



# Guide

## Building in the Countryside - Guide to Planning Policies

January 2017



### Background

Planning Policy Statement 21 - Sustainable Development in the Countryside - was published in June 2010. The aims of PPS 21 include striking a balance between the need to protect the countryside from unnecessary or inappropriate development and supporting rural communities. PPS 21 sets out a number of types of development that are acceptable in the countryside. The following is not intended to be a comprehensive summary of PPS 21 but should act as a useful guide.

In April 2012, the Department issued a new design guide, “**Building on Tradition, A Sustainable Design Guide for the Northern Ireland Countryside**” which aims to “assist all of those involved with sustainable development in the Northern Ireland countryside to understand the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 21”.

This provides additional guidance, in particular in relation to design, rural character and visual integration and examples of the types of developments that may be acceptable and is available on the Planning NI website – [www.planningni.gov.uk](http://www.planningni.gov.uk).



# Policies in PPS 21

## Special Countryside Areas

Five existing Countryside Policy Areas will be renamed as Special Countryside Areas. These will be given a higher degree of protection against development. Local policies to protect these areas will be brought forward in Local Development Plans. These are:

- The Islands CPA as identified in Fermanagh Area Plan 2007;
- The Undeveloped Coast CPA as identified in Larne Area Plan 2010;
- The Slieve Croob CPA Zone A as identified in Banbridge District Rural Area Subject Plan 1986-1998;
- The Ring of Gullion CPA Zone A as identified in Newry and Mourne Rural Area Subject Plan 1986-1999; and
- The Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty CPA Zone A as identified in Newry and Mourne Rural Area Subject Plan 1986-1999.



## Design Standards

### Integration and Design (CTY 13)

All new buildings in the countryside will be required to be visually integrated and to meet specific integration and design standards. A proposed new building will be unacceptable where:

- it is a “prominent feature” in the landscape;
- the site does not have “long established natural boundaries” or does not offer adequate “enclosure” to enable the building to “integrate” into the landscape;
- integration relies mainly on new landscaping;
- where other works related to the building are not integrated with their surroundings;
- the building design is unsuitable for the site and its locality;
- it does not “blend” with the surrounding countryside for example, the “landform, existing trees, buildings, slopes and other natural features”;
- in relation to a dwelling proposed on a farm, it “is not visually linked or sited to cluster with an established group of buildings on a farm”.

The criteria used to determine visual impact will include: the location of the site, the position of the building, existence of features providing enclosure and suitability of design. “Skyline development” or “top of slope/ridge location” will be unacceptable. There will be opportunities for “contemporary” or “innovative design”.

The submission of design concept statements, as part of the planning application, will be encouraged. Where possible an existing laneway should provide access to a new building. Some policies set specific additional design criteria, see for example, CTY 3 Replacement Dwellings.

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## Character

### Rural Character (CTY 14)

New buildings in the countryside should not cause a “detrimental change to” or “further erode” the rural character of an area. The policy notes that a new building will be **unacceptable** where:

- it is “unduly prominent” in the landscape;
- it would create a “suburban style build-up of development”;
- it fails to respect the “traditional pattern” of settlement in that area;
- it creates or adds to ribbon development;
- the impact of other works related to the building would damage rural character.

The cumulative impact of a building on rural character will be assessed.

## Opportunities for Housing

### Replacements (CTY 3)

The buildings listed below can be replaced if they meet the design criteria set out in Policy CTY 3 of PPS 21 and other design standards set out in the document:

- Dwellings that “exhibit the essential characteristics of a dwelling” and as a minimum have all external walls substantially intact;
- Dwellings recently destroyed (by fire, for example) - evidence will be required of the previous condition of the building and the cause and extent of the damage;

- Redundant non-residential buildings, like schools and churches, where replacement would bring significant environmental benefits and where the building is not listed or does not make an important contribution to the heritage, appearance or character of the locality. This does not apply to agricultural buildings such as sheds. The building should preferably be replaced with a single dwelling;
- The replacement should be sited within the curtilage of the existing building unless the existing curtilage is too small or a nearby site would provide landscape, heritage, access or amenity benefits. The replacement should not have a visual impact that is significantly greater than the original;
- Listed buildings will only be granted permission for replacement in exceptional circumstances;
- Vernacular<sup>1</sup> buildings that are not listed and are not an important feature in the landscape. It will be acceptable to keep the original building in addition to the replacement if it is sympathetically incorporated into the new scheme;
- Vernacular buildings that are not listed but are an important feature in the landscape, will only be given permission for replacement where they cannot be made structurally sound or otherwise improved.



### **Personal and Domestic Circumstances (CTY 6)**

Planning permission will be granted for a house in the countryside if there are long-term compelling reasons why a house is required on a particular site due to personal or domestic circumstances, for example, to provide care for someone with a medical condition. Evidence should be provided that:

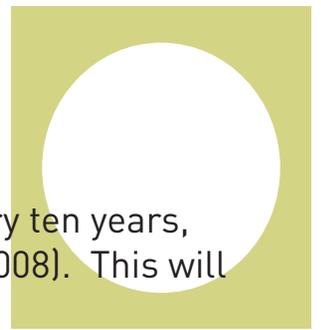
- the house is required;
- hardship would be caused if the application was refused;
- there are no alternatives to building a house, such as an annex or extension.

Only the person named on the application and their dependants will be allowed to live in the house.

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<sup>1</sup> A definition of “vernacular” is provided in Appendix 1.





## Houses on Farms (CTY 10)

Planning permission will be granted for a house on a farm once every ten years, starting from the date that Draft PPS 21 was issued (25 November 2008). This will also apply to those involved in commercial horse breeding.

The farm business should be established for six years.

It should also be currently active. 'Agricultural activity' refers to "the production, rearing or growing of agricultural products including harvesting, milking, breeding animals and keeping animals for farming purposes, or maintaining the land in good agricultural and environmental condition. This is in line with EU and DAERA legislation."

DAERA business ID is required along with other evidence of active farming (such as receipt of the Basic Payment Scheme) over this period should be provided.

Dwellings or development opportunities on the farm should not have been sold off in the last ten years, starting from the date that Draft PPS 21 was issued (25 November 2008).

The house must be visually linked to or sited to cluster with an established group of buildings on the farm to qualify for planning permission under this policy.

Access should be from an existing lane where possible.

Exceptionally, an alternative site on the farm will be considered where there are demonstrable health and safety reasons or verifiable plans to expand the farm business at the existing building group.





## Dispersed Rural Communities (CTY 2)

PPS 21 re-instates 12 Dispersed Rural Communities, 11 in Fermanagh and one in Cookstown. Any new Dispersed Rural Communities will be designated through the Development Plan process. They are usually in more remote areas, away from development pressure. There is usually a strong community identity and evidence of local community activity such as the existence of social and recreational facilities. There is normally a traditional focal point, like a church, hall, sports club or school, other services and a number of dwellings that have been built over time.

Traditional “clachan” style developments or clusters of up to six houses will be granted planning permission in Dispersed Rural Communities, at an identified focal point, provided they meet design criteria. Focal points include, for example, churches and community halls. Generally one cluster of housing per focal point will be allowed.

Appropriate economic development, tourism, social or community facilities may also be accommodated. Designs should be of a high quality, appropriate to the rural setting and have regard to local distinctiveness.

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## New Dwellings in Existing Clusters (CTY 2a)

A dwelling at an existing cluster of development will be granted planning permission where:

- the cluster lies outside of a farm and consists of at least four buildings of which at least three are dwellings (excluding ancillary buildings such as garages or outbuildings);
- the cluster appears as a visual entity in the landscape;
- the cluster is associated with a focal point;
- the site provides adequate enclosure and is bounded on at least two sides with other development in the cluster;
- development can be absorbed into the existing cluster through rounding off and consolidation and will not significantly alter its character or visually intrude into the open countryside;
- development would not have an adverse impact on residential amenity.



## **Conversions (CTY 4)**

The policy encourages the re-use and refurbishment of a locally important building. Buildings, such as schools and churches can be sympathetically converted to a dwelling house or for a variety of different uses where this would secure the retention and upkeep of the building. They must be a permanent building and meet the design criteria set out in policy CTY 4. A locally important building can be sympathetically converted to more than one dwelling where the building is of sufficient size, there is minimal intervention with the building and the conversion is of an appropriate size, scale and intensity of use for the locality.

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## **Social and Affordable Housing (CTY 5)**

A group of up to 14 dwellings to provide social and affordable housing can be built:

- next to or near a small settlement; or
- in a Dispersed Rural Community close to a focal point.

The preferred location for social and affordable housing is within a settlement. However, if this is not possible, there is a sequential test in policy CTY 5 to determine an appropriate location for groups of houses next to or near a small settlement. In addition, the policy states that:

- applications must be made by a registered Housing Association;
  - there should be a need for social and affordable housing in the area, identified by the Housing Executive, that cannot be met within a nearby settlement;
  - usually only one group of social and affordable housing will be allowed for each small settlement or dispersed rural community.
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## **Houses for a Non-agricultural Business (CTY 7)**

A house will be allowed in connection with a business, beside or within, the boundaries of the business, where:

- the business is established;
- it is essential for an employee to live on the site of their work for the business to function properly (not for security reasons alone).

The house should integrate with other buildings on the site. Occupation of the house will be restricted for the use of the business. If the business has been operating satisfactorily without a house on the site, evidence should be provided as to why a house is now needed.

## Gap Sites (CTY 8)

Although ribbon development is discouraged, if there is a small gap in a “substantially and continuously built up frontage - a line of three or more buildings”, up to two houses, or in some cases an economic development, will be granted planning permission. Proposals should respect the size, scale, siting and plot size of existing developments in the ribbon.

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## Temporary Caravans and Mobile Homes (CTY 9)

Temporary caravans will be granted planning permission, normally for three years, in exceptional circumstances, for example:

- while a permanent house is being built;
- if there are compelling personal or domestic circumstances.

They should integrate with other buildings, be screened from public view and will be subject to planning and environmental considerations. On farms, they should be “visually linked or sited to cluster with an established group of buildings on the farm.”

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## Opportunities for Non-Residential Development

### Farm Diversification (CTY 11)

Forestry or farm diversification proposals will be granted where it is demonstrated that the farm or forestry business is currently active and established and the proposal will be used in conjunction with other agricultural operations on the farm.

The proposal must not have a detrimental affect on the landscape, rural character or the amenity of existing residents.

The proposal should involve the re-use or adaptation of existing farm buildings.

In exceptional cases planning permission for a new build will be granted where the re-use or adaptation of existing buildings is clearly unsuitable (sufficient information must be supplied to illustrate this).

## **Agricultural and Forestry Development (CTY 12)**

Planning permission will be granted if it can be demonstrated the proposal is necessary for the efficient use of the holding, will not harm the local landscape or character of the area and will not result in detrimental impact on the amenity of residents.

Where permission is sought for a new building, the applicant will be required to demonstrate that renovation, alteration, or redevelopment opportunities do not exist.

The new building must be sited beside the existing farm or forestry building. In exceptional circumstances proposals may be permitted away from existing buildings provided there are no other alternative sites at another group of buildings on the holding and where it can be demonstrated that it is essential for the function of the holding or enterprise or there are demonstrable health and safety reasons.

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## **Community Facilities (CTY 1)**

Planning permission will be granted for a necessary community facility to serve the local rural population. This must meet the design standards set out in PPS 21. It will normally be necessary to prove the need for any new community facility and to demonstrate that there is no existing facility that can meet this need.



## **Other Issues for Consideration**

### **Non-Mains Sewerage (CTY 16)**

Planning permission for development relying on non-mains sewerage will only be granted where it can be shown that it will not create or add to a pollution problem.

## Appendix 1: Definitions

**Definition of the Vernacular** - The following definition of vernacular is taken from 'A Sense of Loss – The Survival of Rural Traditional Buildings in Northern Ireland' (1998):

“Rural vernacular or traditional architecture is the construction of small plain buildings in the countryside (particularly before 1925) where the dominant influence in siting, materials, form and design is the local ‘folk tradition’. Such vernacular buildings will have been typical, i.e., of a common type in any given locality and will lack the individualistic and ‘educated’ design features that characterised international fashions in formal architecture during the same period.”

**Definition of Curtilage** - The following definition of Curtilage is taken from PPS 21 and will for the purpose of this policy mean: “The immediate, usually defined and enclosed area surrounding an existing or former dwelling house.”

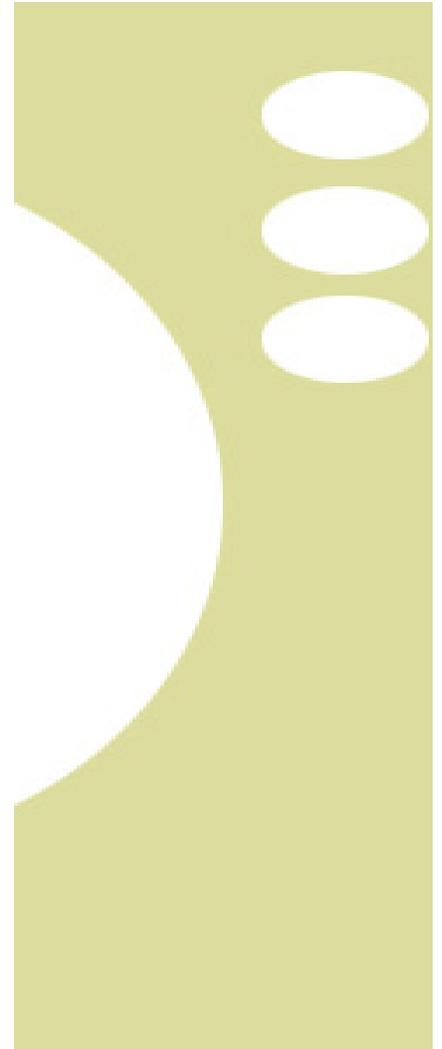
**Definition of Built Up Frontage** - For the purpose of this policy the definition of a substantial and built up frontage includes: “A line of three or more buildings along a road frontage without accompanying development to the rear.”

**Definition of Agricultural Activity** - For the purpose of the SPPS, the definition of ‘agricultural activity’ refers to:

1. production, rearing or growing of agricultural products, including harvesting, milking, breeding animals and keeping animals for farming purposes;
2. maintaining an agricultural area in a state which makes it suitable for grazing or cultivation without preparatory action going beyond usual agricultural methods and machineries, based on criteria established by member states on the basis of a framework established by the Commission; or
3. carrying out a minimum activity, defined by member states, on agricultural areas naturally kept in a state suitable for grazing or cultivation.

This is in line with EU and DAERA regulations - Article 4 of European Council Regulation (EC) No 1307/2013.





**For further information about any of the above please contact us:**

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