

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.

Environment

PPS 23 — ENABLING DEVELOPMENT FOR THE CONSERVATION OF SIGNIFICANT PLACES

Published at 12.00 noon on Monday 14 April 2014

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): I am pleased to inform Assembly members that the Executive, at its meeting on 7 April 2014, agreed Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 23 'Enabling Development for the Conservation of Significant Places', which I am now publishing today.

PPS23 provides planning policy for proposals for 'Enabling Development'. This is development necessary in order to secure the long-term future of a significant place, which includes all parts of the historic environment of heritage value including scheduled monuments, archaeological remains, historic buildings (both statutorily listed or of more local significance) together with any historically related contents, industrial heritage, conservation areas and historic parks, gardens and demesnes.

Northern Ireland is blessed with a wealth of significant places, be these historic buildings, parks or gardens; scheduled monuments, or reminders of our rich industrial heritage. The cost of maintaining or renovating these places can be prohibitive and frequently exceeds the value to the owner or the market value following renovation. Funding for the conservation and upkeep of these important places is therefore difficult to secure from traditional sources. As a result, many of these important places are left to deteriorate and ultimately may be lost forever.

Enabling Development can therefore provide an important source of funds to make good this 'conservation deficit' and ensure that these important places are secured for future generations. PPS23 provides policy and guidance which will create additional certainty for developers, planners and other stakeholders to understand when enabling development proposals are acceptable to safeguard the future of heritage assets.

The final policy has been revised following consultation on Draft PPS23, which was first published in January 2011. There were a total of 62 responses to the public consultation.

When published in draft form PPS23 made provision for a wide range of development types that could be considered to benefit through proposals for 'Enabling Development'. These included schemes for the provision of educational, community and leisure facilities, including social and health infrastructure. This went much further than the established use of Enabling Development in other jurisdictions, namely to finance the conservation deficit in relation to proposals to secure the upkeep of a significant place.

A wide variety of detailed comments were received to the public consultation but the key issue to emerge was opposition to applying the principle of Enabling Development beyond places of heritage value. The opinion was expressed that Enabling Development should only apply to proposals to conserve significant places of heritage value in the public interest.

I have taken on board these comments in the finalised policy which now relates Enabling Development solely to schemes for the conservation of significant places of heritage value. This is in line with planning practice elsewhere in the UK and Ireland.

In line with the RDS, PPS23 enables developers to present proposals, which meet their entrepreneurial objectives and at the same time delivers wider public benefits by ensuring the future of Northern Ireland's significant heritage sites. It will create clarity for all those involved in the process to understand when proposals might be considered acceptable and indeed how they will be assessed when a planning application is submitted. The Department of Regional Development have advised that PPS23 is in general conformity with the Regional Development Strategy.

Under PPS23 proposals for Enabling Development can be permitted even when there is divergence from other planning policies, provided it is demonstrated that they are necessary to secure the long-term future of a significant place in the public interest. Whilst the policy allows for enabling developments that are contrary to established planning policy, it contains the safeguards that the enabling development does not harm the heritage values of the significant place or its setting and that it does not result in detrimental fragmentation of the management of the significant place.

The finalised version of PPS23 contains one operational planning policy – Policy ED1 'Enabling Development' – which sets out the criteria that proposals for enabling development will have to meet if they are to be considered acceptable. Under the policy proposals for the re-use, restoration and refurbishment of significant places will be permitted only where it can be demonstrated by the applicant, in the submission of a Statement of Justification to accompany an application for planning permission, that all of the following criteria are met:

- a) the significant place to be subsidised by the proposed enabling development will bring significant long-term benefits according to its scale and location;
- b) the conservation of the significant place would otherwise be either operationally or financially unviable;
- c) the impact of the enabling development is precisely defined at the outset;
- d) the scale of the proposed enabling development does not exceed what is necessary to support the conservation of the significant place;
- e) sufficient subsidy is not available from any other source;
- f) the public benefit decisively outweighs the disbenefits of departing from other planning policies;
- g) it will not materially harm the heritage values of the significant place or its setting;
- h) it avoids detrimental fragmentation of the management of the significant place;
- i) it will secure the long term future of the significant place and, where applicable, its continued use for a sympathetic purpose; and
- j) it is necessary to resolve problems arising from the inherent needs of the heritage asset, rather than circumstances of the present owner, or the purchase price paid.

The Best Practice Guidance 'Assessing Enabling Development' accompanying the PPS will also be taken into account in considering proposals.

I believe that PPS23 will make a real difference to how we secure the future our historic cultural heritage. Its publication represents my Department's continuing commitment to preserving and

enhancing the Region's rich past so that it can continue to enrich the lives of this and future generations.