



PLANNING BULLETIN

PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas - An Overview

The publication of PPS is part of the Government's programme to review and replace PPGs to provide greater clarity in the expression of planning policies and to describe much more in terms of objectives the outcomes to be achieved.

The policies set out in the PPS will need to be taken into account by regional planning bodies or RPB in the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies, by the Mayor of London in relation to the Spatial and Development Strategy in London and by local planning authorities in the preparation of local development documents. However policies may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications.

Locational Strategy

The Statement provides guidance on the location of new development beyond urban areas. Not surprisingly, outside such areas the focus for most new development should be in or near local service centres as identified by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in their local development documents. The Statement suggests that a local service centre can include a country town, a single large village or a group of villages.

Away from the local service centres, the Statement allows for some limited development in order to maintain the viability and vitality of the smaller towns and villages. Specifically, it requires LPAs to be supportive of small-scale development of this nature where it provides the most sustainable option in villages that are themselves remote from, and have poor public transport links with service centres.

Guidance for business and employment development

LPAs should support a wide range of economic activity in rural areas, particularly where traditional rural industries are in decline. They should identify sites for future development particularly where there is a need for employment creation and economic regeneration; provide criteria for economic development in different locations, including the future expansion of business premises, to facilitate healthy and diverse economic activity in rural areas.

Guidance for Community Services and Facilities

The Statement requires that people living in rural areas should have reasonable access to a range of services and facilities. LPAs should facilitate and provide for new services and facilities, particularly in service centres or in settlements which are expanding. The retention of local facilities should be supported and LPAs should set out the criteria in development plan policies that would be applied in considering the proposed conversion of such facilities to alternative uses.

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Guidance for Residential Development

The Statement recognises that it is necessary to provide for some additional housing in rural areas. The housing needs of all in the community should be recognised, including those in need of affordable or special housing in rural areas. New housing will be provided in accordance with the planning objectives set out in PPG3 (i.e. using brownfield sites in preference to greenfield sites).

Guidance in relation to the policy tests for new agricultural and forestry workers dwellings remains the same as in the old PPG7. However, unlike PPG7, the Statement also allows other rural-based enterprises to be provided on the proviso that they can satisfy the same tests as those set out for agricultural and forestry workers dwellings.

The Statement does provide a policy exception (para 10) for allowing large, high quality country houses, as previously permitted under para 3.21 of PPG7. The design of such a house should be truly outstanding and ground-breaking, for example, in its use of materials, methods of construction or its contribution to protecting and enhancing the environment. This will help to raise the standards of design more generally in rural areas. The value of such a building will be found in its reflection of the highest standards in contemporary architecture, the significant enhancement of its immediate setting and its sensitivity to the defining characteristics of the local area.

The Government supports the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings where this would meet sustainable development objectives. Re-use for economic development purposes will usually be preferable, but residential conversions may be more appropriate in some locations, and for some types of building. Replacement buildings can be allowed where this would result in a more acceptable and sustainable development than might be the case through conversion.

Countryside designations

The Statement maintains National Parks, the Broads, the New Forest Heritage Area and AONB designations. In such areas the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should be given great weight in determining development control decisions. In addition, the guidance provides a definition as to what constitutes “Major Developments” in such areas. Such developments are considered by the Statement to be “more national than local in character”. In permitting such developments, it will be necessary to demonstrate that they are in the public interest and have been subject to the “most rigorous examination” before being allowed to proceed.

The Statement seeks the removal of non-statutory countryside designations from the development plan as it views these types of designations as no longer necessary. In their place, LPAs should adopt criteria based policies for development control purposes.

Farm Diversification

Farm diversification is supported, recognising that non-agricultural activities are vital to the continuing viability of many farm enterprises. In Green Belt locations such diversification should also be supported (provided that the proposal does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt). Where the proposal would result in ‘inappropriate development’ the Statement considers that the wider benefits may contribute to the ‘very special circumstances’ required by PPG2 to justify the grant of planning permission.

The level of protection afforded to the best and most versatile agricultural land is to be reduced. In considering development proposals on such land, land quality is only one factor that should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations.

Tourism

The Statement recognises the important role that tourism plays in the rural economy and encourages LPAs to provide policies that support such proposals, whilst recognising the need to protect the countryside and encouraging the principles of sustainable development.

With regard to tourist accommodation, this should be provided within or adjacent to existing towns and villages. In rural areas, where such a demand can be shown, the reuse of rural buildings will be supported, particularly where it is part of a farm diversification scheme.

The detailed annexes of PPG7 are not replaced as most of the information is now to be found in the body of the Statement. However, Annexe E which provides guidance on permitted development rights for agriculture and forestry remains pending completion of a review of the General Permitted Development Order 1995.

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