

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Infrastructure

PUBLICATION OF A REVISION TO THE STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT ON THE SUBJECT OF RENEWABLE AND LOW CARBON ENERGY

Published at 2pm on Thursday 11 December 2025

Ms Liz Kimmins (The Minister for Infrastructure): A Chairde,
Today, I am announcing the publication of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement, Edition 2 (SPPS). This new edition of the SPPS includes revised policy provisions on the subject of renewable and low carbon energy, as agreed by my Executive Committee colleagues on 2 October 2025.

My statement to this Assembly marks the conclusion of a comprehensive policy review process which was undertaken in accordance with policy development best practice. Consultation on draft policy revisions took place over a 12 week period ending on 30 June 2023 and the matter attracted a positive level of interest. Sixty-six responses were received to the public consultation exercise. In finalising the policy revisions, my Department has given careful consideration to each of the responses received. A Public Consultation Responses Report on the outcome of this engagement is being published alongside the revised SPPS. Engagement with other departments, including DAERA and DfE has also been factored into the final policy provisions, where appropriate.

In addition, my Department has taken into account the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) undertaken by specialist consultants. The consultants (RSK) have advised that the SEA did not predict any significant adverse effects of the Policy being implemented and it has been assessed that there will be no significant transboundary effects as a result of the implementation of the Policy. The consultants (SES) who carried out a HRA of the policy revisions determined that, in light of the mitigations in the revised policy, there is not likely to be an adverse effect on the site integrity of any European site arising from any aspect of the revised Policy.

Tackling climate change is a legislative requirement and a priority consideration for the Executive, this Assembly and our public bodies. This important policy revision to the SPPS is a key measure necessary to support the Climate Change (NI) Act 2022 and Energy Strategy, and its publication fulfils a commitment in the associated Energy Strategy Action Plan 2025.

The revised planning policy framework I am introducing is designed to help ensure that our planning system continues to support the wider ambitions of the Executive by enabling appropriate development and associated infrastructure that can make a positive contribution towards reducing emissions and decarbonising energy use across the region in the long-term public interest, without compromising environmental assets of acknowledged importance.

There are a number of changes that are likely to be of particular interest to Assembly Members. The SPPS includes policy provisions to support proposals to re-power, expand and extend solar and wind farms, unless impacts are unacceptable; greater flexibility in relation to separation distances for wind farms; and improved support for emerging technologies which provide an increased benefit from renewable sources where there is available robust evidence, and any potential adverse impacts are understood and addressed.

The policy seeks to ensure that the importance of our climate change commitments and protection of our valued natural landscapes and built environment are carefully balanced alongside the protection of our communities. The revised policy, therefore, addresses the need for infrastructure development with the importance of environmental protection, ensuring that renewable and low carbon energy projects are delivered in harmony with our natural landscapes and biodiversity. This requires

balanced decision-making and the revised policy I am introducing must be read and applied together with the provisions of the SPPS in its entirety and all other material planning considerations.

The policy does not alter the opportunity for communities to be engaged in the planning process and I believe that when it comes to increasing renewable energy development, it is, right that our planning system is capable of protecting communities and the long-term public interest from inappropriate development proposals.

I firmly believe that these changes will make a positive contribution to supporting the vital transition to a net zero carbon economy and will ensure that the framework for plan-making and decision-taking is fit for purpose and aligned with the wider contemporary context for energy and climate change.

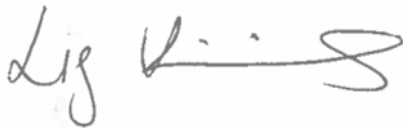
The SPPS is a key component of our planning system, and I fully endorse the regional planning policy framework within it. Its provisions and core planning principles continue to enable local development plans and decisions to positively contribute to furthering sustainable development and improving the well-being of everyone.

Looking forward, I remain committed to working in partnership with local government and key stakeholders, to advance the planning improvement agenda with a clear focus on making continuous improvements that will enhance the effectiveness, resilience, and long-term sustainability of the planning system in the North.'

My Executive colleagues have agreed the policy revisions to the SPPS. I now commend them to you.

Copies of this written statement have been distributed to the Assembly. A copy of the SPPS, Edition 2 and supporting documents will be available to view or download from the departmental website from 14:00 today.

Is mise le meas,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Liz Kimmins', with a stylized flourish at the end.

LIZ KIMMINS MLA

Minister for Infrastructure