
Written Ministerial Statement

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Regional Development

Review of the Regional Development Strategy: Consultation

*Published at 9.00 am on
Thursday 6 January, 2011*

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): I am pleased to inform Assembly members that consultation on the review of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) will commence on 6 January 2011 for three months until 31 March 2011.

As the spatial strategy of the Executive the RDS informs and supports the PfG, Budget decisions and the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. It provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide both the public and private sectors.

Whilst the original RDS, *Shaping our Future*, which was published in 2001 had much to commend it, the speed and direction of change in our society and economy requires a new approach. The revised RDS therefore addresses key challenges on climate change, rebuilding and rebalancing the economy, population growth, the location of jobs and houses, infrastructure provision and the protection of our natural and built environment.

The Executive's top priority is the economy. A new regional economic strategy is currently being developed focusing on rebalancing and rebuilding of the economy. It is essential that the spatial and economic strategies, are aligned in order to achieve maximum benefit for the Region. This means that decisions on the location of key infrastructure projects must be based on strategic principles.

The Investment Strategy seeks to ensure that the Region gets the right infrastructure in the

right place to enable equality of access and to ensure that public services are delivered more efficiently and effectively. The RDS is not in itself a bidding document; rather it aims to provide context and evidence, as well as a framework and guidance, for where development should happen.

The RDS therefore provides an important policy and evidence base on which ISNI draws conclusions about the shape and configuration of future service provision. This helps to address key questions such as where and what size public facilities like schools and hospitals should be to cater efficiently to public needs and secure the best value for the public purse.

Tackling climate change and promoting sustainability both continue to be priorities for the Executive. The revised draft RDS places a strong emphasis on sustainable development, social cohesion and the sensible use of resources, while caring for the environment. The recently published Sustainable Development Strategy recognises the central role the RDS has in providing long term policy directions from a spatial perspective. A new Regional Transportation Strategy is being developed which will complement the RDS with an emphasis on sustainable transport and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

In summary, the key elements of the consultation document are:

- The importance of Belfast City, the heart of the Metropolitan Area, as the driver for regional economic growth and the focus for administration, commerce, specialised services and cultural amenities.
- The significant role which Derry has to play as the hub of the North West. Derry City has a pivotal role in cross-border and international relationships and is already the main urban centre in the North West

and a gateway to America and Europe. Securing a strong and vibrant Derry city is important to the economic and social wellbeing of the North West.

- The identification of sub-regional centres and the importance placed on them to benefit from, and add value to, balanced regional economic growth, in line with the cross-cutting theme in the new Economic Strategy.
- The importance of critical mass to attract growth through the identification of clusters of settlements.
- The need to sustain the overall strength of the rural community living in small towns, villages, small rural settlements and the open countryside.
- Housing figures for District Council areas designed to give an indication of what might be needed from 2008-2025.
- An integrated approach to ensure that decisions on land use and transportation are integrated; this is designed to develop compact urban areas making best use of existing infrastructure and services.
- A new emphasis on how to reduce dependence on the car and change travel behaviour – a theme which will be a key focus on the new Regional Transportation Strategy which is a sister document to the RDS.
- The importance in all aspects of forward planning to address the consequences of climate change; this means an even greater focus on where people live and work and how transport and energy needs are planned.

During the consultation we will be running a series of public events around the Region. I welcome your contribution to the consultation process.

The Consultation document and associated Impact Assessments are available on the Internet at www.drdni.gov.uk/shapingourfuture/

However if any member would prefer a personal hard copy, it can be obtained by contacting Louise Fitzpatrick on (028) 90540642.

Please note the above statement is embargoed until 9am on Thursday 6 January 2011.