NI Planning Permission

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FREE GUIDE · NORTHERN IRELAND

Building a New Home in the Countryside (CTY Policies)

Farm dwellings, infill sites, clusters, replacements and design in the rural area

How rural housing is assessed in Northern Ireland: the routes in PPS 21 (Policies CTY 1 to CTY 16), which councils now apply their own Plan Strategy policies instead, and the evidence a strong application needs.



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INTRODUCTION

Which policy applies to your site?

In Northern Ireland a new house in the countryside is not acceptable simply because a site is available. It must fit one of a limited number of policy routes, and then be sited and designed to integrate with the landscape.

For many years the governing policy has been **Planning Policy Statement 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside** (PPS 21), read with the **Strategic Planning Policy Statement** (SPPS, Edition 2, December 2025). PPS 21 is a retained policy under the SPPS transitional arrangements. DfI states that, where a council adopts its Plan Strategy, the retained policies **cease to have effect in that council's district**, and the council's own operational policies apply instead.

Council position (as of November 2026)	Rural housing policy used
PLAN STRATEGY ADOPTED Antrim and Newtownabbey, Belfast, Derry City and Strabane, Fermanagh and Omagh, Lisburn and Castlereagh, Mid and East Antrim	The council's own countryside policies in its adopted Plan Strategy (for example, Antrim and Newtownabbey Policy DM 18 Homes in the Countryside). Many follow a similar structure to PPS 21, but criteria differ, so check the council's wording.
NO ADOPTED PLAN STRATEGY Ards and North Down, Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon, Causeway Coast and Glens, Mid Ulster, Newry Mourne and Down	PPS 21 (CTY policies) with the SPPS and the existing area plan. A published draft Plan Strategy may be a material consideration, with weight depending on its stage.

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Mid Ulster note: on 27 August 2026 DfI issued a Section 15 Direction requiring Mid Ulster District Council to modify its draft Plan Strategy, including its approach to housing in the countryside. Until a Plan Strategy is adopted there, PPS 21 continues to apply.

KEY RULES · PPS 21

The routes to a new house in the countryside

Policy CTY 1 lists the cases in which an individual dwelling will be permitted. Other development is only acceptable where there are overriding reasons why it is essential and could not be located in a settlement.

Route	Key criteria in summary (see the policy text for the full wording)
Dwelling on a farm CTY 10	The farm business is currently **active and established for at least 6 years**; no dwellings or development opportunities outside settlement limits have been sold off from the holding within **10 years** of the application (applies from 25 November 2008); and the house is **visually linked or sited to cluster** with an established group of buildings on the farm, ideally using an existing lane. Permission under this policy is only forthcoming once every 10 years.
Infill / gap site CTY 8	Ribbon development is refused, but a **small gap site** for up to **two houses** within an otherwise substantial and continuously built-up frontage may be acceptable, respecting the existing pattern of size, scale, siting and plot size. A substantial frontage includes a line of **3 or more buildings** along a road without development to the rear.
Existing cluster CTY 2a	A cluster outside a farm of **4 or more buildings** (at least 3 dwellings) that reads as a visual entity, is associated with a focal point (such as a community building) or a crossroads, and where the site is bounded on at least two sides by other development and rounds off the cluster.
Replacement dwelling CTY 3	The building must exhibit the **essential characteristics of a dwelling** and, as a minimum, all external structural walls must be substantially intact. Agricultural sheds and temporary buildings do not qualify. Retention of non-listed vernacular dwellings is encouraged.
Personal or domestic circumstances CTY 6	Compelling, site-specific reasons, evidence that genuine hardship would result if refused, and no alternative (such as an extension, annex or conversion). Permission is tied to a named person and their dependents.
Non-agricultural business CTY 7	A dwelling in connection with an **established non-agricultural business** where a site-specific need is clearly shown that makes it essential for one of the firm's employees to live at the site. The house should be beside or within the boundaries of the business and integrate with its buildings; permission is tied by condition to occupation for the use of the business.
Conversion and reuse CTY 4	The sympathetic conversion of a suitable building of permanent construction, including to a single dwelling, where this secures its upkeep and retention and meets design, amenity, services and access criteria. Agricultural sheds and stores do not qualify.

PPS 21 also covers dispersed rural communities (CTY 2), social and affordable housing (CTY 5), residential caravans (CTY 9), farm diversification (CTY 11), agricultural buildings (CTY 12) and the setting of settlements (CTY 15).

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KEY RULES · SITING AND DESIGN

Integration, rural character and services

Meeting a CTY 1 route is only the first step. Every rural proposal must also integrate sympathetically with its surroundings and meet drainage, access and road safety requirements.

CTY 13: Integration and design

A new building is unacceptable where it is a **prominent feature** in the landscape, the site **lacks long-established natural boundaries**, it relies primarily on **new landscaping** to integrate, ancillary works do not integrate, the design is inappropriate, or it fails to blend with landform, trees and buildings. A farm dwelling must be visually linked or clustered with farm buildings.

CTY 14: Rural character

A new building is unacceptable where it is unduly prominent, results in a **suburban-style build-up** with existing and approved buildings, does not respect the traditional settlement pattern, **creates or adds to a ribbon** of development, or where ancillary works (other than necessary visibility splays) damage rural character.

CTY 16: Non-mains sewerage

Permission is only granted where the applicant shows that a septic tank or treatment system **will not create or add to a pollution problem**, with enough information to assess it. In areas identified as having a pollution risk, development relying on non-mains sewerage is only permitted in exceptional circumstances.

Access and roads

CTY 1 requires access arrangements to accord with the Department's published guidance. Sightlines, verge and hedge removal, and the classification of the road are often decisive, and visibility splays can themselves affect integration.

Outline or full application?

Many rural applications start with **outline** permission to establish the principle, followed by **reserved matters**. A full application is often better where integration depends on the exact siting and design.

Statutory fee for a single dwelling (from 1 April 2025)	Amount
Outline application (Schedule 1, category 2)	**£515**
Reserved matters (category 3(a))	**£515**
Full application (category 3(b))	**£1,035**

Source: Planning (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025. **Check the current fee** with the council before applying.

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PRACTICAL CHECKLIST

Building the case

- [ ] Council confirmed: PPS 21 or the council's own Plan Strategy policy
- [ ] Policy route identified (farm, infill, cluster, replacement, other)
- [ ] Farm business ID and evidence of 6 years' active farming gathered
- [ ] Land sold off from the farm in the last 10 years checked
- [ ] Farm building group and existing lanes mapped
- [ ] Frontage buildings counted and gap measured (infill)
- [ ] Planning history of the site and neighbouring land searched
- [ ] Long-established boundaries, hedges and trees recorded
- [ ] Sightlines and road classification checked
- [ ] Wastewater treatment and soakaway arrangements assessed
- [ ] Landscape designations (AONB, Special Countryside Area) checked
- [ ] Outline versus full application decided

Common pitfalls

- ✕ **A site that is "out on its own".** Under CTY 10 a farm dwelling is expected to cluster with the farm buildings. An exception needs clear health and safety reasons or verifiable expansion plans, and no other suitable site on the farm.
- ✕ **Selling a site off the farm.** Selling a dwelling or development opportunity can rule out a farm dwelling on the holding for 10 years.
- ✕ **Counting the wrong buildings.** For infill, the frontage must be substantial and continuously built up; a gap that could take more than two houses, or buildings set well back, can fail.
- ✕ **Replacing a ruin.** If the external walls are not substantially intact, CTY 3 is unlikely to apply.
- ✕ **Relying on new planting.** Integration that depends mainly on new landscaping fails CTY 13.
- ✕ **Using old rules in an adopted-plan district.** In the six councils with an adopted Plan Strategy, PPS 21 no longer applies; quote the council's own policy.

ADOPTED PLAN STRATEGY AREAS

Council countryside policies may add, remove or change criteria compared with PPS 21. We check the exact policy wording for your district before you buy land or commission drawings.

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HOW WE HELP

From first site visit to decision

Rural applications turn on evidence and on siting. We assess the policy route first, so you know where you stand before you spend money on design.

1. **Site appraisal.** We review the site, the farm or frontage, the planning history and the policy that applies in your council area.
2. **Evidence pack.** We help assemble farm business evidence, land and sale records, and photographs of boundaries and buildings.
3. **Siting and design brief.** We work with your designer on a siting and design that integrates under CTY 13 and CTY 14, or the council's equivalent.
4. **Application and case management.** We prepare the application and planning statement and liaise with the case officer and consultees such as DfI Roads.

PO

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Thinking of building in the countryside?

Tell us the townland or postcode, the council area and whether the land is part of a farm, and we will give you a frank view of the likely policy route.

Request a site-specific assessment → niplanningpermission.co.uk/contact-us

Or call 028 9591 6888 · info@niplanningpermission.co.uk · Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

CONTACT NI PLANNING PERMISSION

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Important: This guide is general guidance on the planning system in Northern Ireland. It is not legal advice and does not replace advice on your own site. Planning law, policy and fees change; the content is believed correct at the date of publication (November 2026), and you should check the current position with the relevant council before relying on it. No outcome can be guaranteed: every application is decided by the council on its own merits.

SOURCES

Official sources used

All sources were checked in November 2026. Plan Strategy status is set out in full in our guide to the 11 councils.

- **PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside**
  https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/PPS21%20Sustainable%20Development%20in%20the%20Countryside.pdf
- **DfI: Strategic Planning Policy Statement, Edition 2 (December 2025)**
  https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/strategic-planning-policy-statement
- **DfI: Planning Policy (SPPS transitional arrangements)**
  https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-policy
- **DfI: Retained Planning Policy (PPSs retained under the SPPS)**
  https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/retained-planning-policy
- **Planning Act (NI) 2011, s.6 (local development plan)**
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/25/section/6
- **Planning Act (NI) 2011, s.45 (determination of applications)**
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/25/section/45
- **Planning (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025, S.R. 2025 No. 49 (in operation 1 April 2025)**
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2025/49/pdfs/nisr_20250049_en.pdf
- **Planning (Fees) Regulations (NI) 2015, Schedule 1 (fee scales)**
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2015/73/schedule/1
- **Antrim and Newtownabbey BC: LDP 2030 Plan Strategy document (Policy DM 18 Homes in the Countryside; DM 22 Residential Extensions)**
  https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/planning/local-development-plans/plan-strategy-2030/
- **Mid Ulster DC: Mid Ulster Development Plan (Draft Plan Strategy, s.15 Direction 27 August 2026)**
  https://www.midulstercouncil.org/planning/mid-ulster-development-plan
- **Antrim and Newtownabbey BC: LDP 2030 Plan Strategy (adopted 3 July 2025)**
  https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/planning/local-development-plans/plan-strategy-2030/
- **Belfast City Council: Local Development Plan**
  https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/LDP
- **Derry City and Strabane DC: LDP 2032 Plan Strategy Adoption Statement (July 2025)**
  https://www.derrystrabane.com/getmedia/4c8cc3a2-11e1-4c1c-b12a-f02f545fa2e8/0b-LDP-PS-Adoption-Statement,-July-2025.pdf
- **Fermanagh and Omagh DC: Local Development Plan (Plan Strategy adopted 16 March 2023)**
  https://www.fermanaghomagh.com/services/planning/local-development-plan/
- **Lisburn & Castlereagh CC: Adopted Plan Strategy (26 September 2023)**
  https://www.lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk/w/adopted-plan-strategy
- **Mid and East Antrim BC: Local Development Plan (Plan Strategy adopted 16 October 2023)**
  https://www.midandeastantrim.gov.uk/resident/planning-building-control/planning/local-development-plan
- **Ards and North Down BC: Draft Plan Strategy**
  https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/article/2650/Draft-Plan-Strategy
- **Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon BC: LDP 2035 Draft Plan Strategy published (news, 1 October 2026)**
  https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/council-seeks-public-views-on-its-local-development-plan-2035-draft-plan-strategy/
- **Causeway Coast and Glens BC: Development Plan (LDP 2038 timetable)**
  https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/live/planning/development-plan
- **Newry, Mourne and Down DC: Local Development Plan**
  https://www.newrymournedown.org/local-development-plan
- **NI Planning Portal: public planning register**
  https://planningregister.planningsystemni.gov.uk/

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