



Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 Public and Community Consultation

**Community Technical Aid
31 March 2001**

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Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction	5
2. Background	6
3. Consultation Findings - Main Issues	10
4. Consultation Findings - Locational Issues	
- Killyleagh	17
- Portaferry	17
- Comber	18
- Crossgar	18
- Ballynahinch	19
- Downpatrick	20
- Kircubbin	21
- Newtownards	22
- Donaghadee	22
- Ardglass	23
- Ballyhalbert	24
- Newcastle	24
5. Written Submissions	26
6. Concluding Comments	30
Appendices	
1. Schedule of Public Meetings	31
2. Public Meeting Discussion Questions	32
3. Evaluation of Public Meetings	33

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Executive Summary

The Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 public and community consultation process on the Issues Paper took place during January 2001. It was part of an innovative approach adopted by the Planning Service in its attempt to produce a more inclusive and meaningful Area Plan for Ards and Down. The first stage of this new approach involved publication of an Issues Paper and pro-active consultation on its contents. This Paper was designed to stimulate debate and elicit a response on the main issues and needs of the Ards and Down area. The statutory consultation with Government departments, District Councils and other interested parties was undertaken by the Planning Service. It appointed Community Technical Aid (CTA) to facilitate the public and community consultation process.

This process was designed by CTA to be carried out in two stages. The first was a pre-consultation period with the community, voluntary and environmental group sector. This was an important stage as it helped to give the communities involved a sense of ownership of the process and therefore to make it more inclusive and meaningful from the outset. The second stage was widened to include members of the public in pro-active consultation on the main issues and needs of the two districts.

Over 700 people took part in this second stage. They engaged in what were lively, informative and at times heated discussions. In many instances the comments made most often called for some radical re-thinking and policy introductions on the Planning Service's part. One example was the call for a new measure to help tackle the need for social and affordable housing. Existing planning policy does not enable the Planning Service to insist that developers provide for this need and it remains to be seen if the necessary strategic policy tools will be given to them in the future.

There were several main issues raised during all of the meetings including the call for a co-ordinated approach from all Government departments. Participants were frustrated at the perceived lack of an integrated system of governance. They felt strongly that the emerging Regional Development Strategy had promised this and that in their opinion there was little evidence of it happening to date.

Numerous concerns were expressed at the stresses being placed on infrastructure and public utilities as a direct result of the volume of new developments. Examples were given of roads experiencing high congestion levels with many towns and villages, particularly those within commuting distance of Belfast, coming to a virtual standstill at peak times of the day.

The water and sewerage systems were also said to be inadequate and equally unable to withstand the pressures imposed by these developments. It was felt that radical thinking and action was therefore required by all those concerned.

The design and intensity of new housing developments was criticised on many occasions. Apartments were singled out for the most attention with many people calling for an innovative solution to this problem if not a complete halt to this type of development.

The particular needs of the rural community were often voiced. For the most part these referred to the perceived inequalities of living in policy areas where it is difficult

to obtain planning permission. Those affected by this issue felt aggrieved that as a result of this their family members could not stay in the locality and often had to move away in search of a new house.

Repeatedly participants queried the housing allocations referred to in the emerging Regional Development Strategy. There were conflicting views on their accuracy as well as calls for these new units to be spread equally across the two districts.

The protection of the natural environment at Strangford Lough, rivers and coastal areas throughout the area was deemed inadequate at present and stricter enforcement was therefore demanded.

The remaining issues centred on the need for more sustainable yet enhanced tourism; protection of the retailing centres of towns and villages; more recognition of the need for small business units so that local rather than national or international employers could be supported; and the need for the provision of open space and play facilities within new developments.

Most of the comments made on the subject of equality focused on the need to treat all citizens fairly by ensuring that all have equal access to a range of housing and employment opportunities and public services and facilities.

There were numerous comments made relating to specific locations, towns and villages. There are too many to note here but they can be found at Section 4. For the most part they were an expansion of many of the main issues outlined above supported by more specific examples.

CTA is experienced in public and community consultation in many forms. It is fair to say that traditional public meetings can at times be disappointing with many not taking part. However, this cannot be said of the public meetings held in Ards and Down. They were well attended by people who exercised their rights to participate in this important planning exercise and they were structured and facilitated in ways which enabled and encouraged this to happen. This Report summarises the many hundreds of comments and arguments raised by those who participated. More importantly it serves to articulate their views in an integrated way and through presentation to the Planning Service to ensure that their voices are taken into account in the preparation of the Draft Area Plan.

The next stage now is for the Planning Service to respond to this Report. It intends to reply in the published Draft Area Plan due some time in autumn 2001 to each issue raised in this Report. Where issues cannot be taken on board or acted upon by the Planning Service because they fall outside its remit, then an account will be given of how this information has been passed on to the relevant Government department or agency for action.

We hope that for everyone involved the result will be an improved, better informed and more inclusively constructed Draft Area Plan for Ards and Down for the period up to 2015.

1. Introduction

The Planning Service is currently preparing the first stages of the new Area Plan for Ards and Down. This Plan will guide development and help shape the future of these areas for the period up to 2015.

The first stage of the Plan preparation, the Issues Paper, has just been through a statutory public consultation period. The public and community sector strand of this consultation was independently undertaken by CTA. This followed a decision by the Planning Service to adopt a new and more proactive approach to its traditional consultation exercise.

A series of public meetings and community sector events was organised and facilitated by CTA during January 2001. This Report is an account of this exercise and the findings. Section 2 explains the background to the exercise, Section 3 outlines the main issues which arose while Section 4 concentrates on those issues which were specific to a particular location. Section 5 summarises the comments and suggestions made by those people who sent letters or papers and reports to CTA during Stage 2 and Section 6 makes some observations and concluding remarks on the consultation exercise.

This Report has been independently prepared by CTA. It is an account of the comments and views expressed by over 700 people who attended the public meetings and of the written submissions made to us by groups and individuals before the end of the statutory consultation period. We have endeavoured to ensure that it accurately reflects the feelings and opinions of those people who participated in this important planning debate.

The Report was submitted to the Planning Service on 31 March 2001 and thereafter issued to those who participated in the public consultation process.

2. Background

2.1 Background to the Exercise

Community Technical Aid is an independent voluntary organisation which provides architecture, planning and project development advice and support to disadvantaged groups and communities. It has always been one of CTA's main aims to assist the wider community to become educated and effectively engaged in the planning process. The appointment to design and implement this Area Plan consultation has therefore been a welcome one.

For the first time a more inclusive and innovative approach to Area Plan preparation has been introduced by the Planning Service. It took the decision that, under existing planning legislation, the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, the mechanism existed to allow it to prepare the first stage of an Area Plan in an "issues" format. This was seen as a necessary step because of the limitations of the traditionally-used Preliminary Proposals document. This type of document had often been criticised for appearing to contain a lot of the final decisions, including as it did maps and development limits.

With the decision to produce a new style document came the associated desire to ensure a new style consultation. Historically the Planning Service had published its Preliminary Proposals and invited comments thereon. For the most part this elicited a response from private landowners wishing to see their lands included inside development limits.

However following discussions with CTA a decision was taken to adopt a more inclusive and pro-active consultation process - one which would reach out to the wider community and actively seek and record its comments.

Accordingly CTA was invited to initiate and undertake the independent public and community consultation on the Issues Paper stage of the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015. This appointment began on 11 September 2000 and including stages 1 and 2, ended on 31 March 2001.

Taking into account CTA's experiences of good consultation practices, the Planning Service agreed to include a pre-consultation stage so that the process would be as meaningful as possible from the outset. This pre-consultation period lasted eight weeks and specifically targeted all community, voluntary and environmental groups operating in the Ards and Down areas.

Following CTA's initial contact with 460 groups it took advice from the main umbrella community networks in the two districts and invited a number of strategic groups to briefing meetings in October 2000. Two such meetings took place in Strangford and Newtownards on 16 and 23 October 2000 respectively. The comments and issues expressed at these meetings and contained in the ten written submissions received by CTA and the Planning Service were included in the Stage 1 Report. This Report was submitted to the Planning Service so that its contents could be taken into consideration in the preparation of the Issues Paper for Ards and Down. The main comments and points highlighted in the Stage 1 Report were as follows:

- **Housing** - There were calls for both social and affordable housing units to be provided in new housing developments with concern expressed that indigenous communities had been destroyed because of a lack of such provision. Arguments were also made that many, if not all, towns and villages cannot cope with the pressure being placed on their existing services, facilities and infrastructure. There were also associated queries over the numbers of new houses proposed in areas already under pressure and a request that the use of brownfield sites be encouraged instead.
- **Environment** - The case was made for providing greater protection to the natural habitats at Strangford Lough, Scrabo Hill, Enler River Valley and Shimna River among others. There were concerns over the conflicting pressures to manage increasing visitor and tourist numbers and to protect the environment. It was also stressed that Strangford Lough and the banks of rivers should have buffer zones to protect them from inappropriate developments and to preserve the flood plains.

Greater cognisance of the relevance and use of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy was also seen as important, with a plea for the introduction of more innovative and environmentally-friendly developments and waste water systems.

- **Urban Design** - It was stated that the Area Plan should recognise the individual characteristics of towns and villages and should contain appropriate design guidance for new buildings. Guidance on green spaces, vernacular building styles, materials, landscape features and walking and cycling was requested. There was criticism of the number and style of recent town house and apartment developments in certain areas, particularly along the coastal areas in the Ards and Down districts.
- **Transportation** - The most commonly held views were that the majority of roads in Ards and Down are operating at full capacity and cannot cope with the additional traffic that is caused by new developments. Particular congestion problems were cited at Strangford, Newcastle and Donaghadee. Alternatives to the private car, provision of more cycle routes and an enhancement of the public transport provision were among the remedies suggested to encourage a change in the regional travel culture. It was also suggested that disused railway lines should be re-opened with all forms of transport being integrated.
- **Recreation and Open Space** - On this subject it was felt that new developments should have more open and green space with play and recreation provision incorporated into the design from the outset. It was also felt that Strangford Lough and Newcastle Harbour should be developed to accommodate the tourism and leisure industry in line with the emerging Regional Development Strategy.
- **Public Utilities and Infrastructure** - In the main, participants reported that water and sewerage facilities are outdated and cannot cope with existing, never mind planned developments and that they should be overhauled before additional developments are approved.

- **Industry and Employment** - A plea was made for additional and carefully located industrial zonings which would create more employment opportunities particularly for residents who want to operate small businesses from the local area.
- **New TSN and Equality** - It was argued that new zonings should be directed to the areas of greatest need and that the views of equality groupings should be taken on board. The need for integrated planning and implementation was also stressed to ensure a more coherent, co-ordinated and fair outcome.

These comments amongst others were included in the Stage 1 Report submitted to the Planning Service in November 2000. Publication of the Issues Paper followed on 12 December 2000 and with it the beginning of the statutory 14 week consultation period. The public meetings and community consultation exercises which took place during this period led to a wide-ranging debate and generated a lot of information. This information forms the main body of this Report and is reported in Sections 3, 4 and 5.

2.2 Design of the Consultation Process

There are many methods and approaches to public consultation. Some are more suitable than others for large scale consultation. Often the most applicable method used to engage as many people as possible over a wide geographical area is the public meeting, although they are sometimes viewed as being ineffective in terms of engaging a wider audience. In particular some critics feel that excluded groups are reluctant to attend meetings and may even find them an intimidating experience.

However, having looked at the range of options, CTA felt that public meetings would be the most practical method of undertaking this consultation and would appeal to most people interested in Area Plans and planning issues in general. Bearing in mind the difficulties with public meetings, we decided to opt for an approach which included an open forum and small group discussions at each meeting. This approach, when employed, is successful in engaging more if not all of the participants in the discussion. In addition those involved usually relax and feel more confident expressing their views in the smaller group session.

In CTA's experience over the course of the 12 meetings and where circumstances allowed small group sessions to be held, these worked well and were successful in creating a very positive atmosphere. Any anger or frustration directed at the Planning Service during the open sessions was turned into more constructive dialogue during the smaller group sessions with a focus on the future and the needs of the area.

Having decided on the approach to be used to implement the process, CTA carefully designed the programme of events taking account of the location, accessibility, capacity, neutrality and community served by each of the 12 venues.

We liaised with the main umbrella community groups in the area regarding these criteria and decided on the most appropriate venues for meetings. The East Down Rural Community Network provided invaluable assistance in this respect and was extremely helpful in advertising the meetings amongst its member groups and organisations.

Built into our consultation method and approach from the outset in September 2000 was the involvement of community, voluntary and environmental groups. Of the 460 groups originally written to we had received reply slips registering an interest in the exercise from 50 of them. These 50 as well as those who sent written submissions to us or the Planning Service and those who attended the briefing meetings in October 2000 were directly invited to attend the public meetings. The invitations were accompanied by copies of the Issues Paper and a summary of the Issues Paper prepared by us. Given CTA's remit and the inclusion of community groups in Stage 1, two specific community sector half-day events were planned which were designed to engage those community and voluntary group representatives in more in-depth discussions.

The Planning Service advertised the meetings in regional and local newspapers during the week before the meetings and during each of the

three weeks that they were being held. These advertisements referred to the Issues Paper document, invited all interested individuals to attend any of all of the public meetings and asked interested community and voluntary groups to contact CTA if they wished to attend either of the community sector events.

2.3 Programme and Implementation of the Consultation Exercise

Ten public meetings and two half-day community sector events were arranged for the three week period running from 8 January 2001 to 27 January 2001 (a list of locations and dates is included at Appendix 1).

The number of events was evenly split between the two districts and the locations were chosen to ensure a good geographical spread. Some participants were aggrieved that a meeting was not held in their town or village, however it was felt that 12 meetings was adequate to cover the two district council areas with each town, village and settlement being no more than a few miles from any chosen venue. This ensured that most people could attend at least one of the meetings. In addition, two meetings were held on Saturday mornings to accommodate those people who work in the evenings or who have childcare commitments mid-week.

Some criticism was directed at CTA for organising two day time community sector events (Crossgar and Ballyhalbert) because people who work were unable to attend. However these times were chosen, as previously mentioned, to specifically target community and voluntary groups and organisations, many of which have full-time employees, who are available during the day.

Anyone could attend the public meetings with each designed to hear all the views from anywhere in the two districts. The locations chosen were not designed for residents of that location alone. This point was made clear at the beginning of each meeting.

Each meeting for the most part followed the same format. They began at 7.30 pm and lasted for two hours. CTA made the introductory presentation and explained the purpose of the meeting. This was followed by a presentation from the Planning Service on the approach used and the main issues that had to be considered in the preparation of the new Area Plan. The question and answer session which followed lasted for approximately 40 minutes and led directly into the small group discussions. At a few meetings (Killyleagh, Comber, Kircubbin and Donaghadee) this did not happen as participants preferred to remain in the larger group. Where workshop sessions and more informal discussions did take place, participants were asked several questions to help guide them and focus them on the main issues (a list of these questions is included at Appendix 2).

The meetings were well attended with average numbers ranging from 70-80 to 130-140. In total just over 700 people took part (numbers who attended each meeting is included at Appendix 1). This level of attendance is indicative of the widespread interest there was in the process.

The media, and newspapers in particular, played an invaluable part in the exercise. Several local papers carried regular and often daily articles on the proceedings at many meetings. Often the area chosen for a meeting had experienced some difficulties in planning terms, either from a development control or a planning enforcement viewpoint. The discussions at these meetings therefore focused on these issues, very often at the expense of the

discussion about the future needs of the area and the needs from an Area Plan viewpoint.

Nevertheless, the range and quality of debate at each meeting was excellent. A lot of positive and negative energy was evident at the meetings as the comments reported in the following two sections illustrate.

3. Consultation Findings - Main Issues

The topics and issues that were raised at the public meetings are manifold. For simplicity, these have been separated into main issues and locational issues.

At the meetings CTA staff took notes of comments made during the open fora and recorded the smaller group discussions on flipcharts. This information was collated and categorised according to the individual issue and the frequency with which it was raised and the level of support expressed for it during the meetings.

There were recurring themes and similar comments expressed at many meetings. For simplicity and directness the following sections illustrate those main issues which were highlighted by participants at most meetings and on several occasions.

Some of the issues are not entirely relevant to the Area Plan process and may not therefore be dealt with by the Planning Service. Nonetheless they were important to the participants and have thus been included. The Planning Service will direct these issues to the relevant departments and/or agencies and will highlight how it has done so in its response to this Report.

3.1 Strategic and Co-ordinated Government

The dominant issue raised at most of the public meetings (and also during the Stage 1 meetings) was the call for all Government departments and agencies to work together to deliver a holistic, well-planned and sustainable society.

The frustration of participants was evident as they recounted tales of many towns and villages in Ards and Down where roads, water and sewerage plants cannot cope with existing development much less future proposals. It was often said that if the relevant departments worked together in a system of joined-up government (as promised by the emerging Regional Development Strategy) that we would start to witness better towns and villages with adequate infrastructure, public services and utilities able to cope with the levels of demand.

Many participants accepted that the Planning Service is not in a position to provide answers to many of the queries raised at the meetings or indeed to provide solutions to them in the Area Plan. However they believe that the Service does have a responsibility to ask the departments or agencies with the responsibility or remit for these issues how they intend to respond to them. The Area Plan is viewed by many therefore as being the only vehicle whereby a co-ordinated approach can be taken.

The Planning Service has moved to a plan-led planning system and many participants asked to see evidence of this approach instead of the perceived piecemeal development control-led model they said is in use today.

3.2 Inadequacy of Existing Physical Infrastructure, Public Utilities and Services

The strength of feeling on the issue of the inadequacy of existing physical infrastructure, public utilities and services cannot be over-emphasised. It was raised in some format at every meeting, generally with a degree of exasperation and dismay and sometimes anger. Participants, the majority of whom live and work in these districts, described their experience of the inadequacies of roads, public transport and the water and sewage treatment systems. On many occasions they cited examples of roads operating at full capacity and very often alongside a poor public transportation service. The main arterial routes between Downpatrick and Belfast, Ballynahinch and Newcastle, Newtownards and Belfast and Newtownards and Portaferry were most often mentioned as suffering from too much traffic. This problem was seen as largely stemming from the proximity of the two districts to Belfast and their positions within the Belfast travel to work area. One of the solutions suggested for the Ards Borough was the introduction of a new spinal road straight through the middle of the Peninsula. The audience often felt that if the Planning Service and the Roads Service (amongst others) could more fully integrate their functions and plan for the future together then a large part of the development pressure problem would disappear. It was clear from their perspective that new developments get approval and that others are often in the pipeline without an assessment first being made of the real capacity of the roads infrastructure and the public transportation system to cope.

On a similar note, repeated comments were made on the inadequacies of the existing water and sewerage systems. This was particularly so in the Ards Borough where many argued that the situation is nearing crisis point. Cases were cited of raw sewage often being pumped into Strangford Lough and sometimes overflowing from the manholes onto roads and streets.

In general and by way of summary on this point, a plea was made for the introduction of one or both of two policy measures - (i) a moratorium on any further developments (housing in particular) until infrastructure, services and facilities are upgraded to cope with the additional burdens this would cause and (ii) imposing a surcharge on developers per development scheme or housing unit to pay for the upgrading of the aforementioned systems required to cope with these new buildings.

Overall it was felt that these measures would not only benefit the residents of the two districts but would also serve to attract tourists and investors. Related to this issue was the one of accessibility and the need for improved links between Down and Ards. A few participants at some of the public meetings spoke of the isolation of the Ards Peninsula and its inhabitants and asked if a crossing linking the Peninsula with the Down District could be a solution to this problem. Specific examples given were the construction of a tunnel or a bridge over Strangford Lough. Others cautioned that a bridge, apart from expense, would generate more traffic on both sides of the Lough and thus exacerbate the traffic problem. Yet it was felt by its advocates that it could attract tourists and enable local residents (particular those from Portaferry) to access hospital services, employment opportunities and health and leisure facilities in the Down District.

On a final point other public services, such as schools and health care facilities, were also highlighted as suffering from the pressures of too many people living in one area and competing for the same services. As before, they called for an assessment to be made of the ability of these services to cope with more demands being placed on their finite resources.

3.3 Social Housing

The issue of social housing was one of the many strands of the housing debate that dominated on several occasions.

Sometimes participants appeared to confuse social housing with affordable housing which is dealt with at the next sub-section (3.4).

Generally people asked if the Planning Service could insist that developers provide a mix of tenures within their housing schemes. This mix, they felt, should include social and/or special needs housing units as well as the traditional mix of private house types. Whilst realising that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive no longer provides new build social housing, many felt that Housing Associations were suffering from a lack of available land on which to build. Even where land is available, participants felt that Housing Associations are priced out of the market by private developers. A planning policy to address this situation was seen as being the only way forward. At least in this way, many felt that developers would be required to make provision that would not otherwise be provided. Such a move was said to be necessary under New TSN and Equality legislation.

3.4 Affordable Housing

At almost every meeting participants stated that the price of housing in their town or village was spiralling upwards and that this in turn was forcing local people, especially young people and first-time buyers, to move away from the area. As a consequence the query often arose regarding a mechanism for insisting that developers provide a range of house types and prices in their schemes. Again a new policy to deal with this was seen as needed. The issue of expensive housing was perceived as being heightened by speculative developers and the inward flow of people wishing to buy second homes and retirement homes.

The provision of affordable (and indeed social) housing was seen as bringing an intrinsic value to the sustainability and vibrancy of a community. Many said that without the availability of choice a community simply cannot survive as young people and people on low incomes are forced to move away in search of low cost and public sector housing. Many felt that this results in people from outside the area moving in, and that these people very often bring little to the local economy as they shop and work elsewhere.

Reference was made to the need for the provision of housing choice for all. Again this was seen as an equality and New TSN issue.

3.5 Inappropriate Developments - Apartments and Holiday Homes

Strong views were expressed at most meetings about inappropriate developments that have taken place in recent times in the Ards and Down area. Particular reference was made to Newcastle, Donaghadee, Ballyhalbert, Killyleagh and Portaferry where apartments and townhouse developments were seen as being out of keeping with the traditional character of these locations. It was said that little attention had been paid to the vernacular or traditional building style and the ambience of these towns and villages was being eroded as a result. Solutions and suggestions included calls for policy statements in the Area Plan which would refer to the traditional building styles and legislate accordingly.

Participants felt very strongly about this issue and were often angry at the mistakes they perceived had been made. As an alternative way forward it was suggested that derelict housing, particularly in the open countryside, could be restored and that this would be a means of enabling traditional houses to be kept.

To conclude, many participants feared that their towns and villages would start to experience problems similar to those suffered in Portballintrae, where the influx of people wanting holiday homes has resulted in an over-priced and over-developed coastal settlement. They appealed to the Planning Service to stem the tide now and enforce design and suitability guidelines in the relevant holiday and tourist locations in Ards and Down. Otherwise, local people said they feared that their once beautiful, quaint and attractive areas will end up as what the developers have already on occasion termed 'mini-Venice' and 'The French Riviera'.

3.6 Rural and Agricultural Housing Issues and Needs

There were many comments and viewpoints expressed on the problems facing people living in rural areas, particularly on agricultural land. In planning terms it was said that these problems have centred around the need for new houses, either for rural residents or their dependants with many feeling that they face unnecessary difficulties trying to obtain planning permission. Participants said that rural planning policies are too restrictive and that as a result rural communities are disappearing. Specific reference was made to green belt designations which, it was said, are preventing farmers and landowners from developing land. Participants asked if some provision could therefore be made for a relaxation of green belt policy in a bid to keep rural communities together. Some also queried whether green belt policy was contrary to provisions of Equality legislation given its perceived imbalance and that it only affects certain members of the population.

3.7 Housing Allocations

The 7,750 new housing allocation figure set by the emerging Regional Development Strategy, for both Ards Borough Council and Down District Council was queried on several occasions. Some wondered how the figure had been calculated and more importantly how it could be distributed over the plan period. Distribution, it was said, should be equitable and thus spread across the two areas. Concerns were expressed that new housing would be directed to the district towns and larger settlements to the detriment of the smaller villages, hamlets and outlying areas.

Others queried the need for any new housing allocation and asked if saturation point had not already been reached, while some participants argued that the housing figures projected for the two districts were on the low side and would not accommodate the projected need over the plan period. All participants welcomed the fact that the housing figures will be reviewed every five years and saw this as an important way forward. They also asked that brownfield sites be used for this new development and asked if redundant agricultural land could help in this endeavour.

3.8 The Natural Environment

Participants felt that the Ards and Down area has a lot to offer in terms of natural assets and beauty - Strangford Lough, rivers, coastal areas and the Mourne Mountains - but that their viability and delicate eco-systems were being compromised by inappropriate developments and sewage effluent. Strangford Lough in particular was felt to be well protected in terms of its designations, but in reality it still suffered from unauthorised developments and illegal dumping incidents. Cases were cited of raw or untreated sewage being discharged into the Lough and its surrounding rivers. Run-off from new developments and dumping from developments under construction were quoted as further examples of this environmental pollution.

Floodplains were mentioned with calls made for a complete avoidance of these low-lying areas for new development. Participants wished to see better and more strictly enforced protection of the environment in the future, especially trees, hedgerows and small wetland areas. The issues were seen as interwoven with the themes of sustainability and tourism, with fears expressed that neither could be achieved or maintained if the natural assets and beauty which currently attract people to an area are no longer there to enjoy.

For the most part these issues related to enforcement. The legislative and planning protection for these natural areas is seen as not being enforced or adhered to and those at the meetings felt this should be addressed as a matter of some urgency. This issue is connected to the earlier one of outdated sewage treatment works wherein calls were made for modernised and comprehensive systems which will ensure that only treated sewage is discharged and clean water produced as a result.

Some reference was made to the tools provided by the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy and how, if applied properly, a lot of these environmental issues would be dealt with more effectively.

3.9 Tourism

It was felt that both Ards and Down exhibit many attractive tourism qualities and indeed have numerous locations which attract large numbers of tourists, particularly in summer months. A dichotomy was identified however - tourists are necessary for a sustainable local economy but often the environmental losses and unwelcome holiday home developments were perceived to outweigh the benefits. As an equaliser to this problem some felt strongly that planning policies should protect the needs of local people rather than tourists, recognising that tourists' economic contribution was frequently short-lived and seasonal.

On a more positive and constructive note some participants saw the merit of tourism and felt that efforts should be made to improve facilities for tourists. It was said that very often basic facilities and infrastructure such as hotels, bed and breakfast and self-catering accommodation is not available, nor is adequate provision made for supporting activities such as walking and cycling.

Some participants felt that more should be done to cater for a growing industry but that everyone's needs should be assessed and balanced remembering to keep the natural environment and sustainability to the fore.

3.10 Retailing

The issue of retailing was not a dominant one. However there was a concern that out-of-town shopping centres are having a detrimental effect on the viability of town centres. The retailing bases of smaller settlements were seen to be suffering as well, possibly even more than those in towns. This factor was attributed to a number of things - a small and dwindling population, commuters 'sleeping' in settlements and shopping elsewhere, the lack of retail space in the core of urban areas and the overall problem of traffic and a general lack of car parking spaces for shoppers.

Participants queried if the Area Plan could support alternatives to the car and encourage people to walk or use public transport to access shops. For this to be successful it was pointed out that the location of shops near housing and other facilities needs to be carefully considered.

When asked to look at the future needs of the area, participants called for more sustainable and self-contained settlements, where services such as retailing could be facilitated by zonings and policies in the Area Plan.

3.11 Industrial Development and Employment Opportunities

The issue of the location of industry featured in the debate on many occasions. Some queried the merit of large scale industrial zonings when they felt that today's needs centred around a more IT-based economy and thus smaller spaces. They also asked for zonings for small scale business units to house indigenous industries as it was felt that this would help create more sustainable communities and alleviate a lot of the aforementioned problems of commuter traffic whilst contributing to the vibrancy and life of settlements and strong local economies.

Preferred locations for industrial and small business zonings were said to be on the edge of towns, on brownfield sites, and on previously used agricultural land ensuring that industrial zonings were kept away from housing areas. There were calls for incentives and rates reductions to attract potential industrial employers. It was felt that this would then have a ripple effect and attract more industries, thus adding to the longer term viability of many towns and villages.

3.12 Open Space, Play and Community Facilities

Open space, play and community facilities were often said to have been omitted from new development schemes. Many schemes, it was felt, had little, if any open or green space set aside and when provided was often poorly managed and maintained. The example of Home Zones in other parts of Britain was quoted as being good practice. In these Zones children's and young people's needs are factored into the design of housing schemes with adequate provision being made for open space, play facilities and community buildings. Participants hoped that the Government's new Quality Initiative would start to address this issue in a holistic and strategic way, asking if developers could be surcharged or asked to enter into planning agreements to provide such facilities.

3.13 Equality

When asked how the Area Plan could help tackle equality issues many participants answered with regard to housing and employment. They felt that the requirements of the equality legislation could be met if the Planning Service looked at the introduction of policies to ensure mixed development housing schemes.

Other comments referred to the need for an equitable distribution of housing; that industrial zonings should be targeted to the areas of greatest social need; that public transport should be enhanced to ensure fair and equal accessibility to all services; and that communities should receive fair and equitable treatment in relation to consultation on development control issues.

Overall it was strongly argued that all areas in Ards and Down should be treated equally in terms of citizens' rights to access housing, jobs and public services and facilities.

The Planning Service was asked to look at society's shifting population profile and plan for all needs accordingly. A note of caution urged that 'careful' zonings did not result in or exacerbate existing community divisions.

3.14 Development Control and the Operation of the Planning System

Many places in Ards and Down are experiencing development control issues and problems at present and audiences had strong and often forceful comments to make about them. The finer details of locational development control issues are dealt with in the next section but the mood at many of the meetings can be summarised as that of frustration, anger and despair. Many

criticised the Planning Service and called for more effective planning powers and enforcement action.

Inconsistencies were cited with participants believing that developers can get planning permission and that individuals cannot. Consultation with communities was deemed to be inadequate and an over-riding plea was made for an introduction of a third party right to appeal planning decisions.

Many were frustrated at the powerlessness of local communities to fight developers and said that this was worsened by the Planning Service's perceived unwillingness to help and inform members of the public about the development control process. A more transparent approach was thus called for as was better communication. There was a belief that the current system of advertisement and neighbour notification is poor and inadequate.

Overall many participants stated that they must have faith in a public body for it to be credible and that the public are often lacking this faith in the Planning Service.

3.15 The Consultation Process

There was a general welcome for the consultation process and the approach taken by the Planning Service and CTA. It was seen as a move in the right direction and a marked departure from the traditional apparent 'laissez faire' approach. There were caveats to this praise. Firstly, participants asked if the consultation was indeed meaningful needing assurances that people had not wasted their time making comments. They wished to see real responses to their questions and if not direct action from the Planning Service, then at least an answer from the relevant Government department or agency. Secondly, participants questioned the contents of the Issues Paper. Some felt that it was lacking in some details and facts and that full knowledge of the issues on both sides 'of the fence' was therefore not available. Its format was also questioned on occasion with participants wanting a more accessible and user-friendly document. Thirdly, the consultation process was questioned from the perspective of a need for a similar process at the Draft Plan stage. Many said that the benefit of the current process could be lost by retreating to the traditional adversarial position at the next stage. A need was seen therefore for more imaginative consultation and provision of information at the Draft Plan stage. Continuity and consistency were seen as the issues here with some participants and community organisations asking for capacity building and training in future consultations.

3.16 Other Issues

The recurring issues and comments across the meetings in different areas have been described in the previous sub-sections. Inevitably there are those which do not fit easily into traditional planning categories. These ranged from concerns that local council integrated Area Plan information would be taken on board by the Area Plan team, to questions as to why the Area Plan had been delayed by so many years, why it takes so long to prepare an Area Plan, how current planning applications will be dealt with in the interim period, how the brownfield targets are going to be met and if the next plan could begin in 13 years' time to avoid the current policy vacuum.

4. Consultation Findings - Locational Issues

Many comments and queries were specific and pertinent to a particular location in Ards and Down. As such they merit consideration in a separate section. For simplicity, these have been recorded according to the meeting where they were mentioned.

4.1 Killyleagh

The majority of the comments raised at Killyleagh focused on housing and development issues. Many people were concerned about the future growth of the town in terms of new housing, services and economic development. There was a perception that the town is not very economically active and that there is a considerable amount of land available for development. It was suggested that there is a need for redevelopment to include a range of new housing, play areas and open space, alternative sources of employment, such as restaurants or tourist activities, and an upgrading of existing services such as primary and secondary schools. It was also recognised that Killyleagh has a unique townscape character which warrants protection from inappropriate development. It was hoped that all of these issues would combine to create a sustainable town where people could live, work and play.

Some of the participants were concerned that all of the towns and villages in the area would become commuter towns for Belfast if new developments were not strictly controlled and that this would further exacerbate the perceived lack of community and economic vitality in the town. This was seen as a particular problem for Killyleagh, Killinchy and Ballydrain. It was stressed that the Planning Service should therefore assess each settlement on its ability to accommodate further growth in a sustainable way.

The poor condition of the roads was perceived to be a problem by a number of people. There was a call for the roads into Killyleagh, Carryduff, Temple and Downpatrick (A22) to be upgraded to sustain the current level of traffic as well as additional traffic generated by planned new developments.

The volume of traffic travelling into and through Killyleagh also creates problems for many people. Problems cited included difficulties in crossing the main road, the need for a footpath to Delamont Country Park and the need for a car park in Killyleagh town centre.

People at the meeting were very aware of environmental issues. Some queried what penalties developers face for felling trees illegally and what the Planning Service could do to protect the natural environment. It was stated that the current sewerage system cannot cope with the result that sewage is flowing into Strangford Lough and that if this continued it would harm the area's tourism potential.

A number of other issues were raised at the meeting. Some people were concerned that the Planning Service did not have strong enough enforcement policies. One example quoted was that of a housing development at the quay which has been built over an alleged public right

of way. On this occasion it was felt that enforcement procedures have been unable to resolve the problem.

4.2 Portaferry

The main concern expressed by participants at the Portaferry meeting was that their village would become over-developed with holiday homes as is the case in Portballintrae. Already they believe that a high proportion of houses in Portaferry are holiday homes and that their owners contribute little to the local economy. A range of house types, including social and affordable housing, was therefore demanded as an alternative to speculative apartment development.

In terms of facilities and services residents stated that Portaferry suffers from: a lack of facilities for young people, schools, leisure services (particularly a swimming pool), industrial land, modern high-tech telecommunications systems (such as those offered by NTL Group Limited), service installations offered by Phoenix Gas, as well as a lack of attractive tourist amenities (apart from the Marina and the Aquarium).

From an infrastructure viewpoint it was often said that the A20 from Newtownards to Portaferry is in poor condition and needs to be upgraded alongside improved or extended ferry services to ensure that those people living in the village have an adequate means of accessing jobs and services. Such improvements were seen as providing the best opportunity for economic growth and prosperity.

Car parking provision within the village was also seen as insufficient with requests for future parking schemes to be located outside the town to help minimise congestion.

In terms of the physical environment many felt aggrieved that the local amenity site is located at the entrance to the village and is therefore the first impression visitors get of the area. Some called for improved screening of this site together with a general overhaul of the street environment. Some suggested a facelift for High Street in particular including the footpaths, roads and walls.

Looking at the Lough environment, reference was made to the environmental disaster of the salt pans and the Gocean marina site at Killyleagh. Some participants asked if the Planning Service could view proposed developments from the Lough itself and suggested boats be used to do this.

Other comments included calls for an ambulance station (in recognition of the length of time it takes emergency services to reach Portaferry) and an upgraded sewage treatment plant.

4.3 Comber

Many of the participants referred to the need for a bypass around Comber. They said that the volume of traffic travelling through the town centre exceeds 40,000 cars per day and that it suffers from congestion at peak times

with many shops and businesses having already closed because of their physical inaccessibility due to traffic levels. It was said that the town could benefit from more inward investment to regenerate its economic core as it seemed to have high unemployment and poorly developed infrastructure compared to other towns. It was considered, therefore, that the town could not sustain a 25% growth in housing without accompanying resources to target social need. It was suggested that this was also true of Killinchy and Killyleagh.

Participants were keen to see stricter policies to protect the open countryside around Comber and Newtownards for future recreational and tourism needs. They suggested that Comber could benefit from a conservation area or area of townscape character designation in the same way as Hillsborough with the hope that this would similarly aid the economic growth of the town.

4.4 Crossgar

The main issues in Crossgar centred around housing and the need for social and affordable homes. The proximity of Crossgar to Belfast and being within the Belfast travel to work area was seen as affecting house prices and forcing young people to move elsewhere in search of accommodation. Older people's needs were also seen as being unmet with a lack of available sheltered housing accommodation.

The townscape character was said to have been eroded by new modern developments.

Some participants at the Crossgar meeting were from Dundrum and Drumaness and again referred to housing as the main issue. They called for clear boundaries to be drawn around Dundrum, for example to halt its apparent merge with Newcastle. Again the townscape of Dundrum was seen as being destroyed by new townhouses and apartment development.

Future housing provision in Crossgar was seen as best being provided in small clusters of ten units or less. From a location and traffic management perspective it was suggested that these could mainly be directed to the northern end of the village.

Traffic passing through Crossgar was mentioned at times with calls made for a review of the current traffic system at the Square and Main Street and new pedestrian lights at strategic crossing points in Main Street.

Representatives from Drumaness asked for new traffic lights on Kilmore Road for which a traffic survey, undertaken by the local community association, has shown a need.

It was hoped that these traffic problems could be alleviated, at least locally, by the encouragement of walking and the provision of walking routes across the Down District.

The village of Crossgar was seen as having a general lack of community facilities, including provision for indoor sports with the only public/community building being the War Memorial Hall.

As many have said during the consultation process about other areas, residents in Crossgar, Dundrum and Drumaness want to see their areas grow in a sustainable way with Government departments and agencies looking at the whole picture together in a bid to build a better future for all.

4.5 Ballynahinch

The locational issues raised at Ballynahinch included concerns about the consultation process and if it could take on board the Down 2010 information. There was also a particular concern that Saintfield had not been mentioned in the Issues Paper and had been omitted as a public meeting venue.

Participants argued that Ballynahinch should have some of the 7,750 housing allocation for the Down District as a whole. It was stated that new housing could be developed adjacent to the Belfast Road, but that the Hillshore Road could not sustain any further development. It was suggested that there is land available for development closer to Crossgar, but others added a note of caution that villages closer to Belfast are in danger of merging and losing their identity. Other concerns were raised about the allocation of land perceived to be predominantly in one religious community or another. The example given was land at the Flying Horse Estate and the Lisburn Road. Many recommended that the Planning Service should ensure that future development of any nature was not piecemeal, but co-ordinated and carefully planned.

Much of the discussion centred on the proposed bypass for Ballynahinch. A question was raised over its location and it was suggested that the Ballymaglave Road would be a preferred route. Some participants queried where funding for the construction of the bypass would come from, and others speculated on the effects it would have on local people and retailers.

There were a number of other issues raised concerning physical infrastructure, particularly roads. These included the view that the road to Ballynahinch is the gateway to the Mourne which creates problems whilst also benefiting the town. Many asked for the re-opening of the County Down railway line and for improved car parking facilities in Ballynahinch.

The one-way system in Ballynahinch was considered to be a short-term measure. There was a call therefore for a more integrated approach to help tackle traffic problems.

It was said that Ardglass and Dundrum should redevelop their port facilities and generate business with England and Europe for freight ferries. There was however the proviso that surrounding roads should also be improved to sustain the increase in heavy lorries.

Participants considered that the open space around schools should be safeguarded to allow for potential future expansion to accommodate growth in the population, examples quoted were areas of land at Crossgar and Saintfield Primary Schools.

It was stated that there is a shortage of nursery school places in Ballynahinch with no available land for new developments and a need for a nursery facility at Carryduff because the closest available facility is at Purdysburn. There was also a stated need for an inter-denominational school.

It was argued that Drumaness could be the location for new industrial zonings with reference made to land at Park Road being suitable for this. It was also felt that Ballynahinch needed new localised industrial developments and therefore appropriate zonings to accommodate them.

There was some debate over the vitality and regeneration of Ballynahinch town centre. Some participants said that the centre is dead and in need of a focal point, perhaps in the town square. It was hoped that the Planning Service could help shop owners to upgrade their shop fronts thereby helping to improve the townscape character and the tourism potential of the town.

4.6 Downpatrick

Downpatrick residents wanted to see a healthy proportion of housing, retailing, tourism and industrial zonings directed to the district town in the Area Plan.

On the issue of new housing many participants urged caution regarding further allocations given their perception that a percentage of current housing land zoned from the last Area Plan is undeveloped.

Again the problems of roads featured strongly in the debate. Many called for a bypass for Downpatrick, blaming the town layout for the current congestion problems, particularly along Church Street. Relieving the town centre of traffic was seen as a priority. The Belfast Road was cited as having many problems of heavy traffic and needing an upgrade. Many said that the Down District has some of the worst roads in the region.

One participant mentioned that Downpatrick needs a ring road and not a bypass.

The retail core of Downpatrick was said to have suffered from the opening of out-of-town shopping centres and supermarkets.

The natural environment at the Quoile pondage area and Delamont Country Park was seen as providing important havens for wildlife and that these areas should therefore be managed and controlled in a sustainable manner.

Concerns were expressed over green belt boundaries and participants at the meetings from both Ballynahinch and Downpatrick asked if these could be treated more as guidelines for development limits rather than as inflexible stop lines.

The industrial site at the Abbey Lodge Hotel was seen as being too big and unnecessary. Some said that local people would rather have small business areas where local enterprises could locate. This was seen as having the potential to make a valuable contribution to a local economy where large

scale industries have closed down. Examples given were mills at Killyleagh, Drumaness and Shrigley.

Looking to the future, participants wanted an improved quality of life in terms of better use of existing land and development space, better roads and a stronger economic base in the town of Downpatrick.

4.7 Kircubbin

Participants at the Kircubbin meeting asked what percentage of the proposed 7,750 new houses for Ards Borough would be apportioned to Kircubbin.

There was concern about appropriate development with statements to the effect that the number of new developments in Portavogie is unacceptable and resulting in the village beginning to sprawl into a suburban type settlement rather than a small, easily defined one.

Some participants felt that new housing developments very often did not reflect the need in a particular area. For example, recent planning applications have been approved for apartments in towns and villages where terraced houses along road frontages are the traditional style of dwellings. It was felt that this current trend was contrary to New TSN policies by not providing accommodation of an adequate quality and type to cater for all local needs.

It was said that there is little open space in Greyabbey and in the Ards area as a whole. In addition there was a call for stricter controls over new housing developments to protect open space and to prevent further bungalow blight.

Many participants raised concerns over the condition of the road between Kircubbin and Belfast. It was stated that often there are mile-long tailbacks at peak times on the approach to Newtownards. It was argued that this situation would worsen if the 300 proposed new houses in Ballyhalbert were built. It was expected that a large proportion of additional traffic generated would pass through Kircubbin en route to Belfast. It was thus suggested that traffic problems in Kircubbin could be alleviated by a bypass or a road-widening scheme.

Many of these concerns were echoed in relation to Greyabbey. It was said that most of the traffic travelling north towards Newtownards passes through Greyabbey which was felt to be unacceptable. It was said that it is not safe to walk between the two car parks in the town and the school located on the corner of the road has been the scene of several collisions as a direct result of the traffic problems. In order to overcome these problems it was argued that the town would benefit from a traffic calming and management scheme.

A few people at the meeting supported the need for a bridge over Strangford Lough. This was seen as having the potential to bring benefit to school children, people travelling to Downpatrick and Belfast and people dealing with emergency situations.

There was some concern over the inappropriate location of particular developments, such as tourist accommodation and caravan parks. It was perceived that there has been a devaluation of property as a result of their poor location. Furthermore it was recognised that caravan sites can have a negative impact on the environment. One example was given of a caravan park in Ballywalter where all the trees were felled. There was a call, therefore, for tighter controls over the location and development of these sites.

4.8 Newtownards

There were numerous concerns raised about the location of new developments in Newtownards. Participants questioned the emerging Regional Development Strategy's statement that Newtownards should take the major proportion of new houses for the Ards Borough. They did not feel that this was appropriate and that all new developments should be assessed against the needs of that particular area and the resultant effect they would have on the natural and built environment.

It was suggested that the east of Newtownards could not sustain any further development and that it should be encouraged along the Belfast Road instead. This was seen as one measure which would help alleviate traffic problems in the town centre. Similarly, Loughries was cited as an area capable of sustaining further development.

There was a lot of debate and discussion around proposed developments at Movilla Road and the Donaghadee Road regarding over-development of those areas and the inability of roads and other services to cope. Participants specifically asked if developers could be required to provide a ring road in Newtownards to cope with the pressure these housing developments would create.

Allied to this was the reference to the inability of other services (such as schools, health centres and hospitals) to meet the needs of additional people who would locate in the town as a direct result of these planned housing developments.

The built environment, particularly in the town centre, was said to be worthy of a conservation area designation with the Court Street area needing a specific townscape character policy in the Area Plan.

Again pleas were made for small business zonings so that jobs could be provided locally. Reference was specifically made to the lack of industrial space in Comber, Newtownards and Donaghadee.

The Issues Paper refers to a strong retail core in Newtownards. Some argued that this is not the case and concerns were expressed over the impact that the proposed retail complex at Castlebawn could have on the vibrancy of the town centre.

Open space and play areas in housing developments were argued for, particularly in the Beverley area of the town where it was reported that little play space currently exists.

Protection of the natural environment and green belts was referred to as being essential from both a tourism and sustainability perspective.

The Enler Valley Green Belt Association was particularly supportive of the need for green belt protection and asked that more innovative use of brownfield sites be introduced to alleviate some of the development pressures in the Ards area.

4.9 Donaghadee

The Donaghadee meeting was dominated by heated discussions about development control issues. Many participants had concerns over planning processes and the ineffective powers that they believe are at the disposal of Planning Service. Some people therefore called for a clear message to be sent to the Northern Ireland Assembly to change planning legislation to give the Planning Service the greater powers needed. The main areas of concern were: a lack of enforcement; the apparent ease with which developers demolish seemingly sound and worthy buildings, particularly in Conservation Areas; the need for more comprehensive advertising of planning applications and reserved matters and the level of unauthorised development. It was stated that the public has lost confidence in the Planning Service. People said that consultation had been meaningless to date and that they needed some assurances that things will now improve.

A number of people raised the issue of inappropriate apartment developments. It was stated that apartments in the Warren Road area were priced at £200,000 and thus outside the price range of most local people. It was suggested that the Tivoli Bar site would perhaps be a good location for a lower cost, affordable housing scheme instead of becoming another location for apartment developments.

There was a call to develop tighter conservation policies to protect the environment from inappropriate developments, for example, those which have taken place at the harbour. It was argued, therefore, that developments on the coast, especially between the harbour and the Commons should be more strictly controlled.

One participant asked if the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 would address green belt policies affecting Millisle.

Many residents said that land should be reserved in the new Area Plan for a bypass around Donaghadee to cater for the increased traffic generated by new developments. Others said that the Planning Service should not waste resources by including the E-way scheme in the Area Plan as they did not feel it is a feasible proposal.

4.10 Ardglass

There were calls for new private sector housing zonings in Ardglass in recognition of the fact the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is perceived to have been the major provider of most new housing in recent times. Although Ardglass was said to be nearing its development capacity it was felt that brownfield sites were available. Alternatively some participants asked if

additional land could be freed around the boundary of the village, perhaps at the inner edge of the green belt.

The problem of inadequate and heavy traffic was once again a dominant issue. Heavy goods vehicles were said to pass through the village frequently and participants asked if some measures could be taken to control this traffic. The question was asked if land was available for a bypass for Ardglass and if the main road between Ardglass and Downpatrick could be upgraded. The lack of footpaths and walking routes in the village was also seen as a problem, particularly along the Crew Road and the Downpatrick Road with participants saying that this was dangerous for both local people and tourists.

Tourism was seen as important for Ardglass and Killough but the general feeling was that there are few facilities there to attract visitors. While Killough in particular is making attempts at rejuvenation of the village and making it more attractive for tourists, more tourist accommodation in the locality was called for as was more promotion and marketing of the area. The main attractions in the village were said to be the marina and the golf course. However, the marina was said to be used mainly by locals and, as a result, was seen to be inaccessible for tourists.

In relation to the natural environment and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designations at Strangford Lough and the Mourne, the view of these locations was said to be being destroyed by electricity poles and overhead power lines. Participants asked if these could be accommodated underground instead.

The fishing industry in Ardglass was seen as integral to the continued development of a strong local economy. Those at the meeting believed that the fish-processing industry in Ardglass is under pressure and has little space for expansion and they asked if the Area Plan could therefore address this problem.

Questions were also asked about the lack of industrial space and why the District Council had not acquired the Bishopscourt site as an industrial area. Again the desire for local business and training units was identified, particularly for an IT training centre. One location suggested for this was the disused primary school in the village.

With regard to community facilities and open space, residents stated that more green space was required as well as facilities for sport and young people.

4.11 Ballyhalbert

The main issue discussed at the Ballyhalbert meeting was the amount of housing land available in the village for development - 133 acres of land was zoned for housing in the last Area Plan and is still undeveloped. However, it was stated that a number of developers have proposals to build potentially 500 houses. Ballyhalbert has a current population of approximately 350 people and participants felt therefore that this scale of development would completely change the character of the area. It was also felt that the infrastructure and community facilities cannot sustain this level of development. This issue raised a number of other points, for example,

participants asked if such significant decisions could be delayed until the new Area Plan is adopted in order to assess their potential impact and if the new Area Plan could reduce the extent of the existing housing zoning if the land is still undeveloped at the Plan's adoption stage.

It was also felt that villages such as Ballyhalbert and Ballywalter needed social and affordable housing but that current proposals made no provision for this. A concern was also expressed that developers were proposing to provide community facilities such as a swimming pool in order to make their proposals seem more attractive but that the residents believed this was not a viable option.

Numerous concerns were expressed about the condition of the roads on the Ards Peninsula. The road between Ballyhalbert and Cloghy was cited as being in very poor condition. It was also felt that the proposed E-way Scheme and its associated park'n'ride service would not alleviate any of the travel problems suffered by local people as they still have to drive a number of miles before they can avail of the service.

On the issue of a bridge over Strangford Lough one person said that they did not even see the need for a ferry. They agreed that it was beneficial for tourism but it did not necessarily bring any advantages to local people.

It was thought that the boundary of the green belt at Ballywalter has been amended without consultation. Local people had concerns about this and said they should be consulted on policies affecting their local areas.

One participant criticised the Planning Service's Issues Paper and said it was not written in plain English and was a waste of money.

4.12 Newcastle

The issue of apartment and holiday homes was a main topic of debate at the Newcastle meeting. In particular participants felt aggrieved by the Waterfoot development which they said is not in keeping with the character of the town. This development, amongst other apartment developments, reportedly lies empty for most of the year. Social and affordable housing units were seen as better alternatives to this type of development.

Environmental debates centred around the problems faced by the Shimna and Burren Rivers because of flooding and the impact nearby developments are seen as having on these rivers and their corridors.

Participants stated that they did not agree with Newcastle being considered as a retirement town in the emerging Regional Development Strategy. They argued that the Strategy failed to consider the economic profile of the young people living in Newcastle and their need for first homes. Reference was made to tourism not being the only industry in the area as it only lasts for three months of the year. By contrast participants said that the resident population needs employment all year round. To help achieve this participants asked if the Planning Service could zone land for industrial use and encourage high-tech industries to locate in the area.

The road between Newcastle and Belfast was seen as inadequate with the roads south of Newcastle perceived to be less than adequate also. Mention was made of traffic problems and a lack of car parking space in Newcastle with some participants saying that parts of the town should be car-free.

More retail space was asked for at the northern end of the town (towards Kilkeel) with requests made for the allocation of land for bed and breakfast and hotel accommodation, thus enabling Newcastle to become the top tourist location it used to be.

Regarding smaller settlements that have an impact on the town, comments were made about Dundrum and Drumaness experiencing fast growth and yet not getting a mention in the Issues Paper. Castlewellan and Kilcoo were also cited as being able to sustain further development and worthy of consideration in the Area Plan.

When asked about the future of Newcastle and what residents would like to see the Area Plan achieve, participants referred to the need for Newcastle to be alive again, with free-flowing traffic, accommodation for older, young and disabled people as well as open space for young people. They asked for a more sustainable town for residents and tourists alike.

5. Written Submissions

During the course of this second stage of the consultation period CTA received 19 written submissions from community, voluntary and environmental groups and individuals in response to its request for input into the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015. Issues highlighted in the written submissions are detailed below under area-wide issues, and issues specific to Donaghadee, Newcastle, Crossgar, Kircubbin, Enler Valley, Lisbarnett and Lisbane the Aerodrome at Newtownards.

5.1 Area-wide Issues

The following list details the issues most frequently referred to in the written submissions but which are attributed to several locations across the two Districts.

- Current infrastructure cannot support a significant population increase. Roads and sewerage systems need to be upgraded whilst schools, hospitals and community services are already stretched to their limit.
- Urban sprawl must be avoided. Existing green belts and open spaces should be preserved.
- Social and affordable housing is needed.
- New build development should be in keeping with the character of an area and buildings of historic interest should be preserved.
- To encourage the use of brownfield sites developers of greenfield sites should be subject to development surcharges.
- No development should be permitted along disused railway lines.
- Demolition of buildings should not take place until new plans for the site are in place.
- A more visionary approach to transport is required. Developments which arise from the Area Plan should not compromise the implementation of more radical public transport solutions in the future.
- Sustainable tourism must be adequately addressed by the Area Plan.
- People welcomed the public consultation meetings and the chance to become involved, however there were concerns that views and opinions would not be taken on board.
- There is a lack of accountability within the Planning Service for planning decisions.
- Legislative powers should be changed to strengthen enforcement powers.

5.2 Issues Specific to Donaghadee

The following comments and opinions are those which were identified by one or more Donaghadee residents in the letters submitted to CTA.

- Sensitive regeneration of the harbour, moat and lifeboat station could facilitate the regeneration of the town.
- Further town centre improvements are required to encourage people to shop locally. New hotels and a leisure complex would also add to the town's amenities.
- New car parking is required for the town. If the Town Hall was demolished this space could be used as a car park. The land to the rear of Manor House could also be considered.
- The existing conservation area must be protected.
- Apartments are welcomed provided they are controlled and are sensitive in design and appearance.
- The land around the carpet factory should be zoned for further housing development.
- Development should not be permitted: on the seaward side of the Warren Road; as ribbon development along main roads; in prohibited areas of woodland; and as single developments in gardens of larger houses.
- The Woburn Road, Drumfad Road, Kilbright Road and the Carrowdore end of Abbey Road should be considered for protection from development.
- The land adjoining Millstream should be protected from development and developed as a nature reserve.
- The provision of a mini-roundabout at the Cloghy and Millisle junctions would ease traffic flows.
- The Area Plan must link effectively with the North Down interface area.
- The Community Association in Donaghadee is available for consultation on these issues.

5.3 Issues Specific to Newcastle

The issues detailed below are a summary of all those contained in the written submissions sent by Newcastle residents.

- The life and economy of Newcastle is strongly dependent on tourism and the environment. Much of the town centre suffers from development which is out of character. Large apartment blocks are not suitable development and more traditional designs are required for shop frontages.

- Newcastle is dying due to: a growth in second homes or holiday homes; out-of-town shopping facilities; derelict houses; and a lack of facilities and amenities for residents.
- New housing is out of character and there is a concern about the lack of social and affordable housing in Newcastle. A substantial proportion of new houses should be safeguarded for local people.
- Green corridors should be established through the town and into the countryside.
- Development should be restricted along the Shimna River and the fields on either side of Tipperary Lane should be protected.
- The Shimna River catchment area should be examined in detail by the Planning Service to ensure that no further land is released for development which would damage its environment.
- The ecological importance of the Burren River is referred to in the Issues Paper. The Burren River forms part of the Shimna system and the whole Shimna system requires this recognition.

5.4 Issues Specific to Crossgar

A submission from Crossgar Community Association outlined the following concerns:

- A new traffic management system including parking restrictions, re-routing of the bus service, 20 miles per hour speed restrictions and a bypass for through traffic are required. The old railway line could be re-used as a pedestrian walkway or light tramway.
- The richly wooded estate at Tobar Mhuire should be protected at all costs. Cycling should be promoted to reduce exhaust fumes.
- To maintain future generations, a range of house types, including social and affordable housing, is important. Any new housing must be built in accordance with the capacity of sewerage systems and should be situated on the north side of the village.
- Play areas for children are required and an area should be set aside for small business development.

5.5 Issues Specific to Kircubbin

One letter was submitted which referred to the main issues in Kircubbin as including:

- More housing is needed in Kircubbin.
- The location of new housing to the south of the village creates an unfair advantage to business and discriminates against those at the northern end.

- Proposals for new businesses should be encouraged along the Main Street.

5.6 Issues Specific to Enler Valley

Enler Valley Green Belt Association submitted a letter detailing its concerns. These are outlined below.

- There should be a presumption against development on the shores of Strangford Lough and in tourist areas such as Castle Espie and Scrabo.
- The Enler River should be protected as far as Dundonald with all floodplains being protected from development.
- Green belts and good quality agricultural land should be adequately protected.
- Land zoned for housing should be more carefully managed and monitored. The proportion of re-use of brownfield land should be increased to 60%.
- Local roads need to be upgraded to sustain existing traffic before any new large scale development can take place. Consideration should be given to providing a one-way system in Comber.
- Parts of Comber town centre should be designated as an area of townscape character.

5.7 Issues Specific to Lisbarnett and Lisbane

A letter from Lisbarnett and Lisbane Community Association detailed the following points:

- Lisbarnett and Lisbane should be designated as a small settlement.
- New developments should respect their surroundings, local character and vernacular.
- There is existing pressure on local infrastructure such as water and sewage treatment works and local roads.
- New housing development should be in character and scale with the local area and should contain a proportion of social and affordable housing.
- Road safety issues such as the provision of footpaths and traffic calming need to be considered.
- There should be a balance between business and commercial and residential development to ensure growth of a sustainable community.

5.8 The Aerodrome at Newtownards

The Ulster Flying Club raised the following issues regarding the future protection of the aerodrome at Newtownards.

Buildings or structures above 45 metres above the aerodrome level should be prohibited within two kilometres of the drome. The Runway 04 approach should be protected by ensuring that no housing development is permitted within the noise footprint. Some green areas should be left along the Runway 04 approach and beneath the circuit for Runway 22 to provide a site for emergency landings. The take-off flight path from Runway 34 should have a restriction on high buildings to ensure the protection of the approach and take-off slopes. Bright lights in line with runways should be avoided to minimise confusion during night flying. The impact of aircraft noise should be considered during the planning process for all new developments close to the airfield. Access to the airfield for emergency services from both the Portaferry and Comber Roads should be protected by parking and waiting restrictions.

6. Concluding Comments

Participants in the public meetings were asked to complete evaluation forms. The results (at Appendix 3) indicate that the meetings were largely seen as useful, informative, worthwhile and interesting. Two thirds of the respondents said the meetings provided an adequate opportunity for views to be expressed while almost three quarters stated that the smaller group discussions were useful or very useful.

This Report seeks to collate the views of over 700 people who attended what were often very lively public meetings. We hope that they find it at least as valuable and useful as they found the meetings. Like them we look forward to studying the Draft Area Plan and its response to each of the issues contained in this Report.

Appendix 1 - Schedule of Public Meetings

Location	Date	Attendance
1. Killyleagh	- 8 January 2001	: 85
2. Portaferry	- 9 January 2001	: 90
3. Comber	- 9 January 2001	: 80
4. Crossgar	- 11 January 2001	: 12
5. Ballynahinch	- 13 January 2001	: 29
6. Downpatrick	- 16 January 2001	: 33
7. Kircubbin	- 17 January 2001	: 55
8. Newtownards	- 18 January 2001	: 135
9. Donaghadee	- 22 January 2001	: 125
10. Ardglass	- 23 January 2001	: 15
11. Ballyhalbert	- 26 January 2001	: 9
12. Newcastle	- 27 January 2001	: 35

Appendix 2 - Public Meeting Discussion Questions

1. Do you feel that the Issues Paper covers all of the issues affecting your area?
Are there others you would add?
2. What will be the most important issues facing your area over the next 15 years?
3. How should the Area Plan tackle issues such as equality so that specific groups in society (such as older people, ethnic minorities, women, young people etc) are not adversely affected?
4. Are there any other comments that you would like to make?

Appendix 3 - Evaluation of Public Meetings

Each of the 703 participants at the public meetings were asked to complete a multiple choice evaluation form. 214 did so (30% response rate).

1. Overall Perception of the Meetings

Interesting	110
Useful	98
Informative	76
Worthwhile	74
Positive	34
Confusing	30
Challenging	24
Meaningful	16
Hopeless	14
Useless	12
Boring	1

2. Overall Perception of the Discussion Groups

Very Useful	27%
Useful	47%
Satisfactorily	21%
Not Useful	5%

3. Did the Meetings Provide Adequate Opportunity to Express Views?

Yes	67%
No	16%
Not Sure	17%

Community Technical Aid is the only region-wide voluntary organisation which provides professional planning and architectural services for community and voluntary groups. We facilitate community participation in planning and support community development by assisting groups to develop the skills, knowledge and infrastructure needed to regenerate disadvantaged urban and rural areas.

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