

A Guide to Planning Policy for Social and Affordable Housing



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Introduction

Communities seeking social and affordable housing in their areas will often find it helpful to understand the relevant planning policies and the criteria for identifying potential sites for development.

In taking forward their ideas, communities will have to talk with the Housing Executive (which assesses the overall need for housing) and with Housing Associations (who build social and affordable housing).

This introductory guide for communities:

- presents the definitions of social and affordable housing;
- outlines the main planning policies which apply to social and/or affordable housing;
- sets out the main criteria for a site for social and/or affordable housing;
- lists the organisations to contact when seeking social and/or affordable housing;
- provides details on how to obtain further information and advice.

As an introductory guide this does not provide all the details relating to social and affordable housing. If, having read it, you would like more information on any aspect or advice on planning policies for social and affordable housing, please contact us.

“Good quality housing is a fundamental human need that plays a significant role in shaping our lives and our communities. A home is a vital part of people’s lives and contributes to creating a safe, healthy and prosperous society. The planning system can play a positive and supporting role in the delivery of homes to meet the full range of housing needs of society, within the wider framework of sustainable development”.

Definitions of Social and Affordable Housing

What is Affordable Housing?

Affordable housing relates to social rented housing and intermediate housing.

What is Social Rented Housing?

Social rented housing is housing provided at an affordable rent by a Registered Housing Association. Social rented accommodation should be available to households in **housing need*** and is offered in accordance with the Common Selection Scheme.

What is Intermediate Housing?

Intermediate housing consists of shared ownership housing provided through a Registered Housing Association and helps households who can afford a small mortgage, but that are not able to afford to buy a property outright. The property is split between part ownership by the householder and part social renting from a Registered Housing Association.

***Housing Need** - “Housing need’ in Northern Ireland specifically relates to social rented housing and to those on the waiting list for social rented housing who are assessed as being in housing stress. Housing stress is defined as those with 30 or more social housing selection list points .

Main Planning Policies

Planning Policy Statement 7 - Quality Residential Environments

PPS 7 sets out the planning policies for achieving quality in new residential developments. This includes guidance on:

- promoting quality residential environments;
- provision of public and private open space within residential developments;
- design to draw on the best local traditions such as form, materials and detailing;
- ensuring adequate parking provision and sustainable movement patterns.

PPS 7 [Addendum] Safeguarding the Character of Established Residential Areas provides additional planning policy. This includes guidance on:

- protecting local character, that is, ensuring densities in proposed housing developments respect the layout in the surrounding area;
- converting or changing the use of existing buildings to flats or apartments;
- ensuring that all dwelling units are built to an appropriate minimum size;
- protecting residential amenity.

Planning Policy Statement 12 - Housing in Settlements

PPS 12 sets out the planning policies for future housing. This includes guidance on:

- Housing Needs Assessments [HNA];
- affordable and social housing;
- traveller accommodation;
- allowance for windfall housing within the urban footprint;
- sustainable forms of development and balanced communities.

Planning Policy Statement 21 - Sustainable Development in the Countryside

PPS 21 sets out the planning policies for development in the countryside. In this document you will find guidance on providing social and affordable housing to meet the needs of a rural community.

Creating Places and Building on Tradition

These are design guides which promote the importance of good quality design for specific areas or aspects of land-use planning, including housing. In these documents you will find guidance on respecting the local setting and responding to the site (such as landscape design) and density, form and layout arrangements (such as clachan style developments).

Main Criteria for Site Selection

1. Is the site within a city or town?

Land considered suitable for housing developments will be zoned for housing through - the development plan process. If the land is zoned for housing the principle of development for social housing will be acceptable. If the council is developing its Local Development Plan (LOP) representations can be submitted to lobby that parcels of land be zoned for housing.

However, this will not exclude other sites coming forward through the development control process (for example an opportunity site or a windfall site). If the land is unzoned white land, or zoned for another land use, exceptions may be made for social housing. It may be necessary to provide evidence of community benefit.

2. Is the site at the edge of a village or small settlement?

Planning permission may be granted for a group of no more than 14 dwellings to provide social and affordable housing to meet the needs of a rural community. The application should be made by a registered Housing Association and a demonstrable need identified by the NIHE. Only one group will be permitted close to any particular rural settlement.

Any proposal will need to demonstrate that no suitable sites are located within settlement limits.

3. Is the site within a Dispersed Rural Community?

Planning permission may be granted for a group of no more than six dwellings to provide social and affordable housing to meet the needs of the rural community.

The housing group should be located adjacent or close to a traditional focal point such as a church, hall, school or community centre. Only one group will be permitted within any particular Dispersed Rural Community. Any proposal will need to demonstrate that no suitable sites are located within settlement limits.

4. Are there already plans for a housing development?

Housing developments should allow for a mix of tenure whereby social housing should be an integral element of larger housing developments where a need is identified. Planning agreements may be used to secure a proportion of social housing in new development.

5. Other Considerations

Other considerations when developing the proposal -

- Mix of Housing Types and Tenures
- Design, Layout and Character
- Environmental Quality and Open Space
- Residential Amenity
- Movement Patterns and Parking

Organisations to Contact

Local Council

You may want to speak to your local council's development plan team to check:

- if the site is within the development or settlement limits;
- if the site is zoned (housing, industry, open space);
- what stage the development plan is at and if you can submit a representation
- explaining why you think an area should be zoned for housing;
- if the council has a specific policy relating to social and affordable housing.

You may want to speak to your local council's development management team to check:

- if there is existing planning history for housing on the site which would be afforded
- determining weight in consideration of any new proposal;
- the possibility of submitting a pre-application discussion (PAD).

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

You may want to speak with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) about:

- the local Housing Needs Assessment;
- issuing a letter of formal support for housing need or issuing a letter in respect of housing need for scheme proposals giving 'support in principle' only.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

You may want to discuss the proposal with a Registered Housing Association regarding:

- identifying sites suitable for social housing;
- submitting a planning application;
- the planning/development of scheme proposals and their construction/project management.

Planning Policies and Guidance

Planning Policy Statement 7 Quality Residential Environments (PPS 7)

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/PPS07%20Residential%20Environments.pdf>

Planning Policy Statement 12 Housing in Settlements (PPS 12)

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/PPS12%20Housing%20and%20Settlements.pdf>

Planning Policy Statement 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside (PPS 21)

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/PPS21%20Sustainable%20Development%20in%20the%20Countryside.pdf>

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/SPPS.pdf>

Creating Places - Achieving quality in residential environments

https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/Creating%20Places%20-%20Achieving%20Quality%20in%20Residential%20Environments_0.pdf

Building on Tradition - A Sustainable Design Guide for the NI countryside

https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/Building%20on%20Tradition%20-%20A%20Sustainable%20Design%20Guide%20for%20the%20Northern%20Ireland%20Countryside_0.pdf



**community
places**

This guidance is not intended to be a definitive source of planning advice and reference should be made to the appropriate legislation and policy. If you need any clarification or further information please contact us.

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