

# Draft Rural White Paper Action Plan – Response Form

**Note that responses to the consultation should arrive with DARD not later than close of play on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2011**

The Landscape Institute is the chartered institute in the United Kingdom for landscape architects, incorporating designers, managers, and scientists, concerned with conserving and enhancing the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, and represents members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies, in academic institutions and in commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute is an educational charity and chartered body whose purpose is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Landscape Institute's accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Landscape Institute is committed to the principles of sustainable development by improving the quality of design of urban and rural environments and to the protection and enhancement of our physical and natural environments.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI) represents the professional membership within Northern Ireland and is particularly concerned with design, management and planning for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

LINI welcomes the opportunity to consider the Rural White Paper Action Plan, and submits the following response:

## 1. The consultation document sets out a *vision* for rural areas and associated key *policy priorities*.

a. Do you think the *vision* for rural areas reflects how you would wish to see the future of rural area? Please comment as appropriate.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland (LINI) agrees with the broad 'vision' as cited.

However, LINI advises that the themes should be clarified to better meet the value of 'rural' as a fundamental tenet of Northern Ireland. A Rural White Paper should identify what are the essential tenets of 'rural' and how these can be valued and benefitted. It is essential that 'rural' is not presented as a lesser sibling of 'urban', needing and yet not easily accessing the services of 'urban'. 'Rural' services and assets should be recognised and stated and valued to influence and guide the lifestyle of the communities within them.

LINI suggests that the themes of the Rural White Paper (Action Plan) would be better aligned in 4 main themes:

1 –Rural resources (identify these, express their value to the biodiversity and wellbeing of our life and region, and identify actions for their benefit);

2 – Rural lifestyle (recognise and define how a lifestyle might benefit from living with its rural location, within the capacity of its rural location (live in the countryside, live with the countryside), express the value of such rurally-integrated lifestyle, and identify actions for its

benefit. eg. local employment and enterprise, local produce and energy generation, self-sufficiency (water / food / waste management), alternatives to transport requirements, innovative education approaches etc – all of these should be differently approached than urban equivalents. Services may be provided by different ‘assets’ in urban and rural locations, and even in different rural locations such that services are locally distinct – it should be recognised that access to such services should be equitable whilst not necessarily equal between areas);

3 – ‘Rural’ as urban / regional resource (recognise that urban wellbeing depends on rural wellbeing, identify essential requirements (food / water, resources / economy, energy / waste management, health / recreation, biodiversity / beauty etc), and identify actions which will benefit ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ in tandem);

4 – Rural / Urban connectivity (recognise a requirement for connectivity between rural and urban resources and demand; identify sustainable approaches which provide benefit to the assets of each without detriment)

b. Do you think there are other *policy priorities* which should be included? If so, please specify which and explain why.

2 - access to services:

- to recognise and support rural services as valuable and beneficial to well-being.

3 – sustainable rural communities:

- to promote sustainable rural living. ie. to balance expectations with risk (better regulation principles)
- to clearly support and reemphasis objectives of PPS21
  - to manage growth in the countryside to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development that meet the essential needs of a vibrant rural community;
  - to conserve the landscape and natural resources of the rural area and to protect it from excessive, inappropriate or obtrusive development and from the actual or potential effects of pollution;
  - to facilitate development necessary to achieve a sustainable rural economy; including appropriate farm diversification and other economic activity; and
  - to promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development in the countryside.

4 – sustainable rural economies:

- to recognise, support and harness rural resources for local and regional wellbeing (energy, water, food etc)

5 – sustainable countryside (and all other themes):

- to follow the principles of Ecosystem Services (ref: UK National Ecosystem Assessment, carried out in NI in 2010)
- to benefit biodiversity and natural resources (crucial to regional well-being)
- to identify and realize the ‘Green Infrastructure’ potential offered by the countryside.

c. Do you think any of the *policy priorities* should be omitted? If so, please specify which and explain why.

No Comment

**2. The draft Rural White Paper Action Plan sets out the *actions* to which Departments have committed. Please consider how realistic and meaningful the proposed *actions* are and comment on how effective you think they will be in contributing to:**

a. The development of more sustainable *rural economies*

Perhaps too much emphasis on energy production which may place additional development pressure on the Landscape from wind farm development etc.

b. The development of more sustainable *rural communities*

The Rural White Paper (Action Plan) does not seek alternatives to the unsustainable 'status quo', eg. rural living and rural employment, reduction of transport need, rebalancing of expectations, valuing lifestyle and place and culture, health and education alternatives through outdoors, recreation through nature, energy through rural resources etc. Alternatives which are meaningful and beneficial to both society

and environment. The Action Plan only relates to services in terms of 'urban', and does not value or seek to augment the assets of dark sky, biodiversity, natural beauty, natural food and clean water. Sustainability through rural living and being is not sought or addressed. There is no recognition of the importance of rural and local as resource for food and energy and waste management, in current climate change, health and obesity issues, education and social issues etc. All which can be met through local living in local resources, both for urban and rural.

c. The development of a more sustainable *rural environment*

The Action Plan does not address rural ecosystem requirements, either for rural or urban living. Society is not seen as inextricably linked to place and resources.

**3. Please consider what you think are the *key challenges or priorities* for rural areas over the next five years?**

a. Please give details of what you consider to be the *key challenges/priorities* for rural areas and provide reasons why.

It is considered that increased commuting to larger towns and cities will continue to be a significant unsustainable aspect, causing resources to be spread – Balance needs to be achieved between encouraging urban and rural connections and encouraging further commuting. Introduction of large scale out of town shopping centres and improved transport links increase pressure on the viability of businesses within rural settlements.

Villages will need to diversify and specialise and tap into any unique qualities they may have available - Village Design Statements will contribute to this through identification of potential opportunities. Identify assets, value them, adapt to them (lifestyle according to capacity).

Job creation, energy production, improved transport links, social housing all cited as priorities have potential to erode landscape and visual character. Cognisance of the social and economic value of landscape should be factored into all priorities.

b. Please comment on the extent to which you think the proposed actions set out in the Rural White Paper Action Plan will help address these *key challenges/priorities*?

The Action Plan makes no mention of ‘joined up’ structures to address local issues (eg. Mourne Heritage Trust). It is not clear how the Department can propose an Action Plan without having first proposed a Rural White Paper. This Action Plan is a framework of statements stating what all departments can already commit to do. It is not a visionary policy document which sets targets to be worked to, supported and achieved. As such it seems to have blinkered aspirations, and is a statement of a status quo.

4. What further measures do you think should be included in the draft Rural White Paper Action Plan to help address these *key challenges/priorities*?

Include priorities which emphasis the value and importance of all landscape to both rural and urban dwellers. In particular, protection and enhancement of landscape character areas and utilisation of designated landscapes and/or habitats. These should be considered as important assets within rural communities. This is the principle of the ‘European Landscape Convention’ to which the NI government is obliged to adhere.  
Potential for ‘Green Infrastructure’ strategies to deliver many of the priorities highlighted.

5. Do you think that the draft Rural White Paper Action Plan needs to focus more on particular issues? If so, please indicate which issues you think it should focus more on and give reasons for your views.

As above –

Include priorities which emphasis the value and importance of all landscape to both rural and urban dwellers. In particular, protection and enhancement of landscape character areas and utilisation of designated landscapes and/or habitats. These should be considered as important

assets within rural communities.  
Potential for 'Green Infrastructure' strategies to deliver many of the priorities highlighted.

**6. What do you think are the main strengths of the draft Rural White Paper Action Plan?**

Bring greater awareness of rural communities.

**7. What do you think are the main weaknesses of the draft Rural White Paper Action Plan?**

Does not highlight the value and qualities of landscape character or other types of designation/protection – Also needs to emphasize the importance of stewardship for those in rural areas.

**8. How should the success of the Rural White Paper Action Plan be measured?**


To strike the balance between the quality of life for those living in rural areas whilst protecting and enhancing the qualities, value and character of our rural landscapes.  
This Action Plan falls short of an approach which balances serving the rural population with ensuring the wellbeing of the resources which support it (and the rest of the region). It should be closely aligned with the DEFRA Rural White Paper of 2011 ('The Natural Choice'), which has a more appropriate balance between serving the population and also the resources which support it.

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**Signature** 

**Date** 13 June 2011

If completing an electronic version of the form, it should be saved in *MS Word* format and emailed to: [laura.scott@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:laura.scott@dardni.gov.uk)

Alternatively you can post or **FAX** a copy of the completed response form to:

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