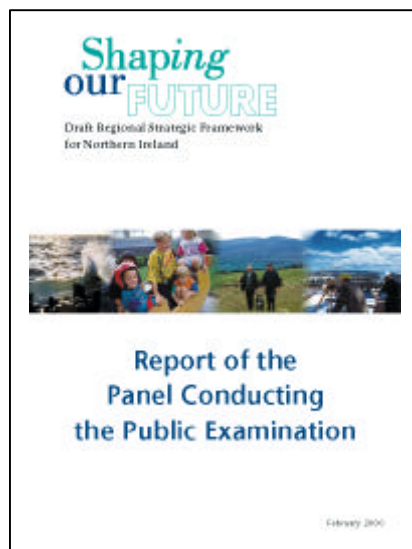


**"SHAPING OUR FUTURE"
THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Response by the Department for Regional Development
to the Report of the Independent Panel following the
Public Examination**



12 APRIL 2000

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SHAPING OUR FUTURE: THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Introduction:

The Report of the Independent Panel:

The Department published the Draft Regional Strategic Framework in December 1998. In response to the comments received, an Independent Panel conducted a Public Examination of the key issues in October/November 1999 and the Panel Report was published on 16th February 2000.

The Department wishes to place on record its gratitude to the three members of the Independent Panel for the open and efficient conduct of the Public Examination, the painstaking sifting of a large volume of comments, and the submission of a well reasoned report which will greatly assist the preparation of the final Regional Development Strategy.

This paper contains the initial response to the main recommendations made in the Panel's Report. It has been produced to facilitate consideration of the Report by interested parties and to assist them in submitting their final views to the Department by 31 May.

Consideration is being given to the relationship between the Regional Development Strategy and Area Plans to ensure flexibility in the development planning process.

Background:

The process of preparing a Regional Development Strategy was launched in June 1997. In November 1997 a discussion paper was published to stimulate public debate. It was followed by very extensive public consultation. The draft Regional Strategic Framework was published in December 1998 and in the autumn of 1999 a Public Examination was held.

The Panel conducting the Examination in Public presented its report to Peter Robinson MP MLA, the Minister for Regional Development, on 31 January 2000. In a statement on 2 February 2000, Mr Robinson outlined the main conclusions from the Report and said that, in the light of the conclusions he was satisfied that, in general terms, the draft Regional Strategic Framework “is soundly based and merits broad endorsement”.

Mr Robinson authorised early publication of the Report and said “that the Report contains a number of detailed recommendations which now require careful consideration by the Department in consultation with other interested organisations”. He said that DRD would produce a paper responding to these detailed points which would identify those matters capable of early settlement and those requiring further consideration. He invited interested parties to put forward their final views by the end of May and in particular invited comments on the Panel’s comments about the approach required to implement the Strategy.

Following suspension of the Assembly and the Executive, Adam Ingram MP, Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office, has confirmed that the closing date for comments remains 31 May.

RESPONSE BY THE DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT PANEL

The paragraphs below set out the initial response of the Department for Regional Development to the main recommendations of the Panel. The Department's paper should be read in conjunction with the Panel Report. The order of headings and paragraph references used by the Panel in setting out its Conclusions and Recommendations in Chapter 1 of the Panel Report is followed.

General:

The Department welcomes the main conclusions of the Panel at Paras 1.1 to 1.3 that:

- there is widespread support for the guiding principles and broad spatial framework of the draft Strategy;
- the open and inclusive approach in drafting the Strategy was appreciated;
- the proposed hub, corridor and gateway framework of the draft Strategy is sufficiently flexible to deal with changing social and economic circumstances;
- the proposed Spatial Development Strategy can accommodate the scale of economic growth suggested by Strategy 2010 and upward revisions of projections for population growth; and
- the draft Strategy is an innovative approach to strengthening social and economic cohesion within the Region.

A Co-ordinated Approach:

para 1.5 The Department has noted the views of the Panel and will restructure Chapter 1 to bring out clearly the purpose of the Strategy to set the spatial planning framework and to guide the physical development of the region to 2025. The relationship of the Regional Development Strategy to the other strategies of Government within Northern Ireland will be set out, as will the relationships with the normal Public Expenditure and project

appraisal arrangements. It will confirm, in accordance with existing legislation, the requirements for Government Departments to have regard to the Regional Development Strategy in order to achieve a co-ordinated approach to spatial development.

Relationships with Neighbours:

para 1.6 The Department accepts the views of the Panel that the British-Irish Council, when reconvened, should be asked to give early attention to the co-ordination of regional spatial development strategies, with particular reference to transport links. The British-Irish Council has already decided to examine transport links.

para 1.7 The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel that examples of co-operation with neighbouring regions should include links with Scotland. It will strengthen references to Northern Ireland – Scotland links in the Strategy, in consultation with the Scottish Executive, and give further consideration to Great Britain links generally.

para 1.8 The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel that, in keeping with the European Spatial Development Perspective, before the Strategy is finalised, Northern Ireland Ministers should consult with the Irish Government to ensure that their respective plans achieve a co-ordinated approach to the future social and economic development of the island. The Department has already recognised the need for cross-border consultation in relation to spatial development matters of mutual interest and has arranged for the necessary liaison.

Guiding Principles:

para 1.9 The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel that it should consider linking the Strategic Planning Guidelines back to the Guiding Principles as it works them through. It will explore how this might be done in a manner, which would provide a helpful explanation for the reader.

para 1.10 The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel that continuing community involvement in all aspects of planning and implementation should be clearly built-in to the first Guiding Principle of the Strategy. Government is committed to encouraging community participation in the planning and implementation processes, consistent with its statutory obligations and the availability of resources. In this respect, the Department of the Environment Planning Service funds Community Technical Aid and is discussing with them how they can assist community input to the development plan process. The Department will amend the first Guiding Principle to reflect the need for continuing community involvement and it will take account of the helpful suggestions of the Panel set out in Appendix 3 in relation to future public participation.

para 1.11 The Panel recommended that the Department should review the status of the principle of sustainability in the Strategy in the light of the Government's published Strategy for Sustainable Development, and use it consistently throughout the final document.

The Department is committed to fostering a sustainable approach to development. It accepts the views of the Panel and will further examine how the principle of sustainability can best be encouraged by, and expressed in the final strategy, taking account of the Government's published strategy "A Better Quality of Life:

A Strategy for Sustainable Development for the United Kingdom – May 1999”.

Social Cohesion:

para 1.12 The Panel recommended that the principles of recognising the problems of segregation and seeking to foster a community interaction should be a feature of plan-making and implementation. The Department is committed to seeking to achieve a more cohesive society in the Region. It has noted the views of the Panel that the Strategic Planning Guideline on Developing Community Cohesion was generally endorsed. The Department, the Planning Service and the Housing Executive are committed to providing appropriate training in the area of community relations and will continue to provide training as required.

The Spatial Development Strategy:

para 1.13 The Panel recommended that economic development must be a cornerstone of the Spatial Strategy, and that any further spatial recommendations arising from the completion of Strategy 2010 should also be incorporated.

The Department agrees with the Panel that economic development must be a cornerstone of the Spatial Strategy. Accordingly, the Department will strengthen the spatial planning references in relation to economic development within the Spatial Development Strategy, and will take account of any further spatial recommendations arising from the Strategy 2010 process.

para 1.14 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the Strategy should be re-structured to include separate chapters on

Rural Northern Ireland, Housing Growth and Distribution, the Belfast Metropolitan Area and its hinterland, and the North West.

para 1.15 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that where the Strategy seeks to allocate future housing growth, it should achieve a broadly even balance between the Belfast Travel to Work Area and the rest of Northern Ireland.

The Department acknowledges the importance of maintaining a strong economic heart in the Belfast Metropolitan Area, and its 'Travel to Work' hinterland, and encouraging a measure of decentralised growth in the rest of the Region, focussed on the North West and the larger towns, particularly on the key transport corridors. This will help to strengthen the network of opportunities across the Region, will encourage a balanced spread of economic growth, and will make optimum use of infrastructure.

para 1.16 The Panel recommended that the Strategy should distribute growth only to District Council areas or appropriate groupings of District Councils within development plans, leaving the level of development appropriate to local settlements to those plans.

The Department accepts this recommendation and will distribute growth to District Council areas, or appropriate groupings of District Councils within development plans, leaving the level of development appropriate to local settlements to be decided within development plans(see also paragraph 1.57). While the Department agrees with the Panel that there should be a flexible approach at regional level, it recognises that there are strong dispersal pressures operating in the Region, particularly in relation to housing, which can generate more commuting.

These pressures need to be managed in a manner which accommodates local development needs but does not undermine the drive to promote more sustainable patterns of development within the Region, and does not weaken the role of the main towns in helping to maintain, or in some cases, achieving the “critical mass” needed for successful economic development and optimal use of infrastructure.

The Department will, therefore, consider setting out some broad principles which will guide the development plan process in seeking to achieve the right balance between achieving sustainable patterns of development and meeting the needs of local communities. It will provide guidance on the need to balance the role of the main towns, as important centres of employment and services, with their related hinterlands, taking account of the complex complementary links with closely related settlements which the Panel have emphasised.

The Hubs:

para 1.17 The Panel recommended that the Strategy should not designate “major” and “key” service centres or Regional Towns but, within the settlement network of the two main cities, main towns and small towns should secure the necessary concentration of major employment and housing growth on the basis of hubs or clusters, key transport corridors and gateways.

The Department remains committed to the principle of the hub, corridor and gateway approach and recognises the potential of settlement clustering, based on the main towns, in relation to creating a “critical mass” for economic development within the Region.

In the light of the Panel's recommendation, the Department will give further consideration to how the Strategy should be revised in order to strike an appropriate balance between efficiency of investment and inclusiveness.

Craigavon:

para 1.18 The Panel's Report recommended that Craigavon should not be given a higher status than it receives in the draft Strategy, but agreed with the view that it has all the attributes in terms of location, "critical mass", and infrastructure to be identified as a focus of major employment and housing growth in the final Strategy.

In the draft Strategy, the Department had acknowledged that Craigavon was uniquely placed to accommodate high growth based on its role as the major service centre in mid-Ulster, the second largest industrial centre in the Region, and taking account of its strategic location on the key transport corridors. The draft Strategy had indicated that Craigavon was particularly well placed to accommodate a growing proportion of the housing market over time, as housing land supply diminishes within the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

The Department, therefore, confirms its intention to identify Craigavon as a focus of major employment and housing growth with considerable long-term capacity and potential.

Key Transport Corridors:

para 1.19 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the Strategy should confirm the 5 designated key transport corridors and introduce a further category of "link corridors", and include

them on the maps in the Strategy. The recommended link corridors are:

- the A29 road down the centre of the Region from Coleraine past Magherafelt to Cookstown, Dungannon and Armagh; and the A28 on to Newry;
- the A3 route from Craigavon through Armagh to Monaghan; and
- the A20 route from Newtownards to Belfast and the A7 route from Downpatrick to Belfast

The Department also recognises that the routes linking Bangor and Carrickfergus town centres to Belfast will have particular importance as Metropolitan Transport Corridors in the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

para 1.20 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the Northern Corridor should run from Moira past Belfast International Airport to the M2 and northwards, and also that the distinction between the two major Development Corridors and the Key Transport Corridors should be further clarified.

Gateways:

para 1.21 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that additional references to the potential of the Port of Larne and Belfast Harbour Area (including the City Airport) should be included.

para 1.22 The Department notes that the Panel was not persuaded by the proposition presented at the Public Examination that a 3-tier hierarchy of gateways should be included in the final Strategy. The Department agrees with the conclusion of the Panel that this was

not a relevant planning tool in determining the strategic location of economic development opportunities at the ports and airports.

Changing the Regional Travel Culture:

para 1.23 The Department accepts, that in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and in the interest of maintaining the viability of the towns and rural service centres, it is appropriate to take a flexible approach to measures aimed at reducing the growth in demand for car travel. This approach will be reflected in the final Strategy and taken into consideration in the drawing up of the proposed 10 year Regional Transport Strategy which the Department for Regional Development is preparing.

para 1.24 The Panel recommended that the Strategy should advocate the provision of improved public transport services before the imposition of traffic restraint measures.

The Department accepts, in principle, that investment in public transport needs to be increased over time and will consider these issues when developing an integrated transportation strategy.

In this context, the recently appointed Government Task Force will be considering future options for the rail network.

para 1.25 The Department notes the recommendations that detailed measures of traffic restraint or to promote cycling and walking should be set out in the Regional Transport Plan or in a Regional Planning Policy Statement or in Area Plans, and will take these points into account in drawing up the Regional Transport Strategy and in a Regional Planning Policy Statement on Transportation. The final Regional Development Strategy will include appropriate

references to encouraging short-term initiatives and pilot projects for the benefit of pedestrians and cyclists.

para 1.26 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation and acknowledges the importance of an integrated and co-ordinated approach to land use and transportation. The final Strategy will explicitly reflect the need for co-ordination, and a co-ordinated approach will be taken to the preparation of the Regional Transport Strategy and the Regional Planning Policy Statement on Transportation.

Enhancement of Public Transport:

para 1.27 The Panel recommended that the Strategy should set medium-term targets for the proportion of journeys met by public transport in the light of the range of requirements arising from the Region's distinctive settlement pattern.

The Department recognises the importance of targets in monitoring changes in the regional transport culture. It considers that medium-term targets for the proportion of journeys made by public transport is a matter for further study, which can best be handled within the context of the proposed Regional Transportation Strategy.

para 1.28 The Department welcomes the Panel's commendation on linking private minibus services with the rural public transport system and will continue to review and monitor the work of the Rural Transport Fund and consider how rural public transport initiatives can be further promoted.

para 1.29 The Department notes the endorsement of the Panel for the strengthening of the Eastern Seaboard Corridor with possibilities of

rail improvement in the long term, to provide a shorter rail route on the Belfast-Dublin inter-city rail link and the creation of a new commuter rail line.

- para 1.30 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation that the prospects for upgrading the Derry/Londonderry rail service appropriate to passenger usage should be periodically reviewed.
- para 1.31 The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel and will amend the Strategy to explicitly propose investigation of the provision of park-and-ride facilities at railway stations.
- para 1.32 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation that the longer-term possibility of operating a circular passenger rail service on the Belfast-Bleach Green-Antrim-Lisburn-Belfast line should be reviewed.

In general, the final Strategy will seek to keep long-term options for innovative public transport improvements open. However, the views of the Panel in paragraphs 1.29 to 1.32, in relation to rail issues, can be taken into account by the Government Task Force considering future options for Northern Ireland Railways.

- para 1.33 The Department notes the recommendation of the Panel that the Strategy should advocate the extension of the E-Way system to Comber and Newtownards and its eventual operation as a light rapid transit route. It is also recommended that Translink consider in the long-term the integration of the E-way with this suburban railway system.

The Department proposes to respond to this recommendation by indicating in the Strategy that possible innovative improvements to the public transport system in the Belfast Metropolitan Area and its hinterland, such as advocated by the Panel, should be considered within the context of the proposed Regional Transportation Strategy, and that these options should be kept open for the long term.

para 1.34 The Department notes the endorsement of the Panel that the feasibility of rail freight movement within the strategic transport network and in an all-Ireland context be kept under continuous review. The proposed Regional Transportation Strategy will consider the issue of future freight movement.

para 1.35 The Department notes the recommendation of the Panel that the Department and Translink should now consider and debate alternative and radical improvements to the public transport systems in the long term. The Department will foster further debate and consideration of experimental, and innovative, solutions to public transport which might be developed over the medium and long-term timescales. The possibility of alternative and radical improvements to the public transport systems will be taken into account when developing the proposed Regional Transportation Strategy.

Environment:

para 1.36 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the possible effects of global climate change be referred to in the Strategy as one of the Forces Driving Change and will include appropriate references in relation to the likelihood of change to

climate and the long-term contingencies which might need to be developed.

para 1.37 The Department notes the recommendation that a study should be commissioned of the potential contribution of the environment to the regional economy, and will give further consideration to this recommendation in consultation with other Departments.

para 1.38 The recommendation relating to Coastal Zone Management will require further consideration in consultation with the Department of the Environment. The Department for Regional Development also proposes to prepare a Regional Planning Policy Statement on The Coast.

para 1.39 The Panel recommended a re-structuring of the Strategy to improve treatment of the Built Environment. The final Strategy will be amended accordingly.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks:

para 1.40 The Panel recommended that a study of the range of conservation designations should take place with a view to simplifying their designations and that the study should also consider whether the National Park designation would still be appropriate within the Northern Ireland context.

The Department will give further consideration to this recommendation in consultation with the Department of the Environment.

Quality and the Built Environment:

para 1.41 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation. It has noted the view of the Panel that the guiding principle of the conservation of diversity is of value. The Strategy will be amended to set out the principles of the Local Development Guidelines, targeted specifically on promoting good planning for the built environment. A separate Planning Policy Statement 7 on "Quality Residential Environments" will be published in the near future by the Department of the Environment. It will be accompanied by a new Design Guide "Creating Places – Achieving Quality in Residential Areas".

Resources and Energy Conservation:

para 1.42 The Department notes the comments of the Panel and is giving further consideration to its response in consultation with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry intends to publish a consultation paper on Renewable Energy Policy in Northern Ireland later this year.

para 1.43 The Department notes the concern of the Panel about the loss of woodland, the importance of the conservation of the diminishing peat reserves, and the need to balance mineral resource extraction and environmental protection. The Department will strengthen the statements in the Strategy relating to the woodland and peat resources. The Department of the Environment will give further consideration to the programming of a PPS on planning and minerals.

Environment and Health:

para 1.44 The Department has noted the views of the Panel that the Strategy should take a much stronger stance on the promotion of health through linkages to a clean environment and healthier recreation patterns. The health linkages will be emphasised and the Department will seek to give a higher profile to the issue of Environment and Health by combining measures for the improvement of air and water quality with proposals for the promotion of good health.

Housing Projections:

para 1.45 The Department notes the views of the Panel that the Strategy should not plan for a higher level of in-migration than envisaged by the Government Actuary. The Department will use the up-dated population projections produced by the Government Actuary as the basis for forecasting housing need.

para 1.46 The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel that the term “Housing Growth Indicators” should be used in the Strategy, rather than “Housing Targets”, in order to give a degree of flexibility in addressing local needs and to give guidance in relation to the preparation and review of Area Plans.

para 1.47 The Department notes the support of the Panel for the view that the necessary flexibility within the Strategy to deal with uncertainties in forecasting assumptions would be provided by a review of housing projections every 5 years. The final Strategy will indicate a commitment to review the housing projections and to adjust the housing growth indicators at 5-year intervals.

para 1.48 The Department notes the view of the Panel and agrees that, with the passage of time, the time horizon for housing growth indicators is now too short. The Department will, therefore, in the final Strategy determine housing growth indicators for 2015, using the latest 1998 data as the basis for forecasting.

Forecasting Assumptions:

para 1.49 The Department notes the support of the Panel for the use of the medium rate of decline in Mean Household Size for forecasting purposes, until 2001 Census data are available. The Department will, for future forecasting, consider whether a more accurate method of projecting households might be obtained, using the 2001 Census data.

para 1.50 The Department accepts the view of the Panel that, in more favourable economic conditions, the level of vacancy is more likely to decline than stabilise and that, therefore, the adoption of a vacancy rate of, at most, 4.5% in 2015 would be appropriate.

para 1.51 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that only the expected increase in second homes be added to estimates of the occupied stock required to accommodate households. The Department also accepts the Panel's recommendation that the second home factor can best be accommodated in the forecasting assumptions by continuing to use the one-for-one relationship between households and occupied stock, since information is not readily available on the proportion of occupied stock actually taken up by second homes.

para 1.52 The Department notes the conclusion of the Panel that much of the large-scale redevelopment of older properties had run its course by

1990 and that the average age of the household stock is much younger, and therefore the rate of stock loss is unlikely to return to the high levels of earlier years. The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel that, until more robust and reliable information is available, for forecasting purposes, the Strategy should assume a continuation of recent levels of net stock loss at 1,700 units per annum up to 2005, falling to a rate of 1,500 units thereafter.

Regional Housing Need:

para 1.53 The Department accepts the considered estimate of the Panel that about 160,000 more dwellings would be required between the end of 1998 and 2015 to meet the regional housing need. This equates to an average building rate of around 9,400 per annum. The Department is satisfied that the Panel's estimate of regional housing need is of the right order, and is consistent with population and household growth trends, housebuilding trends and the experience in Great Britain for the levels of housing stock per 1,000 population for similar levels of mean household size. In accepting the Panel's estimate of Regional Housing Need, the Department has taken account of the fact that the imminent 2001 Census will provide figures facilitating a comprehensive assessment at the 5-year review.

para 1.54 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that limited over-zoning in settlements, including the Belfast Metropolitan Area, would not significantly threaten the objectives of the Strategy, particularly if higher densities than in the past are applied to greenfield sites. In the past, the over-zoning % in housing land allocation has ranged typically around 25% but has been on occasion as high as 40%. It is the view of the Department that the

historic level of over-zoning, if continued, would not be in line with the Panel's acceptance of limited over-zoning, and could defeat strategic objectives, particularly in relation to the drive to promote more housing within existing urban areas. The Department will, therefore, provide guidance in the final Strategy by indicating that limited over-zoning will normally be taken as being 10%.

Management of Housing Growth:

para 1.55 The Panel recommended that the Strategy should give priority to improving monitoring systems, and propose the early development of a Regional Planning Policy Statement setting out how Plan, Monitor and Manage will work and give a commitment to improving the capability of the Planning Service.

The Department welcomes the recognition of the Panel that Plan, Monitor and Manage is fundamental to the Strategy. The Department will prepare, as a priority, a Regional Planning Policy Statement on "Housing in Settlements" and this will indicate how Plan, Monitor and Manage will work. The issues of monitoring and resources are dealt with in Paragraphs 1.98 to 1.109 relating to implementation matters.

Distribution of Housing Growth:

para 1.56 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that in aiming for a broadly even balance of growth between the Belfast Travel To Work Area and the rest of Northern Ireland, some 78,000 additional houses should be allocated to the Belfast Travel To Work Area and 82,000 to the rest of the Region in the period up to 2015.

para 1.57 The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel and will apply the evaluation framework of the Family of Settlements Report

to guide the allocation of housing growth to District Councils outside the Belfast Travel to Work Area. A table of housing growth indicators for the District Councils will be provided within the final Strategy and the Department will leave the precise distribution of that growth between towns and the hinterlands to the Area Plan process, taking into account guidelines provided within the Strategy.

para 1.58 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the Strategy reaffirms the approach taken in Strategic Planning Guideline 8 and Appendix 5 to reinforcing main towns and expanding existing small settlements. The Department notes the recommendation of the Panel that the Strategy should not rule out entirely the concept of new settlements, should household growth accelerate beyond expected levels in the longer term, but further expansion of existing towns and villages should be considered first.

Drive for Housing within existing Urban Areas:

para 1.59 The Department notes that the Panel found widespread support from participants for the principles of urban renaissance and accepts the recommendation that these be given expression in the Strategy in guidelines which are tailored to the specific circumstances of Northern Ireland. The Department will provide more information in the final Strategy in relation to the "Urban Footprint" to which urban housing targets will relate. It will also clarify that zoned greenfield sites on the periphery of towns will not count in relation to achieving the target for the accommodation of housing within existing urban areas. More detailed guidance will be provided as required in a Regional Planning Policy Statement on "Housing in Settlements".

para 1.60 The Department welcomes the recognition by the Panel of the value attached by the Department to an aspirational target in support of the urban renaissance drive. In view of the increasing number of small households, the Department considers there is a growing potential for innovative forms of urban housing developments. However, the Department agrees with the Panel that it would be prudent at this stage to only apply the target to the Region as a whole. The Department, therefore, proposes to indicate in the final Strategy that a minimum of 40% would be an appropriate overall target for the Region. The Department considers that an aspirational target of a minimum of 40% will strengthen the urban housing drive while paying due recognition to the fact that Northern Ireland is less urbanised than many other Regions within the United Kingdom and further afield. Urban capacity studies will inform the degree to which housing growth can be met within the "urban footprint" of individual towns. While the Department is committed to the promotion of a concerted housing drive, it recognises that there may have to be sensible adjustments to the targets defined through the Area Plan process in order to meet local conditions.

para 1.61 The Department notes the recommendation of the Panel that in order to help to deliver urban renaissance immediately, a comprehensive set of measures should be developed to bring forward urban housing land. This is a matter, which will require further consideration within Government before a final response can be made.

Sequential Test:

para 1.62 The Department notes the support of the Panel for the view that the sequential phasing of land through the application of the Plan, Monitor and Manage mechanism should be a more efficient control

mechanism than the application of the sequential test to individual planning applications. The Department also notes the recommendation that where a planning application for housing development on a greenfield site involves a substantial departure from a development plan and is subject to the special procedure for major planning applications, it should be subject to a sequential test. The Department will provide guidance on these matters in the forthcoming Planning Policy Statement on “Housing in Settlements”.

Housing Choice and Balanced Communities:

para 1.63 The Department accepts the Panel’s recommendation that the Strategy should define the concept of a balanced community and will seek to provide further guidance in the final Strategy.

para 1.64 The Department notes the Panel’s recommendation that a Planning Policy Statement on Quality in the Built Environment should include advice on the appropriateness of the mixture of tenures and housing developments and on the minimum size of schemes where a mixture of house type should be sought. It will give further consideration to this matter during the preparation of the Regional Planning Policy Statement “Housing in Settlements”.

Social Housing:

para 1.65 The Department accepts the recommendation of the Panel that the broad provisions of Strategic Planning Guideline 5 need not be amended to reserve a proportion of new greenfield housing sites for social housing.

Density:

para 1.66 The Department accepts the Panel’s recommendation that the Strategy should promote research into the scope for higher density

residential development and urban areas in order to advise the housing drive

Affordable Housing:

para 1.67 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the need to provide affordable housing in rural areas should be regularly assessed with a view to remedial action at the local level.

Retail Development:

para 1.68 The Department notes the Panel's views that a precautionary approach to a defined scale of out-of-centre retail development for all towns should be incorporated in Planning Policy Statement 5, and appropriate tests for proposals for new regional shopping centres and major retail development outside town centres be included in the policy statement. These views will be taken into account when Planning Policy Statement 5 is reviewed.

para 1.69 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that references to Tourism Destination Retail Outlets be deleted from the Strategy. In doing so, the Department noted that participants from the two main cities argued strongly that the proposal in SPG 24 would divert money away from reviving city centre shopping facilities, which are the commercial hearts of entire sub-regions. The Department accepts that this type of competitive retail provision could be accommodated within the city centres of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry.

para 1.70 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation, in principle, that occupied and vacant retail floorspace in all urban centres should be regularly monitored. The form of monitoring will require further consideration consistent with the availability of resources.

para 1.71 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the Strategy should distinguish between out-of-centre and edge-of-centre retail locations.

Sprucefield:

para 1.72 The Department accepts the Panel's recommended amendments to Appendix 7 relating to Sprucefield Regional Shopping Centre.

Tourism and Recreation:

para 1.73 The Department notes the Panel's recommendations that a separate Strategy should be prepared for tourism development, incorporating recreation, on a cross-departmental and cross-agency basis, building on the principles of sustainable development. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board continues to keep its 1997 Strategy for the Development of Tourism in Northern Ireland under review.

The Department notes the views of the Panel that the Regional Strategic Framework should provide the spatial framework needed to accommodate the demands of tourism and changing leisure habits, while conserving the key assets of the natural and built environment. Further consideration will be given to how the spatial framework for the related areas of tourism, recreation and cultural amenities should be presented in the final Strategy, taking account of changing leisure habits and conservation needs.

para 1.74 The Department accepts the thrust of the Panel's recommendation that the Strategy should develop a sustainable approach to planning for tourism and recreation. It will give further consideration to how the Strategy might be amended to further embed the sustainable approach which the Panel would like to see.

- para 1.75 The Department notes the Panel's views on focusing first on identifying the planning implications of a policy for sustainable tourism, including an appreciation of the potential future range of visitor types with their corresponding demands on the environment and infrastructure, and related points in relation to visitor pressures and visitor management. The Department will give further consideration to the way in which these suggestions might be best incorporated in the final Strategy.
- para 1.76 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation that the Strategy should propose exploration of ways of increasing tourist development collaboration with the Republic of Ireland and Scotland.
- para 1.77 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation and will amend the Strategy to indicate that settlements and areas under pressure from second home developments should be identified within Area Plans. The Department of the Environment will commission a study to assess the social economic and environmental impacts of second home developments in settlements. The outcome of this study will be taken into consideration in the Regional Planning Policy Statement on Housing in Settlements.
- para 1.78 The Department notes the views of the Panel in relation to the concept of Tourism Destination Resorts. The Department is satisfied that there is merit in the concept and that it could be helpful in relation to attracting private investment for the development of tourism infrastructure in parts of the Region. It is accepted that additional clarification would be required and the final Strategy will seek to further define the tourism development opportunity that is envisaged and will emphasise the need for a

sustainable approach and for appropriate environmental safeguards.

para 1.79 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the Strategy should recognise the potential of the cities of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry for cultural and conference based tourism.

Rural Northern Ireland:

para 1.80 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation that the Government should prepare a White Paper on Rural Planning and Development in Northern Ireland, similar in scope to the strategy published for Scotland in 1998 and in preparation for England

para 1.81 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the new chapter on rural issues should note the experience of inter-agency and inter-district collaborative working in the rural area, and commend further development as a basis for integrated rural policy formulations.

para 1.82 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the rural economy should be given prominence in the new chapter on Rural Northern Ireland and should discuss the direct planning implications for promoting a rural economic diversity.

para 1.83 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation to review urgently the need for a PPS on Rural Development and include within it clear guidance for advancing the provision of all projects that demonstrate gain to the objective of diversifying the rural economy. The views of the Panel will be taken into account in the future programming of the proposed Regional Planning Policy Statement on the Countryside. In addition, the Department will

further examine the wording of the Strategy to ensure that it is supportive to the objective of diversifying the rural economy in a sustainable way.

para 1.84 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation that Government should give serious consideration to the establishment of a Centre for Sustainable Technology in the rural area. This recommendation will be further considered.

para 1.85 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation about the network of service centres and will consider how the relevant Strategic Planning Guidelines can best be restructured to give effect to the thrust of the Panel's recommendations. The Department notes and agrees with the view of the Panel that the development pressures and planning responses in the Belfast Travel To Work Area must be different from the rest of the rural area and will give further consideration as to how this should be reflected within the final Strategy.

para 1.86 The Department notes the recommendation of the Panel in relation to the problem of reconciling access to services with the dispersed nature of the rural population and would refer to its previous comments at Paragraph 1.80 in relation to the recommended White Paper.

para 1.87 The Department notes the comments of the Panel about the main social issues facing rural areas and will give further consideration as to how the Strategy should respond to this recommendation. In doing so, the Department acknowledges the existing potential for effective community participation in planning for a rural area and the Strategy will continue to encourage rural community participation.

Belfast Green Belt and Open Land:

para 1.88 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the Green Belt should be so defined by Area Plans as to prescribe a relatively permanent limit to urban development in order clearly to prevent urban sprawl by distinguishing the coherent built-up area from the surrounding open countryside, in particular the hillsides which define the City, by preventing the coalescence of settlements, and by protecting the undeveloped shores of Belfast Lough.

para 1.89 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that areas of strategic open space within the urban area should be defined in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and designated as Metropolitan Open Land subject to similar rigorous planning constraints as those relevant to undeveloped land in the Green Belt.

Transport in the Belfast Metropolitan Area:

para 1.90 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the forthcoming Regional Transportation Strategy should examine both physical and financial measures to restrain car usage in the Belfast Metropolitan Area and will give further consideration to the proposition that the Regional Development Strategy should propose the linkage of such measures to the provision of improved public transport services.

Housing:

para 1.91 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation. Until detailed capacity studies of the Belfast Metropolitan Area have been undertaken, the Department proposes to indicate in the Strategy that an indicative regional target of a minimum of 40% of housing growth to be found within the urban "footprint" will be adopted for planning purposes.

Urban capacity studies will inform the degree to which housing growth can be met within the footprint of the Belfast Metropolitan Area. The Department acknowledges that there may be scope, subject to the results of the urban capacity study, to achieve a higher percentage of housing provision within the Belfast Metropolitan Area compared to other main towns. At the same time, it recognises that the drive towards an urban housing target, with higher densities and new styles of development, needs to be balanced by the need to avoid town cramming, particularly in areas of distinctive townscape character.

para 1.92 The Department agrees with the Panel that an allocation of 42,000 dwellings by 2015 to the Belfast Metropolitan Area is achievable. The Department notes the further recommendation that the Strategy should maximise provision of additional dwellings within the existing urban area, and then provide for major areas of planned expansion on the key corridors at West Lisburn and Newtownabbey, focussing development near to areas of employment growth and integrating with the suburban rail links and other primary transport services. It also notes that the additional peripheral expansion should focus on the remaining “White Lands”, on other land zonings to be confirmed in Lisburn and Carrickfergus Area Plans, and on any smaller sites emerging in the review of the Green Belt boundary in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan. The precise identification and allocation of sites will be a matter for consideration in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, taking account of normal planning considerations and views expressed by the public and District Councils. In addition, the Department will wish to promote the quality housing initiative and, in relation to peripheral expansion, the need to achieve safe, complete and balanced

communities including, where appropriate, the concept of “urban villages”.

- para 1.93 The Department accepts all the Panel’s recommendations and indicators set out in this paragraph indicating how future housing growth can be accommodated in the peripheral districts of the Belfast Travel To Work Area.
- para 1.94 The Department accepts the Panel’s recommendation that the Strategy should plan for up to 9,000 extra dwellings by 2015 in existing settlements in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan rural area in accordance with the criteria set out in Appendix 5 of the draft Regional Strategic Framework. It is also accepted that the scale and phasing of housing growth should, so far as possible, be subject to a common approach to the management of the housing land supply in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan area as a whole.

For guidance, the result of accepting the recommendation set out in Paragraphs 1.93 and 1.94 are summarised in the following tables:

Proposed Housing Allocation 1998-2015

BMA	42,000 additional houses
BTTWA outside BMA*	36,000 additional houses
Rest of Northern Ireland	82,000 additional houses
Northern Ireland Total	160,000 additional houses

*Includes 9,000 within the rural part of the 6 BMA District Council areas.

The Department recognises that approximately another 90,000 dwellings may be required to meet housing need in Northern Ireland between 2015 and 2025. This longer term need will be subject to further consideration at the time of the first 5 year review. It is anticipated that the 1998-2015 figures will then be rolled forward 5 years to inform the next round of development plans due for preparation.

Proposed Housing Allocation in relation to the BMA 1998-2015

Whitelands*	12,600	(30%)
Sites within the existing urban area	16,800	(40%)#
Peripheral expansion	12,600	(30%)
TOTAL BMA ALLOCATION	42,000	(100%)

*Whitelands includes the BUA “whitelands”, and land zoned in the Carrickfergus Area Plan, and the Lisburn Area Plan.

#Subject to the results of the urban capacity studies.

The North West:

para 1.95 The Department accepts the Panel’s recommendation that cross-border co-operation should be fostered in the implementation of the Strategy. This will provide further recognition that Derry/Londonderry functions as a Hub for the north west of the island, and there is a particular need to co-ordinate the future development of physical infrastructure on a cross-border basis.

para 1.96 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendations in relation to the presentation of the proposed chapter on "The North West".

para 1.97 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendations in relation to the section on the North West and will amend the final Strategy accordingly.

Implementation:

para 1.3 The Department agrees with the Panel's conclusion that an innovative approach to implementation is required, which will include clear leadership to ensure effective and co-ordinated action. The Department is considering the form of administrative machinery, which will be needed to facilitate the implementation of the Regional Development Strategy.

para 1.98 The Department of the Environment is currently recruiting additional staff to strengthen the Planning Service.

para. 1.99 The Department of the Environment is reviewing the development plan process to seek to identify ways in which it can be streamlined and improved. The Department of the Environment is currently considering the scope for involving District Councils in the preparation of development plans.

para 1.100 The Department of the Environment notes the recommendation of the Panel regarding the setting of a target of 2006 for full development plan coverage.

para 1.101 The Department for Regional Development has created a dedicated team to prepare Regional Planning Policy Statements.

- para 1.102 The Department for Regional Development notes the endorsement of the Panel for the value of using the Local Development Guidelines to test the sustainability of specific developments and will give further consideration to the presentation of these Guidelines within the Regional Development Strategy.
- para 1.103 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that the new approach to the management of land supply should be the subject of consultation with developers and other interests, and will take this forward in the process of drawing up the proposed Regional Planning Policy Statement on "Housing in Settlements".
- para 1.104 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that a regional housing land database should be created. This will be based on the existing housing land availability monitor which is currently prepared by the Department of the Environment's Planning Service.
- para 1.105 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that there should be a concerted drive to promote the provision of new dwellings in urban areas, starting in Belfast where the largest potential lies. The Department places great importance on the promotion of the urban renaissance which will further build on the urban regeneration achievements of the 1980s and 1990s.
- para 1.106 The Department notes the Panel's recommendation that new approaches to and greater investment in public transport should be a high priority. This will be taken forward in the context of the preparation of a Regional Transport Strategy.

Monitoring:

- para 1.107 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that an appropriate monitoring system is essential to the implementation of the Regional Development Strategy. The mechanisms will be a matter for further consideration.
- para 1.108 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation in relation to implementation and monitoring and is considering with other Departments how this might best be achieved.
- para 1.109 The Department accepts the Panel's recommendation that there should be a formal review of the Strategy after 5 years. While it is critical and important to review and keep the Strategy up to date, the Department does not anticipate the need for the preparation of a new Strategy after the first 5 years but rather a focussed assessment which will point up the need for in-course adjustments which can be quickly made to the Strategy to ensure it continues to provide a relevant framework in future circumstances.

Errata:

The Panel has drawn the attention of the Department to the following printing errors in the Panel Report:

On Page 77, paragraph 8.19, line 3, “the built heritage”.

On Page 98 delete “any” from line 1 of Note 4.

The last sentence in paragraph 12.7 on Page 103 should read:

There may be a need for some supplementary local plans to guide development, particularly if our recommendation on bringing forward the expansion of smaller settlements, identified in Appendix 5 of the draft Strategy, is accepted.