

Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

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

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Natural Environment Policy Division (NEPD), Air and Environmental Quality (AEQ)

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.

Drafting and laying new subordinate legislation to amend annual mean particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) limits, targets and objectives in the Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and the Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

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

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

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.

Amending annual mean particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) limits, targets and objectives through a Northern Ireland Statutory Rule – 'The Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026'.

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

DAERA to lay secondary legislation to bring into operation the following annual mean limits, targets and objectives to be met by 1 January 2028:

- Limit values: PM_{2.5} – 10 µg/m³ (currently 25 µg/m³), PM₁₀ – 20 µg/m³ (currently 40 µg/m³)
- Target value: PM_{2.5} – 8 µg/m³ (currently 25 µg/m³)
- Objective: PM₁₀ – 20 µg/m³ (currently 40 µg/m³)

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.

Default definition used.

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Default definition used.

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

Default definition used.

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.

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.

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	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text"/>

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.

This policy is not likely to impact on people in rural or urban areas as this is an amendment to annual mean particulate matter limits, targets and objectives to be achieved across the whole of Northern Ireland as almost all monitoring sites are already compliant. Annual compliance results, which can be accessed through the following link <https://www.airqualityni.co.uk/reports> can be used to assess compliance of air quality monitoring sites in Northern Ireland against the proposed new tighter annual mean limits which Northern Ireland departments have a duty to ensure that levels of pollutants do not exceed.

- 2024: 12 out of 12 PM₁₀ sites compliant. 10 out of 10 PM_{2.5} sites compliant.
- 2023: 12 out of 12 PM₁₀ sites compliant. 9 out of 9 PM_{2.5} sites compliant.
- 2022: 11 out of 11 PM₁₀ sites compliant. 7 out of 8 PM_{2.5} sites compliant.
- 2021: 12 out of 12 PM₁₀ sites compliant. 5 out of 5 PM_{2.5} sites compliant.
- 2020: 11 out of 11 PM₁₀ sites compliant. 3 out of 3 PM_{2.5} sites compliant.
- 2019: 11 out of 11 PM₁₀ sites compliant. 2 out of 3 PM_{2.5} sites compliant

The few instances where compliance was not achieved at monitoring sites the annual average limits for PM_{2.5} were only marginally above these.

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	<input type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input type="checkbox"/>

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.

Public health priorities and environmental/sustainable considerations were identified from the Clean Air Strategy Discussion Document (A Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland – Public Discussion Document). This consultation was launched in November 2020 and ran until February 2021. This consultation gave participants the opportunity to propose their suggested solutions to air pollution in Northern Ireland. Responses to the Discussion Document are summarised in the Synopsis of Responses and informed development of the Strategy, published in June 2022 (https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/clean_air_strategy_discussion_document). With regards to the question “Should there be legally binding targets for particulate matter, which are based on World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines?”, 96% of the comments received, broadly supported legally binding targets which are based on WHO guidelines.

The [Programme for Government \(PfG\) 2024-2027](#) sets out how the Executive will create a brighter future to improve wellbeing for all . Through the 2024-2027 PfG, the Executive want a society focused on well-being with an economy that can grow sustainably whilst reducing our emissions and protecting our environment. Through our proposed actions we will take steps to support a fairer, cleaner, healthier future for all.

The [DAERA Corporate Plan 2025-2027](#) also support implementation of this strategy by prioritising sustainable living, air and health. Other important information sources include:

- NISRA 2021 census data.
- [Air Pollution in Northern Ireland reports](#) (the most recent of which is 2024)
- [Air Pollutant Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland](#) (most recent published September 2025: 2005-2023)
- [BHFNI Air Pollution and Mortality on the Island of Ireland report](#)
- [Energy Strategy - Path to Net Zero Energy](#)
- [Consultation on a new Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland](#)
- [Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2024](#)
- [Sustainability for the Future - DAERA's Plan](#)

Pre consultation on the draft regulations was carried out with the District Councils and no specific economic or social needs were identified for those living in rural areas.

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

The broad analysis undertaken has identified some specific needs of people in rural areas which will be relevant in terms of overall air quality policy - these are broader needs rather than anything specific to the regulations being assessed. Thus, this policy has no disproportionate impact on rural communities.

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?

N/A

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.

People living in rural areas experience a distinct set of social and economic needs shaped by geography, infrastructure, and access to services.

A core issue is access to affordable and reliable heat sources. Many rural households are not connected to the gas network and depend on solid fuels, meaning that policy changes, such as restrictions on coal or certain fuel types, can disproportionately affect them. These communities may face challenges with fuel availability, distribution constraints, rising costs, and a higher risk of fuel poverty. Limited access to alternatives may also encourage the burning of wet wood or locally felled timber, creating pockets of poor air quality with associated health impacts.

Transport is another critical need. Rural residents are significantly more reliant on private vehicles, with 90% of rural workers using their own transport compared with 82% of urban workers. Commutes are often much longer, on average more than 600 extra miles per year, due to reduced public transport, fewer local job opportunities, and greater distances between services. This has implications for household costs, time, and environmental impact, as well as for access to education, healthcare, and recreation.

Despite these challenges, rural areas also demonstrate strengths and growing opportunities. Population growth in rural Northern Ireland has outpaced urban areas by almost three to one in recent decades, signalling their attractiveness as places to live. Broadband availability has improved rapidly, with full-fibre services now available to 82% of rural households, supporting business development, remote working, and digital inclusion. Rural areas also play an important role in tourism, hosting six of the ten most visited paid attractions in 2022.

Overall, addressing rural social and economic needs requires balancing the drive for cleaner air and environmental protection with ensuring fair access to energy, transport, infrastructure, and economic opportunity for rural communities. It is essential that air pollution emissions are reduced across all sectors in order for Northern Ireland to help tackle air quality issues affecting our health and the environment. Accordingly, there is also a need to ensure that the social and economic conditions of people across all of Northern Ireland are enhanced through efforts to reduce emissions. It is important to note, however, that these new particulate matter standards are already been achieved at monitoring sites in Northern Ireland and will therefore not impact on rural communities.

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.

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.

The purpose of the Regulations is to amend annual mean particulate matter limits, targets and objectives for Northern Ireland. As the proposed Regulations do not commit Northern Ireland to specific policy interventions there is no opportunity for the regulations to be influenced by rural needs. However, in order to support tighter standards, it has been acknowledged that there is a need to improve the existing air quality monitoring network. Further expansion of the air quality monitoring network will need careful consideration, taking human health, rural considerations and availability of funding into account.

Monitoring coverage in Northern Ireland has been assessed and a list of short and medium term recommendations is being identified. DAERA will work closely with and seek the advice of the air quality officers within the District Councils when developing the monitoring network further.

Separately DAERA is developing an Ammonia Strategy for Northern Ireland. It is recognised that ammonia can persist for a long time in the atmosphere and be transported for long distances. It can react with other air pollutants like nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide to form ammonium aerosols, which are precursors for fine particulate matter, such as PM2.5 and PM10. This Ammonia Strategy aims to address emissions and their impact on the environment in Northern Ireland. It will support these tighter limits for particulate matter as well as the restoration of biodiversity, ecosystems and the services they provide, while facilitating the sustainable development of a prosperous agri-food industry.

The draft Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland aims to reduce air pollutant emissions, including particulate matter, across all of Northern Ireland, including rural areas. It is a cross-cutting strategy and some of the actions are the responsibility of other NI Executive Departments. Any policies brought forth by other departments in the future will be fully scoped and assessed by those departments at that time.

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:	[REDACTED]
Position/Grade:	[REDACTED]
Division/Branch	[REDACTED]
Signature:	[REDACTED]
Date:	10 March 2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	[REDACTED]
Position/Grade:	[REDACTED]
Division/Branch:	[REDACTED]
Signature:	[REDACTED]
Date:	13 March 2026

