



Derry City & Strabane  
District Council  
Comhairle  
Chathair Dhoire &  
Cheantar an tSratha Báin  
Derry Cille & Strábane  
Districk Council



## 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017 Stakeholder Event – Rural Development Briefing Note

### Purpose

- To consider current planning policies associated with development in the countryside, and
- To determine whether or not they are compatible with regional objectives (RDS and SPPS) regarding development in the countryside, and
- Whether they need to be amended to take account of local circumstances through the new Local Development Plan (LDP).

### Legislative Context

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors.

It sets out a clear strategic objective for rural areas, namely:

- **SFG13 – To sustain rural communities living in smaller settlements and open countryside.**

**The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)** is a statement of the Department's policy on planning matters that should be implemented across Northern Ireland; it was formally adopted in September 2015.

The aim of the SPPS with regard to the Countryside (outside of settlements) is to manage development in a manner which strikes a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, whilst supporting and sustaining rural communities consistent with the RDS.

In relation to housing in the countryside, the SPPS adopts quite a similar approach to Planning Policy Statement 21 "Sustainable Development in the Countryside", setting policy objectives aimed at:

- Managing growth to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development which will support a vibrant community
- Conserving the landscape and natural resources of the rural area, protecting it from excessive, inappropriate or obtrusive development and from the actual or potential effects of pollution
- Facilitating development which contributes to a sustainable rural economy
- Promoting high standards in design, siting and landscaping

The SPPS adopts a policy approach based on **clustering, consolidating and Grouping new development**, particularly new residential development, with existing established buildings and the re-use of previously used buildings. It also states that all new development in the countryside must **integrate, respect rural character and be appropriately designed**. It should not mar the distinction between settlements and the countryside or result in urban sprawl and it should reflect and **complement the overall**

## approach to housing growth in the plan area.

The SPPS/PPS21 also relates to other development in the countryside, including, proposals for businesses (PPS4) or tourism (PPS16).

DCSDC must take into account the implications of this strategic policy in the preparation of our LDP and in the determination of planning applications. The LDP, should reflect the aim, objectives and policy approach of the SPPS, and if deemed necessary it can be tailored to the specific circumstances of the Derry City and Strabane Council District.

## District Context

The table below shows the demographics of the Derry City and Strabane District Council Area based on NISRA 2014 mid-year Population Projections.

The composition of the population in the two old council areas differed in terms of the proportions of their population living in urban and rural areas<sup>1</sup>. The new DCSDC has a large urban population, with 77% of the population living in an urban area in accordance with the NISRA definition of urban/rural. The majority of the urban dwellers are located in Derry City in the north of the district and the District becomes more rural in the south. The rural area is defined by a series of small settlements of less than 5,000 people and those living in single dwellings in the open countryside.

District population % per Settlement Hierarchy

Settlement Hierarchy	Population	% of District Population
City	83,163	56.3%
Main Town	13,172	8.9%
Local Towns	6,434	4.4%
Villages	20,169	13.7%
Small Settlements / Hamlets	3,584	2.4%
Countryside	21,178	14.4%
Total	147,700	100%

It can be seen that approximately 21,000 people or 14.4% of the District's population live in the open countryside. If we add in the population of the settlements other than Derry and Strabane, this gives us 51,000 or 35% being 'rural'. NIPSA also use a definition of urban-rural SOA's, which defines 35,000 or 23% of our population being 'rural'.

According to the 'Agricultural Census in Northern Ireland 2015' carried out by DAERA, our District has 1,735 farms. 73% of these would be considered very small, 14% small, 5% medium and 8% large. Out of the 11 new council areas, DCSDC would rank 7<sup>th</sup> in terms of the number of farms that it has.

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## Rural Planning Trends in the District

Rural planning policy has undergone a number of significant changes in direction in the last 15 years. Since 2002, there have been 4 periods of policy variation in relation to the approval of single dwellings in the countryside:

- A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (PSRNI). September 1993 to March 2006
- Draft PPS 14: Sustainable Development in the Countryside. March 2006 to November 2008.
- Draft PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside. November 2008 to June 2010.
- PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside. June 2010 to present.

In addition to the above policies, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI (SPPS) was introduced in September 2015.

The policy provisions of **PSRNI** were viewed as having a **presumption in favour of building in the open countryside**, except in areas designated as Countryside Policy Areas or Greenbelt. This view is mirrored by the large number of approvals for single dwellings during this period and resulted in quite a dispersed pattern of single dwellings.

**Draft PPS 14** was introduced in response to the PSRNI in March 2006. The policy took a **precautionary approach to the development in the countryside** and there was a presumption against development in the countryside. The policy was largely unpopular in rural areas and public response resulted in a review of the policy.

**Draft PPS 21 and PPS 21** were the end result of the review of draft PPS 14. Whilst these new policies retained a direction towards providing sustainable development in the countryside and not returning to the pre-2006 levels of approvals, they also took a balanced view in that this also meant sustaining the existing rural communities through an appropriate level of development. Therefore the policy **took a permissive stance in relation to dwellings for farmers and also acknowledged the presence of non-farming rural dwellers** through the introduction of policies for new dwelling in clusters, conversion and re-use of buildings, infill opportunities and the removal of the 'abandonment' test for replacement dwellings.

The table below examines the patterns of development during the various planning Policy periods in more detail. There is a clear distinction between the various planning policy periods, with approval rates in the PPS 21 period recovering after a clear fall during the draft PPS 14 period. It is worth noting that the approval rate is actually higher than the PSRNI period, although it is noted that this rate is based on a lower amount of applications, and very different economic circumstances.

Table 4: Rural dwellings in DCSDC during various planning policy periods from 2002- 2016.

Time Period	No. of applications for dwellings in c/side	Single dwellings approved	Single dwellings refused	Replacement dwellings approved	Replacement dwellings refused	Total approvals	Approval rate	Refusal rate
2002-March 2006 (PSRNI period)	1932	1135	443	333	21	1468	75%	25%
March 2006 to November 2008 (PPS 14 period)	780	274	283	191	32	465	60%	40%
November 2008 to June 2010 draft PPS21 period)	257	140	14	100	3	240	93%	7%
June 2010 to December 2016	645	362	106	160	17	522	81%	19%

### Possible LDP Options?

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<b>Rural Economy</b>	Town / Village focussed	Balanced	Rural Development Promoted Generally

**See Questions on Screen re. a) Key Planning Issues, b) LDP Proposals, c) LDP Policies and d) Possible Options**

## **Prompts for Table to Discuss**

1. What proportion of the District's housing allocation should be strategically allocated to the countryside?
2. How can we sustain rural communities while meeting our other environmental objectives?
3. Do you feel having a dispersed pattern of development in the countryside is sustainable?
4. Are there any areas in the countryside within our District you feel are under development pressure?
  - AONB?
  - Around settlements?
  - Other?
5. Are there any areas/communities of the countryside within our District you feel are experiencing decline?
6. Where do you see housing need throughout the District?
7. Can/should we focus development in the 'rural' settlement in order to sustain rural areas or do we need to be permissive of development in our open countryside?
8. Does PPS21 adequately address the issues facing the countryside?
9. If new LDP planning policies are needed for any of the issues, what could these be?
10. In terms of economic development, should non-agricultural businesses be located within settlements or dispersed throughout the countryside?