

# Rathlin Island Policy



Department for  
**Regional  
Development**

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AN ROINN

**Forbartha Réigiúnaí**

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MÄNNYSTRIE FUR

**Kintra Pairts Fordèrin**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Rathlin is our only offshore inhabited island. The Executive recognises that the challenges faced by such an island community are different from those on the mainland, and therefore recognises that they need to be addressed in a different way. The Executive will support the Rathlin Island community in its development of a plan to ensure the sustainability of island life and the promotion of a vibrant island community.

The Executive also recognises that the cliffs of Rathlin and the seas around it are of international importance for their seabirds and marine life, while other areas are nationally important for their plant communities, natural habitats and geology. The Island also boasts a remarkably rich and diverse maritime cultural landscape ranging from Bronze Age cave dwellings to nineteenth century clachans. Its historic heritage, including abundant artefacts, represents an important bridge between Scotland and Ireland. Rathlin is also part of the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of outstanding Natural Beauty, for which a management plan has been published. Developments must thus also be sensitive to this environmental richness, which represents a major draw for Tourists.

The Executive will implement a three way working partnership between itself, the Islanders and any other interested parties to take forward the following purpose, aims and objectives that have been developed by the Rathlin Development and Community Association.

## **2. PURPOSE, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Purpose**

To develop a vibrant healthy Rathlin community and increase the involvement of Islanders in the development of policies and projects which improve conditions for all the people of the Island while protecting its environment.

Policies developed for this purpose may differ from policies applying elsewhere, in recognition of the unique circumstances of Rathlin Island and the challenges of island life.

### **Strategic Aims**

- To enhance community involvement;
- To improve the provision of public services for Islanders;
- To advance policies for a sustainable Island community; and
- To conserve the Island's exceptional environmental heritage.

## **Strategic Objectives**

- To develop Islanders' employability;
- To increase the community's capacity to participate in sustainable economic and tourism development, while protecting the environmental and natural assets;
- To ensure a modern affordable Ferry service;
- To ensure affordable housing provision in accordance with assessed need and budgetary provision for Islanders and people;
- To provide the Islanders with equitable access to health and social care that is of an equivalent standard to that provided for people on the mainland, and delivered as far as possible within their community and close to, or in, their homes;
- To develop Rathlin as a carbon neutral Island generating electricity from renewable sources;
- To have a good mains water supply;
- To promote waste management and recycling;
- To actively maintain the Island school;
- Ensure Islanders have equitable access to post primary education;
- To enable the community to contribute fully to Island policies which protect and sustain its unique rural environment, including the landscape, the natural and built heritage;
- To develop agricultural and marine initiatives which develop sustainable farming and fishing and take account of Island circumstances; and

- To draw up a local biodiversity action plan for Rathlin Island and the seas immediately around it.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **Action Plan**

We will develop an Action Plan over the next six months that will set out in detail how this policy will be delivered over a two year term. This work will be led by the Department for Regional Development and implementation will require close collaboration between departments and other interested parties including the islanders. The Action Plan will be reviewed and refreshed every two years with a view to achieving the strategic objectives outlined. The Executive will implement a three way working partnership between itself, the Islanders and any other interested parties to take forward the following purpose, aims and objectives that have been developed by the Rathlin Development and Community Association.

#### **Forum**

We will establish a forum which will meet twice a year. The forum will be chaired by the DRD Minister and will include Island representatives and senior officials from relevant Government Departments and Local Bodies. Its purpose will be to monitor progress against the Action Plan and to review and refresh the Plan to reflect changing circumstances.

## **ANNEX A – Equality Assessment**

Under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Department is required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

In addition, without prejudice to its obligations above, the Department is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

We have carried out an equality screening exercise for the draft Rathlin Policy and found that it does not have any significant equality impact. A full Equality Impact Assessment, therefore, is not required. If you would like a copy of the screening form, please contact us.

## **ANNEX B – Environmental and Other Assessments**

### **Habitats Directive**

One of the main initiatives of the Habitats Directive is the creation of a European network of “Natura 2000” wildlife sites made up of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the related EC Birds Directive.

These sites aim to maintain or restore the extent and quality of rare habitat types and to ensure that rare species can survive and maintain their populations and natural range on a long-term basis.

There is a need to ensure that the implications of present activities and future proposals are properly assessed in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Regulations.

An initial scoping of the draft Rathlin Policy identified 2 coincident, designated Natura 2000 European sites that potentially could be affected by the implementation of aspects of the Policy:

- Rathlin Island Special Protection Area; and
- Rathlin Island Special Area of Conservation.

The designated sites include the Rathlin coast and an area of sea around the island which is used by many of the seabirds which occur around the island’s coast.

Since the policy will be implemented through a Rathlin Island Action Plan, it was determined that actions which could potentially have a negative impact on the designation features of the SPA or SAC should be avoided by carrying out Appropriate Assessments

as required under the Habitats Regulations as the Action Plan is developed.

### **Environmental Assessments**

We screened the draft Policy for environment impacts using the Integrated Impact Assessment toolkit prepared by the Office of the First Minister deputy First Minister. We did not identify any significant likely impacts.

To further ensure the protection of the environment, Strategic Environmental Assessment will be carried out as the Action Plan is developed.

### **Other Assessments**

We screened the draft Policy for a full range of other assessments using the Integrated Impact Assessment toolkit. This screening process did not identify any significant likely impacts.

If you would like a copy of the completed Integrated Impact Assessment, please contact us.

