

Item 11: DfI Planning Advice Note Implementation of Strategic Planning Policy on Development in the Countryside	Officer Presenting: Principal Planning Officer Author: Principal Planning Officer
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 To appraise Members on the Planning Advice Note issued by the Department of Infrastructure (DfI) on the Implementation of Strategic Planning Policy on Development in the Countryside published on 2nd August 2021.

2 Background

2.1 DfI has decided to bring forward a Planning Advice Note (PAN) on 'Implementation of Regional Planning Policy for Development in the Countryside'. The PAN issued on 2nd August 2021 and takes effect from that date. The purpose of the PAN is to re-emphasize fundamental aspects of strategic planning policy for development in the countryside, as contained in the SPPS and to clarify certain policy matters, such as for 'Integration and rural character'; 'Dwellings on farms'; 'Infill/ribbon development'; and, 'Dwellings in existing clusters'.

2.2 DfI issued a "Call for Evidence" back in March 2016 and commissioned independent consultants to undertake background research on the issue of development in the countryside, with the aim of providing an updated evidential context on strategic planning policy on development in the countryside. A The final report from the consultants in December 2017 recommended DfI should provide an 'emphasis' of fundamental aspects of SPPS policy rather than undertake a review of it.

- 2.3 A copy of the PAN is included in Appendix 22 and the background reports can be accessed via the following web link:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/PAN-countryside>

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The PAN does not add or change existing policy or guidance and is relevant to all planning authorities and all users of the planning system involved in the preparations and determination of planning applications and appeals; and, in the formulation of LDPs.
- 3.2 The SPPS advises fundamentally in para 6.69, *“The policy approach must be to cluster, consolidate and group new development with existing established buildings, and promote the re-use of previously used buildings”*. The SPPS also provides for the facilitation of new development opportunities in the countryside, which can benefit from the utilisation of existing services such as access and drainage, whilst simultaneously mitigating the potential adverse impacts from the cumulative effect of one-off, sporadic development upon rural amenity and landscape character.

Integration and Rural Character

- 3.3 DFI advise that due to a perceived ambiguity within the policy wording in PPS 21, decisions were sometimes taken whereby integration and impact on rural character were not given intended consideration and weight. The SPPS clarifies in para 6.77 that *“In all circumstances proposals for development in the countryside must be sited and designed to integrate sympathetically with their surroundings, must not have an adverse impact on the rural character of the area, and meet other planning and environmental considerations.....”* The SPPS advises any conflict between the SPPS and any retained policy document must be resolved in favour of the provisions of the SPPS and as such there should no longer be any such ambiguity in this regard. DFI considers all forms of development in the countryside must therefore integrate into their setting and ensure that there is no adverse impact on the rural character of the area, as per the SPPS.

Dwellings on farms

- 3.4 The PAN advises that it would be expected there would be a group of farm buildings on the holding to cluster with and refers to the supplementary planning guidance contained with *“Building on Tradition: A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside”*, which must be taken into account when assessing all development proposals in the countryside, which emphasises the location of the new buildings on farms adjacent to established farm groups. DFI considers for the purposes of CTY 10 of PPS 21 that new dwellings on farms should be sited to visually link or cluster with an established group of buildings on the farm holding, which would not include a dwelling and domestic garage only.

Infill/ribbon development

3.5 The PAN advises the acceptance of an unsubstantial ancillary building, such as a domestic garage or small outbuilding as a 'building' which contributes to the assessment of a substantially and continuously built up frontage is at odds with the original policy intent. DFI advise it was not the intention of the policy that such buildings would be considered suitable in any reasonable planning assessment of a proposal for an infill dwelling, given their limited size and visual impact, in terms of their ability to contribute visually to a substantial and continuously built up frontage.

New Dwellings in Existing Clusters

3.6 The PAN notes that all of the CTY 2a policy criteria for new dwellings in existing clusters of development should be met and applied as the policy requires, unless there are overriding material considerations for not doing so, in which case they should be clearly set out.

4 Implications

Equality, Rural Needs, Climate Change and Data Protection

4.1 Not Applicable

Financial, Legal, HR, Improvement and Other

4.2 None

5 Recommendations

5.1 That Members consider and note the PAN.

Background Papers

Appendix 22: DFI Planning Advice Note – Implementation of Strategic Planning Policy on Development in the Countryside (Aug 2021)