

## **POOTS PUBLISHES PROPOSALS TO OVERHAUL THE PLANNING SYSTEM**

Environment Minister Edwin Poots today launched proposals for the most sweeping reform of Northern Ireland's planning system for over 30 years.

The Minister said the proposed reforms were aimed at delivering a more effective and responsive planning system.

Mr Poots said: **"I welcome the fact that Executive colleagues have cleared the planning reform consultation paper. I am also grateful for the sterling work done by my predecessor, Sammy Wilson, in advancing the proposals to this stage. The reforms proposed in this paper represent the most far-reaching changes to our planning system in over 30 years.**

**"I believe these proposals will help transform our mainly regulatory planning system into a more responsive one which helps to enable appropriate development and manage it in the public interest to achieve sustainable economic growth."**

The Minister said Northern Ireland needed a planning system which would enable the Executive to meet its key aim of growing the economy.

He said: **"A reformed planning system should enable more timely decision-making in ways which are transparent, demonstrably fair and deliver better quality development decisions.**

**"No one should underestimate the scale of the reform programme, particularly when combined with the transfer of responsibility for the majority of planning functions to the new councils."**

Among the proposals the Minister tabled were:

- A new streamlined, fit for purpose and responsive local development plan system which would enable district councils, communities and developers to work together to prepare plans setting a clear and realistic vision of how places should change and what they will be like in the future.
- Performance agreements, pre-application community consultation and pre-determination council hearings to improve efficiency, provide greater certainty about timescales and enhance transparency and openness.
- An expansion of the list of statutory consultees to ensure relevant statutory bodies are consulted by the planning authorities. A statutory obligation will also be introduced on consultees to respond within a specified timeframe.
- A new regime of development management, changing the culture of the planning application process to ensure it is responsive to different types of proposals to help deliver development; improve efficiency in determining applications; and enhance community involvement at appropriate points in the process.
- Views are also being sought on whether it should be a criminal offence for someone to carry out development without planning permission.

The Minister said: **"I believe that the publication of the consultation paper lays the foundation for transforming the current planning system and is a significant step on the journey to securing greater effectiveness and responsiveness for all users of the system. It is important that we all contribute to the debate on how we can ensure that we have a first class planning system which serves the needs of all the people of Northern Ireland."**

Accompanying the consultation paper is the Department's draft Equality Impact Assessment at a strategic level. The Minister indicated that views are also sought on its findings as the Department is committed to ensuring that Section 75 principles and best practice are mainstreamed into the planning reform programme.

During September, 11 stakeholder events will be held across Northern Ireland where the proposals can be discussed. These will be advertised shortly on the Planning Service website at [www.planningni.gov.uk](http://www.planningni.gov.uk) and in the local press.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

1. For media enquires please contact DOE Press Office on 028 9054 0014 or out of office hours, contact the EIS Duty Press Officer on pager 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.

This is an automated distribution service - please do not reply to this email address.