



Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041 Public Consultation Document



Easy read version

Understanding, championing and supporting rural Northern Ireland



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of
**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

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- **Telephone:** 028 7744 2139 and talk to a member of the team. If you have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via Text Relay. Dial 18001 028 7744 2139. (Please note this is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back.)



- **Email:** RuralPolicyConsultation@daera-ni.gov.uk

Please note this is an '**Easy Read**' version of this **Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041** which is being consulted on. This version contains a lot less detail than the full version. If you would like more detail, you may find the full version better suited to your needs.



- **These documents are available on the DAERA website at:** <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/rural-ni-our-new-approach>

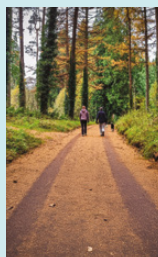
About us

We are the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

What we do?

Here are some of the things we do:

- We look after the development of farming, forests and fishing in Northern Ireland.
- We provide a service to look after the health and welfare of animals, fish and plants.
- We look after the environment and rural affairs in Northern Ireland.
- We provide research, expert advice and education.
- We look after some parts of public health in how food is made.



Introduction

DAERA is making a plan for rural areas in Northern Ireland.

This plan is called a **rural policy**.

What rural policy covers:

Rural policy means

- To improve the understanding of rural needs and opportunities.
- To make sure rural communities are part of government decisions.
- To give support to rural communities going beyond funding.



Why do we need a new rural plan?

- The NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 has closed.
- Rural areas are more diverse.
- New government priorities.
- Climate change is now a bigger issue.
- Rural areas have new challenges and opportunities.
- We want to make sure rural communities get the right support.

Northern Ireland needs a clear plan to understand, champion and support rural Northern Ireland.

This plan will help government and local people work together and make sure rural needs and opportunities are considered when decisions are made.

This plan gives us a chance to work better together to support the different types of rural communities across Northern Ireland.

What is Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041?

- It is a long-term plan for the future.
- It sets out the vision for rural Northern Ireland.
- It is not about single issues or short-term concerns.
- It does not replace the old NI Rural Development Programme funding.
- It will focus on working together, to help rural places reach their full potential.

Why we have written this document

We want to hear **what you think** about the proposals in this plan.

Please tell us your views by answering the questions.

(Details on how to do this are in the 'How can you respond?' section).

What does the draft new rural policy aim to do?

The new policy wants to:

- Understand rural communities.
- Champion rural voices.
- Support rural communities.
- Work together across government and communities.



Vision

The proposed vision for the new policy is:

“People and Government working together to shape a thriving, sustainable and inclusive rural Northern Ireland”.

Aim

This vision is supported by the main aim:

“To understand, champion and support rural Northern Ireland”.

Objectives

To help turn this vision and aim into action, the policy is guided by three core objectives:

- To improve the scope, relevance, accessibility and timeliness of rural research, statistics and other evidence and their use across government.
- To inform, influence and support strategic government policy from a rural perspective.
- To promote and support innovative, collaborative government action on rural challenges and opportunities.

Who helped make this plan?

We have worked with:

- All Northern Ireland government departments.
- Local councils.
- Rural voluntary and community groups.
- Public bodies.
- Universities.

They all helped design the plan together. This is called co-design. Working with lots of different people to help make sure the policy meets the different needs of rural communities.



The realities of rural Northern Ireland

What do we mean by rural?

Rural areas are defined as settlements with less than 5,000 people along with the open countryside.

About rural areas

- About one third of people in Northern Ireland live in rural areas.
- Rural communities are all different. Some are close to towns and cities. Others are more remote, coastal or near the border with the Republic of Ireland.

What is good about rural life?

Many people value:

- Strong community connections.
- Access to nature.
- Local food and farming.
- A good sense of wellbeing.

How are rural areas changing?

Rural Northern Ireland is changing over time.

Some key changes include:

- Lots of different people with different needs.
- Changes in how people work, including working from home.
- Better broadband in some rural areas.

Challenges

Some people in rural areas may:

- Travel long distances to services and jobs.
- Have limited public transport.
- Face higher travel costs.
- Struggle to find affordable housing.
- Some problems can be harder to see but still affect daily life.

Looking ahead

Rural Northern Ireland has strong communities and great potential.

This policy aims to:

- Build on rural strengths.
- Help government understand rural life better.
- Support rural communities now and in the future.



The Proposals

By working together with others, we have made five proposals for the new rural plan.

These explain how government and communities can work better together to support rural Northern Ireland.

We want to hear what you think about these five proposals.

Proposal 1: Putting Rural Voices at the Heart of Government

We want rural voices to be at the heart of government. This means making sure we listen to rural people and rural areas when making decisions. These proposals for a new Rural Champions Model will create strong links between rural communities and people who make decisions. A Rural Collaboration Fund will support this work.

Proposal 2: Local Partnerships for Local Impact

Local partnerships will bring together local organisations and local representatives, using a community-led approach. This structure will help identify local priorities and shape local decision making. A new fund will be available to support actions agreed at a local level.

Proposal 3: Understanding Rural

We want to understand rural communities better. This proposal will help government learn more about life in rural areas and make better decisions for rural communities.

Proposal 4: Strengthening Rural Communities at Local and Regional Level

We will take a long term approach to supporting voluntary and community groups in rural areas.

This approach is about more than providing funding.
It will also help groups build skills and knowledge.
It will help groups have the right tools and resources.
This will help them represent rural interests across government.

Proposal 5: Reviewing the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

We will look at the Rural Needs Act.
This is to see how it can work better for rural communities.
We want to hear what you think is working well.
DAERA also wants to know what needs to improve.

What happens next?

- We will read all the responses.
- We will make changes to the proposals if needed.
- The Minister and the Northern Ireland Executive will decide if the policy is approved.
- Once approved, we will start putting the policy into action.

Have your say

Please tell us what you think about our proposed plan by visiting this website:



- **Clicking on this link to answer the questions:**
<https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/daera/rural-ni-our-new-approach-2026-2041>



- **Email:** RuralPolicyConsultation@daera-ni.gov.uk
to request a written response template.

- **Post:** Strategic Rural Policy Branch
Rural Affairs Division
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
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Find out more



- **Get a copy from our website:**
<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/rural-ni-our-new-approach>

Dates

You can tell us what you think from **Monday 9 March 2026, until Monday 1 June 2026.**