

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2015/16 COMBINED SECOND AND THIRD QUARTERLY BULLETIN

(July - December 2015: Provisional figures)



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Key Points

- There were 3,050 planning applications received in Northern Ireland during October to December 2015 (Q3), an increase of 4.7% over the previous quarter although a decrease of 7.4% compared to the same period in 2014/15. This comprised 3,035 local development, 14 major development and 1 regionally significant development applications.
- During Q3, 2,978 planning applications were decided, up 6.2% on the previous quarter and similar to the same period a year earlier. This reverses the temporary large reduction in decisions issued in Q1, immediately following the transfer of planning powers to councils, and means that decisions issued are again keeping pace with applications received.
- In Q3, the average processing time for major development applications in Northern Ireland (NI) was 47.6 weeks, compared to 39.6 weeks in the previous quarter. The year to date average processing time (Apr-Dec 2015) for such applications was 41.8 weeks. At council level, the year to date average processing times ranged from 28.2 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey to 54.8 weeks in Belfast City; with 2 of the 11 councils currently meeting the statutory 30 week target.
- The number of local applications decided in Q3 was 2,904, up 6.7% on the previous quarter but notably up by almost a half (48.3%) on the first quarter of 2015/16. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon council (407) decided the most local applications during Q3, an increase of 79.3% over the previous quarter.
- The average processing time for local development applications in Q3 was 20.6 weeks, up on the 19.0 weeks recorded in the previous quarter. The year to date average processing time (Apr-Dec 2015) for such applications was 19.2 weeks. At council level the year to date average processing times ranged from 14.2 weeks in Fermanagh and Omagh to 32.6 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down, with 3 of the 11 councils currently meeting the statutory 15 week target.
- Nine of the eleven councils are currently on track to meet the statutory enforcement case target with a high of 88.0% of cases concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey during the first nine months of 2015/16 followed by Mid and East Antrim (85.3%). Newry, Mourne and Down (58.0%), and Fermanagh and Omagh (58.6%), are currently below the target level, however, over the last quarter these two councils have recorded the greatest improvement in performance (+15.1 and +14.7 percentage points respectively).
- The overall Northern Ireland approval rate in quarter 3 for all planning applications was 93.3%, a decrease of one and a half percentage points from the previous quarter but similar to the rate for the same period last year. Approval rates for planning applications during Q3 varied across councils from a high of 97.3% in Mid Ulster down to 88.9% in Fermanagh and Omagh.
- There were 49 renewable energy applications received in Q3, the lowest figure in this quarter's series from 2009/10. Applications received fell by almost half (49.0%) compared to Q2 and were well over two thirds (69.2%) lower than the same period a year earlier, possibly linked to government funding reductions and grid capacity issues.

Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of provisional Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for the new district councils, and the Department of the Environment (the 'Department'), during the second and third quarters of 2015/16. Combining these quarters has been necessary due to the previously announced delay in the release of the second quarter figures. Whilst the bulletin and accompanying tables cover both quarters for completeness, the focus of the commentary is on the latest third quarter results. Please note that all quarterly figures are provisional.

Background

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the '2011 Act') sets out the legislative framework for development management in NI and provides that, from 1 April 2015, councils now largely have responsibility for this planning function. Planning applications for development categorised as being either major development or local development are determined by the councils. Responsibility for planning applications for regionally significant development rests with the Department. In addition, the Department retains responsibility for legacy 'Article 31' applications (i.e. Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991). Furthermore, the Department has the power to 'call in' both major and local development applications from councils, where it so directs, and determine them (see 'User Guidance' for a fuller description of the different planning application types). Responsibility for planning legislation, and for formulating and co-ordinating policy for securing the orderly and consistent development of land, remains with the Department. Consequently, the responsibility for development management is shared between the 11 new councils and the Department.

The Department will continue to have responsibility for the provision and

publication of Official Statistics relating to the overall development management function, including enforcement. The quarterly and annual reports provide the NI headline results split by district council (and the Department where relevant). These data will also provide councils with information on their performance in order to meet their own reporting obligations under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. Note that whilst pre-transfer activity volumes can be mapped historically to the new organisational areas from which the demands arise, it would not be valid to do the same with performance data as the newly established district councils did not exist, nor do they neatly overlap with the old area planning office jurisdictions. This first year, therefore, will be regarded as a base year for the reporting of performance-related data at council level with comparative trend data then building from that point onwards. Note that historic comparisons of performance at NI level are still possible.

Statistics included in this report

This bulletin provides an overall view of planning activity across NI. It provides summary statistical information on council progress across the 3 new 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 DOE Corporate Business Plan targets (see Appendix 1 for 2015/16 departmental planning targets).

All of the information underlying the charts and graphs featured in this bulletin are included in accompanying Excel tables (see Appendix 2 for additional 'Definitions' used in these tables). This summary bulletin provides an overview and high level commentary with more details and further analyses available in the Excel tables. Where relevant, some of the more detailed findings may be referred to in the commentary.

Revisions and changes since Quarter 1

(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 has led to a number of revisions to the first quarter provisional figures which are reflected in this latest bulletin. The validation exercise additionally highlighted some inconsistencies in major and local development classification between the current year and 2014/15 when the new classification hierarchy was first administratively implemented. It has been decided, therefore, that 2015/16, when the classification hierarchy was given full legal effect, will become the base year for future comparisons of major and local development activity. As such, back-comparisons with 2014/15 for these application types will no longer be made.

(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 has led to some further revisions from the previously released first quarter 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 new 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 new tables will be retained until the legacy applications become a negligible part of overall council workload.

Future Releases

The finalised annual report for 2015/16 is due to be published in late June 2016.

The next quarterly release is due in September 2016. This will contain planning data up to 30th June 2016 and will return the release of planning statistics to their regular quarterly schedule.

See Gov.UK Release Calendar for release dates of future publications – <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>.

1. Overall NI Planning Activity

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly – Apr 2005 – Dec 2015

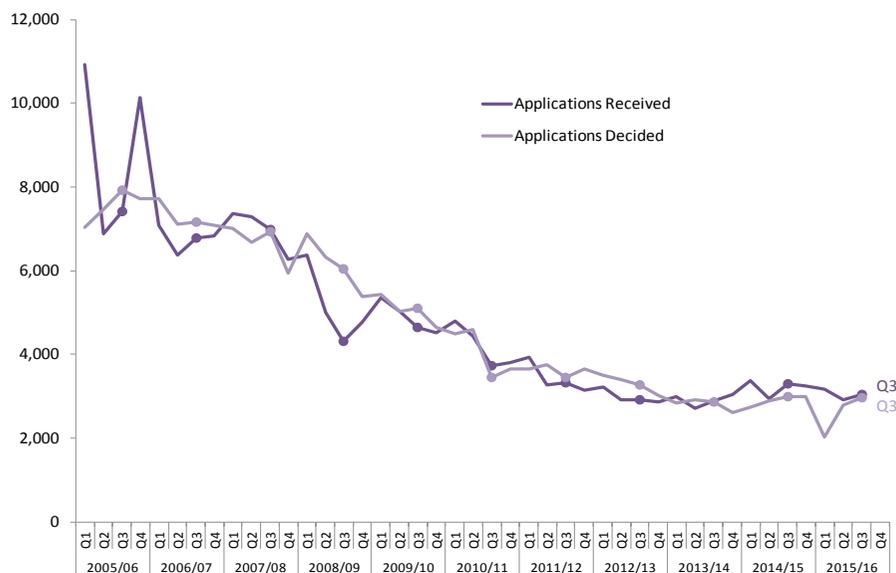
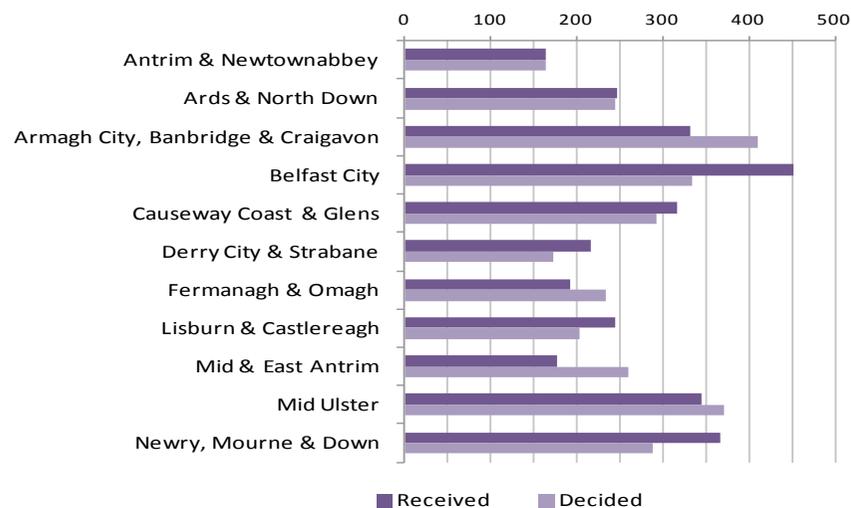


Fig 1.2 Applications received and decided by council, Oct - Dec 2015 (Q3)



Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department, in the period October to December 2015 (Q3), was **3,050**, an increase of 4.7% on the previous quarter (Jul–Sept, Q2). Compared to the same quarter a year earlier, however, the number of applications received decreased by 7.4%. The number of planning applications had generally been declining since 2005/06 in line with the economic downturn. However, since 2012/13 the number of applications received each quarter has largely stabilised.

In NI during the third quarter of 2015/16, there were **16.6 planning applications received per 10,000 population**. This is a stark decline when compared to the 43.2 applications made in the same quarter of 2005/06. The supporting Excel table additionally provides activity per head of population for each new district council.

In Q3, Belfast City received the most (451) planning applications, followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (366), between them accounting for over one quarter (26.8%) of all applications received across NI. This is similar when we look across the first nine months of 2015/16 with Belfast City receiving the most planning applications (**1,196**), followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (**1,103**) and Mid Ulster (**1,016**).

Applications Decided

The number of planning **decisions** issued during October to December 2015 was **2,978**, an increase of 6.2% on the previous quarter (**2,803**) and similar to a year earlier (**3,001**). In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning authority out to councils, the level of decisions dropped sharply. However, notably in quarter two, and continuing into quarter three, the number of planning decisions issued has returned to similar levels recorded over the last four years and is again keeping pace with applications received.

Fig 1.3 Approval rates by council, Oct - Dec 2015

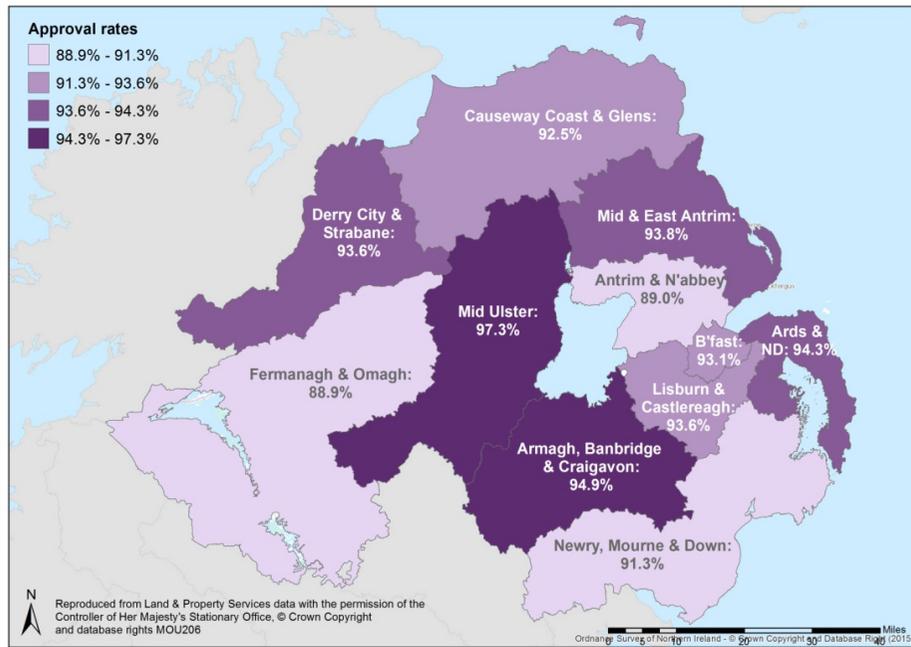


Fig 1.4 Live applications by council at end of Dec 2015



During Q3, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon issued the most decisions (411) up by a very notable 78.7% on the 230 decisions reported in Q2, followed by Mid Ulster (371) who were up by 15.2% over the same time period. In the first nine months of 2015/16, Belfast City has issued the most decisions (**896**), followed by Mid Ulster (**889**) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (**805**).

[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

In addition to this, councils deal with a range of other non application work. For example, during Q3 they processed to decision or withdrawal 51 discharge of conditions, 100 certificates of lawfulness and 116 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 for the period October to December 2015 was **93.3%**, a decrease of one and a half percentage points from the previous quarter but similar to the rate for the same period last year. Approval rates for planning applications during Q3 varied across councils from a high of 97.3% in Mid Ulster to 88.9% in Fermanagh and Omagh.

Live applications¹

At NI level, the number of **live applications greater than one year old** at the end of December 2015 was **1,343**. This continues the five year downward trend in the proportion of older applications, with now nearly 1 in 6 applications taking over one year to process compared with just over 1 in 3 at the end of December 2010. More recently, the proportion of cases over one year old has increased from 14.8% of all live applications at the end of June 2015 to 17.7% of all live applications at the end of December 2015.

¹ It is important to note that cases currently over one year will have been inherited from the Department.

[Refer to Table 1.3](#)

The proportion of live applications greater than one year old at the end of December 2015 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.4. Antrim and Newtownabbey had the lowest proportion of cases over one year (9.0%), which equates to nearly 1 in every 11 applications compared to almost 1 in every 4 in Derry City and Strabane.

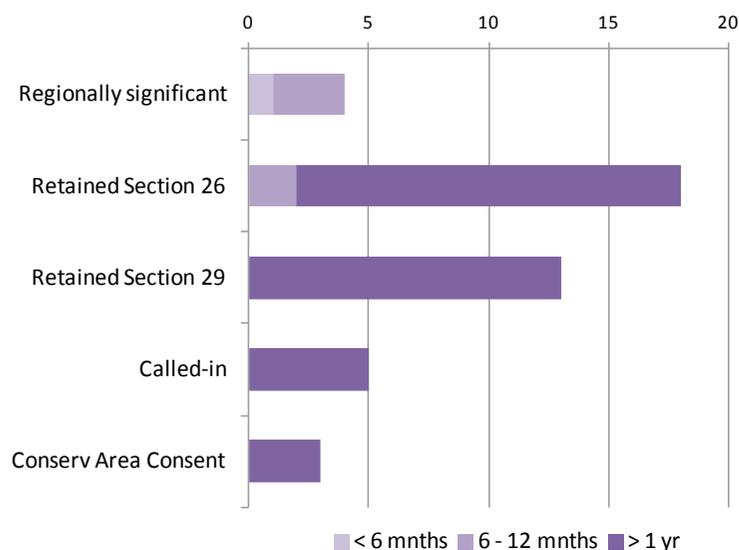
[Refer to Table 1.4](#)

2. Departmental Activity

At the end of December 2015 there were **4** ongoing **regionally significant development (RSD)** applications, **5** called-in; **3** conservation area consent (i.e. consent to demolish); and **31** retained applications.

[Refer to Table 2.2](#)

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end of Dec 2015



During Q3, the Department received **1** RSD planning application, which gives a total of **4 RSD** applications in the first nine months of the year, **3** of which were for renewable energy proposals.

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. No RSD applications were decided during the first three quarters of 2015/16. It is not yet possible, therefore, to report on the Departmental processing target for these application types (see Appendix 1 for target definition).

The Department reached decisions on **4** applications during Q3. Two of these decisions were on 'retained section 29' (*former non Article 31*) applications being dealt with by the Department's Strategic Planning Division. As they were close to determination at 1 April 2015, they were retained for determination as if the Department had called them in under Section 29 of the Planning Act (NI) 2015.

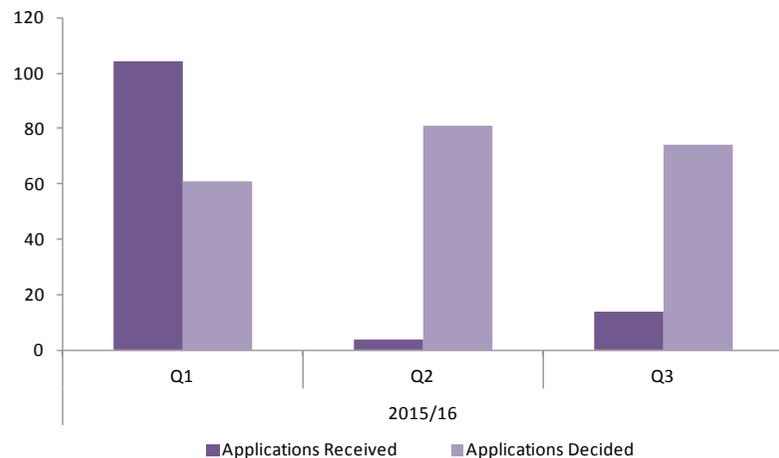
The further **2** decisions were on 'called-in'² applications – these initially went to councils and the Minister/Department directed that the applications should fall to the Department for determination. **Two** 'retained section 29' applications were withdrawn during this period. These applications, as previously mentioned, pre-date the transfer of planning powers as per the 2011 Act. Overall the average processing time for those applications which were decided or withdrawn by the Department was **125.1** weeks.

[Refer to Table 2.1](#)

² Called-in applications are those initially made to councils where the Minister/Department directs that these should fall to the Department for determination. Availability of the called in date is currently being investigated with a view to future reporting.

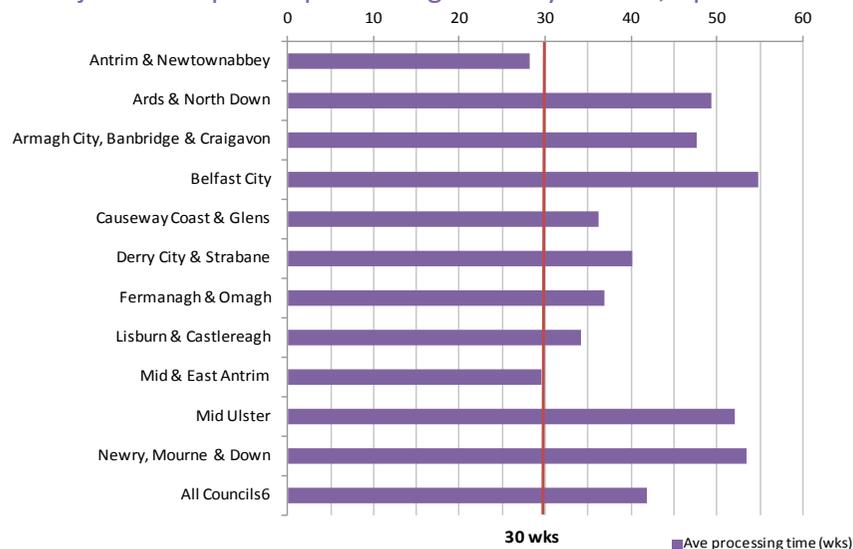
3. Major Development Planning Applications

Fig 3.1 Local Development applications, quarterly Apr 2014 - Dec 2015^(r)



^(r) Following the review of classifications, quarter 1 figures have been revised.

Fig 3.2 Major Development processing times by council, Apr - Dec 2015



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. Excluding RSD applications (reported in Section 2), the number of **major** planning applications **received** by councils, during Q3 was **14**.

From 1st July 2015, pre-application community consultation became a pre-requisite to a major application. This means that major applications will not be accepted until they have gone through the minimum 12 week consultation process and notice has been submitted to the council or Department. This helps explain the very significant drop in major applications when you compare the small numbers received in the second and third quarters against the 104 received in Q1. It may also mean that Q1 was atypically high with major applications potentially being submitted ahead of the new process coming into effect.

In Q3, **74 major** planning applications were **decided** and **2 withdrawn**.

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.

During Q3, the **average processing time** to decide **major** applications was **47.6 weeks** across all councils. This was eight weeks longer than the previous quarter (Jul-Sep) processing time of 39.6 weeks. Moreover, the **average processing time** in the first nine months of 2015/16 was **41.8 weeks**, nearly twelve weeks above the statutory target.

[Refer to Table 3.1](#)

The shortest average processing time³ for major applications in the first nine months of 2015/16 was 28.2 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey (based on 18 decided and 1 withdrawn) while the longest was 54.8 weeks in Belfast City (based on 37 decided and 1 withdrawn). Two of the 11 councils were meeting the target at the end of December 2015.

[Refer to Table 3.2](#)

A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

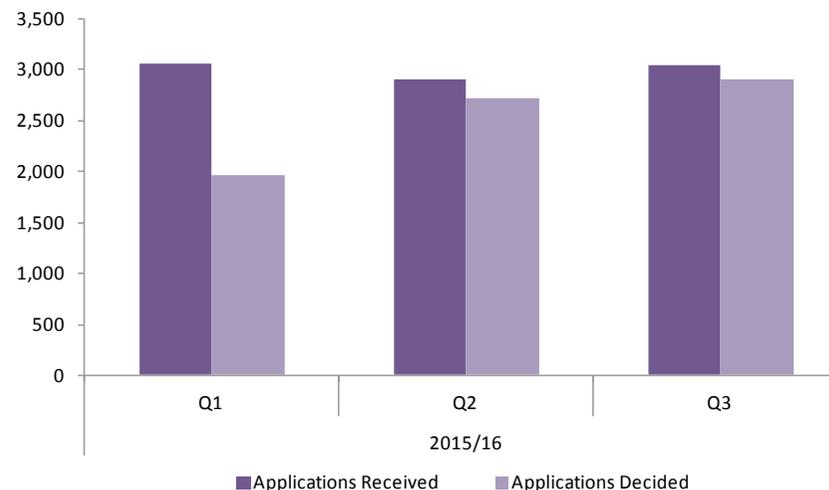
It is interesting to note that the average processing time for major applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (20.8 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (44.0 weeks). It should be borne in mind, however, that the former is still based on comparatively few cases and hence will be subject to greater change as the year progresses.

³ **Note**, for most councils the quarterly processing times are based on a small number of cases, therefore reporting for councils focuses on year to date processing times.

4. Local Development Planning Applications

Local Development planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications received and determined by a council. The number of **local** planning applications **received** in NI during Q3 was **3,035**, up 4.3% on Q2, but, similar to the levels received in Q1.

Fig 4.1 Local Development applications, quarterly Apr 2014 - Dec 2015^(r)



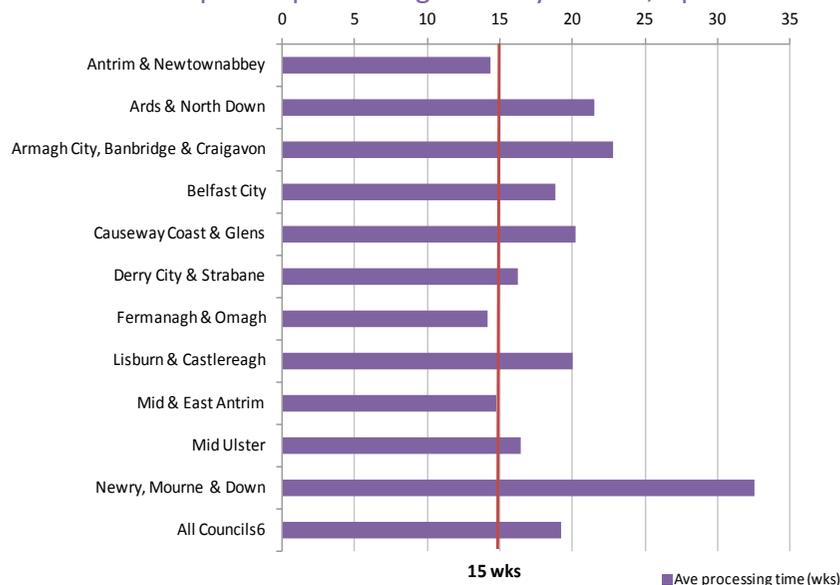
^(r) Following the review of classifications, quarter 1 figures have been revised.

The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q3 was **2,904**, up 6.7% on the previous quarter but notably up by almost a half (48.3%) on the first quarter of 2015/16. There were 126 local applications withdrawn in Q3. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon council (407) decided the most local applications during Q3, an increase of 79.3% over the previous quarter.

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils, the number of decisions reached on local planning applications was considerably lower than the number of applications being received. Moving into Q2 and Q3, the volume of

applications decided aligns more closely with the number of applications being received.

Fig 4.2 Local Development processing times by council, Apr - Dec 2015



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.

In Q3, the **average processing time** to decide **local** applications was **20.6 weeks** across all councils. This was an increase on the 19.0 weeks recorded in the previous quarter. The **year to date processing time** to decide local applications up to the end of December 2015 was **19.2 weeks**, over four weeks longer than the statutory target.

[Refer to Table 4.1](#)

In the first nine months of 2015/16, the shortest average processing time for local applications was 14.2 weeks in Fermanagh and Omagh (based on 686 local applications decided and 41 withdrawn) whilst the longest was 32.6 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down (based on 679 local applications decided and 28 withdrawn). Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target.

[Refer to Table 4.2](#)

A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

It is interesting to note that the average processing time for local applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is significantly shorter (13.4 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (28.2 weeks).

5. Development Type

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, Oct - Dec 2015

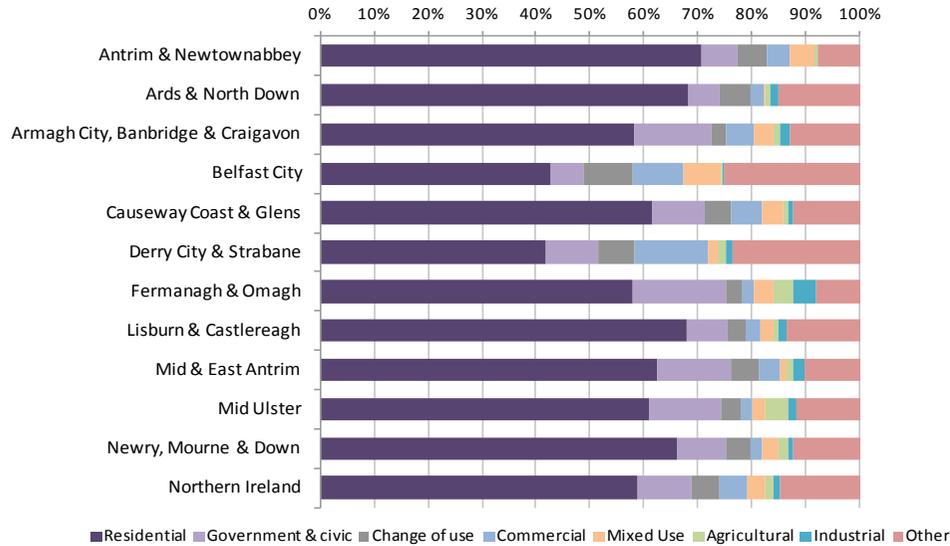
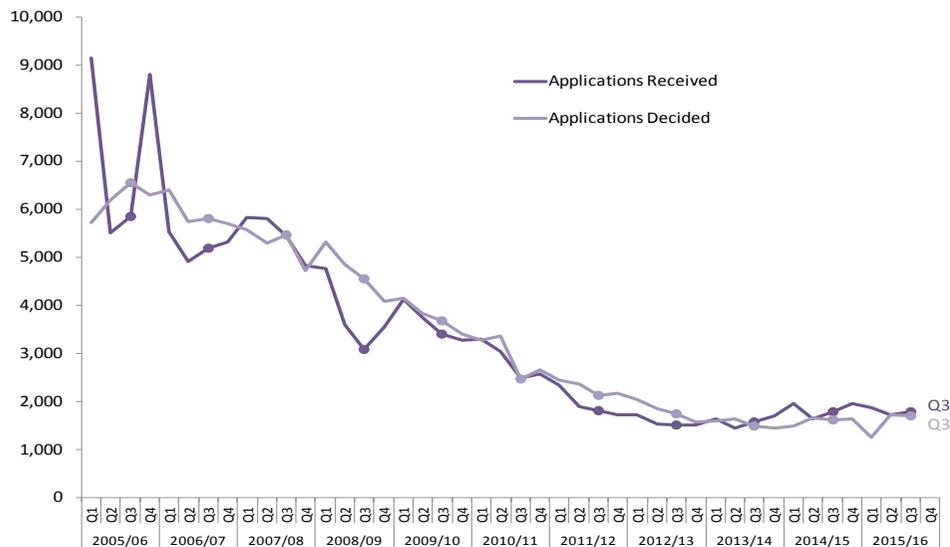


Fig 5.2 NI Residential applications, quarterly from Apr 2005 - Dec 2015



Residential applications received during Q3 made up **58.9%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications. Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

In Antrim and Newtownabbey, seven out of every ten applications (70.6%) were for residential development, compared to just over four in every ten in Belfast City (42.8%) and Derry City and Strabane (41.9%). Both of these councils, however, receives a much higher proportion of applications in the 'Other' (25.3% and 23.5% respectively) and 'Commercial' (9.3% and 13.8% respectively) categories. See Appendix 2 – 'Definitions' for a description of the types of applications included in these categories.

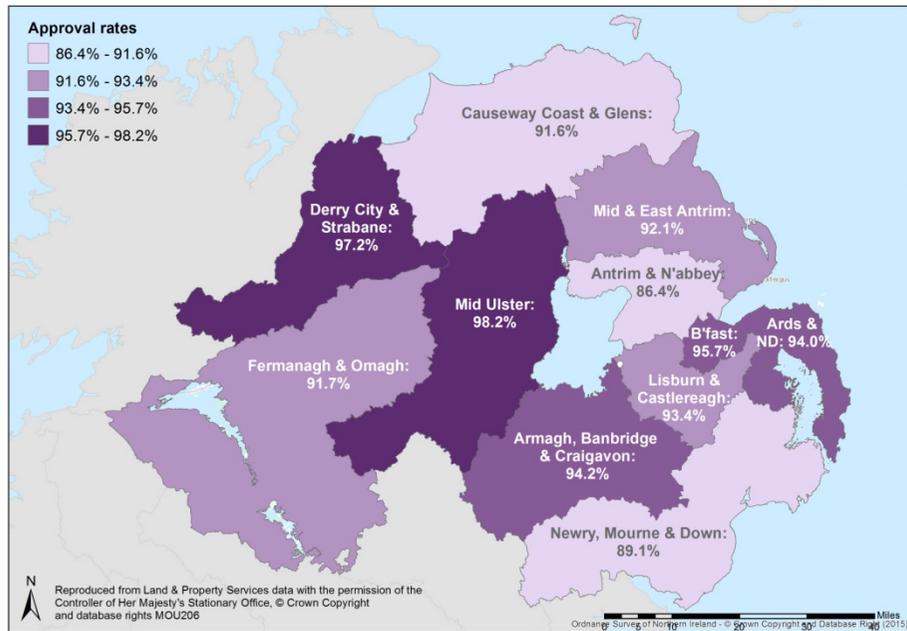
[Refer to Table 5.2](#)

The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in total for Northern Ireland in the period October to December 2015 was **1,795**, an increase of 4.4% compared to the previous quarter but similar to the number received for the same period in 2014/15. However, this is still almost one fifth (19.0%) higher than the Q3 series low of 1,509 received in 2012/13, following a general downward trend since the peak level of 7,267 recorded back in Q3 2004/05.

The number of **residential** planning applications **decided** was **1,699**, a slight reduction of 1.4% on the previous quarter but up by 4.4% on the equivalent quarter last year. This is the highest number of decisions on residential planning applications recorded in the third quarter of any year since 2011/12.

[Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council, Oct – Dec 2015



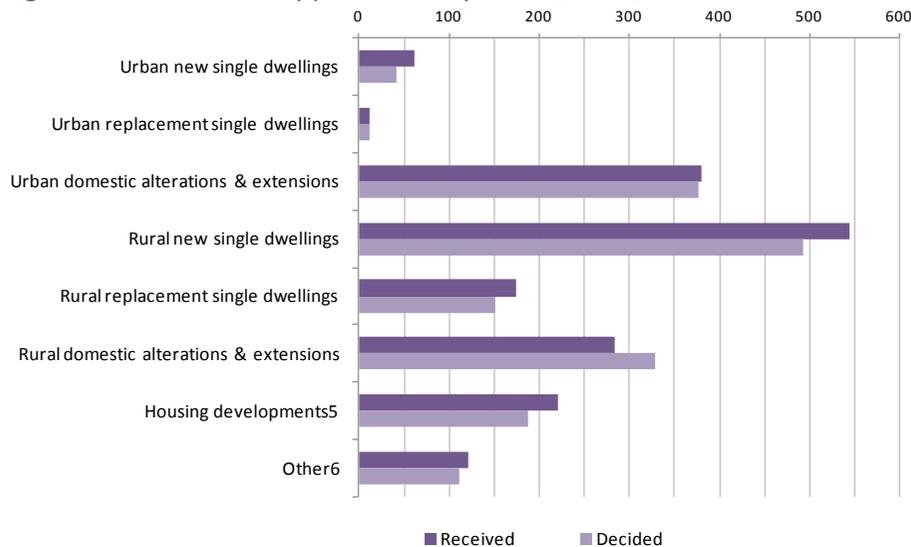
The **Northern Ireland approval rate for residential** planning applications in Q3 was **93.2%**, a decrease of nearly two percentage points from the previous quarter and close to one percentage point lower than the same period last year. Approval rates for residential planning applications during Q3 varied across councils with highs of 98.2% in Mid Ulster and 97.2% in Derry City and Strabane down to 86.4% in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

There were 63 residential applications withdrawn in Q3, nearly twice as many as were withdrawn in Q1.

[Refer to Table 5.4](#)

Fig 5.4 shows that new single dwellings in rural areas and alterations/extensions in urban areas continue to dominate the types of residential applications received by councils, together making up over half (51.5%) of all residential applications received during Q3.

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications by urban/rural, Oct –Dec 2015



Residential applications **received for new single dwellings in rural areas** increased by **8.4%** over the quarter to **544**, this represented a **9.0%** increase when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. Applications for **alterations/extensions received in urban areas** have also increased over the quarter to **380** (an increase of 3.5%) compared to the previous quarter but this still represents a fall of 4.8% when compared to the same period last year.

The number of **decisions for new single dwellings in rural areas** increased over the quarter by 1.0% to 492, but when compared to the same period last year was up by a more sizeable 7.7%. **Decisions on urban alterations/extensions** fell by nearly a fifth (19.4%) to 377 over the quarter but were down by a much less significant 6.7% when compared to same period last year.

[Refer to Table 5.5](#)

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened and closed, Apr 2009 - Dec 2015

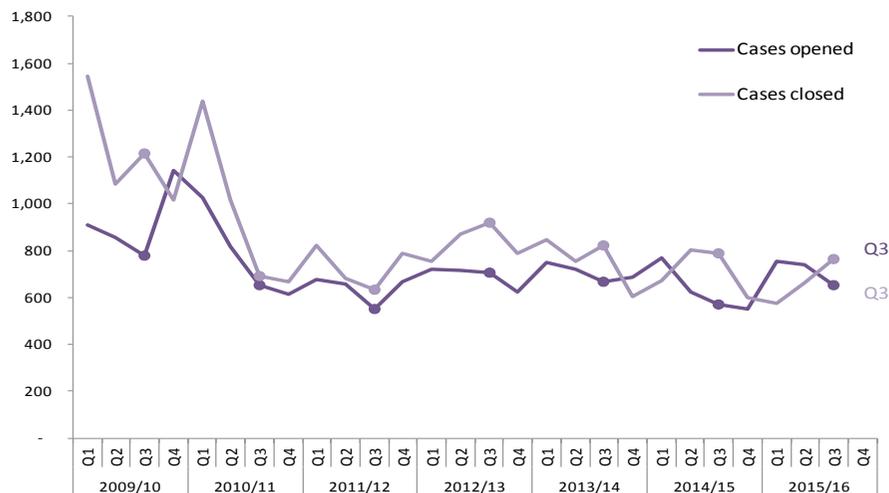
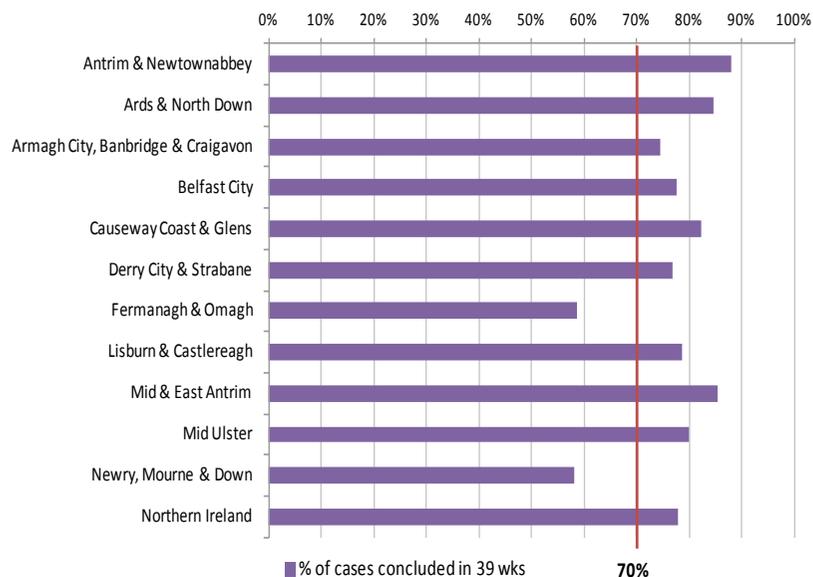


Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, Apr -Dec 2015



The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland in Q3 was **651**, a decrease of 11.9% compared to Q2 but up by 14.0% when compared to the same period in 2014/15. There was a sharp increase (36.2%) in the number of enforcement cases opened between the final quarter of 2014/15 and the first quarter of 2015/16 (753). Despite this sudden increase, the number of cases opened has since retracted to 651 in the current quarter.

The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q3 was **767**, up 15.5% on the previous quarter but down by 3.0% over the year.

[Refer to Table 6.1](#)

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

During Q3, 80.4% of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks, over 10 percentage points more than the statutory target of 70%. This represents an increase of 2.6 percentage points on the previous quarter. In the first nine months of 2015/16 (see Fig.6.2), 77.7% of enforcement cases brought to target conclusion were processed within 39 weeks. At present this would indicate that at the NI level the target is being achieved.

Nine of the eleven councils are currently on track to meet the target with highs of 88.0% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey during the first nine months of 2015/16 followed by Mid and East Antrim (85.3%). Whilst Newry, Mourne and Down (58.0%) and Fermanagh and Omagh (58.6%) are still currently below the target level, over the last quarter these two councils have recorded the greatest improvement in performance (+15.1 and +14.7 percentage points respectively).

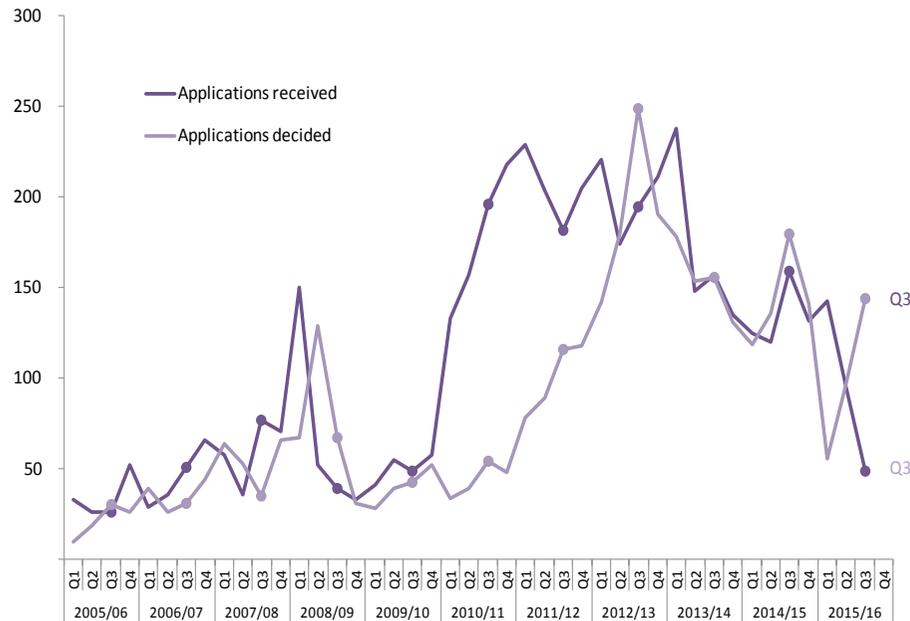
[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

There were **2 prosecutions** initiated and **3 convictions** for planning related offences in the third quarter. The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of December 2015 was **2,717**, 4.1% less than end of Q2 but 3.7% higher than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **736**, a quarter (27.1%) of all live cases. This proportion has remained reasonably constant over the last six consecutive quarters, having fallen from a series high of almost two fifths (38.0%) in Q3 2012/13.

[Refer to Table 6.3, 6.4](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

Fig 7.1 RE applications, quarterly from Apr 2005 - Dec 2015



The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in Q3 was **49**, the lowest quarterly figure in the series from Q3 2009/10.

Fig 7.2 RE applications received and decided by council, Oct - Dec 2015

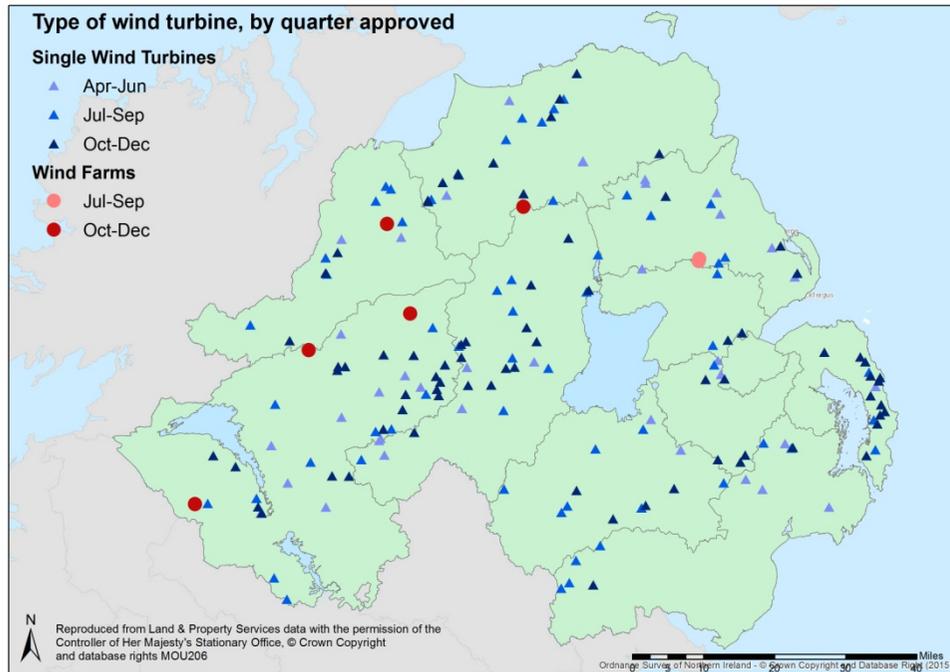


The number of applications peaked in 2012/13. It is likely that the high levels at this time were driven by the NI Executive's targets for electricity consumption from renewable sources, with a target of 20% to be achieved by 2015, and 40% by 2020. The decline in recent years may be partly due to a reduction in government funding available, as well as a lack of capacity on the power grid to allow for new connections.

In Q3, renewable energy applications received fell by almost half (49.0%) when compared to Q2 and were well over two thirds (69.2%) lower than the same period a year earlier. The number of applications **decided** was **144**, an increase of one half over the quarter but down by one fifth when compared to last year. During Q3, the average processing time for these applications was 54.6 weeks across NI.

[Refer to Table 7.1, 7.2](#)

Fig 7.3 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Apr - Dec 2015



Figures 7.2 and 7.3 show the spread across councils with Causeway Coast and Glens (9) receiving the most renewable energy applications in Q3, followed by Mid and East Antrim (7) and Mid Ulster (7). Ards and North Down (1) and Belfast City (1) received the least.

In the first nine months of 2015/16, Fermanagh and Omagh (46) and Mid Ulster (42) received the largest number of renewable energy applications while Belfast City (3) received the least.

At the end of December 2015, there were **532 live renewable energy applications**, mainly comprising 426 single wind turbines, 31 wind farms

and 31 solar farms. Live renewable energy applications were down 18.2% in Q3 from the previous quarter.

[Refer to Table 7.3, 7.4](#)

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **72.9%** in Q3, a decrease of 12.5 percentage points over the quarter and a fall of 3.0 percentage points on the same period last year.

User Guidance

Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1st April 2015 to 31st December 2015 were transferred in January 2016 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analytical Services Branch (ASB) 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 ASB and council validation a final extract was taken in April 2016. Please note the quarterly data are regarded as provisional and will be updated with finalised annual figures at the end of the financial period 2015/2016 in June 2016.

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 the new validation procedures to become properly embedded. It is anticipated, however, that the finalised annual figures when released will reconcile any data issues that may be highlighted during the course of this transitional year.

Regionally Significant / Major / Local Development Applications after 1st April 2014

Note that a new classification hierarchy of development for planning application came into effect on 1st April 2014, on an administrative basis, with the introduction of the following new categories – regionally significant, major and local development. The hierarchy was subsequently placed on a statutory basis in line with the transfer of planning functions to the new district councils on 1st April 2015. It should be noted that there are some differences between the initial administrative hierarchy

classifications in place from 1st April 2014 and the final classifications set out in the Planning (Development Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (S.R.2015 No.71).

Regionally significant developments (RSD) are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or involve a substantial departure from a local development plan. Applications for these development proposals will be submitted to and determined by the Department. However, the thresholds for RSD may mean that applications which may have previously been dealt with by the Department will now be classified as major development and thus determined by the relevant council. Like major applications, RSD proposals will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

Major developments have important economic, social and environmental implications for a council area. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils under the new planning system and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

Local developments will comprise of all other developments (other than permitted development) that do not fall within the classes described for major or for regionally significant developments. They comprise of the vast majority of residential and minor commercial applications to be received and determined by a council.

Departmental activity

Retained Section 26 (former Article 31) applications are Major applications being processed by the Department as Article 31 (under the Planning (NI) Order 1991) and, where a decision had not issued before 1 April 2015, which will now be determined under Section 26 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011.

Retained Section 29 (former non Article 31) applications are those being dealt with by the Department's Strategic Planning Division which were close to determination at 1 April 2015 and which were retained for determination as if the Department had called them in under Section 29 of the Planning Act (NI) 2015.

Called-in applications are those initially made to councils where the Minister/Department directs that these should fall to the Department for determination.

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 on which 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.

It should be noted that the algorithm that selects the earliest date from either a notice being issued, legal proceedings commencing, receipt of an application or the closure of a case to inform the date of case conclusion is subject to ongoing testing and may lead to subsequent small revisions.

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

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

Processing Times

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

Geographical Classification

The method of classifying the urban and rural marker is based on the x and y co-ordinates as recorded on the planning application in conjunction with Settlement Development Limits (SDLs).

Note on Exclusions:

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs), either proposed or existing, have not been included in the Official Statistics bulletin since 2012/13. These are not actually applications for planning permission. A council will issue a CLUD if it is satisfied that a particular development is lawful within the provisions of planning legislation. Examples include proposed extensions, which fall within the provisions of the Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 for permitted development and do not require planning permission, or uses that have become lawful due to the length of time they have been in existence.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

While applications for planning permission and other consents were included in the operational statistics produced prior to transfer, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) were excluded. In the interests of consistency TPOs will also be excluded from the new operational statistics.

Non Material Changes (NMCs)

Applications for a Non Material Change (NMCs) to an existing planning permission are provided for under the 2011 Act, but they are not planning applications. There is no requirement to advertise or consult on NMCs.

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs) are not provided for in planning legislation and councils may adopt different approaches in relation to these, as may the Department.

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs)

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs) are provided for under Section 27 of the 2011 Act, but they are not planning applications. They are essentially advance notices of major/RSD planning applications and detail how a developer proposes to engage with the community. A major/RSD development planning application cannot be submitted without a PAN having been issued, community consultation undertaken and a report prepared and submitted with the application by a developer.

Discharge of Conditions (DCs)

It will be necessary to seek to discharge a condition where planning approval has been granted and a condition has been attached to the decision which requires the further consent, agreement or approval of the council (or the Department).

Further Information

Information and statistics for the other devolved administrations and Republic of Ireland can be found at the following links.

England:

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

Scotland:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning>

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/04/2078>

Wales:

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/planningstats/development-management-quarterly-survey/?lang=en>

Republic of Ireland:

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

Building Control (LPS Starts and completions):

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

Housing bulletin Department for Communities:

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

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-housing-bulletin-july-september-2015>

Appendix 1 – Quantitative DOE corporate targets relevant to the planning function – 2015/16

DOE Corporate Plan Target

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.

Appendix 2 – Definitions

The Statistical Categories referred to in Section 5 and Excel Table 5.1 are defined below.

Agricultural

These include agricultural buildings or structures for the storage of slurry and/or manure, agricultural glasshouses, stables and livery yards and infilling of land for agricultural purposes.

Commercial

These include food supermarkets and superstores, non food retailing, major retail developments exceeding 1000 sq m, alterations, extensions and improvements to buildings used for retailing, retail warehouses, clubs, post offices, factory outlets, petrol stations, offices, purpose built office developments, restaurants, car parking, and motor vehicle display, hire, repair or sale.

Government and Civic

These include police stations, coastguard stations, civic amenity sites, recycling centres, schools and colleges, hospitals, clinics, other medical establishments including surgeries and dental practices, 'Hard infrastructure' facilities such as roads, water mains, water treatment works, trunk sewers, waste water treatment works and natural gas pipelines. Also includes recreational facilities, including indoor and outdoor sports facilities, and swimming pools and renewable energy applications, including wind turbines, wind farms, solar panels, biomass burners, hydroelectric schemes etc. Note that this category also includes non public sector applications related to the above topics.

Industrial and Manufacturing

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

Mixed Development

These include applications for mixed development incorporating a number of development types such as residential, retailing, offices, community and leisure.

Residential

These include housing developments (incorporating a mixture of house types and apartments), purpose built apartment developments, sheltered housing schemes, single dwellings including dwellings on farms, holiday chalets, caravans and mobile homes, alteration, extension or improvement of existing dwellings, residential homes or nursing homes, hotels or motels.

Change of Use

These include applications for a change in the use of land or buildings including changes to residential, retailing, offices, community or leisure uses.

Other types of application

All other types of applications not mentioned above are put into the 'Other' category but mainly comprise 'Works to Facilitate Persons Who Are Disabled', 'Advertisements', and 'Listed Buildings'.

The application types referred to in Excel Table 5.6 are defined below.

Outline permission

An application for outline planning permission can be used to ascertain whether a proposed development is acceptable in principle. This usually means that detailed drawings are not needed. However, the council or, as the case may be, the Department, may, in certain circumstances, require the submission of additional information or insist that an application for full planning permission be submitted.

Full permission

An application for full planning permission requires the submission of all details of the proposal. This type of application would be appropriate, for example, if the erection of new buildings is proposed and / or if a change of use of land or buildings is proposed.

Approval of Reserved Matters

If outline planning permission is granted, then a subsequent application and approval relating to the siting, design, external appearance, means of access and landscaping details, known as 'reserved matters', will be required before building work can commence. The reserved matters application must be consistent with the outline planning permission and take into account any conditions that have been attached to it. If the development proposal changes, then it may be necessary to submit a new planning application.

Consent to Display an Advertisement

Advertisement consent is normally required to display an advertisement, particularly large signs and illuminated adverts.

Listed Building Consent

Works that would affect the character of a listed building need listed building consent. This includes work to the internal or external fabric of the building or any demolition. It should be noted that the requirement for Listed Building Consent is in addition to any requirement for planning permission for works to a listed building.

Conservation Area Consent

Works that would entail the full or partial demolition of a non-listed building in a conservation area need conservation area consent. It should be noted that the requirement for Conservation Area Consent may be in addition to any requirement for planning permission.

Hazardous Substances Consent

The Planning (Hazardous Substances) (No2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 are concerned with the storage and use of hazardous substances which could, in quantities at or above specified limits, present a risk. Hazardous Substances Consent ensures that hazardous substances can be kept or used in significant amounts only after the council or, as the case may be, the Department has had the opportunity to assess the degree of risk arising to persons in the surrounding area and to the environment.

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