

Department of the Environment

25 November 2008

NEW RURAL PLANNING POLICY IS BALANCED, SAYS WILSON

Draft PPS21, the new planning policy for the countryside, will boost the rural economy, Environment Minister Sammy Wilson stated today.

The Minister told the Assembly the new policy, which replaces the more restrictive PPS14, struck the right balance between the needs of rural communities and protecting the countryside from unnecessary development.

Mr Wilson told MLAs: "This policy offers a number of development opportunities which did not exist in draft PPS14 which will benefit non-farming rural dwellers as well as farmers.

"But it will not permit a building free-for-all in our countryside

"Draft PPS21 will assist the rural economy but not at the expense of our rich natural assets or of our built or natural environment.

"In developing this policy we have kept what is good and useful in draft PPS14. We have cast aside the overly restrictive policies imposed by Direct Rule Ministers and we have introduced new, more imaginative measures that are right for Northern Ireland."

The new planning policy, which was published by the Minister, came into effect immediately.

The policy will apply across Northern Ireland, including in Greenbelts and Countryside Policy Areas, with the exception of exceptional landscapes such as the high Mourne and Slieve Gullion which require special protection.

The Minister explained: "Draft PPS21 replaces draft PPS14 as the planning policy on sustainable development in the countryside.

"This means that draft PPS21, rather than draft PPS14, will be used to assess planning applications for development in the countryside received after March 16, 2006.

"Planning Service is now holding in abeyance over 2,000 planning applications which would have been refused under draft PP14. These can now be reassessed under the new policy.

"Some applications - but by no means all - are likely to be recommended for approval. Reassessment will take some months to complete."

He added: "There has been much speculation in the press about what is in this document.

"I urge people to read it for themselves and to make up their own minds about it.

"It is still in draft - that is because we want to hear what people think of the policy before we finalise it.

"In January and February, we will be holding information days across Northern Ireland so that people can find out more about it. I encourage everyone with an interest to let us know their views in the consultation which closes on March 31."

Notes for editors

1. Publication of draft PPS21 marks the culmination of a review of rural planning policy launched on October 25th 2007 by the then Minister for the Environment, Arlene Foster.
2. The work of the review was carried forward by a subgroup of the Executive comprising the Ministers for Agriculture and Rural Development, Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Regional Development, Social Development and both Junior Ministers.

3. The proposed policy is for all rural people and all rural areas. The policy changes which the Subcommittee has proposed offer considerable opportunities for sustainable development in the countryside which do not exist under the current draft PPS14. These include:

- :: The reinstatement of Dispersed Rural Communities;
- :: Greater opportunity for the replacement of dwellings;
- :: New policy for the reuse or replacement of non-residential buildings as dwellings;
- :: An enhanced policy on social and affordable housing;
- :: The reintroduction of a policy for a dwelling to meet compelling personal or domestic circumstances; and
- :: A new policy for dwellings on farms to replace the much maligned farm viability test.

4. The consultation period for the new draft policy starts now and runs until March 31.

5. An independent working group will be set up to consider the implications of Draft PPS21 on, and provide future options for, the non-farming rural community. It will start work in the New Year.

6. Draft PPS21 and the Minister's Statement can be viewed online at www.planningni.gov.uk or from Draft PPS21 Consultation on 028 9025 7374.

7. For media enquiries please contact DOE Press Office 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.