



Department for
Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

Deapartment fur

Infrastructure

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Future Focused Review of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) on the issue of Climate Change

A Call for Evidence

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Respond by: 28 March 2024

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is responsible for the maintenance, development and planning of critical infrastructure in Northern Ireland. With its focus on water, transport, and planning, the Department seeks to manage and protect over £37bn of public assets that improve people's quality of life, reduce our impact on the planet by living sustainably and decarbonising key services, and build prosperity by driving inclusive productivity. Whilst this Call for Evidence is specifically focused on the Department's regional strategic planning policy (the Strategic Planning Policy Statement, SPPS) it is nonetheless set within this wider Departmental context.

Water (Flood Risk Management)

- 1.2 DfI is responsible for, inter alia, the management of flood risk which includes the maintenance of our river and sea defences, construction of flood alleviation schemes, informing development decisions and developing flood maps. Approximately 5% of properties here are in areas at risk from flooding, which is set to increase by 33% to 59,800 when 2080 Climate Change projections are taken into consideration. DfI is also the lead government department for the strategic coordination of the emergency response to severe weather events, including flooding, emergency planning and processes, which are developed in conjunction with our multi-agency partners.

Transport

- 1.3 In addition, the Department is responsible for the oversight and facilitation of surface transport in the region. The main tools for the delivery of the Department's transport vision are the development of transport strategy and policy and related transport plans, the management of the road network asset (including the promotion of road safety) and providing funding and sponsorship of Translink which delivers the public transport network.

Planning

- 1.4 The Department is also responsible for the strategic direction and production of regional strategic policy for land use planning, planning legislation, processing a small number of regionally significant planning applications and those applications which may be 'called in'. It has a statutory consultee role for roads and rivers to provide specialist advice in relation to the consideration of planning applications by councils.
- 1.5 DfI also works together with councils in managing the two-tier planning system and has a statutory consultee and an oversight role in the preparation of local development plans (LDPs) which set out councils' long-term visions, objectives, and growth over the plan period. The Department, together with local government

and stakeholders, is also taking forward a Planning Improvement Programme (PIP) with the objective of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the regional planning system.

- 1.6** There is no doubt that the operating environment, including a constrained resource budget for the delivery of the Department's functions, remains very challenging. By focusing on water, transport and planning the Department is clear on the current state of our infrastructure in these key areas, what we need to do, why we need to do it and how we will prioritise the finite public resources available to address the issues within each delivery area.

Climate Change

- 1.7** In June 2022 the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (CCA) came into force, setting a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with interim targets for 2030 and 2040. These ambitious targets, set out in the CCA represent a decisive change in Northern Ireland's approach to the climate crisis, requiring an immediate step change in all our sectors' activities to achieve this. The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) launched a 16-week public consultation on 21 June 2023 on the related Carbon Budgets and sought views on the Climate Change Committee (CCC) advice report on 'The path to a Net Zero Northern Ireland'. The consultation closed on 11 October 2023. (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/carbonbudget>).
- 1.8** DAERA also intends to consult on the first Climate Action Plan and the recent consultation on Carbon Budgets will help to inform that process. The legislation also requires DfI to put in place a transport sectoral plan and an infrastructure sectoral plan for combatting Climate Change. The infrastructure sectoral plan must include policies and proposals for planning and construction, while the transport sectoral plan must include policies and proposals for public and private transport. Significant cross public sector collaboration will continue to be required over the coming months to put in place the mechanisms which will ensure compliance with the CCA and support the delivery of the related strategies including those on Green Growth, Energy, Clean Air and Nature Recovery Strategies etc.

Implications for the SPPS

- 1.9** It is widely recognised that the planning system has a key role to play in guiding, encouraging, and promoting a more sustainable and integrated approach to land use and infrastructure development and in looking for innovative and locally agreed solutions to the challenges we will continue to face in terms of Climate Change. Beyond the ongoing work to finalise the review of regional strategic planning policy on renewable and low carbon energy, it is important that the policy framework provided for by the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (the SPPS) is fit for purpose and suitably future proofed to appropriately support the Climate

Change agenda and related departmental priorities going forward.

- 1.10** It is within this context that the Department is undertaking a ‘Call for Evidence’ on a potential focused review of the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#) on the issue of Climate Change. The primary purpose of the Call for Evidence is to engage with stakeholders on the proposed areas of focus for a review of the SPPS and to invite the submission of evidence on the relevant factors that can assist with determining the best way forward.
- 1.11** The information gathered through the Call for Evidence will be considered by the Department and will help inform any decision by a future Infrastructure Minister on a review of the SPPS and the options for it. Should there be an absence of ministers, a decision on the way forward will be considered in light of the decision-making legislation in place at that time.

2. How to Respond

- 2.1** This Call for Evidence engagement is being facilitated by means of the Citizen Space Hub, which can be accessed via the following weblink:
www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/call-evidence-future-focused-review-SPPS-climate-change
- 2.2** This is the primary means of responding to the consultation. However, respondents may also reply by e-mail to: sppsteam@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk
- 2.3** When responding please provide the following information:
- your name,
 - contact details (preferably email),
 - the organisation you represent (if applicable), and
 - your main area of interest (Academic/NGOs; Business and Industry; Community/Resident/Voluntary Organisations; Environmental; Local Government; Professional Bodies; Individuals).
- 2.4** The consultation will run for **from 3 January 2024 to 28 March 2024**.
- 2.5** Responses must be submitted **by 5.00pm Thursday 28 March 2024**. Comments after this deadline will not be accepted.
- 2.6** **All responses to this Call for Evidence should be made electronically.**

3. Freedom of Information Act 2000: Confidentiality of Responses

3.1 The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) may publish a summary of responses following the closing date for receipt of comments. Your response, and all other responses to this publication, may be disclosed on request and/or made available on the DfI website (redacted). The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of responses as this will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this publication.

3.2 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 give the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this publication, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties 'in confidence' which is not confidential in nature; and
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

3.3 The information you provide in your response, excluding personal information, may be published, or disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). Any personal information you provide will be handled in accordance with the UK-GDPR and will not be published. If you want the non-personal information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please tell us why, but be aware that, under the FOIA or EIR, we cannot guarantee confidentiality.

For information regarding your personal data, please refer to the DfI Privacy Notice at www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/dfi-privacy.

For further details on confidentiality, the FOIA and the EIR please refer to www.ico.org.uk.

4. Background

- 4.1** The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (the SPPS) 'Planning for Sustainable Development' was published in September 2015, following Executive Committee agreement. It has a statutory basis under Part 1 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the SPPS is judged to be in general conformity with the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (the RDS).
- 4.2** The provisions of the SPPS apply to whole of Northern Ireland. They must be taken into account in the preparation of LDPs and are material to all decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.
- 4.3** Whilst the SPPS and the planning system has the objective of furthering sustainable development at its heart, there has been much contextual change in the period following its publication, particularly with regards to the wider efforts of government in seeking to address the challenges presented by a changing climate.
- 4.4** Since the SPPS was published in 2015, tackling Climate Change has become a legislative requirement and it is a priority consideration in the context of the work and functions of DfI, other departments and the wider public sector.

5. Why undertake a Call for Evidence?

The Climate Emergency

- 5.1** As noted in the introduction, the Department has a vast and wide-ranging remit in relation to water, transport, and planning. Its responsibilities include:
- regional strategic planning policy, legislation and promoting good place-making, including acting as the planning authority for regionally significant planning applications and overseeing the effectiveness of the two-tier planning process that came into effect in 2015;
 - policy and legislation for water, reservoirs and sewerage including discharging the Department's responsibilities, including as shareholder, for oversight of NI Water;
 - responsibility for rivers and drainage policy and legislation and for supporting the work of the Drainage Council;
 - the assessment and management of flood risk and lead department responsibilities for the emergency response to flooding and other severe weather incidents;

- almost all aspects of surface transport policy including public transport, promotion of active and sustainable travel, the development and implementation of a transport strategy and the provision, management, and maintenance of all public roads; and
- being a statutory consultee in the planning process in relation to rivers and roads matters.

5.2 Within the context of the climate emergency and the CCA, the Department is looking at how its policies can contribute to emission reduction in our carbon budgets as we chart the path to net zero by 2050. The following departmental work streams are of particular relevance in the context of Climate Change.

Water (Flood Risk Management)

5.3 More frequent and extreme weather events are indicative of our changing climate. Such occurrences demonstrate dramatically just how vulnerable Northern Ireland's built and natural environment is to extremes of climate variables (e.g. temperature/heatwaves; wind/storms; precipitation/floods; and sea levels/surges). These events, particularly flooding events, present increased disruption to and stress on our infrastructure networks and services including drainage, sewerage, digital, energy, road and rail infrastructure, water resources and can impact on the economy, environment, and communities more widely, as evidenced by recent flooding events.

5.4 The most effective method of managing flood risk is to mitigate, insofar as possible, the risk occurring in the first place. A key area of the Department's work is to advise council planning authorities in relation to flood risk for proposed new development. This is done through its role as a statutory consultee in the planning process, having regard to the SPPS.

Transport

5.5 Transport has been identified as a key sector that will be required to decarbonise by 2050 in order to help manage Climate Change. In response, the Department is developing a new 'Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland' (TSNI) which will set the new approach for the transport system as we embark on a transformative journey to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

5.6 This strategy is being developed around four high level strategic priorities for transport that will shape and influence the planning, design, and operation of the transport network, so that it is resilient and sustainable; supports green growth; is safe and healthy; and supports connected and inclusive communities.

5.7 In addition, a suite of transport plans are being developed in an integrated manner with local councils in the development of their LDPs. These transport plans will

set out the framework for transport policy and investment decisions up until 2035. The plans will build on the priorities set out in the TSNI and describe the future development of our road, public transport, and active travel networks.

Planning

- 5.8** Beyond the ongoing work to finalise the review of regional strategic planning policy for renewable and low carbon energy, it is important to consider the current policy framework provided for by the SPPS in relation to Climate Change and if this remains appropriate. This includes ensuring that the regional strategic planning policy framework keeps pace with changes to the context for, and approach to, the delivery of the Department's wider functions on water (flood risk) and transport.
- 5.9** Where appropriate, regional strategic planning policy can also lend support to the implementation of policy developed by other departments where there is a strong interface with the planning system. However, it would not be appropriate for DfI to assume lead policy development responsibility for matters that are the responsibility of other departments.
- 5.10** In order to deliver for the economy, communities and the environment, the Department is committed to ensuring that the planning system operates in an efficient and effective way and plays its part in assisting the wider efforts of government in addressing Climate Change.

6. Purpose and Scope

- 6.1** This Call for Evidence is part of the process of gathering the necessary information to inform a potential focused review of the SPPS in relation to Climate Change and the options and scope for any such review.
- 6.2** Should the outcome of this Call for Evidence lead to a decision to formally review the SPPS, such a focused review could seek to update and bring forward new and revised policy provisions on Climate Change on:
- The Purpose of Planning,
 - Furthering Sustainable Development (including Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change and The Importance of Ecosystem Services), and
 - The Core Planning Principles of the two-tier planning system.
- 6.3** A focused review could also encompass a fresh look at the appropriateness of extant policy provisions on flood risk, transportation, and development in the countryside, given these are three key policy areas which are impacted by Climate Change (in addition to the review of regional strategic planning policy on

renewable and low carbon energy which is already being progressed).

- 6.4** The Department is particularly keen to hear views and gather evidence in respect of the above-mentioned matters. Nonetheless, there may be evidence in relation to other aspects of the SPPS that you may wish to comment on that might assist the Department with determining the appropriate way forward in addressing Climate Change within the SPPS.
- 6.5** The policy areas outlined in this CfE are considered to reflect how and where the Department can optimise the impact of any focused review of the SPPS in responding to the challenges of a changing climate.

7. The Purpose of Planning

- 7.1** The objective of the planning system, consistent with Part 1, Section 1 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, is to secure the orderly and consistent development of land whilst furthering sustainable development and improving well-being. The SPPS states that this means the planning system should positively and proactively facilitate development that contributes to a more socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable Northern Ireland. Planning authorities¹ should therefore simultaneously pursue social and economic priorities alongside the careful management of our built and natural environments for the overall benefit of our society.
- 7.2** For the existing policy provisions of 'The Purpose of Planning' please see paragraphs 2.1 – 2.4 of the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

QUESTION 1: *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve 'The Purpose of Planning' as contained within the SPPS so that it is fit for purpose and suitably future proofed to appropriately support the Climate Change agenda going forward? Please detail.*

8. Furthering Sustainable Development

- 8.1** The objective of furthering sustainable development lies at the heart of the SPPS and the planning system. The key guiding principles for planning in Northern Ireland are contained within the SPPS. It currently recognises the need to mitigate and adapt to Climate Change and the positive part the planning system plays in

¹ Planning authorities can encompass district councils (in their role as local planning authorities), the Department for Infrastructure and the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC).

seeking to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

- 8.2** In addition, the SPPS seeks to ensure the planning system contributes to a reduction in energy and water usage and helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by continuing to support growth in renewable energy sources, as well as promoting development where it reduces the need for private motorised travel. The promotion of high quality and good design is also emphasised, and in terms of seeking to address the nature crisis, working towards the restoration of and halting the loss of biodiversity is noted, as is the conservation of soil and bog lands. In recognition of the challenges of Climate Change, managing development to safeguard against water pollution, flooding and securing improvements in water quality are also addressed.
- 8.3** Furthering sustainable development also means ensuring the planning system plays its part in supporting the Executive and wider government policy and strategies in efforts to address any existing or potential barriers to sustainable development.
- 8.4** The SPPS outlines that in formulating policies and plans and in determining planning applications, planning authorities should be guided by the precautionary approach that where there are significant risks of damage to the environment, its protection will generally be paramount unless there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

- 8.5** The SPPS currently recognises that a central challenge in furthering sustainable development is mitigating and adapting to Climate Change. It identifies a number of measures that the planning system can consider in this regard.

The Importance of Ecosystem Services

- 8.6** The SPPS also stresses the importance of ecosystem services. It highlights the benefits that a good quality environment can provide not only in terms of economic performance but also by improving resilience to Climate Change. For example, trees and other green infrastructure provide important ecosystem services that reduce the effects of flooding and the urban heat island, a phenomenon that occurs when urban areas experience higher air temperatures than the surrounding rural area.
- 8.7** For the full 'Furthering Sustainable Development' text please see paragraphs 3.1 – 3.16 of the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

QUESTION 2: *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve 'Furthering Sustainable Development' (including Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change and The Importance of Ecosystem Services) in order to better support the*

Climate Change agenda? Please detail.

9. Core Planning Principles

9.1 The SPPS supports 5 ‘Core Planning Principles’ that are fundamental to the achievement of sustainable development, which are: ‘Improving Health and Well-Being’; ‘Creating and Enhancing Shared Space’; ‘Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth’; ‘Supporting Good Design and Positive Place-Making’; and ‘Preserving and Improving the Built and Natural Environment’. Four of these are particularly relevant to Climate Change and are summarised below.

Improving Health and Well-Being

9.2 The SPPS directs that when plan-making and decision-taking, planning authorities should contribute positively to health and well-being through actions, such as: encouraging and supporting quality, environmentally sustainable design; providing better connected communities with safe pedestrian environments; ensuring better integration between land-use planning and transport; and facilitating the protection and provision of green and blue infrastructure.

9.3 In addition, the value of networks of green infrastructure in providing a wide range of environmental benefits including flood water storage, urban cooling, improved air quality and habitats for wildlife are highlighted. It is recognised that green infrastructure should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering on a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for communities. The SPPS also draws attention to the wide range of environment and amenity considerations, including air quality, which should be taken into account by planning authorities when proposing policies or managing development.

Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth

9.4 The SPPS supports sustainable economic growth. Our environment is identified as an asset for economic growth in its own right and in line with the Department’s vision for a ‘sustainable future’, the SPPS requires planning authorities to encourage proposals that make an important contribution to sustainable economic growth whilst also carefully balancing the protection and enhancement of the quality of the natural and built environment.

Supporting Good Design and Positive Place-Making

9.5 Another core planning principle which encourages the need to mitigate and adapt to Climate Change is that of ‘supporting good design and positive place-making’. The SPPS accepts that good design furthers sustainable development and encourages healthier living; promotes accessibility and inclusivity; and contributes to how safe places are and feel.

- 9.6** The SPPS recognises that design is not limited to the appearance of a building or place but that it should encompass how buildings and places function in use over the lifetime of a development. To assist in helping to tackle the impacts of Climate Change, it is stressed that ‘design’ should consider and address, for example, how a development can minimise energy, water usage and CO2 emissions. Landscape design and planting considerations are also outlined as an integral part of design which can contribute to biodiversity.

Preserving and Improving the Built and Natural Environment

- 9.7** This core planning principle seeks to ensure that the environment is managed in a sustainable manner in order to safeguard our landscape and its heritage assets, preserving and improving the natural and built environment and halting the loss of biodiversity. An integrated approach to the management of the natural and cultural aspects of the landscape is advocated as is the important role of the planning system in conserving, protecting, and enhancing the environment whilst ensuring it remains responsive and adaptive to the everyday needs of society.
- 9.8** The SPPS considers that the importance of the environment, however, goes far beyond the immediate benefits it can provide with it being noted that safeguarding our unique landscape (including heritage assets) and biological diversity will also make an important contribution to the protection of the wider global ecosystem.
- 9.9** For the full ‘Core Planning Principles’ text please see paragraphs 4.1 – 4.40 of the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

QUESTION 3: *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the ‘Core Planning Principles’ in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*

10. Subject Policies

- 10.1** The SPPS makes it clear that the objective of furthering sustainable development and the supporting core planning principles that give expression to it should be applied to both plan-making and decision-taking, along with the relevant subject policies. It is clarified that the SPPS should be read and applied as a whole (SPPS para 5.9). As set out at Part 6 above, the Department considers it appropriate to focus on the following three subject policies within the SPPS.

Flood Risk

- 10.2** The Department is the competent authority for The Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 and has overall responsibility for

flood risk management in the region (see para. 5.3). Flooding is recognised as one of the primary risks to people, property and the environment arising from a changing climate in Northern Ireland. As mentioned earlier in this document, we have experienced and should expect more frequent and extreme weather events. This is reinforced by the latest evidence by the Climate Change Committee (CCRA3 published 2021).

- 10.3** It is accepted that more needs to be done and in this regard the Department is progressing a number of initiatives. For example, existing 'Technical Flood Risk Guidance in relation to Allowances for Climate Change in Northern Ireland' (published 2019), is currently based on UK Climate Projections (UKCP09) information. This guidance is used for flood risk management and development planning purposes (primarily in respect of allowances for increased sea level rise, river flows and rainfall intensities) and assists DfI in its role as a statutory consultee in the planning system. However, 2018 UK Climate Projections (UKCP18) information is now available, and the Department is currently considering updates to the abovementioned guidance in this regard.
- 10.4** The Department also provides advice to councils on the drainage/flood risk aspects of emerging draft LDP documents. This advice is informed by a suite of flood maps, including Climate Change mapping developed by the Department and produced in accordance with the requirements of The Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009. These maps have been prepared for areas that have been determined by government to be at significant risk of flooding and were an important step in development of flood risk management plans for these areas. A key aim of the flood maps is to increase awareness among the general public, councils (including planning authorities) and other organisations, of the likelihood of flooding and to recommend that all stakeholders take appropriate action to manage flood risk.
- 10.5** Information relating to flood mapping and Climate Change can be found online at: [Flood Maps NI | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/flood-maps-ni)
- 10.6** As Climate Change predictions indicate there is likely to be an increase in the existing floodplain outlines, developers should be aware of the available Climate Change flood mapping and the expected future changes. The Department's capital flood alleviation schemes are also designed with Climate Change factors taken into consideration.
- 10.7** The Department is also developing preparatory work towards the provision of legislation which will enable it to introduce future arrangements, if funded to do so, to encourage developers to use Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) as the preferred drainage solution in new developments. These arrangements which would require further consultation in due course may propose to detail how SuDS can be approved as part of a potential approval process for developments and requirements for their ongoing long-term maintenance. SuDS can assist in the

management of flood and pollution risks from excess water and can benefit water quality, biodiversity, health, and public amenity.

- 10.8** It is therefore recognised that the SPPS and the planning system have an important role to play in supporting the wider efforts of government in supporting flood risk management. An established approach has been to prevent inappropriate new development in areas known to be at risk of flooding, or that may increase the flood risk elsewhere. The SPPS, therefore, currently provides that, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, new development is not located within the flood plains of rivers or the sea where it may be at risk or increase the risk of flooding in the locality.
- 10.9** The current definition of a flood plain contained in the SPPS does not include an allowance for Climate Change. Whilst DfI Rivers, in its role as statutory consultee, will continue to provide advice taking into account the latest information on flood risk (including for Climate Change) it is recognised that updating the definition of a flood plain in the SPPS can provide further policy backing to support decision making by planning authorities.
- 10.10** The SPPS also recognises that the planning system should help to mitigate and adapt to Climate Change by working with natural environmental processes, for example through promoting the development of green infrastructure and also the use of SuDS to reduce flood risk and improve water quality.
- 10.11** For the existing policy provisions in relation to 'Flood Risk' please see paragraphs 6.99 – 6.132 of the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

QUESTION 4: *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the subject policy 'Flood Risk', as set out in the SPPS, in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*

Transportation

- 10.12** The Department is the roads authority for Northern Ireland with responsibility for almost all aspects of transport policy including public transport, promotion of active and sustainable travel, the development and implementation of a transport strategy, transport plans and the provision, management and maintenance of the road network as well as delivering wider transport projects. In addition, the Department is a statutory consultee in the planning process in relation to roads related matters.
- 10.13** As the second largest contributor to carbon emissions, the transport sector and particularly its surface transport, needs to play a critical role in responding to the climate emergency. The CCA places a clear responsibility on the Department to decarbonise the transportation sector. As previously mentioned, the Department

is currently bringing forward a Transport Strategy (TSNI) that will set out its new approach for the transport system up to 2035. The strategy aims to provide a clear framework for action which will facilitate implementation of a range of decarbonisation initiatives.

10.14 The planning system has an important role to play in supporting the priorities set out in the TSNI and the Department will aim to ensure that the regional strategic planning policies within the SPPS, planning guidance in [Living Places](#), and council LDPs continue to help improve connectivity, promote more sustainable transport patterns and support the decarbonisation of the transport sector.

10.15 Going forward, the planning system could potentially improve the alignment of transport planning in Northern Ireland with the climate targets outlined in the CCA and help support the 'Hierarchy in Reducing the Carbon Impact of Transport'. This hierarchy is focused on reducing the number and length of trips; increasing a shift of modes from the use of the private car to public transport and active travel; and a switch to more sustainable fuels.

10.16 Within this context the Department is focused on encouraging and prioritising low-carbon transport options, such as:

- Transport Demand Management: measures that help manage and reduce travel demand, such as flexible working arrangements, tele-commuting, and further promotion of cycling and walking for short-distance trips,
- Active Travel Infrastructure: enhancing the focus on active travel (cycling and walking) by allocating more space for cycle paths, pedestrian zones, and implementing measures to improve safety and accessibility for non-motorised transport modes,
- Sustainable Transport Networks: ensuring that transport planning focuses on developing sustainable transport networks that minimise carbon emissions, such as investing in efficient public transport systems, promoting shared mobility services, and integrating different modes of transport, and
- Monitoring and Reporting: implementing monitoring mechanisms to regularly assess the progress and impact of transport-related Climate Change targets.

10.17 The SPPS was introduced in 2015 in the context of the 'Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland' for the period 2002-2012, and the subsequent document 'Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future: A New Approach to Regional Transportation', published in March 2012.

10.18 In respect of transportation, the SPPS seeks to support a 'modal shift' by promoting sustainable forms of development that reduce the need for motorised transport and encourages opportunities for active travel and travel by public transport in preference to the private car.

- 10.19** It also recognises that the preparation of a LDP provides the opportunity to assess the transport needs, problems and opportunities within the plan area and that appropriate consideration be given to transportation issues in the allocation of land for future development, including appropriate integration between transport modes and land use. Policy specifies that LDPs should identify active travel networks and provide a range of infrastructure improvements to increase use of more sustainable modes.
- 10.20** Any review of the SPPS in relation to Climate Change should take account of the new approach for transport infrastructure planning and delivery of transport infrastructure services across Northern Ireland.
- 10.21** The planning system can play a positive role in supporting the decarbonisation of transportation. It can promote more sustainable transportation for a greener and more resilient future. The review provides the opportunity to ensure that the subject planning policy for transportation remains up to date and fit for purpose for plan-making and decision-taking. For example, it could consider how regional strategic planning policy can best support and integrate active travel infrastructure and use, deliver sustainable patterns of development that reduce the need to travel and encourage travel by greener modes of travel that minimise carbon emissions.
- 10.22** For the existing policy provisions in relation to ‘Transportation’ please see paragraphs 6.293 – 6.305 of the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

QUESTION 5: *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the subject policy ‘Transportation’, as set out in the SPPS, in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*

Development in the Countryside

- 10.23** It is recognised that there are wide variations across Northern Ireland in terms of the economic, social and environmental characteristics of rural areas and that Northern Ireland is characterised by a distinct dispersed rural settlement pattern.
- 10.24** Given the declaration of a climate emergency and the challenges in delivering on the ambitions of the CCA, the Department is considering whether the current approach to new development in the countryside remains appropriate. The role and function of rural settlements and accessibility to existing services and infrastructure is also important.
- 10.25** The aim of the SPPS in relation to the countryside is to manage development in a manner which strikes a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining rural communities, consistent with the RDS. The policy approach is to cluster, consolidate, and group

new development with existing established buildings, and promote the re-use of previously used buildings.

10.26 The current policy provides a wide range of opportunities for development in the countryside including new dwellings in existing clusters; replacement dwellings; dwellings on farms; dwellings for non-agricultural business enterprises; infill development; the conversion and reuse of existing buildings; and a dwelling where there are personal and domestic circumstances. Additional opportunities are provided for a temporary caravan; social and affordable housing development; and non-residential development including farm diversification; agriculture and forestry development; and the conversion and reuse of existing buildings for non-residential use.

10.27 For the existing policy provisions in relation to ‘Development in the Countryside’ please see paragraphs 6.61 – 6.75 of the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

QUESTION 6: *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the subject policy ‘Development in the Countryside’, as set out in the SPPS, in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*

Other Matters

10.28 As per paragraphs 6.4 and 6.5 above, the Department is particularly keen to hear views and gather evidence in response to Questions 1-6. However, the Department recognises that there may be comments/evidence in relation to other aspects of the SPPS that you may wish to comment on in relation to Climate Change that might assist the Department with determining the most appropriate way forward.

QUESTION 7: *In light of the declared climate emergency and the requirements of The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, can you provide any other evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the SPPS to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*

11. Summary of Questions

- 1) *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve 'The Purpose of Planning' as contained within the SPPS so that it is fit for purpose and suitably future proofed to appropriately support the Climate Change agenda going forward? Please detail.*
- 2) *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve 'Furthering Sustainable Development' (including Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change and The Importance of Ecosystem Services) in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*
- 3) *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the 'Core Planning Principles' in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*
- 4) *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the subject policy 'Flood Risk', as set out in the SPPS, in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*
- 5) *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the subject policy 'Transportation', as set out in the SPPS, in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*
- 6) *Can you provide any evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the subject policy 'Development in the Countryside', as set out in the SPPS, in order to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*
- 7) *In light of the declared climate emergency and the requirements of The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, can you provide any other evidence on how and why the Department should update, revise, and improve the SPPS to better support the Climate Change agenda? Please detail.*

12. Next Steps

- 12.1** Responses to this Call for Evidence should be made to the Department by:
5.00pm, Thursday 28 March 2024.
- 12.2** The information gathered, as a result of this Call for Evidence will be considered by the Department and will help inform any potential focused review of the SPPS in relation to Climate Change.
- 12.3** Depending, in part, upon the evidence received, the consideration and scope of any potential review will be refined to focus on the key issues and/or if further research should be undertaken. Any necessary revisions to regional strategic planning policy will follow the normal policy development process and would involve the preparation of a draft policy proposal which would be subject to full public consultation.

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