



RESIDENTIAL AND NURSING HOMES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Department has recently received a number of planning applications (or residential and nursing homes particularly in the Belfast area and in some rural areas and the purpose of this advice note is to provide guidance and advice to intending developers and their agents as well as to other interested parties.

1.2 "Residential and nursing homes" fall within class 11 of the Planning (Use Classes) Order 1973 which covers the following:

'Use as a home or institution providing for the boarding, care and maintenance of children, old people, or persons under disability, a convalescent home, a nursing home, or a hospital'

Although this Advice Note concentrates on residential and nursing homes, the advice given can also be applied to hospitals in appropriate circumstances. In any case where differences can arise as between one use and another within class 11; the Department reserves the right to grant planning permission, subject to no change within the class.

1.3 Where part of a dwelling house is to be used for residential care and the remainder is occupied by the owner/operator of the facility the latter is advised to contact the Divisional planning Office to see if planning permission is required. In cases where planning permission is required for changes of use the Department will need to be satisfied that detailed planning requirements can be met, and also taken cumulatively, small extensions and changes of use will not adversely affect the character of an area.

1.4 Types of Planning Application

Applications for residential and nursing homes fall into the following categories:

- (1) New development. This covers situations where new home is to be built on an undeveloped site or a site which is due for redevelopment.
- (2) Change of use of a building to a residential or nursing home. Detached dwellings are likely to be the most acceptable for this type of use, particularly if they are substantial villas or mansions set in reasonably large grounds with mature landscaping.
- (3) Extension to an existing residential or nursing home.

2.0 CITIES, TOWNS AND VILLAGES

2.1 It is to be expected that, other than in exceptional circumstances, residential and nursing homes will be located in cities, towns and villages where services are readily and conveniently available. Clearly a different range of planning considerations can arise as between a site in Belfast compared to a site within a small town or village.

2.2 Planning Considerations

In urban areas the Department will have regard to the following matters:

- (1) **Siting.** Attention will be paid to the size of site, its configuration and any physical characteristics and constraints attaching thereto, including the position of the buildings.
- (2) **Locality.** The Department will consider the existing (and anticipated) character of the area in which the proposal is to be located and the compatibility of the use in such an area.

The existence or otherwise of similar establishments will be considered from the point of view of precedent, as well as from the point of view of the effect of an additional establishment or establishments on the character of the area. These considerations will have particular relevance in coastal resort towns where changes of use of hotels and/or guest houses to residential/nursing homes could have a significant impact on the tourist industry and the character of the resort.

- (3) **Traffic Aspects.** The Department will satisfy itself on the following points:
- (a) That access requirements can be met.
 - (b) That the existing road network can satisfactorily accommodate any additional traffic from the proposal.
 - (c) On and off street parking and servicing requirements can be met taking into account provision for staff, (full-time and part-time) visitors, doctors, ambulances, service vehicles, taxis etc and bearing in mind the capacity of the site/area to accept them. Parking standards are as follows:
 - (i) Staff parking - one space per full-time member of staff. Part-time staff - one space per 2 part-time members of staff.
 - (ii) Visitor parking - one space per 3 beds.Service vehicles, particularly doctors and ambulances should be able to manoeuvre unimpeded within the site.
- (4) **Amenity.** Due regard will be given to the effect of nursing and residential homes on the amenity of area in question, both visually and with regard to noise, nuisance and general disturbance.
- (5) **Design and Layout.** In cases other than changes of use it is important to ensure that the design and layout of buildings on site are satisfactory in themselves and in relation to adjoining properties. The Department will have regard to the height, scale, massing, space around buildings, distances from boundaries etc and to the provision of garden amenity space for use by residents.
- (6) **Landscaping.** The impact of any proposals on existing landscaping will be considered together with the need for the provision of new or additional landscape treatment on any proposed site.

3.0 RURAL AREAS AND HAMLETS

- 3.1 Proposals for residential and nursing homes in rural areas and hamlets will be considered in the context of the Department's rural planning policy introduced in 1978'. The policy distinguishes between areas of special control and other rural areas. The areas of special control are identified to protect rural areas around towns and also areas of high amenity or scientific value. Within these areas the policy is much stricter than in other rural areas. Paragraphs 3.5(1) of the policy states that no development will be allowed within areas of special control or it should be kept to a minimum. Whilst planning permission for residential and nursing homes cannot be entirely ruled out in areas of special control, in practice such instances are likely to be very rare indeed.
- 3.2 With regard to rural areas, outside areas of special control paragraph 3.7.4 of the rural policy is relevant. It states that "normally buildings erected for community use should be provided in existing settlements, but it is recognised that exceptionally there may be a need for such buildings in a rural area'.
- 3.3 Planning permission is only likely to be granted for nursing or residential homes in the countryside in exceptional circumstances. In considering what might be exceptional it is necessary to weigh the relevant considerations. These fall into 2 categories:
- (1) The need to locate in the countryside.
 - (2) Impact on the countryside.
- 3.4 *The Need to Locate in the Countryside*
- Residential and nursing homes should not normally be located in the countryside where such locations can be a disadvantage due to the absence of service facilities near at hand. Convenient public transport is desirable for visitors and relatives. Exceptionally there may be circumstances where the peace and quiet of the countryside might be particularly appropriate eg for the nursing of the terminally ill or convalescent cases.
- 3.5 *Impact on the Countryside*
- Planning considerations such as location, siting, traffic aspects, amenity, design, layout and landscaping referred to in paragraph 2.3 above are important. In addition in rural areas it is important to ascertain that satisfactory drainage and sewerage arrangements can be provided.
- 3.6 The nature of the proposal will also be important. Whilst a change of use and limited alterations or extension of a large rural house in extensive grounds may be acceptable in particular circumstances, new building or extensive additions to modest buildings would normally not be permitted.
- 3.7 The question of precedent may also be an important one. If the proposal is likely to lead to a number of similar proposals then this will be a factor in determining an application.

3.8 GREENBELTS AND AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

More recently the Department has agreed to the replacement of areas of special control with greenbelts (around towns) and redesignated areas of outstanding natural beauty (in areas of high amenity or scientific importance) with adjustment to boundaries as necessary. These changes are being incorporated into the statutory development plans process. Essentially these are changes in nomenclature and boundaries, but not in the rural policy itself. The comments in paragraph 3.1 will therefore apply to greenbelts and redesignated areas of outstanding natural beauty and those in paragraph 3.2 in respect of other rural areas.

3.9 HAMLETS

When considering whether or not hamlets are likely to be acceptable locations for residential and nursing homes the question of the scale of the proposal and its impact on the hamlet is important. Because of their size and the nature of the activities involved residential and nursing homes are normally more suited to urban locations. Whilst in certain exceptional circumstances hamlets may well be better locations than the open countryside, they are not normally suitable locations for residential and nursing homes.