

Armagh Area Plan 2018

Public and Community Consultation



**Community Technical Aid
June 2004**

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I. Introduction

The Planning Service is currently preparing the new Area Plan for Armagh. The Armagh Area Plan 2018 will provide the policy framework for development and conservation of the Armagh City and District Council area for this period. This will be an important document and one which will provide the blueprint for land use decisions affecting housing, industry, roads, transportation, tourism, open space, community facilities and retailing. In addition the environment will be afforded protection through environmental designations and the use of green belt policy, Countryside Policy Areas and other protections.

There are many strands to the preparation of this Plan. As well as undertaking extensive in-house research assessment and analysis, the Planning Service consults widely with a range of statutory agencies including the local council, Roads Service, Water Service and Environment and Heritage Service.

This report is an account of one particular element of the overall consultation. Community Technical Aid (CTA) was appointed after a successful tender bid to undertake proactive consultation with community and voluntary groups and members of the public in the Armagh area on the Issues Paper stage. This is the preliminary stage of the Plan preparation and one which provides an early opportunity to influence the content of the Area Plan. We undertook consultation both prior to and after publication of the Issues Paper over a period from October 2003 to June 2004.

The findings of the entire consultation are detailed in this report. Section 2 provides background information on the rationale for the consultation approach. Section 3 outlines the methodology used. Section 4 is an account of the consultation findings from all stages of the public and community consultation and Section 5 provides concluding comments.

This report details the views of the hundreds of people who participated in numerous ways throughout the consultation period. We have used our judgement in collating and summarising their views while ensuring that the content and emphasis is not compromised.

This report was submitted to the Planning Service in June 2004 and thereafter issued to everyone who participated in the consultation.

2. Background to the Consultation

Community Technical Aid has facilitated public and community consultation on behalf of the Planning Service on six Area Plans including the Armagh Area Plan. Consultation of this nature is good practice and is indicative of the changes that have taken place within government and the importance now placed on the need to involve local people in the planning of their communities.

Communities are now helped to more effectively and proactively influence the framework for development in their local areas.

CTA welcomes these changes and is hopeful, as is the community in Armagh, that the ultimate success will be measurable in the policies and proposals contained in the Armagh Area Plan 2018.



3. Methodology

Community Technical Aid divided the Armagh Area Plan consultation into two stages. A preliminary fact finding and information exchange stage was undertaken from October 2003 to March 2004.

Following publication of the Armagh Issues Paper in April 2004, the second stage, which mainly involved public meetings and community consultation events, lasted from April 2004 to June 2004.

The main tasks and key steps undertaken during the first stage included:

- identification of community, voluntary, environmental and equality groupings within the Armagh City and District Council area using in-house information and local District Council, sub-regional and regional sources;
- preparation of an information paper for groups on the Armagh Area Plan to inform groups of the process and help them engage in the consultation (the Planning Service also prepared a briefing paper for groups);
- writing to over 280 groups in October 2003 and encouraging them to get involved, register their interest in the process and send written comments and papers on the issues facing the community in Armagh;
- contacting representative organisations for the nine equality groupings identified by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and conducting structured interviews with those representing ethnic minorities and email or telephone surveys with the others;
- arranging and holding three community information and exchange meetings in December 2003 to facilitate initial dialogue between the community and Planning Service and to gather the main or strategic issues in the community. These meetings were held in Markethill, Keady and Armagh on 2, 3 and 4 December 2003 respectively.

As a final step all groups who had expressed an interest but who had not actively participated to date were contacted again by letter, email or telephone and encouraged to submit written comments and needs analyses, audits or community survey information.

During the intervening period from January 2004 to the publication of the Issues Paper in April 2004, a series of community outreach and information sessions was held with community groups in areas of weaker community infrastructure. These sessions were designed to inform those groups who would not otherwise have participated in the process of the scope of planning, how an Area Plan works and why involvement in the consultation stage of the Armagh Area Plan was important. The rationale for these meetings was thus to give weaker communities an informed opportunity to participate. This links with CTA's belief that all communities should be given a meaningful opportunity to participate in the plan process. We held five sessions during the community outreach

programme which took place in February and March 2004. The information gathered from these sessions is incorporated into the consultation findings in Section 4.

The steps undertaken during the second stage of the consultation from April to June 2004 included:

- a public information session held to coincide with the launch of the Issues Paper on 5 April 2004, to inform members of the public about the forthcoming meetings and answer any queries, and to assist them in making relevant comments on the Area Plan;
- Planning Service setting up a hyperlink on its website - this was designed to enable users to download copies of the Issues Paper and CTA's report of the first stage of the consultation and to submit comments on the Paper to Planning Service for analysis by CTA and inclusion in this report;
- eight consultation events including six public meetings and two community drop-in sessions throughout the Armagh area from 6 May 2004 to 1 June 2004;
- focus group meetings with representatives of Section 75 groupings (to supplement the equality information already gathered from equality organisations during the preliminary stage of the consultation) including a women's group, an older people's group, a young people's group and a disability group as well as information gathered from Travellers and the Chinese community.

All of the above contributed to what was a wide ranging and inclusive consultation process. As many people and groups as possible were contacted, assisted, encouraged and given the opportunity to actively participate in discussion on the future needs of the Armagh District. Towards the end of the second stage, after completion of the consultation meetings and focus group sessions, we contacted community groups in areas which we felt had not been adequately represented. Community groups in these areas were sent questionnaires asking questions relevant to their communities and thereby given a further opportunity to express their views and highlight community needs.



4. Consultation Findings

Findings from all events, discussions and meetings have been categorised and summarised under the following headings:

- strategic issues (issues relevant to the whole Plan area);
- locational issues (issues specific to settlements within the Armagh area);
- consultation with equality groupings; and
- community and voluntary groups' written submissions.

The section ends with an evaluation of the consultation events .



4.1 Strategic Issues

Housing Development and the Protection of Settlement Character

There were conflicting views expressed on housing development trends experienced in the Plan area in recent years. Some settlements were said to be under considerable pressure and had experienced too much development. This was said in light of the fact that roads, infrastructure and community facilities had often not kept pace with the rate of new development. Many settlements were said to be unsustainable as a result. The fact that Armagh is within the commuter belt for Craigavon, Portadown, Newry and Belfast was said to have exacerbated this problem for settlements in or near these locations.

Many people are said to be moving to the Armagh District due to its location and accessibility to key employment centres, because house prices are lower than in other areas and because of the amenity value provided by the natural environment. Particular settlements are experiencing an increase in development more than others and as a result their character and built environments are said to be at risk. These include: Derryhale, Richhill, Loughgall, Milford and Tandragee. The impact of the 'dormitory settlement' phenomenon (where people locate to a village or town and sleep there but work, shop and socialise elsewhere) was described as having a devastating effect on the economic and social fabric of community life in the areas affected. Community spirit is suffering and with a corresponding low level of services and facilities (including closure of those that previously existed), poor accessibility and inadequate transportation for those without a private car, over-stretched infrastructure (roads, water and sewage services) and some destruction of the natural and built environment, some said that these settlements are becoming less attractive places to live.

Housing Allocation Figures and Growth

The Armagh Issues Paper outlines the Planning Service's draft allocation of the housing growth figures established by the Regional Development Strategy (RDS). The increased figure of 5,650 housing units for the District was assessed by the Planning Service against the seven criteria set down in the RDS. A preliminary allocation for Armagh City, the towns, the villages, small settlements and for the rural area has been made. These housing figures were queried at all of the consultation events. Some participants do not want the level of housing development allocated to their area. Others said the overall figure of 5,650 is too low and the allocation awarded to many settlements (by inference) is too low also.

Some expressed concern at the housing allocations and their ability to accommodate expected growth over the Plan period to 2018.

With the exception of Derryhale and Milford and to a lesser extent Armagh City, most participants said that the housing allocation figures are too low and will hamper effective development and growth of the Armagh District over the life of the Area Plan.

Social Housing

While there was limited discussion on social housing, those who discussed the subject said that there is a need for housing provision other than that provided by the private sector. This was highlighted as an issue for Armagh City and several towns and villages.

Addressing the need for social housing was recognised as a factor that should be carefully considered and planned so that the integration of balanced and mixed housing areas can develop.

In terms of social inclusion and the growth in private housing development, some discussion focused on the need for more social housing development to achieve balance in the housing sector in Armagh.

Affordable Housing

Rising house prices and the increasing attractiveness of the Armagh District have contributed to the increasing problem of affordability in the housing market. While recognising that this is a regional (and national) problem, particularly because of low interest rates, participants did say that young people especially are faced with the difficulty of having to move further out of urban areas and the commuter belt district to buy an affordable house.

It was suggested that developers should be obliged to provide a percentage of affordable housing in developments through the Area Plan once a need for affordability is clearly shown.



Housing in Rural Areas

It was said that rural people often find difficulty in obtaining planning permission for new dwellings in the countryside and participants asked if the Area Plan could facilitate rather than restrict growth in rural areas. This, it was said, would help to ensure that rural communities can become more sustainable. Some participants from more rural areas (especially areas outside development limits) said that planning controls have in the past been too restrictive. They asked not for a complete relaxation of control, but for some balance and for some cognisance to be taken of the need to encourage growth in rural areas.

Other participants did however stress the need for a sensitive approach so that the countryside does not become over-developed.

A few suggestions were made to help remedy the situation: the re-use of older and vacant or derelict buildings in the countryside rather than exclusively permitting new build; the prohibition of high density housing developments in rural areas and small settlements; and the promotion of a traditional design for housing in rural areas.

Other Housing Issues

Some participants said that retrospective planning permission should not be granted for housing developments already under way or completed. They also suggested the imposition of substantial fines on developers who demolish buildings and/or remove important trees or hedgerows before a housing development takes place, again without the benefit of planning permission.

A number of participants suggested that any land zoned for housing which has not been developed within a prescribed number of years should be de-zoned and alternative sites should be sought in an attempt to keep house prices stable.

Roads and Transportation

Participants raised a number of concerns about the level of traffic throughout Armagh City and the wider District as well as a number of road safety issues. Many participants called for developers to take more responsibility for traffic impacts resulting from new housing developments. They suggested that the Planning Service and developers should carry out accurate traffic surveys as part of traffic impact assessments that should be undertaken prior to planning permission being granted. Areas under particular pressure, it was said, should be identified in the Area Plan and developers should have an obligation to upgrade roads as necessary as part of the planning approval process.

A call from a number of participants asked the Planning Service to put pressure on Translink to provide adequate levels of public transport to service growing populations in the city, towns, villages and rural areas. Some participants discussed the benefits of re-opening the disused railway line, however, it was acknowledged that in a number of locations the track bed has been built on and that the re-opening of the line would be impossible.

Some participants recognised that poor roads infrastructure is a hindrance to industrial development and job creation in the District. They said that as the ports in the region and the motorway are difficult to access from Armagh there is a resultant negative impact on existing, as well as possible, industrial development in the area.

A few participants suggested that freight haulage firms should be prohibited from using rural roads where two container lorries cannot easily pass. Others highlighted the problems they face when large lorries pass through towns and villages where no bypass schemes exist.

Many participants stressed the need for adequate footpaths and cycle paths. This was considered to be an equality issue, where, in their opinion, pedestrians and cyclists should have standards equivalent to road users. Further, it was requested that Roads Service maintains existing pavements, footpaths and cycle ways as a matter of urgency.

Many participants highlighted difficulties with parking in Armagh City and towns and villages in the District. There was a call for the Area Plan to address the need for traffic management and parking and also to provide off-street parking in existing housing estates.

Infrastructure

Many participants considered the sewage, water and roads infrastructure in the Armagh area to be under considerable pressure from new housing developments, and were keen to see necessary infrastructural improvements in settlements being made prior to further developments taking place.

General comments were made by participants about the poor condition of the sewage system throughout the region. This was said to be important especially in light of the strict EC regulations that now exist for both sewerage and water systems.

The problem of inadequate sewage system infrastructure was considered to be particularly acute in the settlements of Milford, Loughgall and Richhill, and a number of participants suggested that a moratorium on development should be enforced in areas where existing infrastructure is unable to cope with current pressures.

A number of participants said that the road infrastructure in the Armagh District needs to be upgraded to enable it to cope with additional pressure from expected developments.

Industry

Many participants called for the Planning Service to seek community input into identifying sites for industrial land. It was considered to be important that any industrial development has adequate parking facilities.

A number of participants acknowledged the importance of cross border trade and investment. There was a call therefore for the Plan to facilitate cross border growth, particularly in areas close to the border such as Middletown and Keady where there is a stated need for small business units.

It was acknowledged that any growth in industry must be matched by a growth in appropriate housing. It was therefore requested that the Plan zones industrial land according to population growth and housing development areas.

Retailing

The retailing sector in the Armagh District was said to be in serious need of support and facilitation of growth and expansion. Most participants expressed their concerns over the lack of substantial retailing anchors in Armagh City and referred to earlier times when it had been a thriving shopping destination and employment centre. Concerns were expressed that Armagh as a district is losing out to growth locations identified and supported in the RDS, for example Newry and Craigavon. It was said that Armagh's retailing potential is being lost and the population of Armagh is spending money elsewhere.

While acknowledging that the Area Plan cannot deliver retailing initiatives, the Area Plan team was encouraged to prepare a retailing policy for Armagh City that would encourage, direct and then support the growth of new retailing ventures. This argument was made at most of the consultation

meetings, particularly in conjunction with a realisation that tourism alone will not revitalise the economy of Armagh.

Green Belt and Countryside Policy Areas

There was a general discussion on the operation of the green belt policy and the effect of Countryside Policy Area designations. Conflicting comments were made with some participants saying that these policies are too restrictive and others saying that they are necessary for effective protection of settlement boundaries, important environmental areas and areas of high scenic value.

The need for a balance to be struck was mentioned, with reference to the need for protection of the countryside and its assets without that protection stifling countryside development and sustainable rural growth.



Equality and New TSN

A number of issues were raised regarding equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. Some participants mentioned that there are access issues in Armagh City and Markethill. In Armagh City it was said that the pavements are narrow and few have dropped kerbs to allow for easier access, especially for people in wheelchairs.

There was concern over the level of parking in the pedestrian area of the city and in the District towns. Cars block through-routes and footpaths resulting in restricted movement by people with disabilities, older, less mobile people or parents with prams.

Participants were generally in favour of the Building Control regulations which govern the construction of new housing and access to public places. They acknowledged that good access benefits all members of society and not solely those with mobility issues. However, there was concern that there is a deficit of adapted or accessible housing available in Armagh at present and a subsequent call was made for the Area Plan to zone appropriate land to enable providers to ensure an adequate supply is available in the next ten years.

In relation to housing for special needs a number of issues were raised. In some areas, such as Keady and Middletown, participants suggested that the ethnic minority populations in these communities need housing to meet their distinct needs. In other areas it was said that there is a lack of sheltered accommodation in settlements for older people resulting in members of the population relocating to Armagh City. Participants agreed that for many older people it was not acceptable to have to move from their local communities.

It was said that the ethnic minority population in Armagh is increasing with immigration from other countries into the Armagh area. People from China, Lithuania, Portugal, Russia and Bulgaria are working in mushroom farms and factories in and around Armagh and Dungannon and across the border and are living in mostly private accommodation in the Armagh area. Their needs should be assessed by the Planning Service especially in view of their housing and employment requirements. While still a “hidden” section of the community, the Area Plan team was urged nonetheless to assess and cater for the needs of this growing ethnic minority population.

Community Facilities

An issue raised by many participants from the District was the lack of facilities for young people. Young people often have to travel to Newry or Portadown to access services although it was said that in some areas local GAA or sports clubs cater for the needs of young people involved in sport. Many participants believed there is a community facility deficit in many settlements. A number of participants said that they are being unfairly treated by the local council as well as other government agencies in terms of the lack of provision of facilities. There is a fear that in some areas where there are no facilities for young people anti-social behaviour may result.

It was stressed that there is a need for developers to plan and build adequately resourced developments. This should include play areas for younger children, safer environments and road layouts and adequate community facilities.

There is a need for a large sports facility to cater for all interests in the Council area as existing sports facilities in the District are small scale and piecemeal.

The Planning Service was asked to ensure that public provision keeps pace with private housing developments and that providers of community facilities and services (the Council in particular) need to realistically assess the way forward on this central issue in the Area Plan.

Built Environment

The importance of the protection and preservation of the character of the many towns and villages in the Armagh District with historic buildings and historic settlement patterns was appreciated by the local population. However, there were concerns over recent inappropriate development within the Armagh City Conservation Area and the loss of historic buildings in this area.

Although participants acknowledged that within the Armagh area there is an issue of unsightly derelict buildings in need of redevelopment, they were of the opinion that historic buildings, façades and streetscapes should be afforded greater protection through the Area Plan. They also said there is a need for more stringent planning enforcement and more severe penalties imposed on developers who demolish buildings unlawfully.

Natural Environment

A number of participants said the Area Plan should afford greater protection to Armagh's natural environment and wildlife habitats. Participants were particularly concerned about the removal of unprotected, but nonetheless important, trees, hedgerows and marsh areas that has been taking place throughout the Armagh area.

There was consensus among those who discussed the subject that trees throughout the Armagh District, and in Armagh City in particular should be afforded the utmost protection by the planning system through the use of Tree Preservation Order (TPO) designations to prevent developers from removing them, and to impose fines on those who do so. Participants also said that the planting of trees and hedgerows should be encouraged throughout the Plan area, and that the Area Plan can encourage this through a strong statement on the natural environment.

In terms of protecting the environment and providing access to the countryside, participants said the Council has not adequately maintained and managed environmental areas, for example at Folly Glen which, it was said, has been allowed to become overgrown and neglected. Clearance by the Council of trees and important flora at the Old Friary was another example given of what residents perceive to be poor environmental management.

Participants commented on the problem of illegal dumping along the Armagh border and the poor condition of the Newry Canal and Blackwater River. Various environmental locations in the Armagh District were highlighted as being worthy of protection and enhancement in the Area Plan proposals including: Derryhale Marshes; Loughgall's orchard district; Clare Glen; Newry Canal; Blackwater River; and Armagh's disused railway line and associated natural corridors.

Tourism

A number of tourism issues were raised during the consultation meetings with participants recognising that while there are many tourist attractions throughout the Armagh area, the tourism potential of the District overall is not being adequately exploited.

Some participants criticised Armagh City and District Council for not having a visionary strategy and for the perceived piecemeal approach it has taken in the development and support of tourism in the city. While the Navan Fort Centre is being re-opened, many were aggrieved at the news that the Palace Stables will close as a direct consequence. Participants asked why the District cannot benefit from having a more realistic and holistic approach to tourism regarding: what facilities and attractions are needed and should be provided; what the tourist needs as a complement to these attractions in terms of accommodation, services and facilities; and what role tourism can play in the development of the economy of Armagh.

Participants stressed that it is vital that the reinvigoration of the tourist sector be supported and facilitated by the forthcoming Area Plan. For example the significance of St Patrick to Armagh could be capitalised particularly if there was a joint initiative for Armagh and Downpatrick concentrating on the historical facts connecting St Patrick to both locations.

While some participants said that they believed that there has been an over emphasis and too much money spent on tourism initiatives on Armagh City and the Navan Fort Centre to the detriment of other areas in the District, most participants acknowledged the importance of the historical cathedrals and Navan Fort, and said that they should remain as the main focus for tourism in the Armagh District. Participants said tourism opportunities in the District need to be explored and increased, and that in order to encourage more people to visit in the future, a more integrated approach to the promotion of tourist attractions and facilities in the Armagh area is needed.

Participants highlighted the natural resource of Armagh's countryside and waterways and their untapped tourism potential, and said that these tourist attractions should be promoted in the Area Plan. It was suggested that the Plan should facilitate and encourage public access for outdoor pursuits and leisure activities, such as mountain biking, walking, hiking and angling, and that sites of archaeological interest such as Rathrillick outside Middletown, should be signposted and promoted as tourist attractions. There was also public support for the opening of the Lagan Canal Navigational System and the Newry Canal section in particular.

Participants commented that apart from the Armagh City Hotel and Gosford Forest Park Caravan Site there is a lack of accommodation for tourists in the Armagh District. They said that there is a need for more hotels, bed and breakfasts and caravan parks, to cater for people visiting tourist sites both in Armagh City and around the District. Suggestions included a new caravan park to be located near the site of Navan Fort and perhaps the provision of accommodation facilities within the city's Palace Stables building.

Gosford Castle and Forest Park - At a time when there is a degree of uncertainty over the future of Gosford Castle and Forest Park, participants recognised Gosford as a unique resource in the Armagh District and said that its tourism potential should be seriously considered before any decisions over its future are made.

It was said that the Forest Park's natural environment and caravan park facilities need to be better promoted so that more visitors will use the outdoor activities there. The need for the provision of more parking to accommodate these visitors was also highlighted. It was suggested that the history of Gosford Castle and its occupation by American troops during World War II could be explored as a possible visitor attraction.

The population of Markethill is said to be proud of Gosford Castle and Forest Park and many residents said that the Castle should be given further protection through policies and proposals in the Area Plan. Some participants said that in the past links between Gosford and Markethill have not been strong and that local people have not taken full advantage of the Forest Park for recreational activities. It was said that any future development of Gosford Castle and Forest Park should include discussion and involvement with the community in Markethill, and that local businesses should be able to fully benefit from any commercial opportunities that may arise.

Participants urged the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to be transparent by informing the Planning Service about any future plans for Gosford Castle and Forest Park so that they can be both reflected in, and supported by, the forthcoming Area Plan.

Navan Fort - Navan Fort and the Navan Centre were mentioned by many participants particularly from a point of view of tourism and protection of the natural environment. From a tourism perspective local people welcomed the announcement that the Centre will re-open at the end of 2004. They were however critical of the Council's decision to close Palace Stables and queried its lack of vision and absence of a well integrated tourism strategy for the District.



Navan Fort was highlighted as a unique and invaluable asset to the District. Although the site is protected, some participants mentioned that with nearby quarrying activities the integrity and setting of such an important site are being compromised. It was said that quarrying together with the removal of whin bushes and the resultant loss of natural habitats and birds around the Fort is regrettable.

The Area Plan team was urged to place a greater emphasis on the strategic significance of Navan Fort and to enforce stricter planning controls in and around the area.

Open Space and Play Space

Many participants said that the Council has neglected many areas in the District with regard to the provision of open space, play space and playing fields. They urged the Council to address this issue and through consultation with the Planning Service ensure that there is a more equitable distribution of these facilities and related zonings throughout the District.

It was emphasised that existing areas of open space should be protected so that re-zoning does not take place. In Armagh City there is apparently a lack of adequate playing fields and sports facilities for young people, and therefore more recreational areas should be provided.

A number of settlements outside Armagh City were highlighted as having inadequate recreational and open space.

It was stressed that both developers and the District Council need to be responsible for providing and maintaining recreational and open space.

Area Plan Process Issues

Participants made a number of comments relating to the process of preparing the Area Plan, as follows:

- community consultation is welcome but the outcome (in the Area Plan) must reflect the needs and desires expressed by the community;

- the community needs access to the background information used by the Planning Service when preparing the Issues Paper and the appraisal of settlements information in particular;
- the figures in the Issues Paper are misleading and at times inaccurate;
- the meetings were useful and informative but sometimes the introductions were lengthy and participants did not have adequate opportunities to discuss their needs in depth;
- all maps used at the consultation events need to be up-to-date and accurate;
- participants hope that the Area Plan team takes their views into account and that the Area Plan consultation is not a “cosmetic” exercise;
- the meeting advertisements were not stimulating enough to attract a cross section of the community;
- the meetings were not adequately advertised;
- the Draft Plan should be prepared as a matter of urgency given that it is a 15 year plan and there is a need to provide the development framework and guidance now and not one third of the way into that 15 year period; and
- the Council and the Planning Service were urged to work together to prepare an Area Plan that will effectively address the needs of the people of Armagh and provide them with a District which can grow and develop in a sustainable way in the period up to 2018.

Other Issues

Several issues and comments raised by participants are outside the remit of the Area Plan and were comments or observations of a general nature. They included:

- there should be joined up thinking in government and a move towards the integrated approach to governance and action promised in the RDS;
- inconsistencies in the planning system need to be addressed;
- the planning system appears to favour developers;
- it would have been useful to have seen some input and participation from councillors at the public consultation events;
- planning policies need to be adhered to and there should be no ambiguity regarding how policies are applied;
- planning policy for housing in rural areas should be re-examined as it is difficult to get planning permission in the countryside and policies do not respect Northern Ireland’s settlement pattern and the desire to live in the open countryside.

4.2 Locational Issues

Many issues and comments related to specific locations within the Plan area either in the city or in the towns and villages and other settlements throughout the District. These generally relate to the same topics covered in the Strategic Issues section but are more illustrative of the points being made at a local level.

Armagh City

Housing

The existing housing market in Armagh City was seen by some participants as healthy but others said there is too much development and this is having a detrimental effect on roads infrastructure in and around the city.

It was mentioned by some people that the proposed allocation of 2,000 new units for the city (as detailed in the Issues Paper) is too high for Armagh City. Reasons given included the scale and setting of the city and how this could be disrupted by too much housing development. However others said that more people should be living in the central area and that this would help with the regeneration and rejuvenation of an otherwise declining city.

The number of derelict buildings, previously used sites (brownfield land) and opportunity ‘gap’ sites in the city were said to be appropriate locations for new housing development. Several participants said that experience elsewhere would show that new life is breathed into a city when housing is provided in the central area.

In relation to this point, ‘living over the shop’ was suggested as another way of achieving the 24 hour presence that a rejuvenated city can often achieve.

There was some discussion on the fact that more people could be encouraged to live in Armagh City in refurbished and re-used older buildings. These buildings could also be the mechanism for providing affordable housing units, social housing units and accommodation for people with disabilities.

The latter point was a particular one in relation to people with physical accessibility issues. Armagh City was said to be more accessible than other parts of the District and with the availability of shops, services and transport there, some said that it is the ideal location for adapted housing units and housing specifically targeted for people with disabilities. This type of housing in the city would also be suitable for older people who may be experiencing mobility problems.

Participants stressed that new housing in the city should be designed to a high standard. In recognition of the historical significance and calibre of the built environment in the city, new buildings should be carefully designed to ensure developments are in keeping with the Georgian and Victorian architecture and that development respects the historic (medieval) street pattern.

There was some concern expressed over the issue of social housing in the city. Existing accommodation provided as rehabilitative units for people with specific needs already causes some concern for residents in Armagh City. This concern relates to the placement of people into these units seemingly without proper care or attention being paid to those residents' needs and the needs of other people living around them.

Accommodation of this nature is often a 'hostel' and yet is not described by the developer as a hostel at the development stage. This was said to be misleading and not a realistic way to provide accommodation for people with specific needs. In the future the Planning Service was urged to consider zoning housing areas in the city for specific uses - social, affordable and special needs. This could be done, it was said, in a planned and therefore sustainable manner which it was argued is within the remit of an Area Plan and a planning authority.

Housing development in the city should also be linked to roads infrastructural improvements. The roads in and around the city were said to be unable to cope at present and new city centre housing needs to be matched therefore by road improvement schemes. These improvements should be particularly concentrated on the ring road and the need for a north link road (as opposed to the east link road scheme which is forthcoming under Roads Service proposals).

As well as arguing for new housing in the city, participants said housing developments should have adequate parking and community facilities.

Retailing in the City Centre

Many participants mentioned on several occasions that Armagh at one time had a vibrant and thriving retail sector. The number of shops and retail 'attractions' has however declined and the economy of the city is suffering.

In terms of the relevance to the Area Plan it was stressed that steps could be taken to encourage retailers to invest in the city by zoning land for retail schemes.

While acknowledging that the Department for Social Development is responsible for regeneration, some participants did stress the importance of the Planning Service working in conjunction with all departments and agencies to identify a retailing policy and vision for Armagh City.

The Area Plan team was urged to consult with Roads Service to address the specific traffic and parking issues in the core of the Armagh shopping district. At present it would appear that hampered traffic flows are causing problems for existing shoppers and do little to attract new shoppers to the city.

Overall the economic environment in the city was said to be weak - rates are high, land and opportunity sites have not been identified, parking is limited (especially free parking), traffic congestion could be avoided if adequate traffic management schemes were put in place and physical accessibility issues in the city need to be adequately addressed.

On the speciality retail front it was suggested that Armagh City could develop as a location known for its book shops and antiques shops. Regarding the former, many highlighted the fact that Armagh has no book shop, despite its renown as the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland.

If establishing bookshops and other speciality stores could somehow be encouraged and facilitated by the Area Plan, participants believed this would help not only the tourist market but local shoppers. In addition this would help create more local employment in the city and add more vibrancy to a rejuvenated city centre.



Participants said if the retailing sector in Armagh City is to be successfully revitalised through the Area Plan, it must be coupled with a restriction on out-of-town shopping centres. The recent trend in the development of large retailing centres and parks outside of main towns was criticised in this respect, especially in terms of the impact this trend has had on urban centres like Armagh.

Armagh's market moved to the Shambles area in 1990 and some people believe if it was relocated to Market Square the ambience, vitality and attractiveness of the city would be enhanced.

Innovative private sector retailing developments in other areas (for example in Monaghan and Newry) were cited as good examples of retailing schemes that have rejuvenated local economies. Armagh should be able to capitalise on cross border traffic and the associated spending power of shoppers from across the border.

It was argued that free parking (although outside the remit of the Area Plan) and an enforced and improved pedestrianisation scheme in the city centre, would contribute greatly to the rebirth of Armagh City.

Recognising that large scale employers (particularly in the industrial and manufacturing sectors) are a feature of the past, participants did say that retailing investment would create more jobs and keep more of the indigenous population working and shopping in Armagh City.

Armagh city, in addition to having a need for retailing investment, also needs restaurants, tourist accommodation and more provision for the 'after 5.00 pm' economy. These types of development have land use implications and the Planning Service was therefore urged to construct a proactive and facilitative framework for the rejuvenation of the city's retailing sector.

Older people also said that shopping in Armagh City is limited and that without adequate public transport or access to a private car, they are disadvantaged when trying to access retail services.

Traffic, Transportation and Roads Infrastructure in the City Centre

Participants who mentioned traffic and transportation in the city said that there is a need for a ring road (bypass) around the city and full completion of the link road system which was programmed over 30 years ago. While accepting that the Roads Service is undertaking a transport assessment in the Armagh area and will consider if the completion of the ring road is feasible, some people questioned the likelihood of the road scheme going ahead given the financial investment required. It was said that the scheme could also be compromised if a large scale development proposal on the Mullinure Road goes ahead. This development if built will compromise the required road line of the ring road scheme. Participants asked how the Area Plan will handle this issue.

There are reported traffic problems and congestion (especially at school times and on market day) in and around various locations in the city. These locations were highlighted as including College Street, the Shambles, the Mall area and Lower English Street.

Many participants said that the roads in and out of the city cannot sustain any more traffic. Traffic flows throughout the city area need to be easier to enable the economy to prosper and to make the city more attractive to its residents and visitors.

Armagh City's links to other urban centres was discussed in some detail especially the need for better transportation links to Portadown and Newry.

If 2,000 more housing units are to be allocated to Armagh, (as proposed by the draft housing allocation figures in the Issues Paper), then the capacity of existing roads and infrastructure is questionable.

Tourism in the City Centre

While there are numerous tourist attractions in Armagh City, some participants were frustrated at the lack of co-ordination and vision afforded by the Council and others in the tourist industry to tourism in the city. The closure of key attractions including Navan Fort, the limited availability of the Planetarium facilities and the future closure of the Palace Stables Heritage Centre were discussed on several occasions. Participants believe that little is being done to encourage and facilitate real investment in tourism. The disused Armagh Gaol was also referred to with questions asked as to how the Area Plan will treat this important site and safeguard it from future development proposals.

Many people stressed that Armagh City has much to offer in terms of tourism but not enough is being done to exploit its full potential. The 'Georgian City' theme should be promoted and encouraged more by the Area Plan. Visionary policy statements were thus called for to ensure that the city's tourism potential is fully exploited and can be sustained.

The attractiveness of the religious history of Armagh City was mentioned and particular reference was made to a holy well - St Patrick's Well - within the city which would be an attraction for visitors but has apparently become inaccessible in recent years.

Built Environment in the City Centre

The unique historic elements of Armagh City and its Georgian and Victorian architecture were said to be Armagh City's most important assets. Participants therefore asked that the Planning Service is cautious about new development and redevelopment projects within the city and is mindful of the Conservation Area status and the need to sensitively develop the central area.

The recent Mall restoration project was quoted by some participants as one example where the materials used and the finished appearance is not, in their view, in keeping with the original Mall design. Specifically the use of limestone coping stones which do not match the original coping stones, the use of modern seating and bins and the use of a resin bound coloured surfacing for the pathways, were described as being out of keeping with the Mall architecture and its original Georgian design. Other examples were given of the construction of new buildings beside the Mall that are not in keeping with the Mall and the surrounding Georgian buildings.

One participant asked if older buildings could be re-used rather than new buildings constructed which do not necessarily blend into the existing streetscape. Barrack Hill was cited as a good example of a refurbishment scheme. Sainsbury's and the Marketplace Theatre were mentioned as poor examples of blending the new with old.

It was said that the Shambles area of the city has been generally neglected. The area is used at night by drinkers and there are a lot of alleyways where young people congregate. This is unfortunate given that there is an old people's facility in this area. More sensitive analysis by the Planning Service of the compatibility of land uses in the city was urged to address this in future.

Some participants asked for the redevelopment of the Upper English Street area. They welcomed the new pre-school facility between the Cathedral and Upper English Street, saying that developments of this nature would help to regenerate this part of the city.

Although many people (particularly those representing the views of disabled users) called for the pedestrianisation of the city centre to be more effective and enforced, there were some traders and shop owners who by contrast said that the pedestrian scheme should be abolished. They said that the pedestrianisation scheme puts traders at a disadvantage and if discontinued would allow the traffic flow to return to Market Street, Lower English Street, Scotch Street, Barrack Street and around Mall West. They believed that the pedestrianisation scheme contributed to the closure of some businesses in the city.

Natural Environment

Armagh City was in the past said to have had numerous green areas and more trees, hedgerows and woodland areas. Within the core area there were many valuable trees which contributed to the natural setting of the city. Many of these trees have now been removed to accommodate housing and commercial developments.

One particular example cited was the loss of the extensive woodland cleared for the Armagh City hotel development. This woodland was apparently home to many important native tree species and a colony of owls. Due to inadequate protection afforded by the Armagh Area Plan 2004, the site was deemed suitable for development and was thus lost. Many residents were dissatisfied at this loss.

In the adjacent Palace Stables Demesne beside the Old Friary ruins ancient flora were lost due to a clearance scheme undertaken by Armagh City and District Council.

Both of these areas (the woodland at the hotel and at the Old Friary), while not designated as nature reserves or Areas of Special Scientific Interest, are typical of the problem that can arise when non-statutorily designated yet important natural sites are lost. It was stressed that the Area Plan has a critical role to play here ensuring that as much of the natural environment as possible is protected. Reference was made to the removal of trees along the Killylea Road. Mature poplars (which were 50-100 years old) have been removed to facilitate a new housing development. These trees, while not benefitting from Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) provided valuable visual screening and a natural setting along one of the main routes into the city. Their loss was something that could have been avoided, it was said. The emphasis in new developments should be on the retention of trees and hedgerows as opposed to removing them to facilitate development. New trees, some said, can never have the effect provided by mature trees.

The Armagh Area Plan should have a policy on this issue and should insist that all existing trees and vegetation in the city (regardless of TPOs and/or other statutory designations) should be maintained and factored into the planning process as key site requirements.

When informed that there are only a limited number of TPOs in the Armagh District as a whole, participants said that this important planning tool is inadequately used. They were dissatisfied to learn that in a District as archaeologically and historically important as Armagh, more TPOs do not exist.

Other environmentally important areas that should be protected included the area around Callan Bridge, where it was said that existing trees and hedgerows need to be protected, and Creeveroe Road (approximately half mile from Navan Fort) in the area known as the King's Stables where ancient trees and hedgerows have already been lost.

There were many ecological niches in and around the city referred to, mainly wetland areas, which have been drained and used as agricultural land. The loss of these areas, including land around Traybog, was regrettable, it was said.

Open spaces and green wedges should also be retained within the city, for example the open space at Mullacreevy Park; the land previously designated in the Armagh Area Plan 2004 (zoning 26.2.1) to the east of Mullacreevy Park should be re-zoned as open space; and the open space designation (paragraph 28.6.3) should be protected as open space.

The 2004 Area Plan also designated land (paragraph 28.6.5) as an open space wedge. One participant said that this status should be maintained in the new Plan.

Equality and Accessibility in the City Centre

There were many accessibility problems identified in the city. Representatives of disability user groups and individuals said that the city's pedestrianisation scheme for example was useful for people with disabilities, however the area is being misused by drivers and has become a parking area. This causes problems for wheelchair users. It was said that the Area Plan should try to effectively and seriously tackle the issue of physical accessibility in the city.

Thomas Street was quoted as one example of a street which has no ramps or slopes for wheelchairs and narrow pavements which cause problems for people with disabilities. More needs to be done to rectify this situation. The Area Plan should contain positive and definitive statement and guide for developers as to what is acceptable and good practice in the city. In addition adapted housing schemes should be encouraged in the city with land set aside for such developments.

Folly Glen (which is an Armagh Council owned facility) was said to be in such poor condition that wheelchair users are finding it inaccessible. This is just one example of how difficult it is for people with accessibility issues to use facilities in the city that other people take for granted.

Industry

The general decline of the industrial sector generally and its effect on employment opportunities in the city was discussed. People referred to times when there were large employers (often industrial) in the city. They recognised that this was a feature of past economic development and growth and unlikely to re-emerge but asked the Area Plan to zone land for smaller 'light' industry and start up business units within the city.

Other Issues

Other issues included the need for signage to the public toilets in the city and environmental improvements to the area from the Folly Glen to the Grove Nursery School which has become overgrown, inaccessible and dangerous.

Keady

Housing

Residents in Keady said that there should be more land zoned for housing and a higher than proposed housing allocation for the town. The Annvale Road area and Castleblaney Road were mentioned as particular areas where more housing could be zoned.

Local people said that Keady is a growth area, has a lot of potential and yet is still underdeveloped. The potential for housing growth should therefore be recognised by the Area Plan and land zoned accordingly.

It was mentioned that the housing allocation figures could have been inaccurately calculated as the population figures used for Keady are, in the opinion of some participants, inaccurate. They said the population is more accurately 4,000 and not 3,000 as indicated in the 2001 Census. They asked if the Area Plan could assess the 'real' population of Keady rather than relying on census figures and then plan for housing in the town.



A social housing need was also identified for the town with reference made to the lack of housing provision in Keady and a growing affordability issue for people unable to enter the private housing market.

Roads, Traffic and Transportation

Local people said that traffic management in the town needs to be addressed by the Area Plan. Keady is strategically placed on the through route from Armagh to Dublin and because of this there are high traffic levels. This is causing problems for local roads through the town and local people said that this is no longer sustainable. The economy and the quality of life of the local population are both said to be suffering because of heavy (and often HGV vehicles) traffic levels, congestion, pollution and a roads infrastructure that cannot cope.

Some participants said that the main Keady road should be upgraded from a 'B' road to an 'A' road. The improvements that would result, they said, would help alleviate the traffic problems. While recognising that the Area Plan cannot deliver such a scheme they argued that the Plan has a critical role to play in ensuring that the town grows in a sustainable way with all the necessary roads improvements that are required.

The programmed bypass scheme for the town was mentioned with queries as to why this scheme did not proceed and if it will now proceed and be supported by the land use implications in the new Armagh Area Plan.

Overall the need for a comprehensive traffic survey and assessment of the road and transportation needs of Keady was stressed.

There have apparently been little or no improvements made to the road out towards Castleblaney in the past 20 years. Lorry traffic from this area coming into Keady is causing congestion in the town up to Keady Hill and along the Newtownhamilton Road.

Roads Service was said to have discounted the amount of new development (especially housing) in recent years and that both industrial and housing development along the Annvale Road means that this road is now quite dangerous. There is no 30 miles per hour restriction on this road and with houses at both ends of the road and no footpaths, residents find it increasingly difficult and dangerous to walk and get into the town.

Generally the lack of footpaths and street lighting was said to be making it difficult for residents to walk along roads. This is further exacerbated by speeding traffic along roads and average vehicle speeds of 50 miles per hour.

Some people said that only recently a 30 miles per hour speed limit was placed on the Madden Road. This is alleviating traffic problems in the area but there is still a need for new facilities to park and drop off children at the school on Madden Road. Again participants asked if Roads Service and the Planning Service could take this into account when examining the future roads and transport needs of the town.

It is important to highlight that roads and traffic were the main issues raised by local people. These, they said, are the biggest problems the town faces and issues which need urgent attention and assessment by the Area Plan team.

Industry

Local people said that there is a need for industrial growth and appropriate zonings for Keady especially given the closure of two of the town's largest employers in recent times.

Keady is classified as a manufacturing area (according to Invest NI) and yet local people and business owners see little evidence of the support needed to encourage investors to the town. They said that the Plan should proactively identify opportunity sites for industry both within the town centre and outside the town centre.

Open Space and Community Facilities

Local residents said that Keady does not compare favourably to other locations in the Armagh District with regard to open space, play and sports facilities. Land was apparently zoned for playing fields in the town in the past but a scheme has not been developed. Armagh City and District Council was criticised on this issue in terms of having a statutory duty to provide play space, playing fields and open space and, in participants' opinions, doing very little in Keady.

Recreational and community facilities in the town are said to be limited to the Old Mill facility and the council-funded community centre. It was stressed that the latter is in need of investment and an overhaul.

Open space, leisure and recreational projects and facilities are needed in the town. An existing recreational facility at Carnagh Wood was said to be in such poor condition that the community cannot use it.

One participant said that land should be set aside or zoned in Keady for a golf course. Although acknowledging that the proposal would need to be put forward by a private developer, the need for the land to be zoned in the Area Plan in the first instance was emphasised.

In terms of community facilities, local people said that Keady has been treated unfairly by the Council. There is in their opinion a lack of facilities especially for young people and older people. Young people need playing facilities with adequate changing facilities and a play park and older people need a parkland area.

In terms of fair or unfair treatment some local people queried Appendix 3 in the Issues Paper: “Evaluation Test Scores”, saying that Keady’s medium score in the community services test is incorrect as Keady has very few community services.

Retailing

Some discussion centred on the need for retailing space (in conjunction with industrial space) outside the town boundary and in particular along the Annvale Road area. Others mentioned the need for the role of retailing to be strengthened in the town centre, saying that the Area Plan should zone land for retailing space within the town boundary. This, it was said should be supported by a positive retailing statement for the town.

Tourism

Keady has little or no tourist accommodation which results in tourists visiting Keady but having to stay in Castleblaney.

Natural tourist attractions should be better exploited and developed for tourists including the potential of the Clay Lakes and the coarse fishing resource which is currently under-utilised.

Markethill

Housing

There was general agreement amongst participants that Markethill has become a desirable location to live. They said that during the ‘Troubles’ Markethill suffered but now people are beginning to recognise the quality of the local built environment in the town. As a result, it was said, Markethill is now under pressure for growth and housing development. Some participants added that the assessment criteria used by the Planning Service to allocate housing figures should take account of the high quality environment. Other participants said that the population profile of Markethill shows a relatively young population as well as a high number of extended families. They recognised this as

unusual but urged the Planning Service to acknowledge it by zoning an adequate amount of housing land to enable an appropriate level of growth which would allow families to stay together.

A number of participants said that some areas of land zoned for housing in the previous plan had not yet been developed. They queried if this land would remain zoned, be de-zoned and if alternatives could be found.

Traffic and Transport

Most participants said that there are inadequate parking facilities in the centre of Markethill. Participants explained that this not only causes congestion in the town centre but could also affect local business opportunities if people cannot easily access shops and services. Participants therefore urged the Planning Service to address the issue of parking in Markethill.

Some participants suggested that the routes into Markethill should be upgraded to encourage more visitors. This could be achieved, they said, through the use of improved road markings and better signs and lighting.

On the issue of public transport, participants accepted that re-opening the railway line would not be a viable option but requested an improved bus service into the town. Some participants said that they feel isolated and have difficulty getting to the city and other towns and villages because of the inadequate bus service.

Built Environment

Participants said there are a few derelict buildings and land where historic buildings have been demolished. They urged the Planning Service to protect Markethill from any further destruction or inappropriate development and to help to promote the regeneration of the town and its environment.

Industry and Employment

Participants acknowledged that there are some derelict buildings in the Main Street and called for the Area Plan to promote the re-use of old buildings for business and retailing. Although there has been housing growth this has not been matched by employment and retail growth and Markethill is becoming a dormitory town as a result, it was said.

Participants suggested that if more land is zoned for business and industrial uses this would facilitate more industrial and employment growth in the town.

Community Facilities

A number of participants said that Markethill has no leisure facilities and said that developers providing new housing should be obliged to provide a reasonable level of recreational, leisure and community facilities.

Equality

A number of participants said that the people in Markethill have been brought together because of the destruction the town suffered as a result of the 'Troubles'. In terms of housing, therefore, they said that private developments have allowed natural integration to occur and they would not be in favour of the Area Plan having policies to promote either integration or segregation.

Participants from Markethill were in favour of policies and proposals to promote accessibility in the town.

Tandragee

Housing

Participants want the Area Plan to promote different types of housing in Tandragee such as affordable housing for first time buyers, social housing and housing for special needs and for older people. Some participants suggested that this should be achieved through the development of mixed tenure schemes.

Generally participants agreed that Tandragee needs more houses. However they accepted that the Planning Service has to balance the pressure for development against need. Some participants considered that the shortage of housing land has disproportionately inflated house prices which has had a direct negative impact on local people. A number of participants suggested that any land zoned for housing which has not been developed within a prescribed number of years should be de-zoned and alternative sites should be sought in an attempt to keep house prices stable. Other participants went further by suggesting that the Planning Service investigates whether land will be available within Tandragee for development prior to it being zoned.

It was suggested that the Area Plan should contain policies to promote the re-use of derelict buildings for housing.

Traffic and Transport

The main concern regarding traffic and transport in Tandragee was the level of through traffic which causes congestion and hazards for pedestrians. Many participants said that Tandragee needs a bypass to alleviate these problems. They said that this was first proposed in the 1960s but has not yet been constructed.

Some participants mentioned the parking problems in the town. They said that there is a lack of parking facilities which is exacerbated by the numbers of heavy goods vehicles.

Environment

A number of participants suggested maintaining the existing green belt and Countryside Policy Areas (CPAs) around Tandragee. Others suggested extending the CPA to include the Orchard area and the area around Clare, south of Tandragee.

Retail

Many participants said that Tandragee town centre does not have a strong economy. They said that there are a number of vacant or derelict premises which create a negative image, for example on Main Street, Corn Market Street and on the junction of Mark Street and Church Street. However they also said that they hoped the Area Plan would contain policies that would help to regenerate the town. Participants also recognised the opportunity that exists to take advantage of the character of the town centre to create a more attractive retail area.

Hamiltonsbawn

Residents said that there has been a substantial housing development in Hamiltonsbawn in recent years to the detriment of the settlement's character, and that the Area Plan needs to protect the settlement from any further inappropriate development. It was suggested that the existing green belt boundary should be extended to protect the countryside around Hamiltonsbawn.

Participants said that the development of new housing in the settlement has not coincided with the provision of additional community facilities and that the sense of community in Hamiltonsbawn has been affected. Specifically the need for the provision of a community centre, public toilets and a children's play area was highlighted.

It was also said that the local school is in need of extension as it is having difficulty coping with the increased number of children due to new developments, and that the local road infrastructure, and the Annareagh Road in particular, has been experiencing problems due to the increase in traffic levels.

Killylea

Residents said that Killylea has grown in recent years and that the Area Plan needs to further support its growth as a sustainable community through the identification of land for industry and small businesses and the promotion of growth in the village's centre.

In terms of housing allocation, it was said that the Planning Service needs to consider that the local school is currently under threat of closure due to low pupil numbers, and would greatly benefit from the provision of additional housing in the area. It was also highlighted that the new church hall facilities that are currently being built will be able to cater for an increase in population in the village and that this is further evidence of the need for more housing.

Residents said that Killylea's strategic location in the District means it can expand into a commuter town, although it was also recognised that the road through Killylea is already under pressure and any future development in the settlement needs to coincide with a road infrastructure upgrade.

Older residents said that transportation and bus services from the village to Armagh City are limited and that older people without access to a car have difficulties accessing services elsewhere.

Other issues in Killylea were said to include: overflowing drains; a lack of adequate community facilities and an inadequately sized community resource facility; and a need for walking and recreational opportunities.

Loughgall

Residents of Loughgall said that the character and beauty of the village needs to be conserved through the Area Plan, and that the Countryside Policy Area to the south of the village should be extended to include the Orchard Area.

The need for additional housing zonings within the village was highlighted, given that the land currently zoned is owned by St Luke's Parish Church and is unlikely to be released for development in the future. It was also said that the land within the village that is owned by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development would be better zoned for housing. There are reported sewerage infrastructure problems within the village which need to be addressed again before future housing development is planned.

Middletown

Housing

The main concern expressed in Middletown focused on the need to ensure a supply of housing to address future need and to sustain the life of the village. Many participants expressed concern over the housing allocation figures as detailed in the Issues Paper. They considered the allocation for Middletown to be too low and requested that it be increased. An example was cited of a recent housing development of 11 houses which were all sold on the first day they were released. It was also said that Middletown has a young age profile which will have a serious impact on the need for more housing in the next ten to 15 years.

Participants said there is a problem with first time buyers and young families in Middletown not being able to buy homes due to the lack of available or affordable houses. It was said that recently a number of people have been forced to move away from Middletown because of this issue. The Planning Service was urged to zone land in Middletown to accommodate a range of housing needs to address this.

A number of participants highlighted the need for the Planning Service to check that land zoned for housing will become available for development, as in the past zoned land has remained undeveloped in Middletown. The call was also made for the development limit to be expanded to cater for future growth.

The proposed new Centre of Excellence for children with autism was discussed. Participants said that the new centre will be on the site of the former St Joseph's Convent and while they are supportive of the proposals they are also aware of the potential impact on the demand for local housing, special needs housing, house prices and the impact on local roads. They asked the Area Plan to take account of these longer term developments on the housing market in Middletown.

A few participants suggested the re-use of derelict buildings in the village for housing. This would help to improve the environment as well as bring new life into the village centre.

Traffic and Transport

One of the main issues discussed was the volume of traffic going through the Main Street in Middletown. Middletown is on the main route from Monaghan to Armagh (and Belfast to Galway) which is a busy cross-border route. It was said that most traffic is generated by the movement of goods, by people crossing the border for cheaper fuel and by people living locally but working in the Republic of Ireland. A previous traffic calming scheme was considered to have been unsuccessful and in need of attention.

Some participants highlighted the need for improved parking facilities in Middletown.

Participants urged Roads Service and the Planning Service to tackle these traffic and transport issues through Area Plan policies. They suggested a number of improvements such as widening the Armagh Road to improve access to Armagh and the M1, providing parking areas and traffic calming in Main Street and redirecting traffic around Middletown rather than through it.

Environment

Participants suggested a number of areas that should be protected through policies in the Area Plan. These included the crannog on the lake at Doogary, Rathtrillick and the area around Derryhaw which has historic links with the Famine and could be developed for tourism.

Tourism

Participants suggested a number of local attractions which could be developed to promote tourism in the area. These included redevelopment of the Ulster Canal and increased access to the Corr River with associated walkways and public facilities. Others suggested greater access to Rathtrillick, the largest rath outside Armagh City, and a need for bed and breakfast accommodation in the village.

Industry and Employment

There was a call for the Area Plan to zone land for adequate industrial uses. Participants said there was a need to create opportunities for small business and office growth in Middletown.

Community Facilities

Some participants said that Middletown lacks facilities for children and young people. They suggested that the play area be improved and that the Area Plan adequately addresses the needs of young people.

Milford

Housing

Milford was said by residents to be under intense pressure from development and experiencing problems associated with its strategic position within the District, as well as new developments putting the village's character under threat.

Given that the proposed housing allocation figure of 95 (as detailed in the Issues Paper) has already been exceeded in Milford, and that there are a number of vacant older houses within the village, residents urged that no further housing development is allowed. As undeveloped land still remains within the existing settlement limit, the importance of the Area Plan protecting the remaining green belt around the settlement to prevent it merging with Armagh City was also stressed.

Environment and Tourism

Participants suggested that polices and proposals in the Area Plan could help to protect the character of a historic village such as Milford, and help to promote its tourism potential. It was suggested that Milford's historic roots and the fact that the village is the home of the penalty kick in soccer, could be built upon. In addition it was said that Milford should become the host of the annual Armagh Show and that with the provision of new tourist accommodation Milford could capitalise on its tourism potential.

Residents also urged that the Plan helps safeguard Milford's natural environment and prevents further trees in the area being removed for development.

Community Facilities

It was said that while Milford has experienced substantial expansion, the quality of services and facilities in the settlement has not kept pace with development. They are reportedly competing with Armagh City, and many key services including the local primary school and post office have closed. There was specifically said to be a lack of adequate children's play facilities, shops, amenities for older people and a bus service.

Roads and Traffic

It was said that the roads, water and sewage infrastructure in Milford are under pressure and will not be able to cope with any further development, including the 37 new houses that are currently proposed for Monaghan Street and Newry Street.

The sewerage system in the village was said to be old and unable to cope with increased pressure from new housing development. In particular, the Manor Hill housing development on Monaghan Street was said to be experiencing a lot of problems with sewage having overflowed onto the street on a number of occasions.

The roads infrastructure in Milford was said to be poor, with congestion problems on the main road, Hill Street, and on William Street, where traffic has increased as a result of the 41 new houses that have recently been built. Speeding on the roads was also highlighted as a problem in the village and it was suggested that speeding ramps are placed along Hill Street.

There was a call from local residents for these road problems, as well as the need for stop and give way signs at the entrance of Manor Hill housing development, to be brought to the attention of the Roads Service. They were also in favour of a moratorium on new development in the settlement until all necessary infrastructure improvements are made. Residents were hopeful that their views and concerns would be taken on board by Planning Service when preparing the new Armagh Area Plan.

Richhill

Housing

A number of participants said that the development limit of Richhill should be extended to allow for more houses to be built. They said that the RDS housing figures are too low and that Richhill needs more housing to sustain its community.

In recent years, it was said, the number of children in the local primary school has risen from 80 to 600. Participants said that to allow these children to stay in their own community in the next ten to 15 years they would need access to affordable housing. It was suggested therefore that the Area Plan takes account of these issues and zones land accordingly. They asked for the development limit to be extended to the south of the village between Maynooth Road and the Brentwood development. It was suggested that the village also be extended to the west along the Tirnascoke Road, which at present is underused and could sustain a higher volume of traffic.

A number of participants also urged the Planning Service to strictly control the numbers of new houses permitted in Richhill. They believe that the village has expanded disproportionately in recent years, has reached saturation point and is in danger of losing its identity as a village. Some participants expressed the view that Richhill has become a dormitory settlement and that the people moving into the newer developments are not integrating into the community. It was said that

Richhill has a deficit of services and facilities and further development is adding to the pressure on the existing facilities. It was also said that some of the roads in Richhill cannot sustain any further housing, especially on the Corcreevy Road, Legahory Road and in Sleepy Valley.

Participants also expressed a concern over the inadequacy of the sewerage system to sustain any increase in development.

A number of participants said many of the new housing developments are not in keeping with the character and setting of the village of Richhill. They called for the Area Plan to contain policies to prevent any further inappropriate housing developments in terms of design, scale and location especially on skyline developments.

Traffic and Transport

Most participants said that Richhill experiences traffic and congestion problems. For example it was highlighted that there is inadequate parking at the school which causes congestion in the village centre.

It was also acknowledged that people who live on the Main Street have difficulties parking near their homes. The recent environmental improvements incorporating parking areas and tree planting have exacerbated an existing traffic problem and this has compounded traffic speeding through the village centre and people trying to access the shops and the Church of Ireland. It was suggested that a pedestrian crossing should be provided on the Main Street .

A few participants mentioned the problem of speeding traffic on the Tirnascobe Road approaching Richhill. It was suggested that traffic calming measures should be introduced on this road to reduce the risk to road users and pedestrians.

There was a call for a traffic management scheme for the whole village to be included in the Area Plan. Participants suggested that it should include parking on the Main Street and the careful use of road humps and double yellow lines. Some expressed the concern that restricted access or parking arrangements in one area could potentially force traffic on to less appropriate streets.

Environment

Many of the environmental concerns in Richhill centred on the protection of the Conservation Area from inappropriate developments.

A number of participants called for the Planning Service to protect the setting of and approaches to Richhill from piecemeal development and to ensure green belt policies and Countryside Policy Areas are strictly adhered to. It was also suggested that walkways along with Tall River into the village centre should be developed.

Community Facilities

Participants suggested that there is a need for community facilities in Richhill. It was said that the new community building would be focused on sports activities and would not be large enough to cater for community or social events such as concerts.

Tynan

Participants from Tynan said that the village has been neglected and suffers from a distinct lack of facilities and services. There is a need for play facilities, tourist facilities (including public toilets) and a community hall or centre. Tourism is a feature of Tynan largely due to the presence of the historically significant Tynan Cross. Many tourists who visit the village to see the Cross find nothing on offer for them in terms of complementary services, including shops, accommodation and other facilities.

Walking in and around Tynan was also said to be difficult given the lack of footpaths. Recreational facilities were therefore said to be in need of attention and action by the Area Plan team.

Clare

It was said that the Countryside Policy Area should be extended southwards to protect the countryside surrounding Clare village and the Clare Glen area. There was support for an increase in rural housing around the settlement, the development of more housing within Clare, as well as the redevelopment of its derelict dwellings, and it was suggested that as the settlement has a local school and church an increase in housing would contribute to a more vibrant and sustainable community. It was highlighted however that roads and sewerage infrastructure problems are in need of attention before any new development goes ahead. Other participants did stress, by contrast, that Clare cannot sustain more housing.

Derryhale

Housing

Derryhale residents (and the community group in particular) said that there should be no further housing development there without a radical road improvement scheme. There is one end of Derryhale (Portadown Road) which is particularly over developed. A few participants did say however that the eastern side of Derryhale could sustain some new housing development.

Residents believe there has been over intensive use of greenfield sites in Derryhale to date. New developments at Brompton Park and Oaklands were particularly criticised. The latter of these attracted specific criticism for the fact that the oak trees were removed by the developer to enable the development to go ahead and then the development was named "Oaklands". The scale and type of

development is spoiling the character of Derryhale and it was said that the settlement is at, or nearing, saturation point.

Some residents asked that land to the rear of bungalows on the Derryhale Road is not developed and that the current development limit should remain. By contrast one participant did say that the development limit between the two middle sections of Derryhale could be joined given this area's suitability for development and that this could result in a natural extension of the settlement. Furthermore it was said that more development within this part of Derryhale would ensure the community can grow in a sustained manner.

Overall many Derryhale residents said that community life is being destroyed by the level of development and the rate at which what is regarded as a "small settlement" is being allowed to grow. This is not sustainable in their opinion and the local population is hopeful that the Area Plan will address these serious problems in the Draft Plan.

Roads and Traffic

Traffic levels in and through Derryhale are high, it was said, and together with roads which are inadequate, narrow and not designed to carry such high volumes of traffic, this is resulting in problems and dangerous conditions for the local population.

The road out of Derryhale is said to be the most dangerous road in terms of the lack of visibility and the difficulty experienced in making a right turn. A roundabout and/or traffic lights are needed here it was suggested.

Local people asked that the Area Plan team (in conjunction with Roads Service) examines the problem and makes provision for traffic management and road improvements before new development is allowed to take place in the settlement. It was suggested that the Area Plan team in defining development sites within Derryhale, insists (through plan policies) that developers make the necessary roads (and other infrastructural) improvements before planning permission for the development sites is granted.

Environment

It was repeatedly stressed that Derryhale marshes (the area below East Brompton Park) should be designated as an important wetland area and protected within the Area Plan. Residents are concerned that developments are already occurring on the Craigavon side of the marshes and that without protection the marshes could be lost forever.

Furthermore the drainage and clearance which has already taken place in this area has resulted in the loss of important natural habitats (including trees and hedgerows) and disappearance of the cuckoo and skylark from this area.

The residents' group in Derryhale is actively pursuing the need for protection and designation of the marshes and is hopeful that the Area Plan team in discussion with Environment and Heritage Service will share its view that this important habitat is worthy of protection and special control.

Glenanne, Loughgilly and Mountnorris

Representatives of the local community said that Glenanne, Loughgilly and Mountnorris have been disadvantaged by their location on the periphery of the Armagh City and District Council Area, and that this has resulted in a lack of commercial development in the area apart from a few small rural enterprises. They therefore urged that the Area Plan supports and encourages the development of small business in the area.

Glenanne residents were of the opinion that no further housing development should be allowed in the settlement as this will ruin the rural character and setting. They also said that any population increase would affect the strong sense of community in Glenanne as well as lead to an increase in anti-social behaviour.

Glenanne's local beauty spot, Shaw's Lake, and its surrounding area should be protected from development so that it can be accessed and used. It was also suggested that the Area Plan should recognise the potential development of the lake as a tourist attraction. The Glenanne, Mountnorris and Loughgilly community is keen that the Area Plan should support the purchase of the Black Dam and walks up to Shaw's Lake, and facilitate the restoration of the hydro-electric facility that once supplied electricity to Glenanne's mills.

Community representatives also said that the roads in the Glenanne, Loughgilly and Mountnorris area are in reasonably good condition, with the exception of the crossroads at Corkey's Corner which is dangerous. It was also said that a recent Roads Service survey failed to take into account the number of "near misses" experienced by motorists at the junction. They also said that road signs in the area need updating, that 30 miles per hour speed limit signs are needed on all local roads, and that there are visibility problems on the road between Mountnorris and Markethill. It was also said that the lack of adequate public transport facilities needs to be addressed, especially considering the high numbers of commuters living in the area.



Granemore

Residents said that the facilities in Granemore would not be able to cope with any additional housing and therefore any future development must coincide with the provision of recreational facilities, an upgrade in road infrastructure, and a regular public transport service. It was said that the local school in Granemore is overcrowded and if pupil numbers are to increase as a result of future development, additional school facilities, such as more land for expansion, would need to be provided.

Other Small Settlements

Some participants said that the settlement limit of Laurelvale/Mullavilly should be extended so that more land can be zoned for housing, and that more recreational facilities are needed.

It was said that the older buildings with architectural value in Mowhan need to be protected.

4.3 Equality Issues

The Planning Service has a statutory requirement under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to carry out its functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between groupings identified by the Act. These groupings are as follows:

- persons of different religious beliefs;
- persons of different political opinion;
- persons of different racial groups;
- persons of different age;
- persons of different marital status;
- persons of different sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependents and persons without.

When designing both stages of the consultation, CTA was aware of these statutory duties and legislative requirements. We had specifically recommended in our proposal to the Planning Service that a number of additional steps be taken to fully address the equality agenda. These recommendations were welcomed by the Planning Service and incorporated into our methodology.

CTA's approach to community consultation has always been underpinned by equality, equity and open participation by all sections of the community. Our approach to consultation on the Armagh Area Plan was thus underpinned by an appreciation of equality issues and how the views of equality groupings should be accessed. How each of the nine equality groupings were considered is outlined below:

- Persons of **different religious beliefs** were taken into account when deciding on the location of consultation meetings. We tried to ensure that venues chosen are as accessible as possible to all sections of the community.
- Persons of **different political opinion** were equally considered when choosing venues for meetings, ensuring that, as far as possible, neutral locations were chosen and that where this was not possible, the venue chosen was used by all sections of the community in any case, regardless of their political opinion.

- Persons of **different racial groups** were specifically accessed and consulted during both stages of the consultation. Representatives of ethnic minority organisations were interviewed during the preliminary stage of the consultation and Travellers and representatives of the Chinese community were specifically consulted following publication of the Issues Paper.
- Persons of **different age** were considered when deciding on the time of day to hold meetings. Drop in sessions were held during the day to cater for people who cannot attend evening meetings. From past experience and feedback received from participants of other consultation exercises, meetings in the evening are not necessarily suitable for young people and older people. In addition two focus group meetings were held with young people and older people. Specifically targeting these age groups helps to widen the consultation and facilitate participation from a wider age range.
- The views of **persons of different marital status** were sought from representative organisations during the first stage of the consultation (via interviews with Gingerbread, the lone parent organisation) and during the second stage with meetings held with young people who were single, and with a women's group with both married and single members.
- Representatives of **persons of different sexual orientation** were contacted during the first stage of the consultation. They said that the views of their members were not relevant to the Area Plan. This grouping was therefore screened out of the consultation at this stage.
- The views of **men and women generally** were actively sought throughout the process. Mindful of how women are often under-represented, we contacted a number of women's groups at the outset and held a specific focus group meeting with women during the second stage.
- The views of **persons with a disability** were again actively sought through a focus group meeting with a disability group. This supplemented an earlier interview with Disability Action. In general terms we ensured that all meeting venues were physically accessible. Participants were asked (via the public meeting newspaper advertisements and invitation letters) to contact CTA if special assistance was required or if they had special needs. This invitation was taken up by the participants at the disability focus group meeting and the costs of an accessible form of transport were met by the Planning Service.
- The views of **persons with dependents** were gathered at an interview with Gingerbread during the first stage of the consultation and in a focus group meeting with women held during the second stage.

4.3.1 Consultation with Equality Organisations

A number of organisations representing the nine equality groups outlined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 were contacted during the first stage of the consultation. The consultation process for the Armagh Area Plan and the significance of being involved at this early stage was explained. This was followed up by telephone call and by email. The following issues were raised by the organisations which responded.

Minority Ethnic Groups

There is a relatively high number of minority ethnic communities in the Armagh area including Travellers, and Chinese and Portuguese people. In order to become more aware of their issues, CTA interviewed representatives from Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, Traveller Movement Northern Ireland and the Chinese Welfare Association.

Generally, it was stressed by representatives of these three organisations that the Planning Service should have regard to Section 75 and Human Rights legislation to ensure a balanced and fair Area Plan results. It was suggested that local policies must try to combat and alleviate racism. To ensure that ethnic minority communities are engaged meaningfully in the Area Plan process, the Planning Service needs to be aware of language barriers, both in terms of documentation and in the presentation of meetings. It was stressed that ethnic minority populations need assistance and support to enable them to become involved in the Area Plan process.

More specifically, it was said that the Area Plan should ensure greater access to services for Travellers and that there should be policies to allow for a range of appropriate Traveller accommodation when the need arises.

The three organisations interviewed said that the Planning Service needs to be aware of cultural differences between ethnic minority communities particularly in terms of the type of employment they are involved in and the type of accommodation they need. This was said to be a particular issue for the Chinese, Portuguese and eastern European communities who are often involved in the catering, agricultural industries, working unsociable hours and in need of accommodation for multiple occupants. It was urged therefore that the Planning Service takes account of this need and ensures that policies do not unnecessarily restrict the number of houses in multiple occupancy (HMOs) in certain areas in Armagh city.

Older People

Help the Aged identified a number of issues that the Planning Service must consider when preparing the Armagh Area Plan. It said that the Plan should generally meet the needs of older people and more specifically facilitate their ability to access services. It was suggested that the policies in the Area Plan should help to create safe environments and in doing so help tackle crime against older people.

Housing for older people should be integrated into existing communities as sheltered accommodation, it was highlighted, is often built on the periphery of a community which exacerbates feelings of isolation and segregation amongst older people.

People with Disabilities

Disability Action urged the Planning Service to use Area Plan policies as a vehicle for highlighting the importance of access issues. It said that the Plan policies must treat access issues as paramount, especially in proposals for environmental improvements and general infrastructural changes.

Disability Action stressed the need to endorse the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and meet the requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Religion

The Community Relations Council acknowledged that communities have become more segregated in recent years but urged the Planning Service to ensure that the Plan policies deal with the issue of segregation while not reinforcing it. Further, it was suggested that the Area Plan policies should promote a more shared, pluralist and integrated society in the Armagh area.

People with Dependents

Gingerbread Northern Ireland said that the Planning Service must be aware of the needs of single parent families. This includes how to support easy access to a range of services, an adequate transport infrastructure, the location of schools and shops and the provision of adequate childcare. It was suggested that each of these should be local and easily accessible for communities in Armagh.

Young People

Playboard stressed the need for the Area Plan to ensure that there is adequate land available for play space, to help to create child-friendly environments and to meet the needs of young people.

4.3.2 Consultation with Members of Equality Groupings

To complement the equality consultation undertaken during the preliminary stage of the consultation CTA also undertook a number of focus group meetings during the second stage of the consultation with people representative of the equality groupings. These focus groups were held with women, young people, older people and people with disabilities. In addition views were sought from Travellers and ethnic minority groups.

Where possible CTA tried to access a group of people from each of the relevant equality categories, so that the focus discussion would be representative. It was not always possible to locate a group of people who met this criteria. The limited number of women's groups in the District resulted in a meeting only taking place with Keady's Women's Group. Nonetheless, the Group's issues and comments while at times pertained to Keady were sufficiently strategic to be applicable and relevant to women throughout the District.

It was not possible to hold a meeting with the Armagh Senior Citizen's Forum however the Killylea Young at Heart Club again raised issues which were sufficiently representative of older people's needs throughout the District.

Women

A focus group meeting was held with Keady Women's Group which aims to provide a range of activities for young women and create local employment, training and childcare provision for them, as well as helping them to overcome social isolation and enhance personal development.

Keady Women's Group said that the need for services and facilities to be easily accessible to mothers and their children must be recognised and supported through the Area Plan. Comments included:

- more open space needs to be zoned within settlements, and steps must be taken to ensure that all open space and walkways are accessible to mothers with prams;
- recreational facilities for young people need to be provided;
- adequate and safe children's play facilities need to be provided throughout the Armagh District.
- public toilets with facilities for parents and babies need to be provided within settlements in the District;
- local and easily accessible childcare facilities need to be provided within all settlements;
- the Plan needs to address the need for adequate public transport in rural areas so that women, and particularly those within low income or one car households, can access shops and services; and
- more consideration needs to be given to the safety of parents and children crossing roads in areas that are becoming increasingly dangerous as a result of increased traffic, for example, through the provision of pedestrian crossings, lights and other traffic management measures.

Older People

A focus group meeting was held with the Killylea Young at Heart Club which is a group for older people from Killylea, Tynan, Caledon and Armagh City. Given the geographical coverage and age group catered for, this group is regarded as being representative of older people in the Armagh District. During the course of the meeting issues were raised which relate to locations within the District and where appropriate these have been reported previously. Issues which relate to older people's needs included:

- transportation in the District is vital for older people, especially where there is no access to a private car;
- accessibility in urban areas is important especially the physical accessibility of shopping areas and community facilities;

- accessibility to health services for older people in the District is limited, local health services (for example doctors' surgeries) often cater for a wide ranging area and access to hospital services in Craigavon is difficult for older people from Armagh given the lack of a dedicated hospital bus service; and
- there is limited sheltered accommodation for older people in the District and older people from towns and villages outside the city have no choice other than to leave their local area and move into one of the Fold facilities in Armagh City.

Participants asked if the Area Plan can assist and encourage the development of a District which is older people friendly and can more adequately meet their housing, transportation and community facility needs.

People with Disabilities

A focus group meeting was held with the Out and About Project. This Project provides ongoing support to disabled people in the Armagh District in terms of travel needs, care requirements and class assistance for students.

Representatives of the Project said that the Planning Service has a duty to actively promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities, and that within the Area Plan there should be a policy statement to guide all future development and place disability at the top of the agenda so that the needs of people with disabilities are taken into consideration from the first stages of building design. Reference was also made to the Planning Service's own policy guidance (Development Control Advice Note 11) which states that, where appropriate, a policy objective should be included in development plans, to ensure the built environment develops in a way that is accessible to people with disabilities.

Whilst development control deals with the practicalities of issues, it was urged that the Area Plan should facilitate and support the development of a disability-aware environment, and ensure that developers are encouraged to take into account the requirements of disability legislation in all proposals.

Participants were keen that everyone involved in proposals in Armagh consult with disabled people and disability access groups and take their advice on board so that adequate provision is made and a more accessible environment is achieved. It was said that a lack of consultation with disabled people in the past has resulted in the provisions that have been made for disabled people, such as disabled parking facilities, access to and within buildings and sanitary conveniences have often been inadequate. An example given was that although provision has been made for dropped kerbs in Armagh, many have been poorly constructed and as a result wheelchair users have difficulty using them.

Comments were also made about the necessity for the physical barriers of street furniture and shop advertising displays to be removed from the streets of Armagh City so that wheelchair users are no longer forced to dismount footpaths onto busy roads to avoid these obstructions. The need for fully

accessible disabled parking bays, with enough space to the rear of the car to allow the wheelchairs to be easily removed, was also highlighted, as well as the enforcement against the misuse of disabled parking spaces by members of the public.

Young People

A focus group session was held in the Armagh Youth Resource Centre with young people from the Armagh City area. The issues raised included:

- **Housing** - The young people recognised the need for different types of housing to address a range of needs. Some said that in the near future they would be looking for their first homes and that there should be a choice of public sector houses to rent, apartments to rent or buy or houses to buy in the city. However, they said that houses need to be affordable and of an adequate standard. A number of the young people mentioned that some existing Housing Executive housing estates in the city have a negative image arising from anti-social behaviour and dereliction while other estates in the area have few houses available for rent as tenants have bought their homes. They suggested that the Area Plan should promote the development of a range of house types to cater for a range of differing housing needs and that these housing developments should be distributed throughout the District and not concentrated in the city.
- **Environment** - Some of the young people expressed the need for more bins around the city to help improve its image. They also called for more recycling facilities, especially bottle banks. Others acknowledged the importance of trees in the city in terms of providing a 'green lung' within a highly urban environment.
- **Community Facilities** - Most of the young people said that Armagh does not have adequate facilities for its young people and recognised that there are some problems with underage drinking and drug abuse. It was highlighted that facilities such as the Trian Centre or the Palace Stables do not cater for the needs of young people and the cinema which could cater for young people is too expensive and is due to close soon. They urged the Area Plan to encourage the development of new activities which would benefit both young people as well as the wider community and tourists. They suggested, for example, the need for an improved swimming pool, more walks and footpaths and a bowling alley.
- **Traffic and Transport** - The young people said that Armagh suffers from congestion especially at peak school times. They suggested the need for a bypass and traffic management measures to alleviate these problems. The young people who use the local bus service requested better public information on routes and timetabling.
- **Employment and Industry** - The young people asked if the Area Plan could encourage new job creation in the city. They suggested the re-use of the former shoe factory and Gaol which could provide employment opportunities as well as revitalising those parts of the city. They also said there is a need for more manufacturing jobs and office jobs in particular.

Travellers

It was not possible to hold a focus group with members of the Traveller community. However background information has been gathered from the Armagh and Dungannon Health and Social Services Trust, Community Development Team and a report entitled “Who’s That Knocking at My Door? - A Community Audit on the Health, Social, Accommodation, Educational and Employment Needs of the Traveller Community in Armagh City and District Council Area” prepared by the Trust in partnership with Armagh Travellers’ Support Group. The audit identified 36 families living in the District in 2002, all of them in houses or flats. The majority of the families were in NIHE accommodation, only one family as an owner occupier.

The audit concluded that a number of the Traveller families in Armagh City and District area would prefer to live in grouped housing schemes of no more than six to eight units. Further research is needed to ascertain whether there is a need for a serviced site for local Travellers or for nomadic Travellers. The Area Plan should therefore be forward thinking and ensure that provision is made for Traveller accommodation during the lifetime of the Plan.

Chinese Community

It was not possible to hold a focus group meeting with members of the Chinese community but two telephone interviews were carried out with representatives for the Wah-Hep Chinese Community Association and the Oi-Wah Chinese Women’s Group.

The main concern for both groups was the difficulties Chinese people face when accessing information in the planning system. The language barrier was said to be one of the main reasons that the Chinese community does not fully engage in the planning system. The representatives of the two groups also said that the language barriers restrict access to health services, social services and other facilities such as recreation and leisure. There was a call therefore for the Planning Service to recognise the distinct cultural needs and traditions of the Chinese community and to take account of this when preparing the Area Plan.

It was said that Chinese people need more houses in the city to allow them to be closer to jobs in restaurants and hot food takeaways. It was highlighted that public transport from rural areas is not sufficient to allow Chinese people to live outside the city and travel into the city for work. Representatives identified a need for a multi-cultural resource centre in the



city. They said that there are a number of ethnic minority groups, including the Chinese community, who would benefit from a range of support services and activities.

4.4 Written Submissions

Papers, letters and strategy documents were submitted to CTA during both stages of the consultation from regional community networks and a number of community and voluntary groups in response to our request for written information on the issues and needs of communities in the Armagh area. In addition some groups and voluntary organisations completed a community questionnaire which was sent to those groups which had not participated by early January 2004.

Regeneration of South Armagh (RoSA) - South Armagh Natural Resource Rural Tourism Initiative

The Regeneration of South Armagh (RoSA) rural support network is responsible for the South Armagh Rural Tourism Initiative. In its Tourism Initiative Report which was submitted to CTA, a number of tourism and environmental issues relevant to the Area Plan were raised.

In the South Armagh Tourism Initiative (SATI) Report, south Armagh is described as an area of special landscapes and culture with sensitive nature conservation locations, a number of Areas of Special Scientific Interest and a series of protective planning designations, for example along the River Blackwater.

The Report states that notwithstanding the natural beauty of the Armagh District and its neighbour Newry and Mourne District Council, the south Armagh area has suffered from a poor image because of the 'Troubles' and tourism figures have been low because of this image. However this has begun to change in more recent times.

The Tourism Initiative, from an Armagh perspective, covers the electoral wards of Ballymartin, Carrigatuke, Derrynoose, Keady, Killeen, Killylea and Markethill. It is a partnership between local government, community, tourism, environmental and the public sector, with the main aim of supporting and encouraging tourism.

The SATI Report identifies the tourism and environmental strengths of the south Armagh area relevant to the Armagh City and District Council area as including:

- high quality landscapes including the Blackwater Valley;
- a wealth of archaeological sites;
- strong cultural traditions of music, language, literature and song;
- presence of forest parks and way marked walks;
- fishing loughs;
- upland heath land areas of international importance;

- rural reservoirs with boating potential;
- walks including a section of the Newry Canal Walk;
- heritage centres and historic cottages;
- proximity of main shopping facilities at Armagh, Newry, Dundalk and Monaghan; and
- accessibility of the area from the north-south corridor and from the four main transportation focal points of Armagh, Newry, Dundalk and Monaghan.

The environmental and cultural weaknesses are identified in the Report as including:

- parts of the south Armagh act as dormitory settlements for people working in the larger urban areas and this has led to a high level of dispersed developments of modern houses and the loss of many vernacular dwellings and landscape character and charm;
- fly tipping incidents which add to the unattractiveness of the environment in certain locations; and
- poor and vandalised tourism signage, public viewpoints and car parks.

Looking at the opportunities that these strengths and weaknesses present SATI identifies a number which the Area Plan could take cognisance of. These include:

- development and support of activities on lakes and rivers in the area;
- enhancement of appearance and function of towns and villages that have suffered most during the 'Troubles';
- potential for further enhancement and development of Gosford Forest Park;
- opportunity to provide significantly more countryside recreation sites;
- the potential to develop the culture and heritage of the north part of the SATI area especially in the Blackwater Valley;
- opportunity to develop and support venues and facilities such as Navan Fort and Markethill Courthouse and the potential of Gosford Castle;
- development potential in tourism accommodation market including supporting the development of guest house, hostel, camping and touring caravan accommodation; and
- the re-opening of the Newry Canal towpath with restoration of sections of the Canal and the reinstatement potential of the Ulster Canal along the Blackwater.

To summarise, the SATI Report and its initiative see the key needs of the south Armagh area as including the need to develop sustainable tourism and accommodation while at the same time preserving and protecting important and sensitive landscapes. Direct economic benefits will also be experienced in terms of investment and securing existing jobs in tourism in the area through increasing the number of visitors and providing new opportunities for employment in tourism and visitor management within key wards in south Armagh.

Regeneration of South Armagh (RoSA) - South Armagh Countryside Recreation Strategy

The South Armagh Countryside Recreation Strategy covers part of the Armagh City and District Council area, along similar geographical limits to those of the SATI initiative. Key issues in the Strategy of relevance to the Area Plan include:

- there are limited walking opportunities in the District, aside from way marked trails and forest parks;
- lack of public transport routes and schemes in the south Armagh area for visitors and tourists without cars;
- the recreational needs of people with disabilities should be taken account of;
- the tourism potential of lakes has been largely overlooked;
- Blackwater River in particular has great potential for waterside walking and canoeing activities;
- there is potential for continued provision of access routes in the countryside for walking, horse riding and off-road cycling between forested areas;
- the need to enhance open countryside access; and
- associated countryside recreational activities and uses must be catered for including provision for cafes, parking and rural transport schemes.

Glenanne, Loughgilly and Mountnorris Community Development Association

Glenanne, Loughgilly and Mountnorris Community Development Association highlighted the main issues in the District as being the poor condition of the roads infrastructure and the lack of transport.

The Association stresses the need for more development leading to employment opportunities, better transportation, improved tourism, the revitalisation of old houses and properties, more play parks and activity centres for young people, and the need for recreational facilities.

More should be done to protect the environment, in the Association's view, for example, the preservation of bog land, protection of wildlife and the conservation of old walls, buildings and monuments.

From a tourism and recreation point of view the Association believes that the Newry to Portadown section of the Ulster Canal Towpath should be upgraded as should private lands at Shaw's Lake and its car park and the walk through the old factory at Glenanne. While recognising that the Area Plan cannot deliver this type of project, the Association said it can facilitate and encourage the development of environmental projects, recreation and tourism which other agencies can then deliver.

The Association referred to the need to rejuvenate many of Armagh's towns and villages to address the economic decline and degradation that has been experienced. One way of encouraging this rejuvenation would be through appropriate designations in the Area Plan to enable craft outlets and small industrial units to develop.

From a New TSN and equality point of view the Association suggests that the Plan supports the development of better transportation and zonings for adequate community facilities which young people, older people and single parents can use for recreational and educational purposes.

Armagh Business Centre

Armagh Business Centre is responsible for providing workspace and developing and supporting micro enterprises in the Armagh area. In its written response to our community questionnaire which asked what the main planning issues are, it identified a number of issues. These included the importance of examining the Armagh ring road issue and the industrial development potential adjacent; the need to develop incubation units for new businesses; the need to facilitate the development of larger units for growth businesses; how pedestrianisation of the city centre has not brought many economic benefits to the city and how the centre needs to have housing units which will bring more 'life' to the city; that housing developments of a substantial size need to have integrated common areas for young families, children and young people and that there is a need for mixed housing schemes to bring people from varying economic backgrounds together.

Specifically looking at the business and industrial needs of the city, Armagh Business Centre believes that the city could sustain more industrial development. It says that growth businesses are currently moving away from the area because of a lack of suitable industrial accommodation and as this happens, jobs and new job opportunities go with them.

Looking at New TSN it stresses the difficulties involved with the Area Plan taking TSN criteria into account. However it emphasises the importance of local agencies being involved with disadvantaged groups in the decision making process. Armagh Business Centre also stresses the role that industrial zonings can play in addressing economic sustainability via the provision of opportunities for prospective tenants.

From a TSN and equality perspective it suggests that well planned community transport routes could assist with bringing people from more disadvantaged areas to employment locations and that the inclusion and availability of childcare facilities in industrial areas would help encourage women back to work and that the Area Plan could support such initiatives.

Again it was stressed that the ring road and its completion has huge implications for the development of Armagh and will impact on most future planning and business decisions.

Crossfire Trust

The Crossfire Trust is concerned with the needs of young people in the Keady area. The Trust highlights the need for the Area Plan to address young people's needs and to zone land that will adequately cater and meet their needs in terms of the provision of recreational facilities and open space.

Richhill and Hamiltonsbawn District Golden Jubilee Committee

The Committee which represents the community in the Richhill and Hamiltonsbawn areas identified in its response to the consultation that industry, retailing, tourism and the environment are the main planning issues in these areas.

In terms of new development the Committee said that Hamiltonsbawn could sustain more development but that community facilities and transport would need to be improved first.

From an environmental perspective it stated that the Folly Glen in Armagh should be protected from over-development and that Gosford Forest Park at Markethill should be identified as an under-used resource and one which has tourism and recreation potential.

The Parish of Armagh

The Parish of Armagh made a written submission which raised a number of issues. These included:

- Housing Associations need to increase the provision of affordable housing within Armagh City;
- to help tackle anti-social behaviour in the District, play areas for children and recreational amenities for teenagers need to be provided in areas where there will be increased densities in urban housing;
- the Area Plan needs to zone areas of open and recreational space within, and between, housing developments;
- in order for industrial development to be encouraged within Armagh City, the accessibility of the District needs to be improved through the upgrading of existing transport links;
- the Area Plan needs to deal with congestion at the roundabout (by the fire station on Lower English Street) which has resulted from an increase in traffic flows in the city; and

- the poor condition of the sewerage infrastructure in the Armagh District, and the city's storm drains in particular, needs to be addressed in the Area Plan.

Rural Community Housing Estates Programme

A representative from the Rural Community Network Rural Housing Estates Programme provided information gathered from six rural housing estates in the District. This information had been provided by members of the community in these estates through a series of consultation meetings and/or questionnaires:

- **Annahugh** - is an isolated area and suffers from a lack of services and facilities. The nearest facilities are one mile away and local people with limited access to transport (public or private) experience difficulties accessing services elsewhere.
- **Benburb** - There are few facilities in Benburb for young people.
- **Blackwatertown** - Traffic calming is needed as there is a heavy traffic flow through the village and the small roundabout is proving ineffective. There is also a need to provide facilities for young people.
- **Broomhill** - Broomhill is an isolated housing estate on the road from Portadown to Armagh. Residents said that there is nothing there in terms of community facilities. They have a small play park but are in need of more investment and development in the area.
- **Clady** - There is a need for traffic management and calming, a better rural transport service and more adequate community facilities.
- **Charlemont** - Charlemont is seen as particularly disadvantaged as it is located between two local council areas. There is a need for traffic controls as older people experience difficulties crossing roads which carry a lot of heavy traffic because of Charlemont's strategic location on the through route to Dungannon.
- **Hamiltonsbawn** - Hamiltonsbawn has a lack of community facilities especially a community hall, limited play facilities, no facilities for young or older people and a lack of services which complement new housing in the area. In addition residents said that if land from the school along the Annreagh Road had a footpath this would provide a much needed walking route for local people. It is used but without a footpath it is a dangerous facility.
- **General Rural Housing Estate Issues** - Because of the religious division issue in the District and especially the movement of the Protestant population, there has been some movement of the Protestant population out of the city into smaller rural areas. These demographic changes have implications for the future provision of housing, especially social housing, and the Area Plan needs to take account of this.

4.5 Evaluation of Consultation Events

During the public and community consultation for the Armagh Area Plan over 300 people attended the community information exchange meetings, the public information session drop in sessions, outreach meetings, focus group meetings with members of the equality groupings, and the public meetings.

Participants at each of the public meetings were given an evaluation form to complete. The information supplied on these forms is valuable feedback for CTA. It helps future planning of Area Plan consultation events and provides data on the profile of participants enabling us to see if we are achieving our desired outcomes regarding quality, equity and inclusiveness. Over 123 people attended the public meetings, 55% of whom completed an evaluation form.

The participant data showed:

- the majority of those who attended the public meetings were male (of those who answered the question 80% were male and 20% female);
- 50% of participants were from the Catholic community, 38% from the Protestant community (the remainder belonged to neither community or declined to respond);
- all but one respondent answered the question on age, and out of these less than 5% were under 25 years old, 25% were of the 60+ age group and the remaining participants evenly split between the 26-45 years old and 46-60 year old age groups;
- all participants described their ethnic background as white (of the 96% of people who answered the question); and
- 9% of participants (who answered the question) regarded themselves as having a disability.

Feedback on the promotion and implementation of the events included:

- A number of people said that they found out about the meetings through more than one means which is reflected in the following figures: 42% of participants found out about the events via newspaper advertisement; 18% and 19% respectively found out about the events through letters from CTA and by seeing a flyer or poster; and the remaining 21% through word of mouth.
- 87% of participants found the events excellent or good, 13% rated them as average and no-one said that the meetings were boring or useless.
- 93% of participants who answered the question thought that the events had given them an adequate opportunity to express their views (6% said they were not sure and 1% said they had not).

5. Concluding Comments

The community and public consultation on the first stage of the Armagh Area Plan 2018 was a proactive and participative process.

Residents, community groups, voluntary groups, equality groups and their representatives all participated in a range of ways throughout the eight month process. This was done through community meetings, public meetings, drop-in sessions, an outreach programme, equality organisation interviews, focus groups with people representative of the equality groupings, and through written submissions. All of their views and comments have been analysed and are reflected in some way in this report. The Planning Service will be informed of these issues and consider the implications of these for the Area Plan.

Appendix - Consultation Events: Locations and Dates

Public Meetings

Armagh	-	6 May 2004
Markethill	-	11 May 2004
Tandragee	-	12 May 2004
Keady	-	13 May 2004
Middletown	-	17 May 2004
Armagh	-	1 June 2004

Drop-in Sessions

Armagh	-	24 May 2004
Richhill	-	25 May 2004

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.

Community Technical Aid
445-449 Ormeau Road
BELFAST
BT7 3GQ

Telephone - 028 9064 2227
Fax - 028 9064 2467
Email - info@communitytechnicalaid.org
Website - www.communitytechnicalaid.org

