05 Replacement

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Castle Espie Visitor Centre, Comber - replacement on the site for the former centre and winner at the 2009 Sustainable Ireland Awards and the RSUA 2010 Awards.
As part of the general approach to sustainability running through PPS 21 the policy places a strong emphasis on the opportunities to re-use and develop the existing rural settlement pattern through a sensitive policy for replacement dwellings. Policy CTY3 sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed and it contains specific safeguards for the integration and retention of non listed vernacular buildings that are considered to be important to retain because of the contribution they make to the character and appearance of our local rural landscapes.

Their importance in terms of the overall character of the area, means that replacement will only be considered where it is clear that the building is not capable of being made structurally sound. Evidence to support any proposal in this regard will need to be substantiated through the provision of a structural engineering assessment, which will be subject to consideration and approval by qualified engineers retained by Planning Service or their statutory consultee, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Applications for the replacement of recently destroyed dwellings will also need to submit evidence about the status and previous condition of the building.

The guidance offered in this section presumes that the proposal qualifies as a replacement under the terms set out in PPS21. That is:

- It exhibits the essential characteristics of a dwelling
- All external walls are substantially intact
- If a non residential building, it will bring significant environmental benefits
- Is not listed or otherwise judged to make an important contribution to the heritage, appearance or character of the locality

Replacement projects can help to reinvigorate our rural landscape through the sensitive redevelopment of the historic footprints of long established buildings. Sites for replacement projects can prove an attractive option for building in the countryside as they will generally have key services in place in terms of access, water and power etc but will also have well established mature boundaries that will already have achieved a strong visual linkage with the landscape. Renewing development on these sites reinforces the historic rural settlement pattern.

Working within such sites the design priorities will be to:

1. Establish the right scale of the replacement building and make sure it fits comfortably on the original site and integrates well with retained outbuildings and well established mature landscape features.
2. Retain key established site character features particularly at access points, lanes and driveways.
3. Retain all mature trees, hedgerows, walls and boundaries where possible.
4. Make best use of architectural salvage and derelict building materials such as natural stone for incorporation in the new building or ancillary buildings and for the reinstatement of boundary walls. Repair and reuse traditional iron gates and reuse what ironmongery can be salvaged from the original building where possible (letter boxes, door knockers, etc).
Replacement

5.2 Basic Rules for Replacement Projects

5.2.0 The replacement dwelling should generally be placed as close as possible to the footprint of the original house, unless significant benefits are apparent in terms of visual and functional integration.

5.2.1 The replacement dwelling should be of a form and scale that integrates well with the characteristics of the site. Replacement dwellings should not be of an excessive size in comparison to the original building or be located a significant distance away from the original footprint unless there are clear and evident benefits.

5.2.2 The proposal takes full advantage of the retention of established and mature landscape and boundary features and retains the discreet character of existing access points.

5.2.3 Use is made of recycled building materials in the new proposal.

Off site replacement

5.2.4 Circumstances may arise where there are good planning reasons for a replacement dwelling to depart from the site of the original dwelling. For this to meet the terms of policy CTY3 there must be a clear demonstration of betterment in terms of landscape and visual integration, the safeguarding of a built or natural heritage asset or other exceptional access or amenity benefits that offer clear planning merit.

5.2.5 It is important that applicants prepare and present the rationale in support of an offsite replacement proposal and clearly articulate the planning benefits of adopting this approach. Where appropriate, applicants should present sufficient detailed information in the form of supporting drawings, sketches, reports or photomontages to enable the case officer to properly assess the merits of this design approach.
Replacement: Scale and Size

5.3 Replacement: Scale and Size

5.3.0 A frequent mistake with replacement projects often rests with a poor understanding or appreciation of scale and size. A typical group of local rural buildings will comprise a house, store, various outbuildings and perhaps a barn or lean-to shelter. There will be an evident relationship within this collection of buildings that will reflect a common sense of scale and proportion relative to the size of the site and the physical characteristics of its setting. To successfully introduce a new contemporary house to this group will require a skilled understanding of this relationship.

5.3.1 The most common offence is to introduce a new house that is simply too big for the site and bears no relationship to the scale of the traditional buildings that are retained. Skilled designers are trained in the assessment of scale in the design process. The key message is that a building's size must be relative to its surroundings.

The simplicity of form and grouping found in traditional Glebe and linear farmhouses offers considerable scope for breaking down the scale and complex, bulky massing of many poorly designed modern houses. These sketches show various combinations and permutations for this.

As a general rule keep forms as simple as possible. Dormer windows were not a feature of traditional Northern Irish farmhouses - avoid them (especially on large houses).
From this typology of rural buildings we can identify aspects of our regional architectural signature:

- Long and low buildings
- Few add-ons such as dormers, bay windows or rooflights
- Vertical emphasis to gables
- Narrow plan
- 35-55 degree roof pitch

Our countryside contains a wide variety of building shapes and forms which generally tend to be fairly simple. Replacement projects will tend to be most successful where they defer to the form and shape of the building they are replacing. In most cases this means they will need to interpret the long, low form of the narrow gabled Ulster farm house. This form dominates but we also have the two storey house, one and a half storey cottage, and the cuboid glebe house. Add to this the tin and slate roof lean-to, the curved tin hay sheds and the sturdy and solid thatched houses of which we have very few left and we have the collective palette of rural building forms that give our landscape its unique identity.
Examples on these pages illustrate a number of commonly occurring elements that can result in poor or unacceptable design. This list is not exhaustive, but serves to highlight the common pitfalls which should be avoided.

**AVOID THE FOLLOWING**

- Dominant roofs
- Complex roof shapes
- Complex house shapes
- Large scale
- Awkward form
- Excessively small scale outshots/ extensions relative to the main house form
- Varying lengths of roof planes
- Ridge lines that are excessively high relative to the eaves
- Excessively high eaves lines
- Raised verges – these do not integrate well viewed from afar
- Wide gables – these result in poor proportions
- Mix of gable widths
- Mix of roof pitches
- Half hipped gables

5.4.3 We frequently make mistakes when we try to apply the deep plan house form to replacement sites. The wide gabled fat bungalow or big two storey trophy house typical of the 90's and early 2000's, rarely works in these situations because they have difficulty relating to the scale of the site and the form of the retained rural buildings.

They also of course have few of the attributes we can recognise as belonging to the palette of northern Irish rural architecture. Houses that have wide gables, high eaves, synthetic finishes, decorative frontages with a low roof pitch tend not to work well.

**AVOID THE FOLLOWING**

- Two storey projecting bay windows, porches and apses
- Dormers within the roof - these do not integrate well viewed from afar
- Too many dormers - these make a house look overly fussy
- Mixture of dormer types within a roof
- Overhanging fascias and soffits on verges and eaves
- Decorative barge boards and fascias
- Extending main roof plane over bay windows
- Extending bay window roofs beyond plan line of bay
- Excessive mixture of bay windows and roof dormers
- Hipped roofed outshots rising from half hexagonal plan
- More than one or two rooflights
- Storey and a half house on a habitable semi-basement plinth
- Chimney breasts that project from gables
- Excessive number of different materials
- Synthetic materials (such as concrete, imitation clay brick or stone and PVCu)