

## UFU welcome new planning proposal

By Kate Cairns, Senior Policy Officer

The Ulster Farmers' Union has welcomed Environment Minister Alex Attwood's proposals to ease planning rules for farmers. These proposals will be discussed at the next Legislation Policy Committee meeting and a full response will be made.

The proposals would allow a farmer to build an agricultural building or extension up to 500 square meters in ground area, in any two year period, without having to apply for planning permission. This would be an increase from the current limit of 300 square metres in ground area. All other existing limitations of permitted development will continue to apply including proximity constraints from neighbouring dwelling houses, distance to roads etc.

These proposals would bring Northern Ireland more in line with permitted agricultural development limits applied in the rest of the UK.

This is something the UFU has been pressing for since 2009. In response to the Department of the Environment's 2009 consultation on permitted development, the UFU pushed for an increase to the current 300 square metre permitted agricultural development. It was felt this limit was outdated and did not reflect modern, fit for purpose farm buildings. Agricultural development is necessary to allow farms to evolve to become more efficient and continue to produce goods to a high standard. The agricultural industry needs to be able to expand without being unnecessarily restricted by planning rules and fees. This type of agricultural development tends to be less contentious than other types of development so raising the permitted development limit would help take some applications out of the planning system. This in turn would help reduce red tape, expense and delay.

Also recommend in the proposals is limiting permitted development rights for anaerobic digestion plants to those that only use material generated on the agricultural unit where the plant is located.

The UFU has always been of the opinion that permitted development rights should not differ for a farm situated within a sensitive area than one situated

outside a sensitive area. Farms within a sensitive area still have the same requirements and having to apply for planning permission would be overburcratic, unfair and a costly process.

On the whole, these proposals appear to be a good example of government working in response to industry needs.