



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

Department for

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

EASY READ

Issued: 3 January 2024

Respond by: 28 March 2024

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PLEASE NOTE: This is an 'Easy Read' version of the Call for Evidence. It contains a lot less detail than the full document. If you would like more detail, you may find the full version better suited to your needs. This can be accessed at: www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/call-evidence-future-focused-review-SPPS-climate-change

To get a copy of this document in another format, or tell us what you think, you can:

- **Telephone: 028 9054 0612** and talk to one of the Regional Planning and Policy team members. If you have a hearing difficulty, you can use the text relay prefix 18001.
- **Or E-mail: SPPSteam@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk**

About us

We are the Department for Infrastructure.

What do we do?

We have many wide-ranging responsibilities in relation to water, transport, and planning (including the making of regional planning policy).

We look after our water, rivers, roads, and transport infrastructure.

We manage over £37 billion of public assets that improve people's quality of life and help reduce our impact on the planet.

Here are some of the main things we do.

Water

- We help to reduce the risk of flooding by looking after our sea and river flood defences and by providing expert advice on flooding matters to decision makers, including planners in councils.
- We lead the emergency response to flooding and other severe weather incidents.
- We develop policy and legislation for water, reservoirs and sewerage and we fund and oversee Northern Ireland Water as a shareholder.
- We also bring forward rivers and drainage policy and legislation.

Transport

- We are bringing forward a new transport strategy for Northern Ireland.
- We are responsible for the provision, management, and maintenance of all our public roads, and for the promotion of road safety and active and sustainable travel, including walking, wheeling, and cycling.
- We fund Translink which runs the buses and trains on the public transport network.

Planning

- We make planning policy and planning legislation to guide local development plans and decisions on planning applications.
- We also take decisions on some large planning applications.
- We provide expert advice on roads, rivers, and sewerage issues to our local

councils.

- We are working with others to make the planning system better.

This is a Call for Evidence on:

A potential review of the *Strategic Planning Policy Statement (the SPPS)* on the issue of *Climate Change*

What is the SPPS?

The SPPS is our policy on how we should deal with important planning matters for different land uses and types of development across Northern Ireland.

This policy is used to guide councils in making their local development plans (LDPs) and for those that take decisions on planning applications and planning appeals. A LDP sets out the policies and proposals of councils to be used to decide development proposals for the long-term future development of their areas.

In June 2022 government introduced a new law called the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. This legislation sets an ambitious target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with interim targets for 2030 and 2040.

This means we need to make a big shift in Northern Ireland's approach to the climate crisis and will require an immediate change in all of our activities.

We are thinking about changing the SPPS in places to give it an improved focus on the issue of Climate Change.

You can look at the current SPPS here: [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

Why are we doing a Call for Evidence?

We are looking at how our policies can help improve how our planning system responds to the challenges of our changing climate now and into the future.

We want to reach out to everyone to get your views on the policy areas of the SPPS we think are most relevant in relation to Climate Change.

We want to gather information through the Call for Evidence consultation to help a future Infrastructure Minister decide on whether or not to review the SPPS and if so, where the focus should be.

If a decision is made in the future to review the SPPS, the information collected from this Call for Evidence will feed into the review and help us decide the best way to do it.

We want any review to take a fresh look at how suitable the policies in the SPPS are, and to update and develop new policies, if needed.

What does the Call for Evidence cover – what are we asking about?

We want you to focus on the following policies in the SPPS as we think these are the areas which are most impacted by, and are most relevant to, Climate Change:

- The Purpose of Planning,
- Furthering Sustainable Development,
- The Core Planning Principles of the planning system,
- Flood risk,
- Transportation, and
- Development in the countryside.

We want to get your views and gather evidence on the policies mentioned above and how they might need to be updated because of Climate Change.

But we are also interested in any evidence on other policies in the SPPS that you may think are also relevant in terms of Climate Change.

The Purpose of Planning

We are thinking whether we need to update the purpose of planning and give more focus to climate action so that the planning system can do more to help lessen and manage the impacts of a changing climate.

You can read the existing policy wording on 'The Purpose of Planning' by clicking on the following link and going to paragraphs 2.1 – 2.4.

[Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

Please consider question 1 below and give us your views:

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.*

Furthering Sustainable Development

Furthering sustainable development can be described as doing things to help meet our needs now without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is at the heart of the SPPS and the planning system.

The SPPS already gives us examples of how the planning system can play an important part in helping to slow down or address the worst impacts of Climate Change on communities, buildings and on our environment. We are thinking about whether we might need to improve this policy to make it better.

You can read the existing policy wording on 'Furthering Sustainable Development' by clicking on the link below and going to paragraphs 3.1 – 3.16.

[Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

Please consider question 2 below and give us your views.

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.*

Core Planning Principles

The SPPS has 5 'Core Planning Principles' that are very important for planning and for achieving sustainable development. Four of these principles are very relevant to Climate Change and you can read a short description of each below.

Improving Health and Well-Being

The SPPS states that planning should influence health and well-being positively by encouraging better environmentally sustainable design; providing better connected communities with safe pedestrian areas; making sure planning and transport are more linked; and helping to provide and protect green infrastructure (such as parks, green spaces, and street trees) and blue infrastructure (such as ponds, streams, and lakes).

Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth

The SPPS encourages sustainable economic growth whilst also trying to protect and make the natural and built environment better.

Supporting Good Design and Positive Place-Making

This core planning principle also encourages the need to react to and reduce the

impacts of Climate Change. The SPPS accepts that good design can further sustainable development; encourage healthier living; promote accessibility and inclusivity; and contribute to how safe places are and feel.

Preserving and Improving the Built and Natural Environment

This core planning principle tries to make sure that the environment is managed in a sustainable way to protect our landscape and its heritage assets; preserving and improving the natural and built environment; and, stopping the loss of biodiversity (that is the variety of plant and animal life in the world).

You can read the existing policy wording on the 'Core Planning Principles' by clicking on the link below and going to paragraphs 4.1 – 4.40.

[Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

Please consider question 3 below and give us your views.

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.

The SPPS includes 18 subject policies on different planning policy topics. We are thinking about whether 3 of these subject policies may need to be reviewed to make them better, given Climate Change. These are the subject policies on Flood Risk, Transportation and Development in the Countryside.

Flood Risk

Flooding is a big risk to people, property, and our environment. Our changing climate is making this an even bigger risk to us all. We have experienced and should expect more frequent and extreme weather conditions and events because of Climate Change.

The SPPS and the planning system have an important role to play in supporting flood risk management. Our current approach is to limit new development from being built in areas that flood or where a development may increase the risk of flooding elsewhere.

The SPPS, therefore, advises that new development should not be located within the flood plains (the area which may flood) of rivers or the sea.

We are thinking about whether we need to improve this subject policy to make it better, given the context of Climate Change.

You can read the existing policy wording on 'Flood Risk' by clicking on the link below and going to paragraphs 6.99 – 6.132.

[Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

Please consider question 4 below and give us your views:

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

We are responsible for the network that allows people or goods to move around by road, train, or by ship, and for making transport policy, including planning policy on transport.

As the second largest contributor to carbon emissions, the transport sector and particularly surface transport, needs to play a key role in responding to the climate emergency.

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 (making journeys in physically active ways like cycling or walking) and travel by public transport in preference to the private car.

We are bringing forward a new Transport Strategy and think we should also consider changing our planning policy to ensure that it can support more walking, wheeling, cycling and use of our buses and trains.

We are thinking about whether we need to improve this subject policy to make it better, given the context of Climate Change.

You can read the existing policy wording on 'Transportation' by clicking on the link below and going to paragraphs 6.293 – 6.305.

[Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

Please consider question 5 below and give us your views:

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

The aim of the SPPS regarding development in the countryside is to strike a balance between protection of the environment from the wrong type of development, while supporting and sustaining rural communities.

The current policy approach for development in the countryside is to cluster, consolidate, and group new development with existing established buildings, and

promote the re-use of previously used buildings. The SPPS provides a wide range of opportunities for housing, farming, and other types of development in the countryside.

We are thinking about whether we need to improve this subject policy to make it better, given the context of Climate Change.

You can read the existing policy wording on 'Development in the Countryside' by clicking on the link below and going to paragraphs 6.61 – 6.75.

[Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#)

Please consider question 6 below and give us your views:

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

We are happy to receive any comments or evidence you may have about other policies in the SPPS that you think are relevant to Climate Change, that might help us in deciding the best way forward or in improving or making new policy.

QUESTION 7: 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.

How to Respond

You can respond to the full consultation survey online through the [Citizen Space hub](#).

Or

Tell us what you think about it by:

- **Telephone: 028 9054 0612** and talk to one of the Regional Planning and Policy team members. If you have a hearing difficulty, you can use the text relay prefix **18001**.
- **Email: sppsteam@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk**

When responding please provide the following information, if possible:

- your name,
- contact details (preferably email),
- the organisation you represent (if applicable), and
- your main area of interest.

The Call for Evidence will run **from Wednesday 3 January 2024 to Thursday 28 March 2024**.

Please respond through Citizen Space if possible.

Please note, you can complete as few or as many questions as you want.

You can get a copy of the full version of Call for Evidence via the following link: www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/call-evidence-future-focused-review-SPPS-climate-change

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