



Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places



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1. Joint Ministerial Foreword

In an era of uncertainty and change, the sustainability of our village, town and city centres has never mattered more. We understand the power of place, not just as a location, but as the living heart of our communities, giving us a sense of belonging, meeting local needs, and providing jobs and services.

Yet many places are under pressure from the rapid changes in retail, the rise of online commerce and the legacy of the Covid pandemic. The result has been an increase in vacancy, dereliction and neglected places that once thrived as centres of community life.

We cannot afford to let our village, town and city centres become symbols of decline. This is not just an economic issue; it is also about local identity, social cohesion and opportunity. When high streets are hollowed out, so too are the spaces where people connect, local businesses grow, and public life unfolds.

We are proposing Shaping Sustainable Places as a joined-up and strategic response to these trends. We want to put communities

at the centre of reimagining their place for living, learning, working, culture and play.

We want to tackle vacancy and dereliction head-on through interventions that promote adaptive reuse. We want to give places back to people by creating spaces where they can gather and spend time. We want to deliver practical solutions that make communities stronger, safer and better prepared for the future. Our departments have been working closely because we understand the scale of the challenges faced and we know that by working together, we can maximise the impact of our collective investment.

The future of our communities depends on how we nurture, shape and invest in our villages, towns and cities. This consultation document seeks your views on a community-focused approach to re-creating and sustaining vibrant and resilient villages, towns and cities.

We are committed to creating places that work for everyone – alive with purpose, pride of place and rooted in the communities they serve. We encourage you to play your part by completing this consultation to help us guide and shape the future.



Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities



Liz Kimmins MLA
Minister for Infrastructure



Andrew Muir MLA
Minister of Agriculture,
Environment and
Rural Affairs

2. Executive Summary

Whilst no two places are the same, many are dealing with similar problems, including lower occupancy rates and footfall due to economic headwinds and changing consumer preferences.¹ Longer term trends of development away from town centres have removed many village, town and city centre activities and reduced reasons to visit and dwell.²

Shaping Sustainable Places aims to create a flagship programme of interventions to arrest the decline in our valued village, town and city centres. Through more strategic interventions lead by communities we hope to stimulate places and catalyse private sector activity to further protect them.³

Shaping Sustainable Places lays the foundation for new ways of delivering regeneration outcomes. We aim to engage communities at the earliest stages of planning for change, developing solutions to specific place-based challenges through funding local physical and infrastructure interventions.

The Programme has been developed by the Department for Communities working in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and the Department for Infrastructure.

We are building on the successes and

learning from our collaborative delivery of two recent regeneration programmes. The Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme⁴ funded Local Councils to deliver measures to help provide a safe environment for visitors, shoppers and workers within town and city centres. The Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme,⁵ supported projects in small settlements with a population of less than 5,000 people.

It is proposed that the three departments will co-fund the Programme over a 10-year period, contributing a minimum of £5m each per year for investment in capital projects. A further minimum contribution of 10% (£15m) will be requested from Local Councils, creating an initial fund of £165m. However, the Programme would be scalable, and able to utilise additional funds for regeneration if they became available.

The Northern Ireland Executive is operating in an acutely constrained financial environment; by pooling our limited resources, we hope to maximise the impact of the interventions that can be made, and demonstrate that by working in partnership, we can provide a mechanism to deliver for other funders and partners in future.

We will also seek over the life of the programme to drawdown alternative, non-Executive funding sources, through

1 The Government Response to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee Report on High Streets: Life beyond retail? at pg. 1.

2 A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres

3 The existential crisis of traditional shopping streets the sun model and the place attraction paradigm at pg. 30.

4 Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

5 Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

leveraging private sector investment and working with other non-Executive funders on established and new approaches.

It is recognised that the available funding will fall far short of the need of all village, town and city centres. This means it will be important to focus interventions and prioritise places to achieve the transformative impact we wish to see. Whilst it is envisaged there will be core allocations made to each Local Council area, this consultation also explores the use of competitive funding streams for particular types of intervention. We hope to develop opportunities for funding to tackle defined themes or specific challenges and select those proposals that offer the greatest potential benefits.

Our first objective is to improve the places we love by ensuring they are sustainable into the future; to create places where people want to live, work, invest and visit.⁶ We recognise that for places to thrive, they also need strong local leadership and decision-making. This consultation will ask for your views on how to deliver participative, collaborative development of plans in which communities are at the heart of decisions made about their places.

Our second key objective is to prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing of people through regeneration and creation of people-centred accessible and inclusive places. We recognise

that addressing dereliction or vacancy to stimulate local economies cannot be just about retail consolidation.⁷ Creating economically sustainable places will depend on increasing the number of people for whom village, town and city centres are safe and attractive gathering points,⁸ as well as commercial centres.

Our third objective is to shape places to become more resilient to the risks and impacts of climate change. Across many built environments, there are well understood susceptibilities to extreme weather which can be mitigated and adapted through design and innovation, to protect people, businesses, homes and livelihoods, and to invest in long-term sustainable solutions for the future.

The final objective is that by working collaboratively across departments and through Local Councils, we will be able to deliver a programme that is greater than the sum of its parts. Through Shaping Sustainable Places, we aim to coordinate more strategic and transformative capital investments, focussed on delivering outcomes and positive change. We will deliver flexibly, learn from best practice and adapt to changes in the market and operating environment.

If we succeed, the interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places should be key to sustaining places economically, socially and environmentally for people long into the future.

6 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 7

7 High Street: How our town centres can bounce back from the retail crisis: Rudlin, Payne and Montague at pg 211.

8 Draft ISNI Strategy - 2050

3. Introduction

This document sets out draft proposals for Shaping Sustainable Places, a long-term programme of regeneration interventions that aims to reshape village, town and city centres. We are carrying out a public consultation on the draft proposals to test our new approach and to invite fresh insights and perspectives. We aim to develop a final programme for Ministerial and Executive Committee consideration by the end of 2025.

Impact assessments

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality between all Section 75 groups. Without prejudice to these obligations, the Department is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Equality screening of the proposed Shaping Sustainable Places Programme has identified no adverse impacts, and the screening documentation has been published alongside this consultation document. On this basis, the

decision is that the Programme should not be subject to a full equality impact assessment.

The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 introduced a duty on Northern Ireland departments, Local Councils and other public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, or when designing and delivering public services. There is also a requirement to monitor and report on how the due regard duty has been exercised.

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment recording these considerations has been published alongside this consultation document.

In line with The Data Protection Act (DPA) and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Department for Communities is committed to building trust and confidence in our ability to process your personal information and protect your privacy. Our Privacy Notice at Annex C of this document outlines how we process your data. A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) screening exercise was carried out, which determined that a full DPIA is not required for this consultation.

4. Strategic Context

Regeneration and Placemaking

The existing Department for Communities Urban Regeneration Policy Framework defines regeneration as “activities that reverse economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do this without the support of government.”⁹

Shaping Sustainable Places proposes to build on this framework to fund strategic interventions that deliver wider benefits.

Placemaking is impacted both directly and incidentally by many policies and actions across government, the private and the Voluntary and Community sector. Each place is different, has different characteristics, needs and strengths that are understood best by the people who live in and use that place.

Our approach in developing Shaping Sustainable Places has been to reflect and build on the three sponsoring Departments’ organisational goals, existing arrangements and business needs, and to combine this with emerging best practice around the role of communities in placemaking and regeneration.

The Department for Communities’ current programme of urban regeneration

interventions is delivered in the 41 urban towns and cities across Northern Ireland.¹⁰ Until 2020, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, administered the European Union Rural Development Programme.

In leading the delivery of the Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme¹¹ and the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme¹², the Department for Communities stepped outside of its core policy focus on urban settlements. This was enabled by working in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department for Infrastructure.

An additional 24 intermediate settlements and 69 villages with populations of over 1000 people were eligible for funding through the two partnership programmes.¹³ The programmes also delivered active and sustainable travel interventions and enablers.

Spatial and Planning Policy Context

Shaping Sustainable Places will be delivered within the context of regional planning policy and Local Councils’ Local Development Plans. All Local Councils are preparing

9 Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework at pg.5.

10 An urban town or city is defined as one located within a settlement with a population of 5,000 or more The Northern Ireland Town Centre Database Background Paper

11 Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

12 Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

13 An intermediate settlement has a population of 2,500 - 4,999 and a village has a population of 1,000 - 2,499. For the full list of NI villages, intermediate settlements, towns and cities see Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Local Development Plans for their areas which set out a clear vision, typically over a 15-year period, for the type, scale and location of development that should be encouraged. It is within this context that initiatives that provide support to Local Councils can be considered to enable them to deliver local solutions to local issues.

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement¹⁴ sets out regional planning policies for Northern Ireland on town centres and retailing, economic development and development in rural areas, and the Programme for Government commits to the continued implementation of a planning improvement programme to make our planning system work for businesses, people, and the environment.¹⁵ Improving health and wellbeing is one of the five Core Planning Principles set out in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement.

Community Planning

Each Local Council also has a Community Planning Partnership which brings together a range of partners including public bodies, government departments, agencies, businesses and community and voluntary organisations.¹⁶

Community Planning Partnerships work together to identify long-term objectives to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. Each Partnership develops a Community Plan.

A Community Plan is a document telling people the outcome or shared vision of each Community Planning Partnership.

The Plan describes how the partners will work together to deliver interventions and actions locally. Community Planning involves all aspects of public services—from education, health, housing and the environment to arts, culture and heritage. The partners also work with residents and community groups directly.

The Shaping Sustainable Places interventions proposed by Local Councils should align with local Community Plans.

Revenue Generation

Regeneration, where it is successful in catalysing increased tenancy or commercial activity in the locality, can help to sustain the local rates taxbase. Revenue generated from the rates system comprises 78% of local government revenue¹⁷ and supplements around 4%¹⁸ of the Northern Ireland Executive's spending power. This demonstrates the direct link between the sustainability of places and the funding of local services.

Programme for Government Framework: Key Priorities

The Programme for Government Framework sets out three key missions related to People, the Planet and Prosperity.¹⁹ These missions are underpinned by a number of key priorities which Shaping Sustainable Places will support:

14 Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

15 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 10

16 Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

17 Local government facts and figures: Northern Ireland - LGIU – NILGA 2021

18 The Public Finance in Northern Ireland: a comprehensive guide – Northern Ireland Fiscal Council

19 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 67.

Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy

Shaping Sustainable Places aims to create the right interventions which will create the foundations for a more productive and prosperous economy; for better rural and urban communities; and for healthier and greener lives.²⁰

Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing

Shaping Sustainable Places recognises the importance of housing as essential to health and wellbeing and the wider Programme for Government aim of enabling access to affordable, sustainable and quality housing.²¹ Through regeneration and placemaking we hope to create more attractive places both to live and invest in housing.

Safer Communities

Shaping Sustainable Places will ensure that safety is at the forefront of design consideration and all interventions will enable people to have the confidence they need to live productively and engage fully in society.²²

Reform and Transformation of Public Services

Shaping Sustainable Places offers opportunities for cross Departmental transformative approaches to deliver the public services people rely on.²³

Since 2021, Northern Ireland has set a new ambition to decarbonise our economy.

This included the adoption of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 which sets a legal requirement to reduce emissions by 48% by 2030, as well as 100% reduction in net emission by 2050.²⁴ Activities to achieve this are already underway, but huge challenges remain.²⁵

The Act also includes a Just Transition principle to ensure that the benefits of moving to a green economy are shared widely. We believe that Shaping Sustainable Places can help contribute to a Just Transition through having due regard to the desirability of using and supporting nature-based interventions.²⁶

High Street Taskforce Report and Recommendations

An independent High Street Task Force appointed by Executive Ministers in 2020 carried out a call for evidence²⁷ and delivered a report²⁸ and recommendations on the future of high streets in Northern Ireland. Although the report has not been formally adopted by the Executive Committee, Shaping Sustainable Places could deliver on elements of two of the 14 recommendations; Recommendations 2 and 5.

20 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 15.

21 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 42.

22 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 46.

23 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 55.

24 Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 at sections 2-4 and 7 (1).

25 Professor Dave Reay Skills and Net Zero at page 4

26 Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 at section 30 (2) (b).

27 High Street Task Force Call for Evidence Report 2022

28 High Street task Force - Delivering a 21st Century High Street

Recommendation 2 endorses the Living High Streets Craft Kit²⁹ and recommends that it is rolled out with the necessary support for implementation in each high street, village, town and city centre that is prioritised for action by the relevant Local Council. The Department for Communities undertook to carry out pilots of the Living High Streets Craft Kit to test this Recommendation. The first pilot was conducted in Downpatrick and resulted in the launch of the Downpatrick Living High Streets Framework in September 2023.³⁰

The second pilot project, to create the Shankill Living High Streets Framework, commenced in September 2024. To date it has delivered an intense series of community ‘Place’ and ‘Imagining’ workshops; seeking to understand the positive and negative aspects of the Greater Shankill area and how it can be improved. It is expected that the process will conclude in June 2025, when all findings will shape a Physical Development Framework and Action Plan. These ‘living’ documents will be ‘owned’ by the community who will oversee the implementation of the recommendations in the years to come.

This consultation will ask for your views on using the Living High Streets Craft Kit through Shaping Sustainable Places, where possible and appropriate, to develop community-led plans. Initial pilots have reported that the approach requires an intensive period of engagement, resourcing to support the process and the willingness of effective community leaders equipped to encourage participation and take ownership.

There are further insights included on the Living High Streets Initiative **website**.

Recommendation 5 urges the Executive to prioritise the delivery of placemaking by developing and implementing an investment programme for blue-green infrastructure, cleaner and greener public realm and sustainable transport, and would require a significant capital budget to allow for implementation.

Whilst the Recommendations have not been adopted, or any budget allocated to this, Shaping Sustainable Places could go some way to delivering on Recommendation 5, and this consultation asks for your views on the proposals for a cross-departmental regeneration programme.

Types of Intervention

The Department for Communities has at its disposal a range of interventions which it deploys to improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of environments and to stimulate private sector investment.³¹

- Revitalisation Projects
- Public Realm Improvements
- Environmental Improvement Schemes
- Comprehensive Development Schemes
- Creation of Business Improvement Districts
- Urban Development Grants

29 MAG - Living High Streets initiative | Department for Communities

30 Downpatrick Living High Streets Framework

31 Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework at pg.43.

It is proposed that Shaping Sustainable places interventions could include, but not be limited to, those that:

- Improve the quality and accessibility of footpaths and streetscapes
- Change streetscapes to create more room for pedestrians
- Improve streetlighting
- Improve signage
- Create or grow green spaces
- Provide shop front grants to local businesses
- Provide grants to bring buildings back into use
- Provide to create village, town or city-centre housing in mixed-use developments
- Deliver public art
- Provide grants which enable third party or private sector investment
- Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change
- Restore heritage assets

Further Strategic Context

Other government policies that have impacted on the development of Shaping Sustainable Places, include Vital and Viable,³² Living Places Urban Stewardship and Design Guide, the Regional Development Strategy,³³ Air Pollution in Northern Ireland 2022, the Housing Supply Strategy³⁴ and ³⁵ the Department for Infrastructure's Strategic Framework.³⁶

We have also sought to incorporate the Adapting to climate change – Progress in Northern Ireland,³⁷ the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework,³⁸ Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation,³⁹ the draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland,⁴⁰ the Sub-Regional Economic Plan 2024,⁴¹ Planning for the Future of Transport – Time for Change⁴² and Heritage Enabled Regeneration in Towns⁴³.

32 Vital and Viable

33 Regional Development Strategy 2035

34 Housing Supply Strategy - A Home for Everyone

35 Air Pollution in Northern Ireland 2022

36 DfI Strategic Framework

37 Adapting to climate change – Progress in Northern Ireland - Climate Change Committee

38 EVAWG Strategic Framework

39 Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation – A New Framework

40 A Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland

41 Sub-Regional Economic Plan

42 Planning for the future of Transport

43 Heritage Enabled Regeneration in Towns

5. Data Protection

Privacy, Confidentiality and Access to Consultation Responses

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity may be published in full, however we will remove email addresses and telephone numbers.

For more information about what we do with personal data please see our consultation privacy notice. Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. However, all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (UK) 2016/679.

If you wish your response to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under

the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

No personal data is asked for or required during the survey. While we do not ask survey respondents to personally identify themselves; it may be possible, in a small number of cases, for individuals to be identifiable from a combination of responses. There is the potential that responders may in error disclose personal data in the free text boxes. For this reason, the Department for Communities will treat this data as personal data to be disregarded. The consultation will ask consultees if they are responding on behalf of an organisation and request the name of this organisation.

The answers submitted will be collated by Department for Communities employees to form a report which will be used to inform decisions on the shape and remit of the proposed Shaping Sustainable Places programme. It is intended that Consultation responses made will be published or made publicly available as part of a wider report unless a responder identifies themselves as responding as an individual acting in a private capacity.

6. Who are you?

Q1: Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of a business or organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation.

- Individual
- Organisation

7. Vision and Principles

Vision

Shaping Sustainable Places will contribute to Executive commitments to grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy, provide more housing, create safer communities and reform and transform public services.

Our vision is:

To work with communities to address local challenges through funding interventions that deliver sustainable, people-centred places providing economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Q2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q3: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?

Principles

These principles will support our vision and guide the interventions that will help transform places.

Strategic	Ensure interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places focus on long-term impact rather than short-term fixes.
Sustainable	Respond to the changing needs of places by delivering interventions that address the economic, social and environmental sustainability of a place.
Integrated	Building partnerships, collaboration across and outside government to deliver the best possible interventions.
Participative	Empowering people and communities to be part of the regeneration of their place.

Q4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q5: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places?

Timeframe

We believe that Shaping Sustainable Places needs to give a sufficiently long-

term commitment to enable partners, stakeholders and communities to engage, plan and invest in interventions to realise our vision. We have proposed an initial 10-year budget commitment to the Programme, with a midpoint review after 5 years.

Q6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No, it should be shorter
- No, it should be longer

Q7: If you did not select ‘yes’ above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?

8. Placemaking

Shaping Sustainable Places would require Local Councils, in partnership with local communities, to develop detailed plans for its prioritised places. These plans would be required to take a placemaking approach.

An effective placemaking process capitalises on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and should result in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being.⁴⁴

Q8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q9: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?

The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland has co-designed a community-led approach to placemaking. This participatory approach brings people together to consider their local high streets, tackle common issues and enable places and communities to thrive.

The **Living High Streets Craft Kit** has two

parts: Part 1 which sets out the approach and Part 2 which has the tools to use this community-led approach. There are different ways to tailor using the Craft Kit to address variables such as: what stage you are at in making a plan, local capacity, and the scale and complexity of the place. The Ministerial Advisory Group can provide guidance and training to those using the Craft Kit. There is also other guidance available on the **Living High Streets Initiative webpage**.

Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q11: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?

A Placemaking approach will try to involve the Local Council, residents, representatives of statutory bodies, elected representatives, local business organisation representatives, local charity representatives, business owners and residents, in developing the plan for a place. It will also try to engage with a wide range of people in terms of their age, level of interest and perspectives.

⁴⁴ What is Placemaking? – Project for Public Spaces

Most of this activity is done on a voluntary basis, and can take several months, or longer, to complete. Initial pilots have reported that the approach requires an intensive period of engagement, resourcing to support the process and the willingness of effective community leaders equipped to encourage participation and take ownership. There are further insights included on the Living High Streets Initiative **website**.

Q12: If your Local Council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q13: If your Local Council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or intervention for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you? Pick as many options as apply.

- Leaflet campaign to invite survey response
- Townhall style meeting
- Focus group of residents
- Online consultation and promotion
- Newspaper advertisement and promotion
- Drop-in clinic
- I would not want to be consulted
- Other

9. Ambitions and Objectives

Shaping Sustainable Places is focussed on Place, People, Planet and Partnership.

Place

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement⁴⁵ sets out regional planning policies for Northern Ireland on town centres and retailing, economic development and development in rural areas.

Improving the places we love and ensuring they are sustainable into the future is the first and primary objective of the programme; to create places where people want to live, work, invest and visit.⁴⁶

Addressing dereliction or vacancy can help to stimulate local economies and regenerate places for other uses. We recognise that renewal cannot be just about retail consolidation.⁴⁷ Creating economically sustainable places will depend on increasing the number of people for whom village, town and city centres are safe and attractive gathering points,⁴⁸ as well as commercial centres and safe neighbourhoods.

Our ambition is to make places more attractive by working with local communities to create people-centred, shared spaces through sustainable development, refurbishment and reuse of underutilised or unused assets, creating places that people want to live, work visit and invest.

We hope to achieve our ambition for Place through:

- Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres
- Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use
- Creating more productive local economies

Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

⁴⁵ Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

⁴⁶ Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 7

⁴⁷ High Street: How our town centres can bounce back from the retail crisis: Rudlin, Payne and Montague at pg 211.

⁴⁸ Draft ISNI Strategy - 2050

Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?

People

Our second key objective is to prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing of people through regeneration and creation of people-centred accessible and inclusive places. Fundamentally we believe places are for people.

Our ambition is to shape places for human interaction making them accessible to more people, delivering safer streets, improving connections and enabling healthier habits and lives.

We hope to achieve our ambition for People through:

- Improving safety in village, town and city centres
- Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities
- Reducing car dominance

Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q21: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?

Planet

Our third objective is to shape places to become more resilient to the risks and impacts of climate change. Across many built environments, there are well understood susceptibilities to extreme weather which can be mitigated and adapted through design and innovation, to protect people, businesses, homes and livelihoods, and to invest in long-term sustainable solutions for the future.

Our ambition is to shape sustainable and secure village, town and city centres and communities by investing in regeneration projects that mitigate against and adapt places to the impacts of climate change.

We hope to achieve our ambition for Planet through:

- Creating or growing existing green spaces
- Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change
- Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient

Q22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating or growing existing green spaces” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q25: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?

Partnership

Our fourth objective is that by working collaboratively across departments and through Local Councils, we will be able deliver a programme that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The Department for Communities (DfC), the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) have worked collaboratively to develop Shaping Sustainable Places. Since 2020, these three departments have worked in partnership with Local Councils to deliver two other major regeneration programmes:

- Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme⁴⁹
- Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme⁵⁰

Q26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

Q27: What, if any, are your views on how these three departments worked collaboratively in partnership with Local Councils to deliver the previous regeneration schemes outlined above?

Through Shaping Sustainable Places, we hope to coordinate more strategic and transformative capital investments, focussed on delivering outcomes and change. We hope to deliver flexibly, to learn from best practice and adapt to changes in the market and operating environment. If we succeed, the interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places should be key to sustaining places economically, socially, environmentally and for people long into the future.

Our ambition is to work in partnership with Local Councils, other Departments, the voluntary and community sector, local communities and the private sector to deliver improved outcomes and share and benchmark best practices, funding, risks, responsibilities and opportunities.

Q28: Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No

Q29: If you answered yes to Q28 above, please tell us which other partners do you think should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

⁴⁹ Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

⁵⁰ Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

10. Funding and Prioritisation

If approved, Shaping Sustainable Places would deliver a minimum of £150m of Executive funding over 10 years, £50m from each contributing department, i.e. DfC, DAERA and DfI. This would be allocated across all 11 Local Councils to deliver individual in partnership with the Department for Communities acting as the lead department. Local Councils will be asked to contribute a minimum of an additional 10% of the funding they receive.

Shaping Sustainable Places is intended to be scalable, so that if additional capital funding became available for regeneration, Local Councils could be asked to take forward additional plans to draw this funding down. We also hope to pursue opportunities to secure funding from non-Executive funders and will require match funding for some types of interventions from the private sector.

Feedback from Local Councils has indicated that more strategic regeneration interventions would be achievable if Executive departments could give security on indicative budget allocations in advance.

This contrasts with current arrangements, where it can be difficult to guarantee funding for specific projects into future years when annual budgets are uncertain.

Q30: To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and Local Councils?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q31: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q30 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal for investing the limited funds available for regeneration?

In addition to the core funding provided to all Local Councils to deliver Shaping Sustainable Places interventions, it is also proposed that there could be separate, complementary funding opportunities developed to tackle specific regeneration issues.

Local Councils would then bid to a specific fund through an application process, and the applications would be assessed, with the highest scoring applications funded. The ambition for a competitive funding approach is that it would encourage the development of creative and innovative solutions to the challenges faced.

One example could be a competitive fund to support regeneration initiatives for built-heritage assets in town and city centres.

Q32: To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q33: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q32 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal to drive innovation in regeneration?

Q34: Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?

It is recognised that the proposed funding for Shaping Sustainable Places will fall far short of the need of all villages, towns and city centres. It is proposed that Local Councils should be asked to consider the need across their areas in collaboration with local communities, and prioritise settlements for focused, strategic interventions in line with Shaping Sustainable Places ambitions and objectives.

Q35: Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criteria when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Length of time since previous capital investment in public space
- Levels of vacancy
- Road safety
- Economic activity data
- Addressing economic market failure
- Access to services for residents of surrounding areas
- Potential to attract visitors and tourism
- Potential to leverage private sector investment
- Potential for people to meet and spend time
- Potential for increasing pedestrian areas
- Population size
- Air quality
- Impacts of extreme weather (eg flooding)
- Other

11. Centre First for Public Services

In relation to Town Centres and Retailing, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement notes its aim to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions.⁵¹

Regeneration, where it is successful in catalysing increased tenancy or commercial activity in the locality, can help to sustain the local rates taxbase. Revenue generated from the rates system comprises 78% of local government revenue⁵² and supplements around 4%⁵³ of the Northern Ireland Executive's spending power. This demonstrates the direct link between the sustainability of places and the funding of local services.

The High Street Task Force⁵⁴ strongly supported proposals to put important public services and amenities on the high street which are accessible by sustainable forms of transport. Whether these are libraries, healthcare facilities, places for education and community use, or simply more and better housing, these investment choices could help to create vibrant, people-focused places.

It has been stated that the withdrawal of public sector organisations and businesses has contributed to the decline

of high streets and centres.⁵⁵ Changes in retail behaviours and the use of office accommodation require us to think about how to use our centres differently to support and sustain remaining occupiers.

The Northern Ireland Executive departments and their delivery bodies and partners have a significant footprint of buildings and facilities across Northern Ireland, where people travel to for employment, services and support. At present, there is no requirement to consider the potential regeneration impacts on a place when making decisions about where to (re)locate public services outside of normal planning requirements.

DfC is interested in promoting the adoption of a Centre First Policy for the location of public sector jobs and services. The strategic location of these in centres could generate increased footfall and economic activity, whilst also creating better access to public transport for commuting employees and customers. This in turn may support a more resilient retail sector as well as creating demand for other services and restarting cycles of inward investment to existing and new businesses.⁵⁶

The adoption of a Centre First for Public Service policy for the location of public services does not need to feature as an essential component of the Shaping

51 Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

52 Local government facts and figures: Northern Ireland - LGIU – NILGA 2021

53 The Public Finance in Northern Ireland: a comprehensive guide – Northern Ireland Fiscal Council

54 High Street task Force - Delivering a 21st Century High Street

55 Town centres: Position Statement, Welsh Government

56 Town centres: Position Statement, Welsh Government

Sustainable Places proposals. The concept is being included as part of this consultation due to its potential to deliver significant complementary regeneration benefits alongside Shaping Sustainable Places.

Questions 36 and 37 relate to a policy in development which is not central to the Shaping Sustainable Places Programme.

Q36: To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q37: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q36 above, please tell us why.

Annex A – Summary of questions

Q1: Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of a business or organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation.

- Individual
- Organisation

Q2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q3: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?

Q4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q5: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places?

Q6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No, it should be shorter
- No, it should be longer

Q7: If you did not select ‘yes’ above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?

Q8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?

Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q9: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?

Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q11: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?

Q12: If your Local Council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q13: If your Local Council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or a project for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you? Pick as many options as apply.

- Leaflet campaign to invite survey response
- Townhall style meeting
- Focus group of residents
- Online consultation and promotion
- Newspaper advertisement and promotion
- Drop-in clinic
- I would not want to be consulted
- Other

Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?

Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
-

Q21: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?

Q22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with "Creating or growing existing green spaces" as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with "Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change" as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with "Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient" as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q25: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?

Q26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?

- Yes
 - No
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-

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- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q37: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q36 above, please tell us why.

Annex B - Landing Page Text

How to respond

This consultation will be hosted online at the following website: **<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/shaping-sustainable-places-public-consultation>**. The Citizen Space website has been specially designed to be as user-friendly and welcoming as possible for those who wish to complete the consultation. It also allows DfC to rapidly collate results. For this reason, we would encourage anyone who is interested in responding to this consultation to utilise Citizen Space as the method of their response.

If this is not possible, you can however respond to this consultation via email to **ssp@communities-ni.gov.uk** by completing the Word template on the Department's website or you can respond in writing to the following address:

Shaping Sustainable Places Programme Team

Regional Development Office

Department for Communities

8th Floor, Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast

BT2 7EG

When responding via email or in writing, please state whether you are responding as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation (please state the name of the organisation). Please also quote the following reference in your response: "Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation".

Responses must be received by 23.59 on Sunday 24 August 2025.

Annex C – Privacy Notice

Data Controller Name: Department for Communities (DfC)

Address: Causeway Exchange, 1-7 Bedford Street, BELFAST, BT2 7EG

Email: **prs@communities-ni.gov.uk**

Telephone:

02890829129

Data Protection Officer Name: Karen McMullan

Telephone: 02890829200

Email: **DPO@Communities-ni.gov.uk**

Being transparent and providing accessible information to individuals about how we may use personal data is a key element of the **Data Protection Act (DPA)** and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). The Department for Communities (DfC) is committed to building trust and confidence in our ability to process your personal information and protect your privacy.

Purpose for processing

The Department is publishing an Equality Impact Assessment for consultation. The aim of the consultation is to seek evidence to inform the drafting of Regulations on circumstances where longer notice to quit periods would not apply (also referred to as exceptions).

We will process personal data provided in response to consultations for the purpose of informing the development of our policy, guidance, or other regulatory work in the subject area of the request for views. We will publish a summary of the consultation responses and, in some cases, the responses themselves but these will not contain any personal data. We will not publish the names, email addresses or contact details of respondents but will include the names of organisations responding.

If you have indicated that you would be interested in contributing to further Department work on the subject matter covered by the consultation, then we might process your contact details to get in touch with you.

Lawful basis for processing

The lawful basis we are relying on to process your personal data is Article 6(1)(e) of the UK GDPR, which allows us to process personal data when this is necessary for the performance of our public tasks in our capacity as a Government Department.

We will only process any special category personal data you provide, which reveals racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious belief, health or sexual life/orientation when it is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest under Article 9(2)(g) of the UK GDPR, in the exercise of the function of the department, and to monitor equality.

How will your information be used and shared

We process the information internally for the above stated purpose. We don't intend to share your personal data with any third party. Any specific requests from a third party for us to share your personal data with them will be dealt with in accordance the provisions of the data protection laws.

How long will we keep your information

We will retain consultation response information until our work on the subject matter of the consultation is complete, and in line with the Department's approved Retention and Disposal Schedule (which can be accessed through: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/dfc-disposal-records-schedule>

What are your rights?

- You have the right to obtain confirmation that your data is being **processed, and access to your personal data**
- You are entitled to have personal data **rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete**
- You have a right to have personal data **erased and to prevent processing**, in specific circumstances
- You have the right **to 'block' or suppress processing** of personal data, in specific circumstances
- You have the right to **data portability**, in specific circumstances
- You have the right to **object to the processing**, in specific circumstances
- You have rights in relation to **automated decision making and profiling**.

How to complain if you are not happy with how we process your personal information

If you wish to request access, object or raise a complaint about how we have handled your data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer using the details above.

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire SK9 5AF

casework@ico.org.uk

Available in alternative formats.

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