

Response ID ANON-JBHM-G43B-H

Submitted to Draft Environmental Principles Policy Statement
Submitted on 2024-12-09 11:46:10

Introduction

1 What is your name?

Name:
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2 What is your email address? (optional)

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3 Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?

Yes

If "Yes", Name of Organisation:
Royal Town Planning Institute

4 If so, which of the following best describes your organisation?

Sector:
Professional Body

Background and Purpose of EPPS

5 Do you believe the Introduction, Background and Purpose sections of the draft statement give the reader a good understanding of the aims and objectives of the EPPS?

Yes

Additional Comments:

6 Do you believe the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development is communicated adequately within the EPPS?

Yes

Additional Comments:

Understanding the Statement and the Due Regard Duty

7 Is there enough information provided on the due regard duty to effectively assist policy makers to comply with the statement?

Yes

Additional Comments:

The Environmental Principles

8 Do you believe the descriptions of the 5 principles and advice for policy makers give adequate assistance to policymakers on how the principles should be applied?

Don't know

Additional Comments:

RTPI NI would encourage the government to pursue a place-based and ecosystems-based approach, rather than a sectoral one, where policies relating to environmental protection and sustainable development are integrated into land use policies and development decisions, and behaviour change of all individuals in society towards sustainable choices is encouraged through the creation of environments that encourage low carbon lifestyles. This can bring positive and lasting change, be more reliable longer term, and provide multiple co-benefits to society such as improved health and wellbeing, more secure supply chains, creation of sustainable green jobs, and a reduction in NI's reliance on fossil fuels. Research published by the RTPI in 2021 provides the evidence base for this:

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2021/march/place-based-approaches-to-climate-change/>

Planning and sustainability colleagues need to work together in local authorities, and with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, to develop strategies and action plans which prioritise a place-based approach where people thrive within social and planetary boundaries. In addition, more effective cross scale working between DAERA, DfI, NIEA and Local Councils is needed to deliver local plans and policies that will support environmental protection and sustainable development objectives.

Also, more guidance could be provided on the social dimension of policy decisions. Policy makers must consider not only how and why levels of environmental protection and sustainable development vary, but also how and why their policy responses benefit or disadvantage different groups. Answering these questions requires long-term thinking, coordination and engagement across sectors and places, all of which demands effective spatial planning.

Monitoring and Reporting etc.

9 Departments will be required to monitor their compliance of the EPPS – do you believe the guidance given in the 'Monitoring and Reporting' section is sufficient?

Yes

Additional Comments:

10 Do you have any other comments on the draft policy statement which are not covered by the previous questions?

Yes

Comments:

A well-resourced, plan-led, positive planning service offers an established and effective process to support a sustainable future for Northern Ireland. However, the service is under severe pressure and scrutiny, with specialist resources and skills under particular strain, particularly Planning Enforcement officers whose roles are often the first to be cut in budgetary constraints. Planning Enforcement officers are, for instance, vital to monitoring and acting on the Polluter Pays principle.

There are three main opportunities for ensuring that the planning system can fully play its part in supporting wider government efforts.

1. Like any good public service, the planning system requires resources and capacity to deliver outcomes efficiently, effectively, and equitably. Financial support to increase the number of public sector planners employed, particularly Planning Enforcement officers, funding for specialist knowledge in environmental protection and sustainable development, and investing in efficiency-saving digital technologies can help support the shift from a largely reactive, regulatory planning system, to a proactive and strategic planning system.
2. Support capacity-building in planning. Our planners (across all aspects of planning: local planning authorities, NIEA, Department for Infrastructure, Planning Appeals Commissioners, and private planning consultancies) will need to undergo significant training to effectively and efficiently deal with development to ensure environmental principles are upheld and sustainable development is holistic and equitable. For instance, RTPI Scotland is currently working on a New Ways of Working paper that will cover the upskilling of Scotland's planning sector to facilitate an effective consenting regime for renewable energy infrastructure.
3. Provide new models of funding for plan-making. Most planning expenditure is on development management, with the greatest spending cuts in recent years seen in planning policy and planning enforcement. This is partly due to increasing statutory obligations on development management, and partly due to the functions of planning which generate revenue. Funding available for non-revenue generating plan-making activities could be greatly expanded in size and scope to incentivise quality outcomes, joint working, community participation, and climate ambitions.