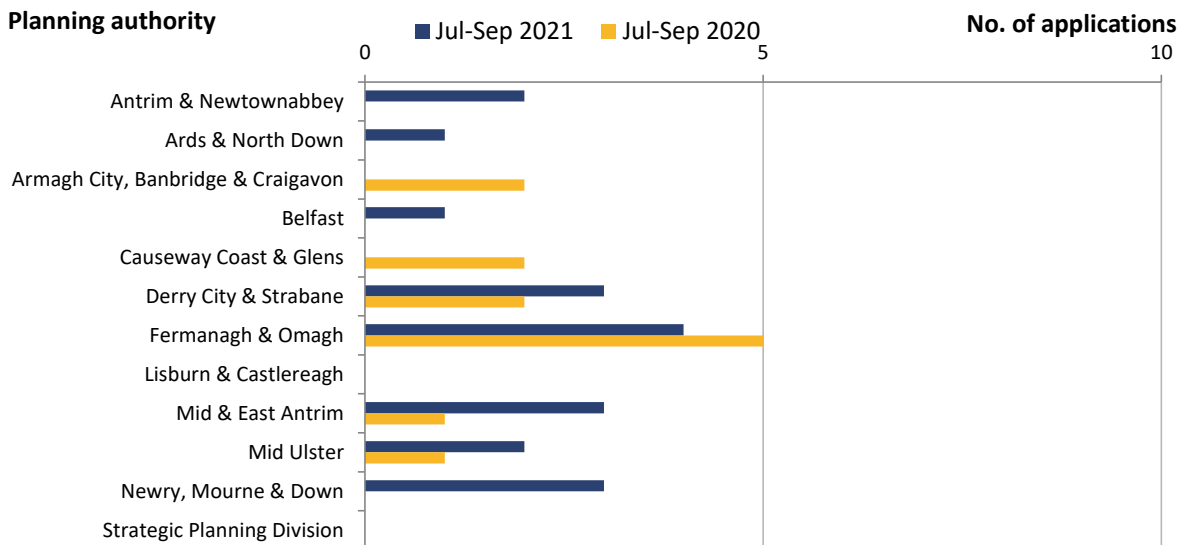
[Figure 7.2](#) shows the distribution of renewable energy applications received across the different planning authorities, with Fermanagh and Omagh (5) receiving the most in Q2 2021/22.

Fig 7.2 Renewable Energy applications received by authority, July to September 2020 & 2021



[Figure 7.3](#) shows the distribution of decisions issued on renewable energy applications across the different planning authorities, with Fermanagh and Omagh (four) issuing the most during the second quarter of 2021/22.

Fig 7.3 Renewable Energy applications decided by authority, July to September 2020 & 2021

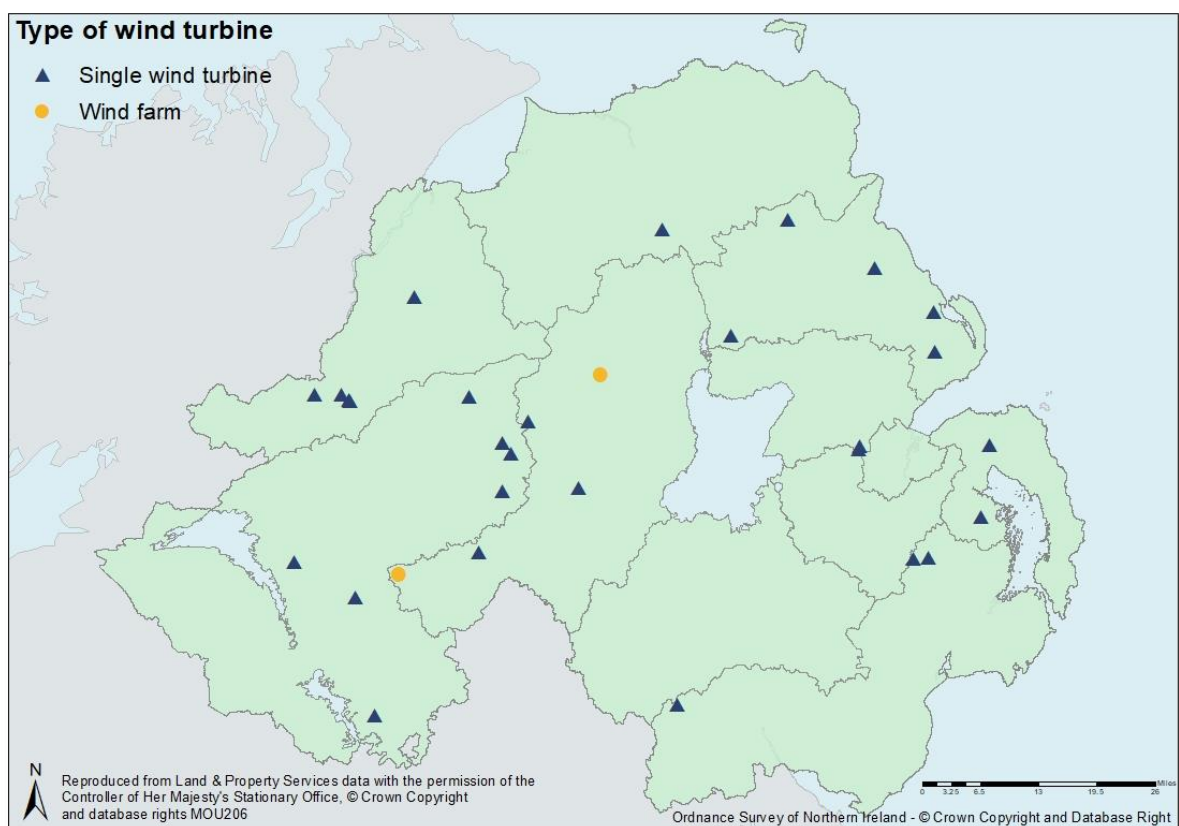


At the end of September 2021, there were **124 live renewable energy applications** in the planning system across NI; almost three-quarters of these (72.6%, 90 of 124) were for single wind turbines. Of these 124 live applications, 45.2% were in the planning system for over a year; an increase from the proportion reported for the same point in 2020 (40.8%).

The **NI approval rate** for renewable energy applications was **94.7%** in Q2 2021/22, with 18 out of the 19 decisions issued during this period being approvals.

[Figure 7.4](#) displays the locations of wind energy applications approved during the first six months of 2021/22. A total of 28 single wind turbines and two wind farms were approved during this period.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, April to September 2021



[Refer to Tables 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4.](#)

## User Guidance

### Notes on data source and quality

The records of all planning applications from 1 July 2021 to 30 September 2021 were transferred in October 2021 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Northern Ireland Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) which involved quality checks and inspection of the coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils and the Department were provided with their own headline planning statistics as part of the quality assurance process. On completion of ASRB and planning authority validation, a final extract was taken in November 2021. Quarterly data for 2021/22 are regarded as provisional and will retain this status until the annual report of the 2021/22 is published in July 2022.

### Quality assurance of administrative data sources

In 2015 the UK Statistics Authority published a regulatory standard for the quality assurance of administrative data (QAAD). This standard is supported with an [Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit](#) which provides useful guidance to assure the quality of administrative data used in the production of statistics. ASRB have carried out a QAAD assessment on the Northern Ireland Planning Portal application – the administrative data source that is used to produce the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics. [This report](#) will be reviewed and updated as necessary on a biannual basis, with the most recent update published in May 2021.

### Background quality report

In order to provide users with further information on how the statistics in the NI Planning Statistics report have been compiled and detail on the quality of the data used, a [background quality report has been published](#). This report will be reviewed and updated as necessary on a biannual basis, with the most recent update published in May 2021.

### Regionally significant / major / local development applications after 1 April 2014

A new classification hierarchy of development for planning applications came into effect on 1 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 1 April 2015. It should be noted that there are some differences between the initial administrative hierarchy classifications in place from 1 April 2014 and the final classifications set out in the [Planning \(Development Management\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2015 \(S.R.2015 No.71\)](#). Data and analysis based on this new hierarchy is available from 1 April 2015.

*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. Note that from 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has subsequently been extended until 31 March 2022.

*Major developments* have important economic, social and environmental implications. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community. Note that from 1 May 2020, the requirement to hold a public event as part of the pre-application community consultation was temporarily removed for five months in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This has subsequently been extended until 31 March 2022.

*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

### [Refers to Chapter 2 of report](#)

*Retained Section 26 (former Article 31) applications* are major applications being processed by the Department as Article 31 (under the Planning (NI) Order 1991) where a decision had not issued before 1 April 2015. These are now 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 and 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 Chapter 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 Chapter 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.

## Departmental target

From Q1 2019/20 the Departmental target for Regionally Significant planning applications in the NI Planning Statistics publication changed.

The previous target was:

*It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing 50% of regionally significant planning applications to a ministerial recommendation within 30 weeks, subject to pre-application discussions having taken place and meeting the requirements of relevant environmental legislation.*

From Q1 2019/20 onwards, this was replaced by:

*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.*

## Enforcement activity

[Refers to Chapter 6 of report](#)

Compliance and enforcement are important functions of the planning process. The summary data presented in this report and [accompanying data tables](#) covers enforcement cases opened, enforcement cases closed and concluded, court action taken and the live caseload as at the end of the quarter. A case is closed for one of the following 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; or
- the case is closed.

Please note that the number of cases closed is not a sub-set of the number of cases concluded in that period - cases that are concluded in any given period may not be closed until subsequent periods, and cases that are closed in any given period may have been concluded in previous quarters.

The value at 70% is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point at the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile of the sequence.

## Processing times

The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The average processing time is the median. The median is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point in the middle of the sequence. The median is used because some planning applications can take several years to reach a decision. As a consequence, these extreme cases (outliers) can inflate the mean to the extent that the mean may not be considered as 'typical'. Therefore the median is considered 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. This 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 plot the location and subsequently determine the urban/rural banding.

From Q2 2016/17, an additional split was introduced which reports 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 coordinates as recorded on the planning application in conjunction with Westminster Parliamentary Constituency boundaries (2008).

## 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.

## Note on exclusions

In addition to processing planning applications and enforcement activity, planning authorities deal with a range of other planning related work. Data on this 'non-application' workload is generally excluded from the main publication as it does not inform any of the calculation of performance against relevant statutory targets. Information on this part of the planning authorities' workload is included in [Table 9.1](#) of the accompanying data tables. Details of these exclusions are:

### 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).

### Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs), either proposed or existing, have not been included in the main NI Planning Statistics bulletin since 2012/13. 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

While applications for planning permission and other consents were included in the operational statistics produced prior to the transfer of planning powers, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) were excluded. In the interests of consistency TPOs are excluded from the main NI Planning Statistics bulletin.

## Uses of the data

The data in this statistical release are used by a wide variety of users for a range of purposes. For example, the Department uses the information to inform policy and monitor performance in relation to planning in Northern Ireland, as required in legislation. Local councils use the information for policy briefing and development, and to monitor performance. The data are also used to ensure democratic accountability in answers to Northern Ireland Assembly Questions, ministerial correspondence, Freedom of Information Act cases and queries from the public.

## User engagement

Users are encouraged to provide feedback on how these statistics are used and how well they meet their needs. Comments on any issues relating to this statistical release are welcomed and encouraged. Feedback can be provided through an [ongoing customer survey](#).

Alternatively users can email ASRB directly at: [ASRB@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:ASRB@nisra.gov.uk).

During 2019, ASRB undertook a specific user consultation exercise and [results of this were published](#) in October 2019. It is anticipated that an updated user consultation exercise will take place during late winter 2021/22.

## Further information

Information and statistics for England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, as well as other relevant NISRA statistics, can be found at the following links:

### England

This [statistical release](#) presents National Statistics on authorities that undertake district and county level planning activities in England. It covers information on planning applications received and decided, including decisions on applications for residential developments (dwellings) and enforcement activities. Data are provided at national and local planning authority level.



## Scotland

The Scottish Government establishes overarching land use policies and principles in Scottish Planning Policy, which is applied spatially in the National Planning Framework for Scotland. In the four largest city regions in Scotland, Strategic Development Planning Authorities prepare strategic development plans which set out the vision for long term development and which should address important land use issues that cross local authority boundaries or involve strategic infrastructure. There are 34 planning authorities in Scotland, 32 local authorities and two national park authorities, who must deliver local development plans, in these plans they must identify sites for new development and set decision-making policies. [Published planning statistics](#) include data on planning performance and vacant and derelict land.

## Wales

The context for planning in Wales is established by Planning Policy Wales. There are 25 planning authorities in Wales and each must prepare a local development plan. These plans must conform to the national context and the plans must set out proposals and land use policies for the development of the area. Regional planning is a discretionary layer of the planning system, the Welsh Government has powers to identify 'Strategic Planning Areas', who have planning powers to produce strategic plans. Data on planning services performance are [published](#) on the Welsh Government website.

## Republic of Ireland

[Central Statistics Office provides](#) a number of tables which present the number of planning permissions granted, floor area and units. Region and county data is available in associated tables.

## Northern Ireland

### Building Control (LPS Starts and completions)

Land & Property Services (LPS) receives information from Building Control in each council in Northern Ireland. [This information](#) contains the number of recorded new dwellings (houses and apartments) started and completed.

### Housing Bulletin, Department for Communities (DfC)

[DfC produce](#) quarterly and annual compendium publications of housing statistics, as well as biannual homelessness statistics and an ongoing review of data included in these publications and their proposed changes. The Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin is a quarterly bulletin containing information on new housing starts and completions, homelessness, the House Price Index and new house sales and prices.

## Cross-government working group on housing and planning

The Department for Infrastructure is part of a cross-government working group, working to improve the trustworthiness, quality and value of housing and planning statistics across the UK. ASRB's involvement in this group ensures continuous engagement with producers of similar and related statistics across the UK, ensuring opportunity for collaboration and improvement of this publication through understanding the wider UK picture. More information can be found on the [Government Statistical Service website](#).

## OpenDataNI

Datasets accompanying the finalised Northern Ireland Planning Statistics annual reports are made available on [the OpenDataNI website](#). These datasets contain information on received and decided planning applications during the year, as well as details of pending applications at the end of the financial year. Datasets are available from 2016/17.

## NINIS

Finalised annual data on planning applications and enforcements are also available on the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service, from 2002/03 (where applicable). These data can be found under the 'People and Places' theme on the [NINIS website](#).

## Planning readership list

An email alert is sent after the release of each NI Planning Statistics publication to readers who wish to be informed of new / updated planning statistics. To sign up for this free service, please email: [ASRB@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:ASRB@nisra.gov.uk).

## Pre-release access

Details of persons who receive pre-release access to this statistical release up to 24 hours prior to publication can be found on the [Department for Infrastructure website](#).

# Appendix 1

## Definitions

The statistical categories referred to in [Chapter 5](#) and [Data 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 [Data 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.

### Reader information

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.