

# **IPH response to Department of the Environment (NI) Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS21)**

27 Mar 2009

IPH have responded to the draft [Department of Environment \(DoE\) consultation on Planning Policy Statement 21 \(PPS 21\)](#).

In responding, IPH identify a number of potential health impacts including providing employment opportunities through farm diversification. Other issues include access to open space and housing located close to traditional focal points. Below is the full IPH response:

## **The Institute of Public Health in Ireland**

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) is an all-island body which aims to improve health in Ireland, by working to combat health inequalities and influence public policies in favour of health. IPH promotes co-operation in research, training, information and policy in order to contribute to policies which tackle inequalities in health.

IPH is particularly interested in the Draft Planning Policy Statement 21 due to the impact on the countryside and potential implications on health for the population of Northern Ireland. IPH conducted a Health Impact Assessment on the proposed West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 and through this work has developed extensive knowledge when looking at health and rural issues.

## **Key points**

IPH welcomes the Planning Policy Statement 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside (PPS21) and the opportunity to comment on the publication. IPH applies a holistic model of health which emphasises the importance to health with a wide range of social determinants, including economic, environmental, social and biological factors. In particular:

- IPH welcomes the approach DoE has taken to promote sustainable development in the countryside. It is essential this is managed to ensure there is no adverse impact on health.
- IPH believes sustainable development in the countryside has the

potential to impact positively on health by:

- o creating employment opportunities for the agricultural sector
- o ensuring housing developments maximize opportunities to enhance community and social cohesion, and
- o protecting open space
- IPH calls for a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to be routinely adopted for all new developments in the countryside.

**In response to the consultation, PPS 21 has the potential to impact on health in a number of areas:**

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development and human health are closely linked. The World Health Organization stated 'the goals of sustainable development cannot be achieved when there is a high prevalence of debilitating illness and poverty, and the health of a population cannot be maintained without a responsive health system and a healthy environment. Environmental degradation, mismanagement of natural resources, and unhealthy consumption patterns and lifestyles impact health. Ill-health, in turn, hampers poverty alleviation and economic development'. Development policies and practices need to take into account current and future impacts on health and the environment

Development in the Countryside

IPH welcome the opportunity for farm diversification and other development within regulated conditions. Different types of employment have major impacts on health. Recent changes in farming such as structural changes and economic factors have the potential to increase mental health issues amongst this group. 'Farmers and farm workers have been identified as a high risk group for stress, depression and suicide. Economic difficulties and the social isolation of farming life can contribute to mental health problems'. Farm diversification allows opportunities to attract income from other sources to alleviate financial difficulties. Other development in the countryside can also create employment and also support the strong rural tourism sector. The Northern Ireland environment is one of the key tourist attractions and therefore protecting the environment protects and promotes tourism, and the associated health benefits of employment.

Housing in the countryside

IPH particularly welcome the requirement for social and affordable

housing to be located close to traditional focal points. Housing, local employment, retail, education and health facilities help to establish healthy neighbourhoods, ensure local people can access services and encourage shorter journeys by car. There are also opportunities for increased social interaction. Housing developments which encourage community and social cohesion are likely to be beneficial to the mental health of individuals.

#### Open space

By protecting development in the countryside, PPS21 has the potential to maintain opportunities for open space which is beneficial for health. Research has shown that those who have access to open space are more likely to exercise more. Physical activity is essential for maintaining a healthy weight and also contributing to prevent diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Access to and use of public open space also encourages greater social interaction which is positive for mental health.

#### Development relying on non-mains sewerage

IPH support the need to ensure that any new development which relies on non-mains sewerage demonstrates it will not create a pollution problem. 'Septic tanks are usually connected to a soak-away or drainage field. This means that the chances are higher that contaminated water reaches the saturated zones. Where many septic tanks exist or are being planned, careful attention needs to be paid to their emptying, including the availability of sufficient tankers, suitable treatment and/or disposal sites, and the potential downstream impacts of those sites' .

IPH calls for a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to be routinely adopted for all new developments in the countryside. HIA takes into consideration the wider determinants of health and is a methodology which assesses the potential and unintended health impacts of an identified proposal. HIA uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to identify the health impacts on the population's health and makes recommendations for decision-makers as to how negative health impacts can be mitigated and positive ones enhanced. HIA can also make a contribution to tackling health inequalities in that it specifically explores the impact of the proposal on sub-groups within the population. This will help to ensure that the Proposed Plan does not

exacerbate existing health inequalities and that where possible steps can be taken to reduce health inequalities thus making a significant contribution to a more equitable society.

IPH would like to highlight the importance of monitoring PPS implementation. Policy guidance must be adhered to at the implementation stage by each developer and regulating authority in Northern Ireland to ensure the full benefits of the PPS are gained. IPH ask DoE to ensure there are clear responsibilities for monitoring the implementation of PPS21.

We welcome the draft PPS21 and potential positive health impacts on the rural population of Northern Ireland. However due consideration must be given to all potential health impacts upon implementation of the PPS21 and prior to the commencement of any development work.