

**Planning Policy Statement:**

# **Planning and Climate Change**

**BRIEFING DOCUMENT**

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**TCPA**  
Town and Country  
Planning Association



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# Preamble

This briefing sets out the principles that the Northern Ireland Assembly should observe in formulating planning policies, making development plans and exercising its development powers in order to tackle climate change. The briefing highlights the need for using the planning system as a way to bring about concerted action on climate change and establishes this as a key tenet for land use regulation in Northern Ireland.

In particular, it makes the argument for a Planning Policy Statement on climate change, and notes the inclusion of an annex on climate change in the English PPS1.

This document has been produced by the **Town and Country Planning Association** and **Friends of the Earth** to promote debate about the scope and contents of a potential Planning Policy Statement on climate change. The two bodies welcome the publication on 23 November 2007 of Draft PPS 18 on Renewable Energy, which sets out the Department of the Environment's planning policy for development that generates energy from renewable resources. They also welcome the fact that Draft PPS 18 also contains policy provisions on the application of the principles of passive solar design in new development. **It is not an Assembly publication.** The contents reflect discussions held between TCPA, Friends of the Earth and other stakeholders, including Government Departments. In addition it addresses the patchy nature of climate change policy, and specifically:

- the need to provide an advocacy statement on the importance of climate change;
- the need to provide a systematic policy approach to climate issues, covering both mitigation and adaptation; and
- the need for brevity in the context of further detailed advice in accompanying best practice guidance.

# 1. Introduction

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This briefing sets out how the Assembly should seek to address climate change through its responsibilities for land use planning. It describes the need for action on climate change and sets out the ways in which land use regulation can contribute to the prevention, adaptation and mitigation of climate change. This includes placing climate change as a central principle in making planning decisions in Northern Ireland.

## 2. Climate Change and Planning

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There is a compelling scientific consensus that human activity is changing the world's climate. The evidence that human induced climate change is happening<sup>1</sup> is strong and indisputable. If these changes deepen and intensify, as they will without the right responses locally and globally, they will increasingly change the environment. For Northern Ireland, this could mean more extreme weather events, including hotter and drier summers, flooding and rising sea-levels leading to coastal realignment. This has been further underlined by the latest IPCC report<sup>2</sup>.

There will be permanent changes in the natural environment but also, and increasingly, substantial challenges to national prosperity and social cohesion. It is quite likely that the impacts of climate change will be felt first, and disproportionately so, by the most vulnerable in society.

The UK Government believes that climate change is the greatest long-term challenge facing the world today. The Northern Ireland Executive has agreed to opt-in to the Climate Change Bill which would set legally binding UK targets for reducing CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.

Even with effective policies for reducing emissions in place, the world will still experience significant climate change from emissions of greenhouse gases already released. Changes in climate are likely to have far-reaching, and potentially adverse, effects on our environment, economy and society for which we need to prepare.

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1 See Annex A. in the English PPS on Climate Change Supplement.

2 IPCC 2007 Climate Change: the Physical Science Basis - <http://www.ipcc.ch/SPM2feb07>

There is an urgent need for action. Used positively, land use planning has a pivotal and significant role in helping:

- Secure enduring progress in Northern Ireland towards the UK's emissions targets by direct influence on energy use and emissions;
- Deliver the UK Government's ambitions of zero carbon development;
- Shape sustainable communities that are resilient to the climate change now accepted as inevitable;
- Create an attractive environment for innovation and for the private sector to bring forward investment in renewable and low-carbon technologies and supporting infrastructure;
- Give local communities real opportunities to take action on climate change;
- Facilitate the provision of renewable energy generation; and,
- Ensure that development occurs at locations that will maximise its carbon performance and promote sustainable travel patterns.

### **3. 'Climate proofed' development Principles**

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The need to adapt to a changing climate is urgent even if the probability of particular events is uncertain. For instance, adaptation actions such as amending building or urban design, relocating out of 'at risk' areas, safeguarding infrastructure, and making space for wildlife can all be planned for. Incorporating climate adaptation is especially important for long-term sustainability when making long-lasting decisions, for example about where to locate new developments.

There is an urgent need to manage for uncertainty and implement 'no regrets' strategies – social, economic and environmental 'win-win-wins' that will be generally beneficial regardless of the full extent of climate change impacts. The overarching goal should be to minimise risk and vulnerability across a range of land uses, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

Policies in area plans should take into account anticipated direct and indirect impacts of climate change and plan for adaptation in the following key sectors:

- Agriculture and forestry;
  - Biodiversity conservation;
  - Coastal defence and re-alignment;
  - Flood risk;
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- Land and landscape;
- Urban and rural development;
- Water resources;
- Energy infrastructure provision;
- Transport infrastructure provision; and
- Healthcare infrastructure provision.

## 4. Energy Supply

How, and where, we generate electricity must be central to any climate change policy. The Assembly should assess Northern Ireland's potential for accommodating renewable and low-carbon technologies, including for micro-renewables to be secured in new residential, commercial or industrial development. The priorities for this sector will be set out in a forthcoming PPS on Renewable Energy and planning policy for this will be integrated with CO<sub>2</sub> reduction strategies, renewable energy generation targets and energy demand management and reduction measures. The Assembly should work closely with industry and other stakeholders to:

- Utilise and expand existing decentralised energy supply systems, and foster the development of new systems;
- Look favourably on proposals for renewable energy, including on sites not identified in Area Plans;
- Not require applicants to demonstrate either the overall need for renewable energy and distribution<sup>3</sup> or for a particular proposal for renewable energy to be sited in a particular location;
- Other than in the most exceptional circumstances such as within nationally recognised designations, avoid restrictive policies that effectively preclude the supply of certain types of renewable energy;
- Ensure that a significant proportion of the energy supply to new developments<sup>4</sup> is gained on-site renewably and/or from a decentralised, renewable or low-carbon, energy supply.

## 5. Planning and building performance

Building regulations have an important role to play in raising the environmental performance of buildings and Northern Ireland is adopting

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file31890.pdf> and <http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/sources/renewables/planning/planning-process/legislation/renewable-energy/page27887.html>

<sup>4</sup> See paragraph 23 of the English PPS on Climate Change Supplement.

new standards that will promote low or zero carbon systems for all new buildings. The planning system complements these actions by guiding development to the most appropriate locations and encouraging innovation in design, construction and master-planning inside the framework of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Decision-makers should view the impact of building regulations and planning policy as a holistic package of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction and climate change adaptation measures in the built environment. It is vital, for example, that the Strategic Environmental Assessment for a new plan takes into account carbon savings and adaptation measures from both planning policy and building regulations in considering future development options.

## **6. Community and Stakeholder involvement**

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The planning framework is a powerful tool for promoting community empowerment, and planning authorities should encourage full public participation in the development of policy. Early and full participation provides an opportunity to develop ‘bottom up’ solutions on climate change and to build consensus on appropriate strategies. It is vital that business and other stakeholders play a constructive role. There is an important leadership role in fostering effective community engagement, and the Northern Ireland Assembly should provide the support to enable this.

## **7. Conclusion**

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Combating climate change is the greatest challenge facing humanity, and the planning system has a central role to play. A Planning Policy Statement would help to ‘climate proof’ the planning system and send a positive signal to developers and the public that global warming was a central principle in making planning decisions.