

Appendix 1 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template – Accessible Version

SECTION 1 – Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department for Communities, Historic Environment Division (HED).

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

An Historic Environment Policy for Northern Ireland is being developed as a strand of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme within the Department for Communities.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

- Developing a ☒ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Plan
- Adopting a ☐ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Plan
- Implementing a ☐ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Plan
- Revising a ☐ Policy ☐ Strategy ☐ Plan
- ☐ Designing a Public Service
- ☐ Delivering a Public Service

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Historic Environment Policy for Northern Ireland

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The overarching vision for the Policy is: 'Our People. Our Past. Our Place: an inclusive and valued historic environment that delivers for Northern Ireland.'
The policy aspires to strengthen, connect to and innovate within Northern Ireland's Historic Environment.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

- ☒ Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).
- ☐ Other definition (Provide details and the rationale below).
- ☐ A definition of 'rural' is not applicable'

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

Not Applicable

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Not Applicable

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Not Applicable

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The Proposed Historic Environment (HE) Policy will propose activity through strategic objectives leading to an action plan, implemented primarily by the Department for Communities Historic Environment Division, but also through new and established partnerships. The Policy aims are to improve the protection, awareness, understanding of and care of historic places – which includes landscapes and archaeology as well as buildings, industrial or defense heritage assets or seascapes. The Policy also suggests ways to benefit from the care and interpretation of the Historic Environment – pride in and improved quality of places leading to better life chances, good relations, and health benefits. HE Policy suggests how using existing assets can benefit the local economy/and or tourism through the revitalization and regeneration of places including small settlements, or for example vernacular and historic farmsteads. HE Policy sets out actions to support conservation and reuse of historic buildings at risk, in small rural settlements, as a way of tackling rural poverty and social isolation. Suggested actions may include harnessing voluntary and community organizations within rural communities to own and/or maintain /access historic assets and landscapes. Policy actions therefore have potential to positively contribute to resilient communities and to improve local confidence and pride, with the potential to impact beneficially environmentally, socially and economically in rural areas.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The policy will impact on people equitably across both urban and rural areas, however these impacts will be different because as described above they will respond to the differing needs and unique assets in different places which could be urban versus rural communities, and urban versus rural places or landscapes. 80% of NI's monuments are found in farmland for example. Many historic settlements, landscapes and small villages are centred on historic layouts, infrastructure like bridges and canals and heritage buildings like churches and features like market squares.

The Rural Community Network (RCN) has advised the Department that strategies should consider the specific characteristics of rural areas. For example, small, more

numerous cultural activities which span more than one activity and which reach across more than one organization or catchment have a greater impact in Rural areas than one large activity in one place. RCN experience suggests that small but more joined-up 'cultural' initiatives (which support for example the historic environment but also the arts, oral histories etc) and those which support the community and voluntary sectors which are strong in rural areas have scope for greater impact in Rural Communities than urban ones.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

- ☒ Rural Businesses
- ☒ Rural Tourism
- ☒ Rural Housing
- ☒ Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas
- ☒ Education or Training in Rural Areas
- ☐ Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas
- ☐ Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas
- ☐ Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas
- ☒ Poverty in Rural Areas
- ☒ Deprivation in Rural Areas
- ☐ Rural Crime or Community Safety
- ☐ Rural Development
- ☒ Agri-Environment
- ☒ Other (Please state)

Health & Wellbeing. Social inclusion.

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

Not applicable

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

- ☒ Consultation with Rural Stakeholders
- ☒ Consultation with Other Organisations
- ☒ Surveys or Questionnaires
- ☒ Published Statistics
- ☐ Research Papers
- ☐ Other Publications
- ☒ Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Consideration has been given to:

- NISRA - The Continuous Household Survey 2024/25
- Relevant guidance provided by DAERA, including the Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) for Public Authorities. (A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 for Public Authorities (Revised) (daera-ni.gov.uk)).
- DAERA's Key Rural Issues 1993: Key Rural Issues 2023 and 2025
- NI Multi-Deprivation Measure 2017 which indicates that in relation to accessing key public services, physical and online, 95 of the 100 most deprived Super Output Areas are classified as rural.
- Rural Heritage Survey conducted by Rural Community Network (May 2024).

The Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) Policy team sits within the Department for Communities.

The team met with all 11 Northern Ireland local councils, with specific discussion around proportion of urban to rural areas within councils and their needs in relation to the Historic Environment. In person meetings took place November to December 2024 at each council's offices.

(HCC) Policy team also met with all central government Departments, including DAERA. In person meetings took place November to December 2024 at each Department's offices.

HCC Team also met with Rural Communities Network (RCN) on Monday 17th February 2025.

Surveys of both Listed Buildings and Monuments owners were carried out across both urban and rural parts of NI equitably, though the differences in opinion in each area have not been highlighted. These were published in May 2025 - Market failure in heritage | Department for Communities

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

The discussions with Government Departments were wide-ranging covering issues which apply to all (including rural) areas such as volunteering for improved wellbeing (DoH), need for energy efficiency for historic buildings (DoF), needs for heritage training and skills (DfE), Tourism (DfE), community and good relations (TEO) and access/challenges relating to transportation (DfI). This engagement included DAERA, with specific discussion around Landscape Character Assessment Landscape Character of Northern Ireland | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Village Catalyst Village Catalyst Pilot case studies | Department for Communities projects relating to heritage at risk, the revitalization of high streets in rural areas, 'Adopt a spot' Live Here Love Here | Adopt A Spot relating to the need to care for historic monuments in rural areas. Local Councils and Owners identified needs such as the financial strain felt by listed building owners and owners of monuments on farmland. They discussed the need for a better cared for historic environment because characterful and authentic places fosters pride of place which is good for people, attracts tourism, and through care and repair activity can improve employability regarding heritage skills. Community buildings which revitalize small settlements like in the Village Catalyst Scheme are needed to support local activities. RCN raised the potential of the historic environment to counter social isolation and mental health challenges, for volunteer heritage organizations within communities to improve local confidence and pride, thus having potential to impact beneficially environmentally, socially and economically.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

Not Applicable

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

The March 2016 Framework for Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI), was published by DAERA following extensive consultation. This document is now in its third iteration - Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation – A New Framework | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Within this Policy, the NI Executive recognises that no one single Department has responsibility for rural issues and that all Departments have functions which can contribute to alleviating the impact of poverty and social isolation. The TRPSI Framework has been developed to provide a broad Framework within which Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural sector can work in partnership to develop new and innovative ways to help alleviate the effects of poverty and social isolation in rural areas, particularly among vulnerable groups. It reads:

‘..Our vision is for rural areas that maintain their distinctive features as places of agricultural production, areas of outstanding beauty, places of social, historic and cultural uniqueness and places with a strong community infrastructure which can avail of economic, social and cultural opportunities.’

This highlights the value of historic places to rural places in Northern Ireland. It also describes the social and economic needs in rural places which the Historic Environment Policy aims will hope to address. The framework sets out:

- ‘To promote the development of new and innovative approaches to tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas;
- To encourage effective partnership working between the Department, other statutory organisations and the rural community sector in seeking to tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas;
- To support interventions which lever additional resources to tackle poverty and social isolation among vulnerable people in rural areas to maximise the benefits from TRPSI funding;
- To facilitate the piloting of new projects aimed at tackling poverty and social isolation in rural areas more effectively and to encourage the mainstreaming of new approaches by public authorities if they prove to be successful;
- To promote the sharing of information, best practice and expertise and to promote an increase in understanding of the causes of poverty and social isolation in rural areas.’

The framework lists three priority areas: ‘Access Poverty’, ‘Financial Poverty’ and ‘Social Isolation’. An aim under access poverty is to improve access to key services. Repurposed historic buildings may have the potential to provide a space for such services. Relevant aims to tackle financial poverty are to reduce household expenditure – closer services in a nearby village can do this; to increase household incomes- jobs associated with a completed heritage project and its new use can do this. Relevant aims to tackle social isolation include: to promote positive health and

wellbeing- visits to historic sites or buildings have been shown to have a significant statistically relevant impact upon wellbeing; well cared for heritage buildings contribute to distinctive places which are good for people's wellbeing and life chances; to increase opportunities for social engagement – a community project delivering community uses will do this; to provide support for groups – a community project has the potential to do this.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If the response is NO GO TO Section 5C.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The rural needs identified have influenced the development of clear objectives for the project , in particular those needs identified through engagement with local councils and the RCN.

In particular, the discussion with RCN highlighted the need for smaller, more joined up activities, particular to rural areas, and the impact that projects investing in volunteer led activities can have. This will form part of the 'collaborative', 'innovative' and 'potential' areas of the policy, and those supporting local networks.

DfC's Heritage, Culture, and Creativity policy programme will see separate but connected policies for public libraries, heritage, the arts, and museums. These policies and a joint action plan will explore rural needs and opportunities to connect these sectors.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

Not applicable

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

☒ I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:

Natalie O'Rourke

Position/Grade:

Deputy Principal

Division/Branch:

G7 – Heritage Advice and Regulation Branch

Signature:

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Date:

28-05-2026

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Signature:

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Date:

15/07/26