



Volume 1

Ards Down Area Plan 2015

Plan Strategy, Policy Framework and Countryside Proposals



An Agency within the Department of the
Environment
www.doeni.gov.uk

March 2009

Volume 1

Plan Strategy, Policy Framework and Countryside Proposals

Contents

	Page No
Preamble	5
Part 1 Introduction (Plan Strategy)	
Plan Area	9
Purpose of the Plan	10
Plan Policies and Proposals	10
Policy Context	10
Plan Aim	15
Plan Objectives	15
Plan Strategy	15
Part 2 Policy Framework	
Environment and Conservation	17
Settlement	28
Housing	33
Industry	39
Retailing, Services and Offices	43
Transportation	46
Recreation and Open Space	52
Tourism	55
Education and Community Facilities	60
Public Services and Utilities	66
Minerals	71
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	74

Plan Strategy, Policy Framework and Countryside Proposals

	Page No
Part 3 Countryside Proposals	79
Green Belt	83
Countryside Policy Areas	84
Craigantlet Escarpment Area of High Scenic Value	84
Magheraknock Loughs Area of High Scenic Value	85
Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance	85
Kearney Area of Townscape Character	86
Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes	87
Areas of Constraint on Mineral Developments	88
Ballynahinch Informal Park and Ride and Park and Share Site	89
Clough Informal Park and Ride and Park and Share Site	89
Industrial Site, Ballynahinch Road, Crossgar	90
Existing Industrial Lands at Belfast Road, Downpatrick	90

Appendices

1	Policy Context	93
2	Planning Policy Statements	94
3	Development Control Advice Notes	95
4	Environmental Designations	96
5	Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance	135
6	Kearney Area of Townscape Character	215
7	Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes	216
8	Proposed Industrial Site at Ballynahinch Road, Crossgar	243
9	Sewerage Infrastructure	244

Maps packaged with the Plan

Volume 2

2/001a & 2/001b - Ards Countryside Maps

2/002a - Newtownards Settlement Map

2/003a - Comber Settlement Map

2/004a - Donaghadee Settlement Map

Volume 3

3/001a, 3/001b & 3/001c – Down Countryside Maps

3/002a - Downpatrick Settlement Map

3/003a - Ballynahinch Settlement Map

3/004a - Newcastle Settlement Map

Preamble

The Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 is a Development Plan prepared by Planning Service, an Agency within the Department of the Environment, under the provisions of Part III of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

Notice was given to Ards Borough Council on 12th January 1999 and to Down District Council on 27th January 1999 that the Department intended to prepare a new development plan to cover the two council areas for the period 2000 to 2015. A Notice of Intention to prepare the Plan was published in the local and regional press in the week beginning 15th March 1999 and comments were invited from the public and interested parties in respect of the issues to be addressed in the Plan. Consultations were also carried out with both Councils, community groups, Government Departments and Agencies, statutory undertakers and other appropriate bodies. All representations received were taken into account in preparing the Issues Paper and the Draft Plan.

In April 2000 the Department informed Ards Borough and Down District Councils that the Plan would be prepared under new procedures which replaced the publication of Preliminary Proposals with the publication of an Issues Paper.

The purpose of the Issues Paper was to offer the opportunity for wider and more effective public participation in the preparation of the Draft Plan by focusing thought on strategic matters in the early stages of the preparation process, in preference to the traditional approach of publishing for comment Preliminary Proposals of a site specific nature. The aim of the Issues Paper was to promote debate and feedback on matters which would shape the preparation of the Draft Plan.

Further discussions with Ards Borough and Down District Councils took place in October 2000 on the content of the Issues Paper

then being prepared. The Department also appointed Community Technical Aid, (CTA), to undertake an extensive community and public consultation exercise on the Issues Paper. The first stage of CTA's work preceded publication of the Issues Paper. That work involved identification of community, voluntary and environmental groups throughout the Plan area likely to have an interest in the preparation of the Area Plan. Contact was made by CTA with 460 groups who were informed of the process and encouraged to participate. CTA held initial briefings with key umbrella groups in the area which were given the opportunity to express their views on issues of importance to the Plan. CTA then reported the results of this first stage exercise to the Department on 7 December 2000.

The Department published the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 Issues Paper on 15th December 2000. A public notice was placed in the regional and local newspapers during the week beginning 11th December 2000. Copies of the Paper were made available free of charge from the Divisional Planning Office, from the offices of Ards Borough and Down District Council and from local libraries.

The Issues Paper and the Press Notice advised that all views expressed in writing by 30th March 2001, including views conveyed through the report of CTA, representations received during the initial stages of the Plan review and the representations of statutory consultees, including Ards Borough and Down District Council, would be considered in the preparation of the policies and proposals to be published in the Draft Plan.

In January 2001 CTA facilitated five public meetings in each of the two council areas. Planning staff were in attendance at each meeting to assist and to answer questions. Each of the meetings was advertised in advance in the local press, the Notices appearing during the weeks beginning 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd

Preamble

January 2001. A reminder of the closing date for responses to the Issues Paper was published in the local and regional newspapers in the week beginning 19th March 2001.

CTA reported to Planning Service on 31 March 2001 on the implementation of, and their conclusions on, the community consultation exercise which they had facilitated. CTA received responses from 50 community, voluntary and environmental groups and from over 700 people who had attended the public meetings. Their Report was included as part of the Technical Supplement on Public Participation which accompanied the Draft Plan.

During the published response period 568 representations were received by Planning Service of which approximately 40% either addressed issues raised in the published Issues Paper, or otherwise dealt with general rather than site specific issues. Some representations of general concern were received both before and after the advertised period for response to the Issues Paper. In preparing the Draft Plan consideration was given to all representations received throughout that process.

The Department published the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 Draft Plan on the 10th December 2002. The statutory period for objection to the Draft Plan expired on 21 January 2003. In view of the number and nature of the objections received within the statutory period, the Department requested the Planning Appeals Commission to hold a Public Inquiry into the relevant objections and to report to the Department on the Inquiry. The Public Inquiry opened on Tuesday 3rd May 2005 in the Queen's Hall, West Street, Newtownards. The Planning Appeals Commission formally closed the Public Inquiry on Wednesday 17th January 2007. The Planning Appeals Commission completed its report into the objections to the Draft Plan and submitted its report to the Department on the 14th March 2008. The recommendations contained

in the Commission's report have been fully considered by the Department and revisions have been made to the Written Statement and to the maps as appropriate. Full details of the Department's response to the Commission's recommendations are set out in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 Adoption Statement and its Appendices.

The Department is now publishing the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015. The Plan is comprised of three volumes: Volume 1, Plan Strategy, Policy Framework and Countryside Proposals, Volume 2, Ards Borough Proposals and Volume 3, Down District Proposals. These volumes should be read in conjunction with the accompanying maps. The document incorporates the amendments outlined in the Adoption Statement and replaces all previous versions of the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015. In the event of a contradiction between the Written Statement and a map, the provisions of the Written Statement will prevail.

In preparing and prior to the publication of the final Plan, the Department prepared a number of Technical Supplements containing technical information, which has influenced the policies and proposals contained in the Plan. The Technical Supplements do not form part of the statutory Plan. These are:

1. Technical Supplements which deal with housing and population, industry, commerce, education, social and community facilities, tourism, open space and recreation, public utilities, transportation and public participation.
2. A Countryside Assessment Supplement which includes an appraisal of environmental assets, an assessment of the landscape of the Plan area, an analysis of rural development pressure and an appraisal of each settlement in terms of its character, assets and constraints, conservation issues and settlement limit.

3. Settlement Reports relating to each town, village and small settlement which detail the settlement's role and facilities, population, housing, urban capacity sites, land availability and the investigation of future housing lands.
4. A Strategic Environmental Appraisal and Equality Impact Assessment Supplement comprising an assessment of the probable environmental and equality impacts of the policies and proposals contained within the Plan.
5. An Appropriate Assessment, (AA), Report containing details of the appropriate assessment carried out in respect of the Plan in line with the requirements of Article 6.3 and 6.4 of the Habitats Directive.

Equality of Opportunity

The Northern Ireland Act 1998, Section 75 has placed the following statutory requirement on each public authority:

- (1) to carry out its functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:
 - (a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
 - (b) between men and women generally;
 - (c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and
 - (d) between persons with dependants and persons without.
- (2) Without prejudice to its obligation under subsection (1) a public authority shall, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Department has sought to ensure that the Plan does not have the effect of discriminating against individuals or groups of people who have these characteristics. The Equality Impact Assessment of the policies and proposals contained in the Plan has considered any potentially adverse effects on these groups. The Assessment is published along with the Written Statement.

Preamble

Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy

The Department is committed to implementing Lifetime Opportunities – the Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland which is structured around a number of general challenges which become the priorities for future policy and action. These are as follows:

- Eliminating poverty;
- Eliminating social exclusion;
- Tackling area based deprivation;
- Eliminating poverty from rural areas;
- Shared futures – shared challenges;
- Tackling inequality in the labour market;
- Tackling health inequalities; and
- Tackling cycles of deprivation.

The Strategy recognises different priorities at different stages in people's lives and the need for policies and programmes to be tailored to these specific needs and targeted at those in greatest objective need. Departmental spending plans and resources are directly linked to the delivery of commitments within the strategy in order to achieve the goals and targets within Lifetime Opportunities. Planning Service is not a major spending Agency, however, one of the main functions of a development plan is to facilitate development and create a land use framework that will allow investment to take place. The Plan seeks to implement the Strategy through specific objectives, policies and proposals.

Nothing in the Plan should be read as a commitment that public resources will be provided for any specific project. All proposals for expenditure by the Department are subject to economic appraisal and will also have to be considered having regard to the overall availability of resources.

Introduction

part 1

Plan Area

The Plan area consists of the administrative districts of Ards Borough and Down District. It is approximately 1,024 square kilometres in extent with an estimated 2001 population of approximately 137,000.

Ards Borough is approximately 377 square kilometres in extent and in 2001 had a population estimated at 73,244 of which 27,795 (38%) lived in Newtownards. Comber and Donaghadee are the largest settlements outside Newtownards. Comber had a population of 8,952 in 2001 and Donaghadee 6,474.

Down District is 647 square kilometres in extent with a 2001 population estimated at 63,828, of which 10,320 (16%) lived in Downpatrick, the lowest proportion in any district in Northern Ireland resident in its main town. Ballynahinch and Newcastle are the largest settlements in the District outside Downpatrick. Ballynahinch had a 2001 population of 5,334 and Newcastle a population of 7,431. Downpatrick is some 32 kilometres and Ballynahinch 36 kilometres from Belfast.

Ards Borough abuts the Belfast Metropolitan Area to the north and west. Down District stretches southwards from Ards Borough to the Mourne Mountains south of Newcastle. The eastern edge of the Plan area is the Irish Sea

coastline. From Donaghadee to Ballynahinch a line of towns and large villages lies close to the southern and eastern edges of the Belfast Metropolitan Area. The villages in the Plan area are, for the most part, situated along the sea coast and the shores of Strangford Lough, and smaller settlements are distributed throughout the open countryside.

The Plan area contains a rich diversity of terrain, landscapes, habitats and settlement. It stretches from Scrabo Hill and the many places of natural and historic interest around Strangford Lough, southward through St. Patrick's Country and the Lecale Coast to the northern edge of the Mourne Mountains. Coastal areas are an especially valuable resource for their landscape qualities, earth-science features and as wildlife habitats.

Ards Borough and Down District share the shoreline of Strangford Lough, a shallow island - studded arm of the Irish Sea. The Lough stretches some 25 kilometres from a wide expanse of sand and mud flats between Comber and Newtownards at its northern extremity, through the swift tidal waters at the narrows between Portaferry and Strangford, and then southwards where it meets the open sea between Ballyquintin Point in Ards Borough and Killard Point in Down District.



Introduction

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the Plan is to inform the general public, statutory authorities, developers and other interested bodies of the policy framework and land use proposals that will be used to guide development decisions within Ards Borough and Down District over the Plan period 2000 -2015.

Plan Policies and Proposals

The policies and proposals contained in the Plan constitute considerations that the Department will take into account in determining planning applications within the Plan area. The contents of the Plan must be read as a whole as often several policies may be relevant to a particular development proposal.

The policies and proposals contained in the Plan should not, however, be read as the only tests of acceptability for development proposals. In making its decisions, the Department will also assess proposals against all planning policies and other material considerations that are relevant to it. The contents of the Plan must therefore be read in conjunction with the relevant contents of regional policy publications and supplementary planning guidance documents.

In order to ensure that there is no public misunderstanding of these Plan policies and proposals, it must be recognised that there may be occasion when other material considerations outweigh one or more of these. Each case must be considered on its merits to assess whether an exception would be justified but the provisions of the Plan policies and proposals will prevail unless there are other overriding policy or material considerations which outweigh them and justify a contrary decision.

Policy Context

The Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 is prepared within the context of the priorities of the Northern Ireland Executive as set out in the Programme for Government. The Plan also takes account of National and European policies which have implications for the future pattern of development within the Plan area.

Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), which was formulated by the Assembly in September 2001, sets out a dynamic strategic spatial planning framework for Northern Ireland to guide physical development within the region until 2025 and provides an overarching strategic framework for development plans.

The RDS seeks to promote a balanced distribution of development to facilitate economic growth and competitiveness and to distribute the benefits of economic opportunity throughout the Region. The objective is to provide a basis for strengthening the regional economy, for reducing social disadvantage and for the sustainable planning of future development.

The overall aim of the RDS for rural Northern Ireland, which, in the context of the RDS includes the Plan area, is "to develop an attractive and prosperous rural area, based on a balanced and integrated approach to the development of town, village and countryside, contributing to the overall well-being of the Region as a whole. The Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 will contribute to the implementation of the RDS and to the achievement of its principles and objectives.

This will be achieved by action taken on the following Strategic Objectives and supporting Strategic Planning Guidelines for Rural Northern Ireland: -

part 1

- Supporting the development of a strong, diversified and competitive rural economy served by the Regional Strategic Transport Network;

C8: SPG-RNI 1: To maintain a working countryside with a strong mixed use rural economy;

- Developing a living and working countryside which recognises the unique rural character and special landscapes of the Region and contributes to a sense of belonging in local rural areas;

C8: SPG-RNI 2 and C12:SPG-RNI: To create and sustain a living countryside with a high quality of life for all its residents;

- Promoting the continuing renewal and revitalisation of towns and villages in Rural Northern Ireland;

C8: SPG-RNI 3: To support the network of service centres based on main towns, small towns and villages in rural communities throughout the North;

- Improving the accessibility of the rural community to employment, services and regional amenities;

C8: SPG-RNI 4: To create an accessible countryside with a responsive transport network that meets the needs of the rural community;

- Managing and enhancing the natural and built heritage in rural areas, including the coast, and the special character, beauty and interest of designated features and landscapes within rural communities throughout the North;

C8: SPG-RNI 5 and C12 SPG-ENV 1: To create and sustain an attractive and unique rural environment in the interests of the rural community and the region as a whole.

The approach set out in these guidelines is to *“conserve and enhance the environment, whilst improving the quality of life of the rural communities and developing the rural economy”*.

The policies and proposals of the Plan are in conformity with these regional objectives and guidelines and with the approach to the planning of growth in rural areas, which they represent.

The RDS is consistent with the integrated approach of the European Spatial Development Perspective. Account is also taken of the UK shared framework for sustainable development *“One Future – Different Paths”* which was launched in March 2005 to provide a consistent approach and focus across the UK. It is supported by separate strategies for each administration. *“A Sustainable Development Strategy for NI: First Steps towards Sustainability”* was launched in May 2006 and is supported by an implementation plan.

The European Union and the United Kingdom have embraced the principle of sustainable development based on stewardship of the environment and it has widened the concept to embrace economic and social considerations. At the heart of the RDS is the principle of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come, by seeking to meet the four objectives of sustainable development.

- social progress that meets the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

The objectives of sustainable development embody the concept of conserving biodiversity, which is the total variety of all

Introduction

living things. Development plans can therefore contribute to biodiversity by ensuring that development is sustainable and through implementation of SPG-ENV 1: To conserve the natural environment.

In October 2000, the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group published their Recommendations to Government for a Biodiversity Strategy containing 76 recommendations on how government and private interests might tackle the main issues and threats to biodiversity in Northern Ireland. Habitats and species for priority action were also identified. The Department accepted those recommendations and published the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy in August 2002.

The policies and proposals in the Plan have been subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment. This assessment has sought to anticipate and evaluate the environmental, social and economic consequences of the Plan, and to minimise any potentially negative effects.

Transportation Policy

In the latter half of the 1990s there was a marked change in transport policy in both Great Britain and in Northern Ireland. "The Way Forward" document, published in 1995 by the Department of the Environment indicated a new approach to dealing with transportation issues. Concerns about increasing car ownership and usage, and the need for sustainable development influenced the emerging transport policies. "The Way Forward" document defined a new direction for transport planning. It sought to:

- reduce, where possible, the need for travel;
- encourage the use of alternatives to the private car; and

- provide an efficient, safe and accessible transportation system which offers better choice and mobility for all its users.

In the United Kingdom the Government produced the White Paper in July 1998, 'A New Deal for Transport'. The focus of this document was the promotion of integration within transport, with the environment, with land use planning and with wider policies for health, education and wealth creation. This document is considered the 'mother' document for subsequent publications on transport policy.

The 'Northern Ireland Transport Policy Statement: "Moving Forward" published in November 1998, was an important step in developing a new transport strategy. It signalled a desire to move away from a transportation system dominated by the private car to a more balanced and integrated system, in which public transport together with cycling and walking would play a greater role than at present. It articulated the principles of the UK White Paper in a way that reflected the current and future circumstances of Northern Ireland. It also set out a need for the development of a Regional Transport Plan, which would provide short-term guidance on transportation within the context of the 25-year Regional Development Strategy.

In January 2001, the Department for Regional Development issued a Consultation Paper "Developing a Regional Transportation Strategy". The Strategy, which will reflect the principles set out in "Moving Forward", has as its vision **"a modern sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life"**. The Strategy will identify what can be achieved over the next 10 years in moving towards the transportation vision.

The Plan has been prepared in the context of the measures outlined in the 'Moving Forward' document, which support the principles of the White Paper, and of the Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012 (RTS), which was published in July 2002.

The RTS supports the RDS and makes a significant contribution towards achieving the RDS vision for transport. The RTS is now being delivered through the preparation and implementation of more detailed Transport Plans.

Planning Policy Statements

Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) set out the policies of the Department on particular aspects of land use planning and apply to the whole of Northern Ireland. Their contents have informed the policies and proposals contained in the Plan and are also material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals within the Plan area. Details of current PPSs are contained in Appendix 2.

The Department has a rolling programme for preparation of new PPSs and review of existing PPSs. In addition, a number of PPSs are currently being prepared by the Department for Regional Development, (DRD), and Planning and Environmental Policy Group (PEPG), which will also apply throughout Northern Ireland. When forthcoming PPSs are published in final form, they will supersede the equivalent policies within the Plan.

PPSs may, from time to time, be revised to take account of changing circumstances, including experience gained through the development planning and development control processes. Good practice guides may also be issued to illustrate how concepts contained in PPSs can best be implemented.

A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland

A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (the Rural Strategy), published in September 1993, contains a number of strategic policies, but essentially comprises a compendium of planning policies setting out, on a topic basis, the factors that the Department takes into account when reacting to development proposals. It applies throughout the Plan area.

The Department has begun progressively to replace the Rural Strategy. The strategic section of the document has been superseded by the RDS, whilst the topic sections are progressively being replaced by PPSs. In the meantime, policies within the Rural Strategy, which have not been superseded by PPSs, will remain in force.

Regional Supplementary Planning Guidance

The Department's publication, 'A Design Guide for Rural Northern Ireland', issued in May 1994, provides guidance for all those who are considering building in the countryside of Northern Ireland. Its purpose is to improve the quality of design and to help ensure that new buildings fit into the landscape.

The Department's publication, 'Creating Places', issued in May 2000 in furtherance of the Quality Initiative to improve the quality of new housing developments, provides guidance on the design, character and layout of new housing areas in Northern Ireland. The guide describes the contributions to quality and sustainability that developers will be expected to make through the design of new residential developments.

Introduction

The Department also publishes and updates as necessary a set of Development Control Advice Notes, which explain the planning criteria, and technical standards, which the Department considers when dealing with specific categories or particular aspects of development in Northern Ireland. Development Control Advice Notes are listed in Appendix 3.

It should be noted that the Department is continuously reviewing its regional planning policies and advice. It is therefore advisable to contact the Divisional Planning Office to ascertain the current relevant policies and supplementary guidance that apply within Ards Borough and Down District.

Plan Aim

To provide a planning framework which is in broad conformity with the RDS in facilitating sustainable growth and a high quality of development in Ards Borough and Down District throughout the Plan period, whilst protecting and where appropriate, enhancing the natural and man-made environment of the Plan area.

Plan Objectives

- to facilitate sustainable patterns of growth and development throughout the Plan area in accordance with the sustainability related strategic objectives of the RDS;
- to promote Newtownards and Downpatrick as main towns within Northern Ireland and to strengthen their role as the principal administrative, trade, employment and residential centres within the Plan area;
- to allocate land for additional housing development over the Plan period in accordance with the strategic objectives and guidelines contained in the RDS relating to managing future housing growth, the distribution of housing and the drive for greater housing provision within existing urban areas;
- to facilitate appropriate development within existing urban areas that will promote urban renaissance, create ease of access to services and community facilities, and to maximise the use of existing infrastructure;
- to promote compact urban forms that respect the individual character and identity of settlements, avoid urban sprawl and conserve the countryside;
- to facilitate economic development and the creation of employment, taking into account the Government Strategy on Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland;
- to facilitate integration between land-use planning and transportation in order to reduce congestion and the need for car journeys and to encourage a shift to more sustainable modes of transport, in particular walking and cycling;
- to promote vital and viable town centres;
- to protect and enhance the character, quality and biodiversity of natural and man-made environments; and
- to facilitate the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different religions belief, political opinion or racial group.

Plan Strategy

The Strategy of the Plan centres on the need for it to be in broad conformity with the RDS and in particular its Spatial Development Strategy, a major thrust of which is to promote more sustainable patterns of development based on:-

- a polycentric network of growth poles integrated with the transport corridors and incorporating enhanced public transport;
- compact urban forms;
- more housing within existing urban areas; and
- the sensible and sensitive use of the built heritage and the rural environment.

Introduction

In summary, the Plan Strategy is to: -

- identify, define, designate and safeguard as appropriate, areas of conservation, archaeological, scientific, landscape or amenity importance or interest, within both the natural and built heritage of the Plan area;
- designate settlement limits and land use zonings for Newtownards and Downpatrick such as to facilitate a level of growth which reflects their status as main towns and main hubs so defined in the RDS; and for Ballynahinch, Comber and Newcastle such as to facilitate a level of growth which reflects their defined status as local hubs; and for Donaghadee such as to facilitate a level of growth which reflects its town status;
- designate zonings for housing development which will facilitate an appropriate level of housing growth in Ballynahinch and Comber, two of the seven towns in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Rural Hinterland, for which the RDS has indicated a significant planned expansion to meet housing need related to the Metropolitan Area;
- facilitate management of the release of housing land for development in towns in accordance with the RDS, through a sequential and phased approach, where appropriate, and in support of urban renaissance and conservation of town settings and greenfield lands by maximising as feasible the identified proportion of new housing potential within existing urban areas;
- designate settlement limits for villages and small settlements, which will facilitate a level of new housing development that is in conformity with the approach set out in the RDS and in accordance with the assessment of their individual capacities, whilst recognising a proportion of new housing development is likely to continue to be provided in the open countryside;
- establish policy, proposals and criteria as appropriate against which particular site development proposals will be assessed in order to help achieve good quality development, to respect environmental assets and to facilitate the development of balanced communities in accordance with the strategic requirements of the RDS;
- protect existing and designate additional industrial areas to make provision for an adequate supply and choice of land for employment uses which take account of the provisions of the RDS including the proximity to Plan area population, in particular areas of economic and social deprivation, and of accessibility to major transportation routes;
- identify, define, designate and safeguard as appropriate specific areas where the retention of, or provision of additional, retail, services, leisure and other community facilities will positively contribute to the amenity and well being of the Plan area population, subject to prevailing regional planning policy;
- promote appropriate growth of the tourism industry; and
- define, as appropriate, transportation related proposals in accordance with the Regional Transportation Strategy which are intended to facilitate improved flow of vehicular traffic whilst promoting reduction in car travel and the use of alternative modes of travel.

It is proposed that the Plan will implement this Strategy through a set of Policies and Proposals that are in accordance with the Department's current regional planning policies. These Plan policies and proposals are contained in Volumes 1, 2 and 3.

Policy Framework

part 2

Environment and Conservation

Ards Borough and Down District are especially rich in varied landscapes, wildlife habitats and heritage features, which together distinguish their special character and identity.

The two districts share the important environmental resource of Strangford Lough, an enclosed, tranquil stretch of marine water with an indented coastline of islands or half-drowned drumlins and inlets on the western side and a smoother coastline on the east, both backed by wooded estates. Extensive mudflats are exposed at low tide at the northern end of the Lough, from the Comber River estuary to the shoreline of the Ards Peninsula. Both districts also share the distinctive drumlin landscape of County Down, which gives the landscape an intimate character and often prevents long distance views along public roads.

To the south-east, the rugged Lecale hills stretch from Downpatrick to Portaferry and are the centre of St Patrick's Country. The Lecale coast from Strangford to Ballykinler is a predominantly flat and exposed landscape in contrast to the Mourne visible to the south-west. The distinctive stone wall farmed landscape and upland heather of the Mourne Mountains and Slieve Croob areas occupy the southern part of Down District with the rocky and exposed outer Ards coast to the east.

The high scenic quality and character of the landscape of the Plan area is reflected by the designation of three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty at Strangford Lough, Lecale Coast and Mourne. National Park status for the Mourne has been under consideration but the outcome has yet to be determined. A public consultation exercise was recently completed involving all interested parties.



Environment and Conservation

There are two Areas of High Scenic Value at Craigantlet and Magheraknock and parts of both are within the Plan area. The landscape character areas within the Ards Borough and Down District are described in the published Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 Series.

Biodiversity is the total variety of all living things and includes all animal and plant species. At the larger scale, biodiversity relates to the variation in landscapes and habitats and at the smallest scale to genetic differences in plants and animals. Biodiversity is vital to the health of the planet and to our own quality of life. Human activity can have both positive and negative influences on the distribution and diversity of plant and animal species in the Plan area and throughout Northern Ireland.

All the main habitat types are well represented within the Plan area. Improved grassland is the predominant land use, with habitat value within the dense network of boundary hedgerows and other linear features. Extensive areas of acid grassland are found in upland areas and margins. Woodland cover is least common, with small areas of semi-natural woodland on steep slopes and in river valleys. The large number of inter-drumlin hollows within the area has given rise to small areas of wet woodland, raised bog or more commonly loughs, swamp or fens. Ards and Down also share a long and varied coastline featuring areas of internationally important sand dunes, salt marsh and mudflats.



part 2

The most common form of conserving biodiversity and geodiversity is the designation, protection and management of the best sites of nature conservation importance. A hierarchy of designations is available under European and National legislation and designation is primarily the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). Generally sites are selected for their rarity value or the diversity of species and habitats they contain or as a representative example of their habitat or geology type on a national or international scale. For example, sites of international importance comprise sites listed under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and European Sites (Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation) protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007. Collectively these European sites are known as “Natura 2000” sites.

Article 6 Assessment and Compliance with the Habitats Directive

Article 6 of the European Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC states that any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. The Plan may be granted authorisation only on the condition that the Department is certain that it is not likely to have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of the sites concerned. The assessment should consider the impact of the Plan alone, cumulatively or in combination with any other relevant plans and projects likely to impact on the Natura 2000 sites concerned. Accordingly, the Plan has been assessed as to its likely effects on the following Natura 2000 sites within or close to the Plan area:

- Strangford Lough Special Area of Conservation (SAC);

- Eastern Mourne SAC;
- Lecale Fens SAC;
- Hollymount SAC;
- Murlough SAC;
- Aghnadarragh Lough SAC;
- Turmennan SAC;
- Ballykilbeg SAC;
- Strangford Lough Special Protection Area (SPA);
- Outer Ards SPA;
- Killough Bay & Strand Lough SPA;
- Belfast Lough SPA;
- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA;
- Turmennan Ramsar;
- Killough Bay & Strand Lough Ramsar;
- Belfast Lough Ramsar;
- Strangford Lough Ramsar; and
- Outer Ards Ramsar.

An Appropriate Assessment Report is published along with the Plan.

Any future planning application that is likely to have a significant impact on a Natura 2000 or Ramsar site will be subject to an Article 6 Assessment. Any future planning application will be considered in the context of the relevant proposals contained in the Plan and also prevailing regional policy. Where appropriate, hydrological Zones of Influence have been identified for Natura 2000 sites in line with the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 2 (PPS 2): Planning and Nature Conservation. Details of these are contained in the Appropriate Assessment Technical Supplement. An Article 6 Assessment will be carried out before development proceeds in respect of such built development or mineral

Environment and Conservation

extraction applications within these zones of influence. An assessment will also be carried out before any development proceeds in respect of any industrial development which will have aerial emissions that could result in likely significant adverse impact on a Natura or Ramsar site. This assessment should consider the impact of any project alone, cumulatively or in combination with any other relevant plans and projects within the vicinity of the above Natura 2000 sites. Where waste water treatment works capacity is not sufficient to cope with a proposed development at the time of a planning application, the developer will be required to work with the Department and Northern Ireland Water to ensure that there will be no likely adverse impact on any Natura 2000 or Ramsar site by providing interim sewerage treatment arrangements.

Sites important in a national context include Areas of Special Scientific Interest and Nature Reserves, and sites of local importance for nature conservation include Wildlife Refuges, Local Nature Reserves established by District Councils and non-statutory nature reserves managed by public agencies or voluntary conservation bodies, as well as other sites of local nature conservation importance highlighted in undertaking the Countryside Assessment. Management of these sites is generally achieved through regulation of activities and negotiation with landowners or government ownership.

Strangford Lough is of outstanding value and importance as a marine habitat for a wealth of plant and bird life. Conservation of its habitats and wildlife is effected by a variety of statutory designations made under European Directives and regional legislation. A Strangford Lough Management Scheme is now in place to provide a monitor and control framework to ensure that human activities are not allowed to degrade the Lough's key conservation features.

The story of human activity within the Plan area is illustrated by archaeological sites and monuments, vernacular and historic buildings, features and structures surviving from past industries, planned parkland landscapes and in the pattern of streets and buildings in our historic townscapes. As a coastal area, there is also a particular maritime element in the local heritage. This heritage is finite and vulnerable and it is important that it be cherished and protected for future generations to enjoy as we do. The Plan area contains a wealth of buildings listed as being of special architectural or historic interest, and a significant number of historic parks, gardens and demesnes of special historical interest. There are also 9 designated Conservation Areas in the Plan area.

Within the Plan Area there are a range of important archaeological sites, many of which are scheduled under the provisions of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995 and some are presently in the care of the Department. The interrelationship between the surrounding landscape and upstanding remains often heightens the appreciation of an archaeological site. The preservation of such sites and their settings is of the highest priority.



part 2

With ongoing archaeological survey work there may be changes to the exact location of these sites. Over the Plan period, additional archaeological remains may be discovered. The existence of such remains may represent a material change that can affect the nature of development that will be permitted in respect of an area within a settlement, or in the countryside.

In some cases, archaeological sites and monuments have formed the basis for, or contributed to the designation of Local Landscape Policy Areas.

(see Plan Policy CON 2)

All these features are identified on the relevant maps included within the Plan.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, (NIEA), is also responsible for safeguarding the quality of air, water and land through safe and sustainable waste disposal, monitoring standards, enforcing legislation, controlling pollution and raising awareness of the problems and their causes. Their aim, to improve the marine and freshwater aquatic environments, is particularly significant given the high number of rivers, loughs and lakes and the amount of coastline within the Plan area.



Environment and Conservation

Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), is based on the guiding principle of protection and enhancement of the environment through an approach to development and policy formulation, which has the condition of the environment as a central deciding factor. One of the key regional challenges will therefore be to accommodate future development growth while protecting and caring for the environment. The RDS includes the following strategic planning guidelines:

- to conserve the natural environment (SPG-ENV 1);
- to protect and manage the Northern Ireland coastline (SPG-ENV 2);
- to conserve the built environment (SPG-ENV 3);
- to foster a stronger community spirit and sense of place in relation to local development proposals in urban and rural areas by the use of Local Development Guidelines (SPG-ENV 4);
- to respond to the implications of climate change and promote more prudent and efficient use of energy and resources, and effective waste management (SPG-ENV 5); and
- to create healthier living environments and to support healthy lifestyles (SPG-ENV 6).

The Department's regional planning policies for the protection of conservation interests are currently set out in Planning Policy Statement 2, (PPS 2): Planning and Nature Conservation, and Planning Policy Statement 6, (PPS 6): Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage and Addendum. In addition, the Department published the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy in August 2002.

The remainder of the Department's regional planning policies in relation to the environment including protection of rural landscapes and the coast, assessment of environmental effects of proposals and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are currently set out within the Department's A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (the Rural Strategy).

Policy CON 1 Areas of High Scenic Value

In determining applications for planning permission within Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSV), the Department will consider how the proposals will conserve and enhance the landscape of the AoHSV and will have particular regard to the siting, massing, scale and design, materials, finishes and landscaping of proposals in order to ensure that development will:

- integrate well into the topography and landscape of the local environment; and
- respect the scale of, and materials used in, existing vernacular and traditional buildings in the surrounding area.

Areas of High Scenic Value have been designated at Magheraknock Loughs and Craigtlet Escarpment as identified in the Countryside Section in Part 3 of this Volume of the Plan and indicated on the relevant Countryside Maps.

Where the boundary of the AoHSV follows the line of a road, the outer edge of the AoHSV is defined at 100m beyond the road line.

The landscapes of the proposed AoHSV are considered to be of local and regional importance. Planning applications in these areas will be considered within the context of prevailing policy, but in addition, a proposed development must demonstrate that it can further satisfy the above criteria to ensure that it will not result in adverse changes to the character or quality of the landscape.

High design standards will be required of developments within AoHSV and re-use of traditional buildings and vernacular features may be preferred to new build.

Landscape analysis should accompany development proposals to indicate the likely effects of the proposed development on the landscape. Planting of indigenous tree species should generally be an integral part of these proposals, and the site must be large enough to accommodate any mitigation measures identified.

Environment and Conservation

Policy CON 2 Local Landscape Policy Areas

Planning permission will not be granted to development proposals which would be liable to adversely affect the environmental quality, integrity or character of these areas.

Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs) are those areas, within or adjoining settlements, which are considered to be of greatest amenity value, landscape quality or local significance, and therefore worthy of protection from undesirable or damaging development. They include:

- archaeological sites and monuments and their surroundings;
- listed and other locally important buildings and their surroundings;
- river banks and shore lines and associated public access;
- attractive vistas, localised hills and other areas of local amenity importance; and
- areas of local nature conservation importance, including areas of woodland and important tree groups.

LLPAs proposed in association with the settlements listed below will help to ensure that new development does not dominate their distinctive landscape and townscape characteristics. They may also function as buffer zones between different uses and help to reduce the likelihood of over-intensive development. LLPAs located outside settlement limits will help to protect those features considered of greatest importance to the local landscape setting.

Where trees, groups of trees and woodlands in LLPAs contribute significantly to visual amenity, or where they are considered to be under threat from development, tree preservation orders will normally be used.

Where riverbanks are included within LLPAs the Department will normally require, as part of any development proposal, that access be provided to the river corridor. A landscape buffer may also be required between any development and the river corridor to maintain its intrinsic environmental value.

Local Landscape Policy Areas may contain significant parts of Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes, conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeological monuments to which prevailing regional planning policies contained within PPS 6 will also apply.

Local Landscape Policy Areas have been designated in and adjoining the following settlements:

Newtownards, Comber, Donaghadee, Balloo, Ballygowan, Ballyhalbert, Ballywalter, Carrowdore, Cloughey, Greyabbey, Killinchy, Kircubbin, Millisle, Portaferry, Portavogie, Downpatrick, Ballynahinch, Newcastle, Ardglass, Castlewellan, Crossgar, Killyleagh, Saintfield, Annsborough, Clough, Drumaness, Dundrum, Killough, Shrigley, Strangford and The Spa and in or adjoining the following small settlements:

Ballyboley, Ballycranbeg, Ballydrain, Ballystockart, Glastry, Kilmood, Annacloy, Bryansford, Carrickinab, Drumaghilis, Kilclief, Kilcoo, Kilmore, Loughinisland, Maghera, Raholp, Saul and Seaforde.

The LLPAs are identified on the relevant Settlement Maps and Countryside Maps and further information on the environmental quality, integrity and character of each area is set out in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Policy CON 3 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance

Planning permission will not be granted to development proposals that would be liable to have a significantly adverse effect on the nature conservation interests of these sites.

Where a development is permitted which might adversely affect conservation interests, the Department will endeavour to ensure that such effects are kept to a minimum, and that appropriate mitigation measures are implemented.

In assessing development proposals on or adjacent to these sites, priority will be given to the protection of their nature conservation interests. Planning permission, where granted, will be subject to conditions in order to protect the conservation interest, or to require appropriate mitigation measures.

Where appropriate, developers may be asked to enter a Planning Agreement to secure these outcomes.

Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance have been designated within the open countryside and Newtownards and Newcastle settlement limits as identified in Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of the Plan and on the relevant Countryside Maps and in Appendix 5.

Areas of Townscape Character

Areas of Townscape Character are designated in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 6 and Addendum (PPS 6): Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage in Newtownards, Comber, Donaghadee, Greyabbey, Kircubbin, Kearney area, Newcastle, Dundrum, Bryansford and Seaforde as indicated on the relevant Settlement Maps and Countryside Map and Appendix 6 (for Kearney). Planning applications within Areas of Townscape Character will be considered in the context of prevailing planning policy.

All settlements have their own identity and character, derived from the sense of place that comes from human activity, which over time has shaped the present built form. In some places, the variety, or consistency of the overall character, including style of construction and in some instances landscaping, is particularly distinctive or pleasing, and merits specific protection from inappropriate change.

The Department wishes to ensure that new development respects the distinctive character and appearance of the townscape in the designated areas. The Department also considers that the characteristic built forms in these areas can inform developers in preparing development proposals elsewhere in these settlements, in order to reinforce local identity. More detail on the traditional character, appearance and key features of the designated Areas of Townscape Character and advice on development within these areas is provided within the Countryside Section in Part 3 of this Volume (for Kearney) and within Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Environment and Conservation

Policy CON 4 Areas of Significant Archaeological Interest

Planning permission will not be granted for proposals for large-scale development or the erection of masts or pylons within these areas unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no significant impact on the character and appearance of this distinctive historic landscape. Particular attention will be paid to the impact of proposals when viewed from the monuments and other critical viewpoints within this area and on the impression gained while moving in and around the various monuments and the area.

Should planning permission be granted for development within this area the Department will require the implementation of mitigation works.

An Area of Significant Archaeological Interest (ASAI) is designated within and adjoining Downpatrick and adjoining Dundrum as identified in Volume 3 of the Plan and indicated on the relevant Settlement Maps and Down Countryside maps.

The Department will use its development control powers to ensure that the setting of the monuments is preserved and that development does not have a detrimental effect on sites and monuments or the character, appearance or visual amenity of the surrounding landscape. Accordingly, there will be a general presumption against large-scale developments within the ASAI, such as quarrying or mining operations, waste disposal, industrial units or major tourism schemes and proposals for the erection of masts or pylons as it is considered the scale and overall impact of such proposals could be particularly damaging to the distinctive appearance, character and heritage interests of the area. Other development proposals will be determined on their merits having regard to the Department's regional planning policies and the policies and guidance in the Plan.

Policy CON 5 Areas of Archaeological Potential

Within designated Areas of Archaeological Potential developers will normally be required to submit an archaeological assessment or archaeological evaluation to accompany planning applications.

Areas of Archaeological Potential are designated within the following settlements as identified in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan: Newtownards, Comber, Donaghadee, Ballyhalbert, Greyabbey, Millisle, Portaferry, Ardmillan, Downpatrick, Ballynahinch, Newcastle, Ardglass, Castlewellan, Clough, Killyleagh, Saintfield, Strangford and Kilclief and on the relevant settlement or Countryside maps.

These areas indicate to developers that, on the basis of current knowledge, it is likely that archaeological remains will be encountered in the course of future development or change within the area. Submission of an archaeological assessment or evaluation in support of a planning application will therefore allow informed and reasonable decisions to be taken.

Prevailing regional policy on archaeological excavation and mitigation is currently set out in Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS 6): Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage.

Advice on the treatment of archaeological sites and monuments within residential developments is contained within the Department's Publication "Creating Places: achieving quality in residential developments". Developers are strongly advised to liaise with the Department before submitting any proposals within these areas.

Policy Framework

Settlement

The estimated 2001 population of Ards Borough and Down District was 73,200 and 63,800 respectively. Approximately 80 per cent of the household population of Ards Borough live within its 16 towns and villages, whilst 62 per cent of the Down District household population live within its 17 towns and villages.

Newtownards in Ards Borough and Downpatrick in Down District function as the major centres for housing, employment, retail, professional services and for cultural activities, including sport and leisure.

The 2001 Census confirms that 59% of the population of Ards Borough live in the main town, Newtownards and the two small towns, Comber and Donaghadee, which are located around the outside edge of the Belfast Metropolitan Area. In contrast, 36% of Down District's population live in the main town of Downpatrick and the two small towns of Ballynahinch and Newcastle.

The smaller towns and villages perform a lesser, but locally significant role, in providing housing, employment and services. Villages in Down District are generally larger than those in Ards, in particular Castlewellan, Saintfield, Crossgar and Killyleagh, offering a wide range of services and facilities to the rural community. The range of services available in villages in Ards Borough, other than Portaferry, is generally more limited.

Small settlements, at the lower end of the settlement hierarchy, provide a community focus for their immediate rural area but are limited in their infrastructure, services and employment provision and offer only very limited growth potential.

Regional Policy Context

Each tier of settlement has a specific role to play in the Spatial Development Strategy, which is central to the Regional Development Strategy, (RDS). The Spatial Development Strategy is a framework for the future physical development of the Region and identifies a hierarchy of rural settlements based on:

- main hubs, (also referred to as main towns), which are settlements with a population between 10,000 and 30,000;
- local hubs, (also referred to as small towns), which are settlements with a population of between 5,000 and 10,000;
- villages; and
- small rural settlements.

The Strategy states that future levels of growth of each town will vary, depending on a range of factors such as strategic location, the size of its population and its catchment, the range of employment, infrastructure and services available and the quality of the environment and living conditions.

Newtownards and Downpatrick are identified as Main Hubs or Main Towns in the Spatial Development Strategy. It states that due weight needs to be given to reinforcing their leading roles as the major centres of administration, cultural and leisure amenities, employment and services. They will have a leading role in accommodating the need for urban housing in each council area. Both towns are considered potentially as counter magnets to the Belfast Metropolitan Area, which should develop according to their individual capacities and growth potential.

part 2

The Spatial Development Strategy identifies both Ballynahinch and Comber as Local Hubs, the planned expansion of which may be required to meet housing need related to the Belfast Metropolitan Area. Newcastle is also identified as a Local Hub.

Villages also have a specific role as identified in the Spatial Development Strategy. They are market centres, providing employment and services. The Strategy refers to the need to sustain and consolidate the role of villages as local rural service centres. It distinguishes between those villages that have experienced excessive levels of growth, disproportionate to their services and infrastructure, and those in decline and in need of revitalisation.

Small settlements provide local housing opportunities for rural dwellers wishing to continue living in the countryside. Consequently, a portion of the regional housing indicator for each district will be accommodated within small settlements and the open countryside.

Within the Belfast Metropolitan Area travel-to-work hinterland, which includes much of the Plan area, the Strategy highlights the need to consolidate villages and small rural settlements, to resist their large scale expansion, and the development of entirely new settlements, in order to support and to reinforce main towns, to make best use of past investment in infrastructure and services, and to conserve resources.

Proposals for major growth in a village or small settlement, or the creation of a new settlement, are to be tested against the principles supporting the Spatial Development Strategy, and within the BMA travel-to-work hinterland, specifically against Strategic Planning Guidance (SPG-RNI 3),

- “To support the network of service centres based on small towns and villages in rural Northern Ireland”.

A strong network of vibrant main and small towns, supported by the villages, is stated in the Strategy to be vital to sustaining and servicing the rural community.



Settlement

Policy SETT 1 Settlement Limits

Favourable consideration will be given to development proposals within settlement limits including zoned sites provided that the proposal is sensitive to the size and character of the settlement in terms of scale, form, design and use of materials; and is in accordance with the requirements and guidance contained in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

A settlement limit is designated for each town, village and small settlement in the Plan area, including Ballygalget in Ards Borough and Drumaghlis in Down District, two additional small settlements. Land is zoned for the principal land uses within Newtownards, Downpatrick, Comber, Donaghadee, Ballynahinch and Newcastle. Proposals for the defined settlement limits are set out in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Settlement limits are defined following a detailed assessment of each settlement in accordance with regional policy as part of the Countryside Assessment. This involved a detailed analysis of each settlement, including specific roles and functions, environmental issues, availability of services, community facilities, infrastructure and spare capacity, and current development pressures. Detailed consultation has been carried out with other statutory bodies.

Settlement limits will facilitate compact, properly structured and appropriately scaled local growth, protect the character of each settlement and constrain both ribbon development and urban sprawl in the countryside.

In some settlements the identified limit to development is defined to exclude lands within the current settlement limit. A reduction in the extent of current settlement limits is

justified where the capacity for development within existing limits is incompatible with a sustainable distribution of development throughout the district and is therefore inconsistent with the policies and guidance contained in the RDS. Less extensive settlement limits are also identified to protect visual amenity in a number of localities. Caravan sites on the inner edge of existing settlement limits have been excluded to avoid their unplanned development for housing and loss of valuable tourism accommodation. Similarly, existing playing fields in such locations are excluded since their recreational purposes are appropriate and will be protected in areas where rural policies apply.

Development proposals in the towns, villages and small settlements of the Plan area will be considered in the context of prevailing planning policy and of relevant policies and proposals in the Plan. In towns, and in some of the villages and small settlements, Key Design Considerations are provided which are specific to the development of particular sites. Development proposals will be tested against these requirements.

Within the settlement limits there exists within the urban fabric incidental parcels of land which are neither built-up nor zoned for a particular use. Any future development proposals on such areas must satisfy prevailing policy requirements, for example, Planning Policy Statement 15 (PPS 15): Planning and Flood Risk in which there is a presumption against development on lands subject to flooding.

Settlement limits and land use zonings are shown on the settlement maps. Specific requirements and guidance for each settlement and for zoned sites are provided in the Settlement Proposals Section in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Policy SETT 2 Land Use Policy Areas

Land Use Policy Areas are identified within the settlement limits of villages and small settlements to indicate areas, which are considered particularly suitable for a specified type of development. Favourable consideration will be given to development proposals within Land Use Policy Areas provided that the proposal is in accordance with the requirements and guidance contained in Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Planning permission will be granted for alternative types of development in a Land Use Policy Area only where the development proposed will:

- be subordinate to the preferred use and occupy a small portion of the Land Use Policy Area;
- exist in close proximity to the preferred use without adverse environmental consequences;
- not prejudice accessibility to the remainder of the Land Use Policy Area, and
- not prejudice potential in the settlement to meet overall development needs.

In addition development proposals in Land Use Policy Areas will be subject to the requirements of all prevailing planning policy.

It is not the Department's practice to zone lands for specific purposes within villages and small settlements. Zoning creates a degree of inflexibility in the development of those lands, which can frustrate the orderly development of smaller settlements if the lands are not made available for the intended use, or the zoning prevents an alternative suitable use of the land.

Land Use Policy Areas identify lands considered to be particularly appropriate for specific types of development. For example, they identify lands which can make a key contribution to the amount of housing growth allocated to a village or small settlement. They are also used to identify sites which are particularly suitable for industrial or business use, or for which there is a clear indication of potential demand for such use.

Development requirements are set out for each Land Use Policy Area in the relevant settlement section in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Settlement

Policy SETT 3 Development Opportunity Sites

Development Opportunity Sites are identified within the settlement limits of Main and Large Towns to indicate areas which are considered particularly suitable for a specified type of development. Development Proposals in Development Opportunity Sites shall be in accordance with the requirements and guidance contained in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Development Opportunity Sites are identified in Newtownards, Comber and Donaghadee in Ards Borough, and in Downpatrick, Ballynahinch and Newcastle in Down District.

Development Opportunity Sites are identified where lands are under-utilised or vacant and where development, which might provide a mix of new uses, could promote the vitality and viability of the urban area or town centre, or could enhance the townscape, for example by closing frontage gaps or by replacing unattractive features. Such development within a town centre could enhance shopping frontages, encourage pedestrian movement and so assist commercial growth.

Proposals to develop these sites will be considered in the context of prevailing regional planning policy and guidance, and the policies and guidance contained in the Plan. Development requirements for each site are provided in the relevant Settlement section in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

The initiation of development proposals for identified sites will be a matter for landowners and interested developers.

Policy Framework

part 2

Housing

Housing continues to place the greatest demand on the land resource throughout the Plan area. Need for additional housing land is created by the formation of new households through natural increase in the population, inward migration and the trend to smaller household sizes. That need includes variety in dwelling size, type and tenure to meet the particular requirements of groups such as the elderly, people with limited incomes and people with disabilities.



Housing

Regional Policy Context

Prevailing regional planning policy for housing development is currently contained in the Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), in relevant Planning Policy Statements, (PPS's) and in "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland", (the Rural Strategy). A Planning Policy Statement, PPS 12 – Housing in Settlements was published in July 2005.

The RDS has introduced a radical change in the manner in which the amount of land for housing development is to be allocated to, and distributed throughout, a plan area. The RDS identifies a need for 208,000 new houses in Northern Ireland in the period 1998-2015 and allocates this growth to each district council area by means of "Housing Growth Indicators".

The RDS allocates 10,500 housing units as an appropriate "Housing Growth Indicator" for the period 1998-2015 to Ards Borough and to Down District respectively. It is the task of the Plan to distribute the growth allocated to each district in accordance with the strategic planning guidance in the RDS.

Achieving balanced communities and social cohesion, consistent with the RDS (SPG-HOU6), requires that social diversity and inclusion should characterise new housing development. Affordable housing, social housing and housing to meet the special needs of community groups such as the elderly and disabled will be required.

Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7): Quality Residential Environments sets out the Department's regional planning policies for achieving quality in the design and layout of new residential developments. It embodies the Government's commitment to sustainable development and the Quality Initiative. The Statement contains criteria-based policies against which all proposals for new residential development will be assessed, with the exception of single dwellings in the

Countryside. These will continue to be assessed under policies contained in Draft Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS 21): Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Zoning of lands for housing development will not of itself convey permission to develop. All development proposals must demonstrate to the Department how quality objectives are to be achieved. Development of housing lands will require to be designed and implemented in accordance with prevailing regional planning policy on housing and with the relevant policies of the Plan. In addition, Key Design Considerations are detailed in the Plan which are specific to certain sites and which should be taken into account in the preparation of site proposals.

Many development sites will require the improvement of existing infrastructure and / or the provision of additional infrastructure to enable the development to take place. The infrastructural works may include roads, water and sewerage or land drainage. It is presently government policy to require developers to bear all or part of these infrastructural costs. This policy applies to both public and private sector developments. Where appropriate, planning agreements under Article 40 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 may be used to enable developers to proceed.

Supplementary planning guidance for residential development is contained in "Creating Places - Achieving Quality in Residential Development", published in May 2000. It is the principle guide for use by intending developers in the design of all new housing areas.

In addition, the Department has published Development Control Advice Note (DCAN) 8: Housing in Existing Urban Areas, which will be material to the determination of planning applications for small unit housing within existing urban areas.

part 2

Proposal HOU 1 Zonings: Ards Borough

A total of approximately 317 hectares of land are zoned for housing in Ards Borough, comprising:

- Newtownards: 207 hectares
- Comber: 68 hectares
- Donaghadee: 42 hectares

Within the settlement limits as designated for the villages in Ards Borough, there is capacity to accommodate approximately 2300 dwellings. A further capacity exists within the designated limits of the small settlements.

Proposal HOU 2 Zonings and Phasing: Down District

A total of approximately 240 hectares of land are zoned for housing in Down District, comprising:

- Downpatrick: 141 hectares
- Ballynahinch: 68 hectares
- Newcastle: 31 hectares

Phase 1 Zonings

Approximately 218 hectares are allocated within Down District as Phase 1 Housing land, comprising:

- Downpatrick: 119 hectares
- Ballynahinch: 68 hectares
- Newcastle: 31 hectares

Phase 2 Zonings

The remaining 22 hectares have been zoned as Phase 2 housing land:

- Downpatrick: 22 hectares

Land is Phase 2 in Downpatrick will not be released until the transportation infrastructure associated with the Phase 1 housing has been completed.

Within the settlement limits as designated for the villages in Down District, there is capacity to accommodate approximately 2500 dwellings. A further capacity exists within the designated limits of the small settlements.

Housing

Land developed since the outset of the Plan period

Housing land developed and units constructed throughout the Plan area since January 2000 contributes to the housing supply over the Plan period.

Windfall Sites

Windfall development is housing provision on undesignated sites and as such, can not be precisely anticipated. It can arise as a result, for example, of plot sub-division or property conversion and can normally make a significant contribution to the housing land supply over any Plan period. Accordingly, past trends have been used to estimate the potential level of windfall sites that might become available for development during the Plan period and this has been taken into account in the housing allocations designated for each settlement.

Urban Capacity Land

The RDS aims to provide an increased share of future residential development within the existing urban footprint to reduce greenfield housing extensions and to encourage compact urban forms, in order to promote sustainable forms of development. The RDS states that targets for individual towns will be set through the development plan process.

In Ards Borough it is anticipated that urban capacity sites will provide approximately 87 hectares of future housing land in Newtownards, Comber and Donaghadee, (or 27 % of the total provision for the Plan period) the remaining 230 hectares to be provided from Greenfield sites.

In Down District, it is anticipated that urban capacity sites will provide approximately 81 hectares of future housing land in Downpatrick, Ballynahinch and Newcastle, (or 34 % of the total provision for the Plan period), the remaining 159 hectares to be provided from Greenfield sites.

The higher anticipated targets or yields in terms of units constructed within urban capacity sites in comparison to the amount of land to be developed reflects the higher densities expected on urban capacity sites compared to green field sites.

Site Densities

Site densities are specified in line with the requirements of prevailing regional policy and in response to specific site circumstances. A minimum site density has been specified as part of the specific Key Design Guidelines for Urban Capacity Sites and Greenfield sites within the main and large towns of Newtownards, Comber, Donaghadee in Ards and Downpatrick, Ballynahinch and Newcastle in Down and in each village throughout the Plan area. This is to ensure the optimum use of land and to achieve housing targets identified for each settlement in the Plan.

A maximum site density is also stipulated for each greenfield site within the Main and Large towns only. This is to minimise the potential for significant divergence between the Plan housing allocation framework and the RDS strategic objectives. In considering applications for housing on such sites other prevailing regional policy requirements will also be material considerations. A maximum density has not been set for urban capacity lands.

Policy HOU 3 Protected Housing Areas

Planning permission will not be granted for redevelopment or change of use within the protected housing areas in the Town Centres as identified on the relevant settlement town centre maps in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Protected Housing Areas are designated in Newtownards, Comber and Donaghadee in Ards Borough, and Downpatrick, Ballynahinch and Newcastle in Down District.

Town Centre housing can provide benefits, particularly for the elderly and young single people and for those without cars who wish to live within walking distance of the facilities of the Centre. Housing can bring benefits by providing continued life, activity and surveillance in the Centre outside normal commercial hours.

The Department will resist the spread of commercial uses into those areas which have a useful longer term residential life. They provide a valuable housing stock and are homes for established communities which contribute to the variety and vitality of life in the Town Centre.

Accommodation for the Travelling Community

Within the context of meeting local housing need and ensuring balanced communities it is important to deal with the needs of the travelling community; therefore, proposals for traveller's accommodation that meet identified local need should be encouraged, subject to meeting prevailing regional policy, currently Planning Policy Statement 12 (PPS 12): Housing in Settlements. These proposals will be expected to clearly demonstrate how they

meet identified local need and the planning authority will assess this in consultation with Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

As with all development proposals, careful consideration will need to be given to the impact of the proposal on both surrounding land uses and the environment. Proposals that have a significant detrimental impact on surrounding land uses or the environment will be resisted.

The RDS, (SPG-HOU6) requires that consideration must be given to the distinctive needs of the travelling community. Policy HS 3 in Planning Policy Statement 12, (PPS 12): Housing in Settlements requires that where a need is identified and a development plan is under preparation, a site should be identified.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has carried out a Housing Needs Assessment and there are no Traveller accommodation needs currently identified for the Plan area. Future review of this assessment will be carried out by the NIHE on an annual rolling basis to reflect changes in need.

Social Housing

Social housing will be provided in accordance with the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 12, (PPS 12): Housing in Settlements, and draft PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside. This states that in locations where a demonstrable housing need is identified by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, planning permission for housing proposals will only be granted where provision is made for a suitable mix of house types and tenures to meet the range of market and social housing needs identified. The proportion of land or units to be set aside for social housing will be determined as part of the development control process.

Housing

Draft PPS 21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside states that planning permission may be granted for a group of no more than 14 dwellings adjacent to or near a small settlement or within a Dispersed Rural Community to provide social and affordable housing to meet the needs of the rural community.

A detailed Housing Needs Assessment has been prepared by NIHE and will be subject to regular review. It will be material consideration when assessing the requirement for social housing provision. Implementation will be achieved through the application of Quality Initiative principles to specific development proposals and, where appropriate, through Planning Agreements to secure a proportion of social housing in major new developments.

Affordable Housing

Policy SPG- HOU 6.4 of the RDS places an onus on development plans to consider if there is a need for an exceptional housing land response to ensure a local supply of affordable housing and if local planning policies are required as a result of this. Lack of affordable housing was raised as an issue in the public participation process, which was followed by the preparation of the Plan.

Affordable housing is a regional issue, which might potentially affect the whole of Northern Ireland. Housing policies seeking to promote affordable housing are addressed in PPS 12: Housing in Settlements and Draft PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

There is currently no mechanism in place for the Plan to specifically address this issue in respect of its housing designations. The Plan focuses development at higher densities in urban areas, promotes mixed housing developments to accommodate balanced communities and promotes improved infrastructure and communications in the Plan area. Although these planning measures will not directly address affordability issues they can contribute positively.

Second Homes

Policy HOU 6.4 of the RDS places an onus on development plans to identify settlements and areas under pressure from second home development but offers no guidance on how this might be achieved.

Pressure from second home development was raised as an issue as part of the participation process leading to the formulation of Plan policies. While it may be the case that second homes is an issue for certain parts of the Plan area, it has not been possible to establish evidence of the exact scale of second home ownership as part of the Plan process. In addition, there is currently no mechanism in place to establish what percentage of planning approvals for new housing is intended for second homes ownership. The Department for Regional Development, (DRD) has confirmed that the uplifted HGI figure for each district includes an allowance for second homes.

Opposition to apartment development in areas most vulnerable to pressure for second homes forms a significant part of the second homes issue. Where considered appropriate, the Plan contains measures intended to protect those areas, which are likely to be under pressure from apartment type development issues, for example Donaghadee and Newcastle.

Policy Framework

part 2

Industry

Industry and employment opportunities within the Plan Area are largely concentrated within the two main towns of Newtownards and Downpatrick. The unemployment rate within the Plan Area has reflected the downward trend in Northern Ireland and has tended to be below the Northern Ireland average.

The most recent figures available confirm that 12.4% of employees in Ards Borough Council were employed in the manufacturing sector and 80.7% in the service sector. This compares with 12.8% and 80.8% respectively for Northern Ireland as a whole. There has been a sharp decline in manufacturing jobs within the Ards Borough since 2003, falling by 20.2% compared to the Northern Ireland average which saw a decline of 4.6%.

Down District Council also has the majority of its working population, some 83.6% concentrated in the service sector, and 7.5% in the manufacturing sector. Downpatrick does not have the same manufacturing tradition as Newtownards and this is reflected in the number of people employed in this sector which is below the Northern Ireland average of 12.8%. There has also been an overall loss

of manufacturing jobs in Down District since 2003, with a decline of 14.5%.

The previous area plans zoned land for industry in Comber, Donaghadee, Ballynahinch and Newcastle as well as in Newtownards and Downpatrick. Further areas of land were also indicated as being suitable for industry in Killyleagh, Annsborough, Ballygowan, Ballywalter, Cloughey, Portaferry, and Portavogie.

Of the 47 hectares previously zoned for industry within the Ards Borough, approximately 29 hectares remain undeveloped. Of the 27 hectares of land zoned in the Down District approximately 7 hectares remains undeveloped. In addition to the remaining zoned land, an additional 34 hectares of industrial land was approved at the start of the Plan period on the edge of Downpatrick for IDB and LEDU companies (now Invest Northern Ireland (INI)). This land is not included in the Down District figures for proposed industrial land, but is protected under Proposal COU 12 in Part 3 of this Volume of the Plan as existing industry.



Industry

Regional Policy Context

SPG- ECON 1 of the Regional Development Strategy, (RDS) is to promote a balanced spread of economic development opportunities across the Region focused on the main regional cities and urban hubs/clusters. It places an onus on development plans to provide a generous and continuous supply of land for employment purposes.

SPG-ECON 2 of the RDS (revised June 2008) aims to exploit the economic development potential of the key transport corridors by promoting and exploiting the potential for economic development at selected locations on the strategic network of key transport corridors and links.

SPG-ECON 4 of the RDS (revised June 2008) is to provide an ample supply of land to facilitate economic growth and protect such land from losses to other uses.

The RDS also aims to develop an attractive and prosperous rural area which, within the context of the RDS, includes the Plan area. This will be achieved by acting on a number of strategic objectives, including:

- Developing a living and working countryside which recognises the unique rural character of the Region and contributes to a sense of belonging in local rural areas;
- Promoting the continuing renewal and revitalisation of towns and villages in Rural Northern Ireland; and
- Improving the accessibility of the rural community to employment, services and regional amenities.

Policies and proposals addressing RDS objectives in respect of industry within the rural area, specifically the open countryside, villages and small settlements are contained in Part 3 of this Volume, and Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Regional development control policies for industry are currently set out in Planning Policy Statement 4, (PPS 4), Industrial Development, published in March 1997. The Department published a consultation draft intended to replace the existing PPS 4 in January 2003 entitled "Industry, Business and Distribution. Work is well advanced on this replacement PPS and it is anticipated that it will be published shortly in its final format.



part 2

Directive 96/82/EC, known as the Seveso II Directive, was implemented in Northern Ireland by the Control of Major-Accident Hazards Regulations (NI) 2000 and the Planning (Control of Major-Accidents Hazards) Regulations (NI) 2000. These are specifically concerned with the implementation of Article 12 of the Directive which requires that the objectives of preventing major accidents and limiting their consequences are taken into account in land-use planning policies and that these objectives are pursued through controls. There is also a requirement to set up appropriate consultation procedures to facilitate implementation of these Regulations.

The Plan does not identify new development sites for the use or storage of hazardous substances. The determination of planning permission for such proposals may entail the submission of an Environmental Statement, which may be accompanied by an application for consent to store hazardous materials on a site. Granting consent to store hazardous substances would establish a consultation distance within which Planning Service is required to consult with Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Environment Agency on proposals for new development.

Details of such guidance and procedures for controlling development in relation to hazardous substances are contained in the Department's Development Control Advice Note (DCAN) 12 - Planning Controls for Hazardous Substances available from Divisional Planning Offices or Planning Service Headquarters.

Policy IND 1 Existing Industrial Sites

Existing industrial land designated in the Plan will be safeguarded against inappropriate development.

Lands in existing industrial use have been designated in Newtownards, Comber, Donaghadee in Ards Borough and in Downpatrick, (including lands at Belfast Road), Newcastle, and Ballynahinch in Down District and are indicated on the relevant settlement maps in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan and relevant Down Countryside Map.

Throughout the Plan area it is important that a supply of industrial land be retained within settlements in order to secure the proper economic development of the Plan area and to meet the needs of local communities. The Department therefore considers it necessary to safeguard existing industrial land within settlements from competing uses. This policy will help maintain the overall level of industrial provision and in line with the RDS will allow for a continuous supply of land for employment purposes.

Where land designated as existing industrial land is being proposed for an alternative purpose to that specified in the Plan it will be necessary for developers to demonstrate that the proposal will not result in a deficiency of industrial land.

It has not been possible to identify all areas in existing industrial use but the precautionary principle inherent in this policy will apply when an alternative use is being proposed for all lands in existing industrial use.

Within these areas, planning applications will be determined in accordance with the provisions of prevailing planning policy.

Industry

Proposal IND 2 Proposed Industrial Land, Ards Borough

A total of approximately 32 hectares of land are zoned for industry in Ards Borough, comprising:

- Newtownards: 27 hectares
- Comber: 5 hectares

Favourable consideration will be given to development proposals on land zoned for industry provided that it is accordance with the requirements and guidance set out for each of these areas in Volume 2 of the Plan.

Applications for planning permission on lands zoned for industry will be processed in accordance with prevailing planning policy.

It is in the interests of the Plan area that adequate sites are identified for industrial uses. Accordingly the Department has zoned land for new industry to meet the needs of industry and business enterprises over the Plan period.

The principal site development requirements affecting zoned lands are set out in the relevant settlement sections in Volume 2 of the Plan. These include the provision of infrastructure, landscaping and appropriate access arrangements as well as matters relating to form, design and layout of development. It is considered that the range of sites will provide flexibility in choice of site for developers. Lands proposed for industry are identified on the relevant Plan settlement maps.

Proposal IND 3 Proposed Industrial Land, Down District

A total of approximately 25 hectares of land are zoned for industry in Down District, comprising:

- Downpatrick: 20 hectares
- Ballynahinch: 5 hectares
- Newcastle: 0.3 hectares

Favourable consideration will be given to development proposals on land zoned for industry provided that it is accordance with the requirements and guidance set out for each of these areas in Volume 3 of the Plan.

Applications for planning permission on lands zoned for industry will be processed in accordance with prevailing planning policy.

It is in the interests of the Plan area that adequate sites are identified for industrial uses. Accordingly the Department has zoned land for new industry to meet the needs of industry and business enterprises over the Plan period.

The principal site development requirements affecting zoned lands are set out in the relevant settlement sections in Volume 3 of the Plan. These include the provision of infrastructure, landscaping and appropriate access arrangements as well as matters relating to form, design and layout of development. It is considered that the range of sites will provide flexibility in choice of site for developers. Lands proposed for industry are identified on the relevant Plan settlement maps.

Policy Framework

part 2

Retailing, Services and Offices

Newtownards, the primary commercial centre within Ards Borough, provides 33% of the shopping floorspace and is also well served by banks, offices and retail services. Ards Shopping Centre adds to the variety of retailing provided by independent traders.

Downpatrick is the main administrative and service centre for Down District and provides a wide range of retail facilities. Commercial floorspace in the town has recently expanded with the arrival of a number of new commercial developments including a new shopping centre at Ballydugan Road and other multi-national and regional stores.

Ballynahinch and Newcastle in Down District and Donaghadee and Comber in Ards Borough provide important commercial focal points and service centres for their rural hinterlands.

The villages throughout the Plan area provide a range and variety of local and specialist retail and service facilities for their immediate areas.



Retailing, Services and Offices

Regional Policy Context

The Spatial Development Strategy central to the Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), seeks to develop a vibrant rural Northern Ireland spread across a network of hubs/clusters based on the main towns or hubs which have a role as centres of employment and services for urban and rural communities. Newtownards and Downpatrick have been identified as main hubs

The RDS requires the promotion of town centre vitality and viability. The means of achieving it include establishing a multi-functional role for town centres as prime locations for retail, service, administrative, leisure and cultural activities, making them physically attractive and distinctive, encouraging a diversity of economic activity and strengthening their accessibility by public transport. Residential development is to be encouraged in town centres to add vitality and security.

The Department's current regional policy for retailing and town centres is contained in Planning Policy Statement 5, (PPS 5): Retailing and Town Centres. For office development in town centres and elsewhere, current regional policy is contained in "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland". The Department has published consultation drafts proposed to replace the existing PPSs entitled PPS 4: Industry, Business and Distribution and PPS 5: Retailing, Town Centres and Commercial Leisure Developments. Work on PPS 4 is well advanced and it is anticipated that it will be published shortly in its final format containing the Department's regional policies on industry, commerce and office development.

Relevant supplementary planning guidance is contained in the following series of Development Control Advice Notes (DCANs):

- DCAN 1 Amusement Arcades;
- DCAN 3 Bookmaking Offices;
- DCAN 4 Hot Food Bars;
- DCAN 5 Taxi Offices;
- DCAN 6 Restaurants and Cafes; and
- DCAN 7 Public Houses.

part 2

Town Centre Health Checks were carried out as part of the Plan preparation process and in accordance with PPS 5.

Town Centres are designated for Newtownards, Comber and Donaghadee in Ards Borough, and for Downpatrick, Ballynahinch, and Newcastle in Down District and are identified on relevant settlement and Town Centre maps. The purpose in designating town centres is to provide the degree of control over change in their structures to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of their vitality and viability.

Primary Retail Cores are designated in Newtownards, Downpatrick, Ballynahinch and Newcastle and are identified on the relevant Town Centre maps. The purpose in identifying a Primary Retail Core within a Town Centre is to provide control over development inside that area, to ensure the continuance of a compact,

lively and attractive shopping environment, offering both choice and convenience. Some office uses, such as banking and professional services, are convenient in the shopping environment but their proliferation at street level within retail frontages can displace significant amounts of retail floorspace, reducing shopper activity and the commercial viability of the main shopping area.

Local Centres are designated at Stratheden Heights and Scrabo estate in Newtownards and Ballymote in Downpatrick and are identified on the relevant settlement maps.

Development proposals within Town Centres, Primary Retail Cores and Local Centres will be assessed in the context of prevailing regional planning policy and other relevant policies contained in the relevant settlement sections in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.



Policy Framework

Transportation

The movement of people and the efficient distribution of goods and services are essential to the functioning of any area.

Public transport provision in the Plan area is primarily the responsibility of Translink, which operates both local and express bus services.

Roads Service is an Executive Agency within the Department for Regional Development. It is the responsibility of Roads Service to ensure that:

- the public road network is maintained and improved;
- the road network is developed to improve road safety and traffic management;
- measures are taken to implement the Department's sustainable transportation policy; and
- the most efficient use is made of existing public car parking spaces.



Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), and the Regional Transportation Strategy, (RTS), seek to take forward the Executive's objectives for transport in Northern Ireland. Both documents share the vision of a "modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life" as a key factor for their successful implementation.

These Regional Strategies also reflect the transportation principles set out in the current Northern Ireland Transport Policy Statement "Moving Forward" published in November 1998, which provides strategic guidelines for the long-term development of the transport network and promotes a more integrated approach to transportation and land use planning at a regional level.

The RDS provides strategic guidance on the development of transportation focused on several major themes, including:

- developing a Regional Strategic Transport Network;
- extending travel choice;
- integrating land use and transportation; and
- changing travel culture and contributing to healthier lifestyles.

That guidance includes policy objectives and specific measures required to achieve the vision. For example, development of the Regional Strategic Transport Network (RTSN) based on key transportation corridors to enhance accessibility to regional facilities and services, includes the provision of multi-modal

interchange facilities. Extending travel choice is to be addressed through measures to promote the development of public transport routes, including travel interchange points such as the Park and Ride and Park and Share facilities.

The RTS was published in July 2002. It sets out the budgets and types of transportation measures to be implemented during the period 2002/03 – 2011/12 in the Belfast Metropolitan Area, the RSTN, and Other Urban and Rural Areas.

The RTS is now being delivered through the implementation of the following more detailed Transport Plans:

- The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, (BMTP) – published in November 2004 (covering the Belfast Metropolitan Area);
- The Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan, (RSTNTP) – published in March 2005 (dealing with the Regional Strategic Transport Network); and
- The Sub-Regional Transport Plan, (SRTP) – published in June 2007 (dealing with Other Urban Areas and the Rural Areas).

The Ards and Down Plan area contains a portion of the RSTN:

- A 24 Belfast-Ballynahinch-Newcastle;
- A 7 Belfast-Saintfield-Downpatrick (Link Corridor);
- A 22 Dundonald-Comber;
- A 21 Comber-Newtownards-Bangor; and
- A 20 Dundonald-Newtownards (Link Corridor).

Transportation

Newtownards, Comber, Downpatrick, Ballynahinch and Newcastle are in the Other Urban category of the RTS and the majority of the Plan area is in the rural category.

Planning Policy Statement 3, (PPS 3 revised) Access, Movement and Parking and Planning Policy Statement 13, (PPS 13), Transportation and Land Use, both published in February 2005, had envisaged that Local Transport Studies for the large towns identified in the RDS would be undertaken in conjunction with the preparation of development plans and any emerging schemes would be included in the SRTP for the relevant districts. However, due to timing inconsistencies and the fact that the preparation of the Draft Plan was so far advanced ahead of the emergence of this regional policy requirement, this has not been possible in the case of the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015. DRD Roads Service subsequently commissioned detailed Local Transport Studies for the large towns in Plan area in 2004, which were completed in 2006. These studies, which were based on the land use proposals contained in the Draft Plan, were used to inform the development of the SRTP for Ards and Down council areas, published in June 2007.

The RSTNTP, published in March 2005, identified four general locations for road improvement schemes along the A7. Any emerging schemes, which are envisaged to have minimal land take implications, will be subject to a separate public consultation process undertaken by DRD. The RSTNTP also includes proposals for highway improvements throughout the sub regional network for Ards and Down.

The SRTP, published in June 2007, also contains schemes that emerged following the Local Transport Studies carried out for each town. Any emerging schemes will be subject to a separate public consultation process undertaken by DRD. The SRTP was based on a consideration of the Draft Plan land use proposals and projections and includes schemes identified in the Draft Plan, e.g. those major housing distributor roads planned for Newtownards, Downpatrick and Ballynahinch. DRD will also carry out a continuous assessment and public consultation on traffic flows, car parking and the need for improvement to the transport infrastructure within rural settlements and the rural road network throughout the Plan area.

The Department's current regional planning policies on the roads aspects of transportation policy are set out in PPS 3. This sets out the Department's planning policies for vehicular and pedestrian access, transport assessment, the protection of transport routes and parking and those matters which will be taken into account in determining planning applications involving development which affects the public road network and road safety. For example, applicants will be required to demonstrate the impact of their proposals on the transport network and provide appropriate measures to mitigate them.

PPS 3 contains the current regional planning policy in relation to the designated Protected Routes Network, which is to restrict existing accesses onto selected roads. Protected Routes within the Plan area are shown on the relevant Countryside maps and settlement maps and listed below:

- A20 Newtownards – Dundonald
- A21 Bangor – Newtownards – Comber – Saintfield – Ballynahinch
- A48 Newtownards – Donaghadee
- B21 Donaghadee – Bangor
- A23 Belfast – Ballygowan
- A22 Dundonald – Comber – Downpatrick
- A25 Downpatrick – Clough – Castlewellan – A25/B8 junction
- A7 Downpatrick – Crossgar – Saintfield – Carryduff
- B6 Saintfield – Lisburn
- A24 Clough – Ballynahinch – Carryduff
- A49 Ballynahinch – Lisburn
- A2 Clough – Newcastle – Kilkeel
- A50 Newcastle – Castlewellan

PPS 13 flows directly from the Strategic Policy Guidelines within the RDS and forms part of the implementation process of the Strategy. The Statement recognises the significance of the RTS in delivering the transportation vision of the Strategy. Its primary objective is to promote an integrated approach to the planning of transportation and development at all levels in the formulation of policy.

Supplementary Planning Guidance is contained in Development Control Advice Note 15 (2nd edition): Vehicular Access Standards, August 1999.

Car Parking

In implementing the Sub-Regional Transport Plan it will be necessary to survey the demand for and supply of parking in towns in the Plan area to determine whether areas of restraint on parking are appropriate. Parking strategies may be refined or further developed in due course in line with future changes in parking demand and accessibility.

A Roads Service priority is to ensure the most efficient use of existing spaces by their effective management, so as to ensure that short-stay spaces are available in those car parks convenient to town centres. To this end charging will be maintained in busier town centre car parks. The operation of car parks will also support the transportation strategy of reducing travel by car by discouraging parking by commuters.

The Department will normally require that in association with major new town centre developments an adequate level of on-site parking will be provided, having regard to the particular circumstances of each development.

Transportation Strategy

A number of key transportation measures, likely to be initiated in emerging transportation policies, will impact on land-uses. The Plan addresses strategic guidance on transportation and land use integration by including the reduction of demand for peak time travel among those factors which determine the spatial allocation of growth. It does so for example, by focusing a high proportion of growth into towns in the Plan area, and particularly into the main towns which have the greatest potential for investment in employment. The Plan also gives high priority to maintaining compact urban areas and it proposes the safeguarding of routes which could be important in the continual development of transport infrastructure.

Transportation

Implementation of the variety of transportation facilities proposed in the Plan and the encouragement and promotion given to the greater use of public transport, walking and cycling, for example through the Key Design Considerations listed as site development requirements, are intended to contribute to the change in travel culture which Government seeks.

EWAY

The RDS indicates that rapid transit type services may help to achieve the long term transportation vision. The RTS makes reference to a pilot rapid transit scheme within the Belfast Metropolitan Area, and quotes Belfast – Dundonald as an example. This is further developed in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan which identifies the delivery of a bus rapid transit scheme known as EWAY in the Newtownards Corridor as the preferred option for commencement of the network. The selection of EWAY as the pilot stage has also been influenced by issues such as strong latent demand and the opportunity provided by the re-use of the former Comber railway line to provide significant sections of exclusive (or segregated) operation.

The Plan seeks to keep open realistic options for the implementation of such a scheme. The Plan therefore continues to give protection to the road line, identified in the North Down and Ards Plan 1984-1995, between the Kempe Stones Road / Blair Mayne Road roundabout and Frederick Street / Mill Street.

It is also important that the Plan reserves land on the edge of the town, on the former Scrabo High School site, for an informal Park and Ride facility to serve as an inter-modal transfer site between car, local “busy-bus” and express bus services, and EWAY vehicles.

Disused Transport Routes

Within the Ards Borough and Down District there exist the remains of disused transport routes, primarily rail track beds, which offer potential for re-use either for transportation purposes or for recreation, leisure or tourism. Some former transportation routes may also have considerable environmental value (flora, fauna, geology and industrial archaeology).

Prevailing regional policy is contained within PPS 3: Access, Movement and Parking which flows from SPG-TRAN 3 in the RDS seeking to ensure that disused transportation routes are not severed by non-transportation land uses.

An example of re-use is the Comber Greenway, a new 7 mile traffic free section of the National Cycle Network developed by Sustrans along the old Belfast to Comber railway line. The path was completed in November 2008 and provides a tranquil green corridor all the way from Comber to the heart of East Belfast with views along the route of Stormont and Scrabo Tower. The walking and cycling route provides local people with a traffic free environment for leisure walking and cycling and offers commuting cyclists a direct and traffic-free route from Comber to Belfast city centre.

Park & Ride / Park & Share Sites

Park and Ride/Park and Share Sites are identified in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS 3): Access, Movement and Parking. Flowing from the vision and guidance within the RDS and the RTS and in order to encourage mode shift from private car to Goldliner buses, small scale sites offering potential as Park and Ride or Park and Share sites are identified in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan along key commuter corridors. These sites will be subject to feasibility studies, taking account of factors such as location, site availability, service capacity and frequency to determine their suitability for development.

Policy TRAN 1 Planning protection for road schemes

Planning permission will not be granted for development that would prejudice the availability of land required for road schemes identified in the Plan.

The road proposals associated with these schemes are identified in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan and on the relevant settlement maps.

These road schemes, considered necessary for the proper development of the area, will be undertaken as resources permit. In advance of the completion of a publicly funded road scheme permission may be granted to related development proposals where developers are willing to provide, at their expense, an appropriate section of the road to Roads Service standards.

Policy TRAN 2 Development reliant on the provision of road schemes

Development proposals which rely on the construction of road schemes to:

- provide satisfactory access, and / or
 - reduce the impact on the adjacent road network of traffic generated by the proposed development,
- shall not be permitted in advance of the road scheme being completed to an appropriate stage.

These road schemes are referred to in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

The road schemes, which are Distributor Roads, will be designed to the standards laid out in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and will be required to provide access to zoned development lands. The number of accesses will be limited, and correspondingly at each of these accesses, a right turning lane will be provided. Implementation will be funded at the expense of the developers of the lands to be served by the schemes.

Concept Master Plans, to demonstrate how these lands are to be comprehensively developed, will be required to accompany applications for development of the lands to be served by the above roads in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 7, (PPS 7):Quality Residential Environments and will include the proposed line of the relevant development road.

Policy Framework

Recreation and Open Space

Provision of open space and recreation facilities throughout the Plan area is the statutory responsibility of Ards Borough Council and Down District Council. Other public agencies such as the Departments of Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development and Education, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive also provide and manage a variety of publicly accessible recreation facilities and open space.

Sports and recreational facilities are also provided by various private organisations, including bowling, cricket, tennis, hockey, Gaelic football, golf, rugby and soccer clubs. School playing fields have the potential for dual use by the public outside school hours.

The natural resources of the Plan area, such as Strangford Lough and the Mourne mountains, also provide a wealth of opportunities for active outdoor pursuits such as sailing, angling, and walking.

The Plan area contains a variety of informal recreational open space, particularly parkland. Castlewellan Forest Park, Tollymore Forest Park and Scrabo Country Park are notable examples. Informal recreation facilities also exist in association with the natural resources of the area such as rivers, canals, lakes, heritage sites, and disused railway tracks. Tyrella Beach and Murlough Nature Reserve are popular examples. Opportunities for cultural recreation are provided at places like Mount Stewart and Castleward, and other National Trust properties, as well as the Department's historic monuments.

Both Ards Borough Council and Down District Council are currently liaising with Sustrans, a national cycling organisation, with a view to providing, where possible, a network of leisure cycle routes.



Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), aims to promote the important link between environment, health and well being and places an emphasis on supporting healthy lifestyles and the promotion of health in the community.

Strategic Planning Guideline ENV 6 of the RDS is to create healthier living environments and to support healthy lifestyles. A particular aspect of this policy is to encourage the protection and enhancement of open spaces and playing facilities for the long term benefit of the whole community and to recognise the value to health and well being of greenery, including community greenways, woodlands and landscape.

Strategic Planning Guideline ENV 7 of the RDS is to facilitate access to a range of opportunities for recreational and cultural facilities. A particular aspect of this policy is to prevent town cramming and seek the provision of open space, playing facilities, woodland and landscaping within easy walking reach of homes, for physical activity, rest and leisure use. This is especially important in densely populated and disadvantaged communities and in new developments. The policy also aims to enhance the range of sports and leisure facilities enabling accessibility by all citizens.

Policy RNI 1.5 of the RDS is to further develop the potential for countryside recreation in an environmentally sensitive way: One particular approach identified is to enhance the range of opportunities for leisure in the countryside based around the use of land.

The Department's regional planning policies for recreation and open space are currently

set out in Planning Policy Statement 8, (PPS 8): Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation, published in February 2004.

Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7): Quality Residential Environments requires adequate provision for public and for private open space in new residential developments.

Throughout the Plan area it is important that a network of open spaces be retained within settlements in order to meet the needs of local communities, for children's play and other forms of active and passive recreation. Such areas also contribute to the visual quality and character of settlements and provide valuable green spaces for wildlife.

The Department considers it necessary to safeguard existing open space within settlements from competing uses, for once built upon the value and amenity of such areas are almost certainly lost to the community forever. These areas are protected against inappropriate uses by the policy provisions of PPS 8. Some open spaces have been identified as Local Landscape Policy Areas (LLPAs) within which development proposals will also be subject to Policy CON 2 of the Plan.

Existing recreational open spaces and amenity land within the major settlements and the relevant villages throughout Ards and Down are identified on the settlement maps in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan. Where there is a commitment to provide open space by an enabling authority, lands have been identified within some of the urban areas for proposed open space, to meet future demand. Open space proposals are identified in Volumes 2 and 3 of the Plan.

Recreation and Open Space

Smaller open spaces, such as children's play areas and kick-about areas, within existing housing developments have not generally been identified for reasons of scale. The safeguarding policy within PPS 8 however will apply equally to all existing areas of recreation and open space, whether identified or not.

Open space areas are complemented by walkways, river corridors, cycle ways and several established community woodlands throughout the Plan area.

Lands ideally suited for amenity, recreation and open space as part of future housing developments have also been identified in some larger settlements and are indicated on the relevant settlement maps. Criteria for their development are provided as part of the Key Design Considerations for the zoned housing lands.



Policy Framework

part 2

Tourism

Tourism is an industry with excellent growth prospects in the Plan area and its potential rests firmly on the beauty of the landscapes and variety of interests and heritage features to be enjoyed. Strangford Lough/St. Patrick's country, the Lecale Coast, Slieve Croob and the Mourne Mountains are recognised for the rarity and quality of their landscapes and offer opportunities for touring and a diversity of individual and organised recreational activities.

Apart from the attractions of mountains, countryside and seashores, the Plan area has a great variety of places to visit including, for example, Country and Forest Parks, historic houses and gardens, historic monuments and visitor centres, such as the St. Patrick's Visitor Centre in Downpatrick, Castle Espie Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Centre near Comber, and the Exploris marine life centre in Portaferry.

Downpatrick is one of the earliest settlements in Ireland. The town and surrounding countryside claim close association with St. Patrick, who is said to have built his first church in Ireland at Saul, and after all his travels, to have died there. The present Cathedral stands high above the town, opposite the Mound of Down, the 12th Century site of John de Courcey's castle. To the north west, the ruins of de Courcey's Cistercian abbey of Inch, are beautifully set by the Quoile River and marshlands.

Downpatrick, identified as a Heritage Town in the Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), is centrally located and has the potential to develop as a base for touring within the Plan area. Investment, which would make the town more attractive as a tourism centre, might include a better range of accommodation, an improved retail sector and facilities for social, cultural and recreational activities.



Tourism

Newtownards, like Downpatrick, was an important Anglo-Norman town, and one of the earliest 17th century “new towns”. It presently offers limited facilities for tourists, but is instantly recognisable as the northern “gateway” to Strangford Lough and to County Down through its association with Scrabo Tower, the landmark feature on Scrabo hill which dominates the town and the northern end of the Lough. Newtownards is also highly accessible from the Belfast Metropolitan Area, and is well located to provide accommodation and related facilities, which would significantly benefit the growth of the tourism industry throughout Ards Peninsula, Strangford Lough and St. Patrick’s Country. The proximity of Belfast offers opportunities for business tourism within the Plan area, with hotel accommodation and conference facilities linked to recreational, cultural and landscape/wildlife activity packages.

Promotion and marketing of tourism in the Plan area is primarily the responsibility of Ards Borough Council and Down District Council. Both operate a range of tourist facilities including picnic, caravan and

amenity sites. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development’s Forest Service and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency manage historic and special wildlife sites such as the archaeological remains of Nendrum Monastery near Whiterock, Ballycopeland Windmill at Millisle and the Quoile and Mourne Countryside Centres. They have also developed walks, bird hides and caravan and camping sites.

The National Trust also owns and manages properties of nature and historical interest: Mount Stewart House and Gardens and Castle Ward House and Estate, both on the shores of Strangford Lough; Rowallane House and Gardens at Saintfield and Murlough Nature Reserve at Dundrum.

The private sector provides tourist accommodation in hotels, guesthouses, bed & breakfast and self-catering chalets, and tourism services such as restaurants, cafes and craft shops. The potential exists to develop the range and quality of these facilities.



Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), provides the following strategic planning guidelines:

- to promote a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism infrastructure;
- to enhance and develop the 'distinctiveness' of the Region as a key element of its tourism product; and
- to build a Competitive Advantage.

The Department's operational planning policies for tourism development and accommodation, caravan and camping sites, signage and the protection of tourism assets in Northern Ireland, are set out in "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland". Proposals will be assessed on their contribution to the tourism industry, their implications for conservation of the natural, man-made and built heritage, and against any relevant policies in the Plan.

The tourism industry offers economic reward and social benefits. Developing its potential however, requires that developments should not be at the expense of the natural and built environment on which the industry relies and in which local people live. Prevailing regional planning policy provides for the protection of tourism assets and for protection of rural character and visual amenity in areas of landscape quality.

Assessment of development proposals related to tourism will take account of impact on the Plan's assets, such as the scenic routes and views provided along the coastal shorelines and the shores of Strangford Lough, and roads through the foothills of the Mourne mountains.

Realising the tourism potential of Down District and Ards Borough will require investment in marketing, product development and physical facilities in terms of visitor infrastructure, and especially visitor accommodation. However, since a vibrant tourism sector depends on a quality host environment, its growth must be based on the provision of quality tourism facilities and accommodation that contributes to the sustainability of the industry.

Development proposals, which comply with the principles of good design and landscaping, sympathetic location, sensitive siting, and respect for vernacular styles and traditions, will secure the long term future of tourism resources.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has set out a new direction in its Framework for Action 2004-2007. In line with its Corporate Plan, the strategic framework's target is to increase visitor tourism revenue by 9% every year, visitor numbers by 7% and to increase Northern Ireland's share of visitors to the island of Ireland. The framework sets out the steps needed to address this challenge. It will deliver improvements in tourism performance across three key objectives of Attracting Visitors, Business Enhancement and Communicating Effectively.

Plan policies and proposals in respect of the Environment and Conservation and Recreation and Open Space Sections in this Volume and plan proposals in Volumes 2 and 3 are in keeping with the strategic planning guidelines for tourism as outlined in the RDS and will assist in the achievement of related objectives.

Tourism

Signature Projects

SPG-ECON 8 of the RDS seeks to enhance and develop the 'distinctiveness' of the Region as a key element of its tourism product. Five Signature Projects are identified, two of which fall within the Plan area, which are unique to the North of Ireland, and offer distinctive characteristics that will enable it to stand out in an increasingly busy marketplace, creating a new 'brand identity' for the North as a place to live, work and visit.

St Patrick / Christian Heritage

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board promotes this Signature Project with the aim of capitalising on the international recognition of St Patrick while bringing together the authentic Patrician and other Christian Heritage sites prevalent throughout the North, including in particular those in Down.

The Mournes

This Signature Project focuses on this unparalleled Irish landscape, with the aim of capitalising on this beautiful natural asset and to establish the Mournes as an exemplar destination for sustainable tourism development in a protected landscape. This represents a destination where value rather than volume of visitor activity will be targeted.

Strangford Lough

Despite not being identified as a 'Signature Project', Strangford Lough represents a development opportunity within the Plan area related to wildlife and heritage tourism based on bird and marine life, historic monuments, buildings and gardens, and also includes the St. Patrick's Country theme.



part 2

Despite the accessibility of this area and its wealth of natural and man-made attractions, tourism is presently a low-key economic activity. Limited growth in activity levels and facilities, consistent with the capacity of its landscapes and vulnerability of its natural habitats, could therefore create a significant economic return. However, the over-riding objective must be to facilitate increased opportunities for enjoyment of the areas without harming the environmental quality of the area.

“Strangford Lough: A Strategy for Sustainable Development” was published in 1998 on behalf of a group of government agencies, including Environment and Heritage Service (now the Northern Ireland Environment Agency), Planning Service, Ards Borough Council and Down District Council, and in consultation with Strangford Lough Management Committee

and local interests. It offers much useful analysis and advice on the potential role of tourism around Strangford Lough and St. Patrick’s Country.

This was followed in 2001 by the publication of Strangford Lough SAC/SPA Management Scheme which is intended to safeguard the conservation status of those features for which Strangford Lough has been selected as a candidate SAC and designated as a SPA. The Scheme sets the framework through which activities will be managed, either voluntarily or through regulation, so as to achieve the conservation objectives of the European marine site. Management of the conservation interests will work to accommodate, and may in some cases encourage, appropriate human activities



Policy Framework

Education and Community Uses

Responsibility for the provision of educational facilities in Ards Borough and Down District Council areas rests mainly with the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) supplemented by a number of voluntary authorities. The Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning, and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure retain overall responsibility for education, policy and finance.

The SEELB is also responsible for library provision within the Plan area.

It is currently the overall responsibility of the Eastern Health and Social Services Board, (EHSS) to assess the health and social care needs of Plan area residents and to secure the care to meet those needs in keeping with available resources. Provision of community health and social care services to meet those needs is the responsibility of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (an amalgamation of the former Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust and Down Lisburn Trust). The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety retains overall responsibility for policy and funding of major capital works.



part 2

Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), seeks to meet a number of key regional challenges as part of its Spatial Development Strategy, including the need to “facilitate the development of education, health and commercial services, cultural and leisure amenities necessary to meet the needs of a growing population”.

Policy SPG-ECON 5 is to undertake or where appropriate, facilitate a programme of infrastructure improvements essential to business needs and identifies social, cultural and community facilities as the infrastructure which enhances the quality of life.

Policy ECON 6.1 aims to meet the educational and training needs of the Region by maintaining a well developed network of schools and colleges and by facilitating improved access to education and training opportunities, including linkage with associated childcare provision.

The RDS identifies Newtownards and Downpatrick as main hubs to be developed as the major locations providing employment services, and a range of cultural and leisure amenities. Decisions on the future location of new public sector development for a variety of functions, including health and education, will take into account the strategic role of the main towns.

The Department’s regional planning policies for allocating lands to meet community needs within the Plan area are currently set out in “A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland” and within Draft Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS 21): Sustainable Development in the Countryside.

Supplementary Planning Guidance is contained in Development Control Advice Note 9 ‘Residential and Nursing Homes’ and Development Control Advice Note 13 ‘Crèches, Day Nurseries and Pre-school Playgroups’.

Education and Community Uses

Educational Facilities

The Independent Review Body on Post Primary Education reported to the Minister for Education in 2001, and there is the possibility that the long term outcome of this review may influence the number and type of post primary schools across Northern Ireland.

The Department of Education commented that educational demand in the secondary school sector in both Ards and Down over the Plan period can be met by a combination of existing surplus places in the system plus the accelerating decline in the secondary school population.

Ards Borough

SEELB capital development projects are found in its Strategic Capital Development Plan 2004-2009. The building of a replacement school for Castle Gardens Primary School, Newtownards was completed in 2001 on the Bowtown Road. The extension and refurbishment work to Regent House Grammar School in Newtownards has been completed. Scrabo High School in Newtownards closed in 1997.

The SEELB anticipates that a new primary school, with a nursery unit and an enlarged secondary school will be required in Newtownards in view of the additional housing to be provided over the Plan period. A suitable site for the secondary school has yet to be agreed. Land will be reserved for a primary school as part of a future housing scheme on lands zoned to the north east of the town as part of the Plan. An economic appraisal is being undertaken by the SEELB to consider the extension of Victoria Primary School in Ballyhalbert. SEELB stated that land may be required for an extension to Killinchy Primary School but no specific site was identified.

There is one college of further education in Ards District - North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education with two campuses, Bangor and Newtownards, and two outreach centres, Holywood and Ballyboley.

part 2

Down District

SEELB has recommended the need for a new site for Down High School and discussions are underway in connection with the submission of a planning application. A permanent building for All Childrens' Controlled Integrated Primary School has replaced the temporary accommodation at King Street in Newcastle. Clough and Downshire Primary Schools have been amalgamated into a replacement school on the site of Clough Primary and is known as Cumran Primary School.

Down Academy Controlled Integrated High School combined with Rowallane Integrated College in September 2008 and is known as Blackwater Integrated College. SEELB has advised that the current site is over developed and they would wish to provide a replacement school on a new site. A suitable site has yet to be agreed. The Board advised that additional land should be zoned for educational use adjacent to Academy Primary School in Saintfield to facilitate the future expansion of the school. This is now included as an Educational Policy Area in the Plan.

Work has been undertaken for the extension and refurbishment of Saintfield High School within the existing site.

There is one college of further education in Down District, East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education, with the main campuses at Downpatrick, Newcastle and Ballynahinch and an adult education centre in Downpatrick. Permission was granted for a replacement East Down Institute on the existing site in Market Street, Downpatrick in 2007 and work is underway.

The establishment of a free-standing grant-aided Irish medium primary school at Circular Road, Castlewellan is proposed by the Board of Governors of Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche and Comhairle na Gaelscolaiochta.

Libraries and Youth Services

The SEELB is also responsible for library provision within the Plan area. There are 4 branch libraries in the Ards Borough and 6 in Down District. The Board is currently investigating the possibility of a second library in Newtownards.

Youth clubs operate throughout the Plan area from various premises owned by Councils, churches and schools. Various other organisations operate widely throughout the Plan area such as Boys Brigade, Girls Brigade, Girl Guides, and Scouts etc. The YMCA operates a facility in Donard Street and an outdoor pursuits centre from the Green Hill Centre in Newcastle.

There are youth resource centres located in Newtownards, Downpatrick and Ballynahinch and 2 Outdoor Education Centres based at Castlewellan (Annsborough), and Killyleagh.

Education and Community Uses

Health and Social Services

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) has stated that additional health and social care services will be required in Donaghadee, Comber and Newtownards and requested that provision be made for such health facilities in these areas. A purpose built Intensive Support Unit for children on the Ards Hospital Site in Newtownards was completed in 2008.

The SEHSCT opened a Healthy Living Centre at Kircubbin in 2002.

The SEHSCT has also indicated that there is some unused capacity in the health centres at Portavogie and Portaferry.

The Report of the Acute Hospitals Review Group recommended that an enhanced local hospital services should be provided from the Downe Hospital. The SEHSCT has made provision for a new community based facility in Newcastle.



part 2

Policy COY 1 Community Uses

Planning permission will be granted for community uses provided all the following criteria are met:

- there is no significant detrimental effect on amenity;
- the proposal does not prejudice the comprehensive development of surrounding lands, particularly on zoned sites;
- the proposals are in keeping with the size and character of the settlement and its surroundings;
- where necessary, additional infrastructure is provided by the developer; and,
- there are satisfactory access, parking and sewage disposal arrangements.

Applications for planning permission for community related facilities will be considered in the context of prevailing regional planning policy and all other proposals contained within the Plan.

Current policy is contained within A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland and Draft Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS 21): Sustainable Development in the Countryside. Unforeseen demands for new community facilities may arise over the lifetime of the Plan. Accordingly, a flexible approach is required in considering such development within settlement limits in order to make the most effective use of existing facilities, infrastructure, utilities and resources. For the purposes of interpreting this policy, Community Use refers to those uses specified in Use Classes 13 and 15 of the Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004.



Policy Framework

Public Services and Utilities

The provision of public services and utilities within the Plan area is primarily the responsibility of a number of Government Departments and Agencies, Ards Borough Council, Down District Council and statutory bodies. However, the role of the private sector is becoming more important. The main services are water and sewerage, drainage, waste disposal, cemeteries, electricity, telecommunications and natural gas.



Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy provides the strategic environmental context for the delivery of public services and utilities and contains the following strategic planning guidelines:

- to undertake or where appropriate, facilitate a programme of infrastructure improvements essential to business needs (SPG-ECON 5);
- to respond to the implications of climate change and promote more prudent and efficient use of energy and resources, and effective waste management (SPG-ENV 5); and
- to create healthier living environments and to support healthy lifestyles (SPG-ENV 6).

Current policies on new infrastructure and the disposal or treatment of waste materials is contained within PPS 11 – Planning and Waste Management. Current policies on developments at risk from flooding or land instability are contained within PPS 15 – Planning and Flood Risk. Draft policies on renewable energy are contained within PPS 18 (Draft) Renewable Energy. PPS 21 (Draft) Sustainable Development in the Countryside contains policies relating to septic tanks, whilst A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland contains policies on overhead electric cables. Prevailing regional policy in relation to telecommunications is provided by PPS 10 - Telecommunications.

Water and Sewerage

The abstraction, treatment and supply of drinking water and conveyance and treatment of sewage are the responsibility of Northern Ireland Water (NIW). Future improvements to this infrastructure are also the responsibility of NIW.

Water supply within the Plan area is drawn from several sources and delivered through various local service reservoirs. The main source is currently the Silent Valley reservoir in the Mourne Mountains via a new Water Treatment Works at Drumaroad.

Lough Cowey near Portaferry supplies the lower Ards Peninsula but there are plans for future decommissioning with supplies from Mourne via a reinforced network. Similarly it would be proposed to decommission the existing borehole supplies in the Newtownards and Comber areas.

Castlewellan, Annsborough and Kilcoo areas are supplied from Fofannybanne Water Treatment Works which is supplied from the Spelga and Fofanny Reservoirs.

Throughout the Plan area, NIW has schemes programmed to upgrade the water and sewerage system, where required and to comply with EU Directives, to ensure water quality and meet increasing demand.

For the larger areas of population, drainage studies, involving computer modelling of the drainage system, are being carried out to ensure that sewerage will meet existing requirements, the requirements of development and the effluent discharge standards set by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and

Public Services and Utilities

required by European Directives. In other areas, growth will be accommodated by local improvements as required.

A major new Waste Water Works has been constructed in the Ards Borough to serve Bangor, Donaghadee and Millisle. The plant is designed to meet the effluent discharge standards into the Irish Sea set in the European Directive on Urban Waste Water Treatment. The existing Waste Water Treatment Works at Ballyrickard, serving Newtownards and Comber is being upgraded with an anticipated completion at Spring 2009.

A number of other Waste Water Treatment Works within the Plan area have been, or are, scheduled for upgrade or replacement to comply with the European Directives and to cater for existing and future development. Details of the current programme of upgrade to the sewerage infrastructure are provided in Appendix 9. This Table lists each Wastewater Treatment Works throughout the Plan area in three categories. Those listed within category 1 are deemed satisfactory and capable of accommodating all development within its catchment area that is proposed in the Plan throughout the plan period. Category 2 details ongoing and planned work within the existing funding period, (April 2007 to March 2010), where NIW has identified and is committed to capital improvements to ensure that discharge standards and the development needs of the plan area, as identified in the Plan, are met. Category 3 details those Works being considered for inclusion within the capital programme for the period April 2010 to March 2013. Their inclusion is dependent on a positive determination by the Financial Regulator following submission of the Capital Programme in June 2009. NIW's Capital Programme for the period April 2010 to March 2013 and beyond has not yet been determined by the Financial Regulator.

Development within those small settlements where there is no public sewerage system will be dependant upon the provision of a suitable and adequate means of sewage disposal.

All land to be developed through the Plan will be subject to the availability of adequate sewerage infrastructure. Acceptable interim sewerage disposal measures will be required in the absence of such adequate sewerage infrastructure. NIW publishes a 'Developer's and House Builder's Information Pack' detailing all aspects of infrastructure provision including pre-development and capacity checks and it is recommended that developers should make early contact with NIW to discuss site specific issues including phasing and the provision of interim sewer and sewage disposal measures including developer contributions, where appropriate.

Drainage

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Rivers Agency is responsible for drainage and will be consulted in relation to applications for development, which involve:

- land protected by sea embankments;
- land susceptible to flooding;
- a significant increase in surface water run off;
- discharge of storm water to watercourses; or
- drainage requirements with regard to designated watercourses.

In accordance with government policy, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is committed to the introduction of procedures for the recovery of developer contributions towards the costs of drainage infrastructure improvement work. Currently, drainage improvements necessary to permit development are subject to strict cost/benefit analysis and scheme prioritization and whilst drainage works necessary to facilitate development may be identified as viable, their implementation will be dependant on the availability of resources.

part 2

Major areas of flooding affecting the larger settlements within the Plan area lie to the north west and areas alongside the Enler River in Comber, to the west and south west of Downpatrick originating from the Quoile River and its tributaries, along the Ballynahinch River to the north west and south east of the town centre, along the Burren River to the west of Castlewellan Road in Newcastle and along Carrigs River to the north of the town.

Many existing urban drainage systems are damaging the environment and are therefore not sustainable in the long term. The government wishes to promote a move to Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). These provide a number of options for draining an area and fall into three broad groups that aim to:

- reduce the quantity of runoff from the site (source control techniques);
- slow the velocity of runoff to allow settlement filtering and infiltration (permanent conveyance systems); and,
- provide passive treatment to collected surface water before discharging into land or to a watercourse (end of pipe systems).

Waste Disposal

It is not the purpose of the Plan to prescribe either the preferred methods of dealing with waste materials or specific sites for new facilities. These matters are determined by the producers or holders of waste in the context of land use policies and the Waste Management Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The management of waste is an essential community service. Presently Ards Borough Council operates a transfer station at North Road where waste is transferred to bulk trailers and disposed of outside the Borough. Down District Council operates a landfill site at Drumanakelly, approximately 4 kilometres north of Seaforde.

Ards Borough Council and Down District Council published a waste management plan along with the other councils in the Eastern Region entitled 'Arc21' in 2003 and revised in 2006 providing a sustainable solution for the disposal of waste in the area.

Prevailing regional planning policy is provided within Planning Policy Statement 11 (PPS 11): Planning and Waste Management.

Cemeteries

Ards Borough Council and Down District Council have responsibility for a number of cemeteries and burial grounds within the Plan area. Some churches also manage associated cemeteries and burial grounds.

Electricity

Northern Ireland Electricity will continue to develop existing 33kV and 11kV distribution networks as customer requirements and demand change in the future. The existing 33kV networks within the Plan area are presently being reinforced.

Public Services and Utilities

Telecommunications

Telecommunications provision within the Plan area is primarily the responsibility of British Telecom, supplemented by a number of other private companies. There are five providers operating second and third generation mobile telecommunication networks within the Plan area, namely 3, Vodafone, Orange, O2 (formerly BT Cellnet) and T-Mobile (formerly One to One).

Prevailing regional planning policy on telecommunications development is contained within Planning Policy Statement 10 (PPS 10): Telecommunications and supplementary planning guidance is provided in DCAN 14: Siting and Design of Radio Telecommunications Equipment.

Natural Gas

Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd. has been granted a twenty year licence for the transportation and supply of natural gas to the industrial, commercial and domestic markets of the Greater Belfast Region. Development work on the network in the Newtownards and Comber area has commenced.

Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd is committed to expanding the availability of gas to new areas and in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Utility Regulator (NIAUR) is keen to explore further the possibility of bringing gas to the towns along the Downpatrick Economic Corridor.



Policy Framework

part 2

Minerals

Mineral resources within Ards Borough Council and Down District Council areas comprise sandstone/gritstones which are quarried at a number of locations between Newtownards and Ballynahinch, granite which is extracted from one small quarry in the Mourne, and clay, used in the manufacture of bricks, which has been extracted over the past ten years outside Killough and Ballygowan.

The minerals produced from the hard rock quarries are primarily used in the production of building and road stone aggregates for the construction industry. As well as producing primary crushed rock for use as hardcore, many quarries further crush the material to produce finer aggregate which can be used in a range of secondary processes. Such processes include ready-use concrete, tarmacadam production and the manufacture of concrete blocks. These

processes increase the value of the aggregates and enable the quarries to compete over greater distances.

Smaller amounts of the minerals extracted in the area are used in the agricultural industry. The one remaining granite quarry is the only survivor of hundreds of small mountain quarries which once produced granite for construction work. Today's output of granite is small scale and worked into high quality polished products primarily used in monumental and restorative building work throughout Northern Ireland.



Minerals

From 2002 – 2007 the output from the five sandstone/gritstone quarries operating in the area has averaged some 1.56 million tonnes per annum, with the highest output of 1.68 million tonnes being extracted in the year 2005. Output from three sand and gravel quarries operating within the area averaged 0.3 million tonnes per annum. Output from these quarries since 1990 suggests a consistent demand for these minerals in the Ards Borough and Down District. This demand seems likely to continue but future productivity in the area could be affected by the lifespan of the larger quarries. Alternative supplies of a similar mineral may then have to be sourced outside the Plan area.

Small scale sand removal from beaches in Northern Ireland is a persistent environmental problem. Sand deposits on these beaches are generally finite in quantity and a non-renewable resource. The removal of sand from beaches impacts on the coastal ecology and may also affect the stability of coastal infrastructure. When the level of a beach is lowered by the removal of beach material, larger waves form, leading to an increase in coastal erosion. Indirect impacts can include loss of aesthetic quality, habitat destruction, damage to access provision and impairment of the ability of the shoreline to regenerate.

In some instances, private estates have granted individuals rights to take sand/gravel from the shore. Such rights were frequently established before planning control was enacted in Northern Ireland. However this does not remove the requirement to obtain planning permission for the extraction of sand/gravel from the coastal zone under current planning legislation.

Over the past number of years intermittent extraction of sand/gravel has been taking place at different locations on Cloughey beach. Tyrella beach has also been the subject of sand extraction. There is a need to control the extraction of sand/gravel from within the coastal zone in order to ensure no irreparable damage to ecology, shoreline stability and the environmental amenity of such areas.

Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), includes the following guidelines:

- to maintain a working countryside with a strong mixed use rural economy; and
- use of minerals for economic development in a sustainable manner and in a way which assesses the need to exploit the mineral resource against the need to protect and conserve environmental resources.

The Department's regional planning policies for mineral development are currently set out in "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland." This contains a range of policies for the control of mineral development including peat extraction, taking into account environmental protection, visual amenity, public safety and traffic considerations. It also includes policies for mineral reserves, valuable minerals, areas of constraint on mineral development and restoration of mineral workings. Areas of Constraint on Mineral Developments are designated as identified in the Countryside Section of Volume 1 of the Plan.

The policies contained in Planning Policy Statement 2, (PPS 2), Planning and Nature Conservation provide protection for the full range of sites of nature conservation importance, including peat lands.

Planning Policy Statement 6, (PPS 6): Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage sets out the policies for the protection and conservation of archaeological remains and features of the built heritage and embodies the Government's commitment to sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

Policy MN 1

Hydrocarbon exploration

In the event that hydrocarbon exploration identifies the possibility of commercially viable reserves of oil or gas, applications for planning permission to sink wells for the purpose of appraising the nature or extent of the discovery will be considered in the context of the long term suitability of the site for production purposes.

While no hydrocarbon exploration is currently taking place within Ards Borough or Down District, future exploration under licence may identify deposits of oil or gas, minerals, which are particularly valuable to the Northern Ireland economy. Exploitation may create environmental effects that are particular to the methods of extraction or treatment of that mineral. The Department will not therefore operate a general presumption against their exploitation in any part of the Plan area, including Areas of Constraint on Mineral Developments. Rather, applications will be treated on their individual merits having regard to impact of the specific development on nearby residents, and sites or features designated for their scientific, landscape or heritage interests.

Policy Framework

Agriculture Forestry and Fishing

Agriculture

Agriculture is the predominant land use within the Plan area and employed 4556 people on 2119 holdings in 2001. Over two thirds of farms in Down District and almost half in Ards Borough are involved in cattle and sheep production. Dairy farming is also important, particularly within the Ards Borough. The Ards Borough currently has one of highest numbers of farms per District producing cereals, general crops or involved in horticulture in Northern Ireland whereas Down District has the highest number of mixed farms and falls within the top 10 districts for farms involved in cattle and sheep production.

A number of agri-businesses also exist within the Plan area, for example, the strong poultry sector within the Crossgar area, poultry and meat processing outlets in the Newtownards area and numerous small companies specializing in providing and repairing agricultural machinery.

Farm size within the Plan area tends to be small with approximately half of farms in both Districts classed as very small by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD(NI)) under European standards and only 2% in Down and 10% in Ards described as large.



part 2

In common with the rest of Northern Ireland, farm incomes in the Plan area are falling in real terms, leading to an increased demand for alternative employment on and off the farm. The Department accepts the need for farmers to diversify into non-agricultural activities in the context of prevailing planning policy to supplement their farming income and the DARD (NI) has a range of grant assistance to support this process.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) are designated by DARD (NI) and comprise areas of special landscape, wildlife or historic interest which can be protected or enhanced by supporting and grant aiding specific agricultural practices. The Mourne and Slieve Croob ESA falls partly within the Plan area.

Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) are areas where the natural characteristics, including geology, attitude and climate, make it difficult for farmers to compete. However, within these areas, agriculture is the main factor shaping and maintaining valuable landscapes and habitats. Support is therefore paid to farmers in the LFA so that society can continue to enjoy these benefits. LFAs are divided into Disadvantaged and Severely Disadvantaged Areas. 89% of farms in Ards Borough fall mainly outside Less Favoured Areas whereas 60% of Down District farms fall within defined Less Favoured Areas and 16% within Severely Disadvantaged Areas.

High quality agricultural land is a valuable and finite resource. Within the Plan area, there are areas of agricultural land comprising some the best and most versatile in Northern Ireland. Of particularly high quality is the agricultural land below Scrabo and around Newtownards and Comber.

Forestry

Forestry operations within the Plan area are carried out by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Forest Service. Approximately 110 hectares within the Ards Borough and 1770 hectares within the Down District are within publicly managed woodland. Forest Service currently combines the commercial production of timber with public recreation at a number of locations including two forest parks at Castlewellan and Tollymore and minor recreation areas at Drumkeeragh Forest and Donard Park.

Forest Service also assists in the planting and management of privately owned woodlands within the Plan area through the payment of grants.

A review of forest policy in Northern Ireland and the preparation of an updated long-term strategic vision for forestry based on the principles of sustainability are presently underway.

Community Woodlands have been established by the Woodland Trust at 8 locations within the Plan area as shown on the relevant Countryside Maps and relevant settlement maps. These

Agriculture Forestry and Fishing

woodlands were established in partnership with local communities as part of the “Woods on Your Doorstep” project which began in 1996 with a grant from the Millennium Commission.

These woodlands are intended to mark the millennium and will provide a source of informal recreation, beauty, tranquillity, and quiet enjoyment for local people. The sites will also increase people’s awareness of woodland, contribute to woodland biodiversity and increase the area of new native woodland. The Woodland Trust provides and maintains paths, gates and similar facilities for public access.

Other woodlands are managed by the local councils or the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development.



Fishing

The Plan area comprises two coastal areas as well as Strangford Lough and has an important fishing industry centred on the busy ports at Portavogie and Ardglass. The processing and packaging of fish is also important in economic terms to the local areas around these villages.

In 2007, almost 8% of the full time employment in the Northern Ireland fishing industry was based in Ardglass and 21% in Portavogie. Ardglass has a higher full time labour force involved in fish processing and marketing and a rather low proportion of part time workers. Almost two thirds of the full time labour force based in Portavogie is involved in catching, although Portavogie does have a relatively high proportion of part time workers who are predominantly involved in processing and marketing. At 31 March 2008, 14% of the Registered Fleet in Northern Ireland was based in Ardglass and 16% in Portavogie. Vessels in Ardglass were generally smaller in overall length than those based in Portavogie.

Recreational fishing, mainly under license, also takes place along the various rivers and inland watercourses within the Plan area, which are also important habitats for wildlife. For example, the Shimna River in Newcastle is renowned for its salmon population.

Strangford Lough also has a vibrant business sector involved in aquaculture.

Regional Policy Context

The Regional Development Strategy includes the following strategic planning guidelines:

- To maintain a working countryside with a strong mixed use rural economy (SPG-RNI 1); and
- To continue to create and sustain an attractive and unique rural environment in the interests of the rural community and the Region as a whole (SPG-RNI 5).

SPG-RNI 1 will be implemented through the following policies:

- RNI 1.1 Sustain the continuing development of a strong agricultural and agri-food sector;
- RNI 1.2 Facilitate the development of rural industries, businesses and enterprises appropriate to the open countryside which benefits economic activity while protecting or enhancing the environment;
- RNI 1.3 Sustain and extend the forestry resources of Northern Ireland; and
- RNI 1.4 Maintain a viable fishing industry in Northern Ireland.

SPG-RNI 5 will be implemented through the management of rural resources to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development.

Draft Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS 21) – Sustainable Development in the Countryside contains current regional planning policies related to agricultural and forestry development and agricultural diversification.



Countryside

The character of the countryside throughout the Plan area, its landscapes, biodiversity and heritage are summarised in the Environment and Conservation section of this volume and aspects of the rural economy are outlined under Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.

Landscape Character and Development Pressure

The Countryside Assessment of the Plan area included an analysis of development pressure throughout the countryside. That analysis together with the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment and the Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), has informed proposals for the confirmation of existing Green Belt and Countryside Policy Area designations and for additional designation to offer enhanced protection against future development pressures.

Ards Peninsula

The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment considers the peninsula's landscape from Newtownards south to Portaferry, with the exception of the outer Ards coast, to be generally in good condition but suffering from loss of character in areas of open farmland, and from development out of scale with small clustered settlements. The pattern of countryside development pressure in the Ards Peninsula is one of individual dwellings along minor roads between recognised settlements, with substantial clusters at cross-roads. This is particularly noticeable south of Kircubbin and Ballyhalbert, and between Greyabbey and Carrowdore.

The Landscape Character Assessment describes the Strangford Lough Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as sensitive to

change increased by the high visibility of the north Lecale hills and surrounding lowlands from Strangford Lough. The analysis verifies the pressure in this area particularly on higher ground with views towards the Lough. The western coastal area of the Strangford Lough AONB is particularly vulnerable to changes, which may have an impact on its small scale, tranquil character. Pressure is particularly evident around Killinchy and Whiterock.

Down District

South of the existing Green Belt in Down District, development pressures have been intense, particularly so to the west and north of Downpatrick, where evidence supports the conclusion that pressures have been diverted most strongly into a band of countryside immediately outside the existing Green Belt. The pattern of pressure continues with less intensity southwards towards Newcastle, to the west and north of the Downpatrick-Newcastle road. The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment notes a proliferation in some areas of large modern bungalows, of various shapes and styles, along road frontages.

Initial examination of development patterns in the area between the existing Downpatrick Green Belt and the Lecale Countryside Policy Area suggests that pressures are less intense than elsewhere in Down District. The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment states that the Lecale has a relatively unspoilt and tranquil landscape, but one which is therefore sensitive to change. The landscape has an open character, often allowing extensive views within which development is often prominent. A significant increase in development would therefore be likely to harm the Lecale's rural character.

Countryside

The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment describes the condition of the landscape in the Tyrella Coastal Dunes Landscape Character Area as degraded by the spread of built development along the coastal road and landscape sensitivity as increased by the visibility of this low coastal strip from the south west. The pressure analysis suggests pressure for development along minor inland roads within easy reach of the coastal area.

Along the roads in the valleys and on hillsides on the northern edge of the Mourne Mountains in the vicinity of Kilcoo, the pressure analysis suggests continuing pressure for new housing which is adversely affecting rural character. The Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment refers to the sensitivity of this landscape, the proliferation of large modern dwellings and the abandonment of traditional cottages all as a threat to landscape character.



Regional Policy Context

The overall aim of the Spatial Development Strategy, which is central to the RDS in rural Northern Ireland is:

- to develop an attractive and prosperous rural area, based on a balanced and integrated approach to the development of town, village and countryside, in order to sustain a strong and vibrant rural community, contributing to the overall well-being of the Region as a whole.

Three of the five strategic objectives, which address that aim by applying the principles of sustainable development, are:

- to develop a living and working countryside which recognises the unique rural character of the Region and contributes to a sense of belonging in local rural areas;
- to promote the continuing renewal and revitalisation of towns and villages in Rural Northern Ireland; and
- to manage and enhance the natural and built heritage in rural areas.

In support of these objectives, Strategic Policy Guidelines are established;

- to create and sustain a rural community with a high quality of life for its residents (SPG-RNI 2);
- to support the network of service centres based on main towns, small towns and villages in Rural Northern Ireland (SPG-RNI 3); and
- to continue to create and sustain an attractive and unique rural environment in the interests of the rural community and the Region as a whole (SPG-RNI 5).

The RDS requires that in allocating the Housing Growth Indicators within each district, judgements should be made to achieve a complementary urban/rural balance of growth. It also states that analysis of population balance can facilitate an evaluation of the relationship between towns and their rural hinterland. This evaluation should inform the development of the district growth strategy to achieve optimal balance between settlements.

Measures outlined in the RDS to create and sustain an attractive rural environment include, managing rural resources by designating Countryside Policy Areas (CPAs) to protect valued landscapes, and controlling development in areas under pressure for development by means of Green Belt designation. Such pressures are often caused by townspeople moving to live in the countryside, particularly in the main commuter zone around the BMA.

The Spatial Development Strategy of the RDS also includes the objective of establishing a Belfast Metropolitan Area Green Belt. Precise delineation of the Green Belt is to be considered in the context of development plans, informed by the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment (NILCA).

The whole of the Ards Borough, including the Ards Peninsula is within the area defined in the Spatial Development Strategy as the Belfast Metropolitan Area “travel-to-work” hinterland, and the Peninsula is within the approximate extent of the strategic BMA Green Belt as indicated on Key Diagram 4 of the Strategy document.

Countryside

The approximate extent of the strategic BMA Green Belt also includes much of the countryside south-west of Downpatrick. Moreover, the whole of Down District is defined in the RDS as part of the Belfast Metropolitan Area “travel-to-work” hinterland.

The approximate extent of the BMA Green Belt excludes much of the Lecale area. However, the Lecale is within the defined BMA “travel-to-work” area.

At the time of the formulation of the Draft Plan prevailing regional policy, including the objectives of Green Belt and CPA designation and the policies for the control of development within those designations was contained in “A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland”, (PSRNI).

Prevailing regional policy for the countryside of Ards and Down is now contained within Draft Planning Policy 21 (Draft PPS 21): ‘Sustainable Development in the Countryside’. The policy provisions of Draft PPS 21 take precedence over published draft plans, existing statutory plans and the policy provisions of PSRNI in respect of Green Belts and CPAs.

Draft PPS 21 proposes a single tier approach to replace the existing two tier rural policy framework based on Green Belts/CPAs and the remainder of the rural area. At the time of the adoption of the Plan, Draft PPS 21 remains subject to public consultation and the future form of rural policy in Ards and Down will depend on the outcome of this process. In these circumstances the Department considers that the Plan should continue to refer to and delineate Green Belts and CPA coverage for Ards Borough and Down District, should they be required for the operation of rural policy following the outcome of the Draft PPS 21 public consultation exercise. These will only become operative in the rural policy context should the final PPS 21 revert to a two tier rural policy framework based on Green Belts/CPAs and the remainder of the rural area.

Draft PPS 21 will continue to take precedence over the provisions of the adopted Ards and Down Plan, pending the completion of its public consultation process. The policy content of the final PPS 21, when decided, will take precedence over the final Plan.



Proposal COU 1 Green Belt

A Green Belt is designated for Ards and Down as shown on Map No. 1.

The pressure analysis suggests that development patterns and continuing pressures are threatening the rural character of the countryside beyond the existing Green Belt.

In the context of the RDS and the analysis of existing and potential development pressures, landscape character and travel-to-work patterns, the Department considers Green Belt designation in those parts of the Plan area indicated on the Countryside Maps to be justified, in order to exercise control over new development to meet the objectives of regional planning policy.

The area covered by the existing BUA Greenbelt, together with the area immediately to the south in Down District, continues to experience pressure for development. To exclude from Green Belt designation, that part of Down District south-west of Downpatrick and north of the Mourne Mountains, which has easy access to the main road network and which is within the BMA "travel-to-work" hinterland as identified in the RDS, would be likely to facilitate a future increase in pressure for development and consequential further loss of rural character. Furthermore, to exclude Lecale from designation risks additional pressures for development being diverted to this area from other parts of Down District designated as Green Belt or Countryside Policy Area, as demonstrated by historical trends to the north of Downpatrick.

In order to exercise control over existing and future development pressures in the Ards Peninsula, and to be consistent with the RDS, Spatial Development Strategy, the Department considers that the Peninsula should be designated as Green Belt.

The dispersal of district population throughout the countryside, evident in the pressure analysis has left Downpatrick without the "critical mass" of population, employment and expenditure required to attract and sustain a level of investment in industrial, commercial and social infrastructure sufficient to provide and maintain a reasonable level and quality of services for the population of Down District. To achieve self-sustaining growth in Downpatrick, and to implement the Spatial Development Strategy in Down District in respect of main town growth and urban renaissance, it is necessary to restrain development in the open countryside.

Developments proposed within these designated areas will be determined in accordance with prevailing regional policy. Where the boundary of the Green Belt follows the outer edge of a road, the outer edge of the Green belt is defined at 100 metres beyond the road line.

Countryside

Proposal COU 2 Countryside Policy Areas

A Countryside Policy Area is designated for Ards and Down as shown on Map No. 1.

The Plan area contains two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a substantial part of the Mourne AONB falling within Down District. These are scenic areas within daily travel distance of both Belfast and Newry and therefore likely to attract inward migration from urban populations. Development pressures may also increase in response to greater constraints elsewhere. The Department considers that Countryside Policy Area designation is necessary to protect these valued landscapes of recognised national landscape quality from existing and future development pressures and to maintain their rural character. Where the boundary of the Countryside Policy Area follows the line of a road, the outer edge of the Countryside Policy Area is defined at 100 metres beyond the road line.

Proposal COU 3 Craigantlet Escarpment Area of High Scenic Value

An Area of High Scenic Value is designated at Craigantlet Escarpment in accordance with Policy CON 1 in this Volume of the Plan and as indicated on the relevant Ards Countryside Map.

The distinctive landform of the Craigantlet Escarpment was identified in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment as an area of scenic quality and is designated in the Plan as an Area of High Scenic Value. The escarpment provides a dramatic visual setting and contains the urban area to the south east side of Belfast city and continues to the junction of Belfast Road and Holywood Road at Ballybarnes within the Ards Borough. This area lies predominantly within the Belfast Metropolitan Plan area. Where the boundary of the AoHSV follows the outer edge of a road, the outer edge of the AoHSV is defined at 100 metres beyond the road line.

Proposal COU 4 Magheraknock Loughs Area of High Scenic Value

An Area of High Scenic Value is designated at Magheraknock Loughs in accordance with Policy CON 1 in this Volume of the Plan and as indicated on the relevant Down Countryside Map.

The area around Magheraknock Loughs was identified in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment as an area of scenic quality and is designated in the Plan as an Area of High Scenic Value. These loughs form part of the Ravarnet Valley landscape and lie within the broad undulating valley floor of the Ravarnet River and its tributaries. This area lies predominantly within the Belfast Metropolitan Plan area. Where the boundary of the AoHSV follows the outer edge of a road, the outer edge of the AoHSV is defined at 100 metres beyond the road line.

Proposal COU 5 Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance

Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance are designated in accordance with Policy CON 3 in this Volume of the Plan in the locations identified on the Countryside Maps, and in Appendix 5.

Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance have been identified and proposed on the basis of their flora, fauna or earth science interest.

Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance are also designated as Areas of Constraint on Minerals Development under COU 8 overleaf.

Countryside

Proposal COU 6 Kearney Area of Townscape Character

An Area of Townscape Character is designated within the Kearney area in accordance with Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS 6): Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage as indicated on the relevant Down Countryside map and in Appendix 6.

Kearney's distinctive character, appearance, key features and intrinsic qualities and the basis for its designation as an Area of Townscape Character derive from:

- uniformity of scale, structure and materials finding expression in the vernacular building practice;
- the shared open space and private enclosures;
- the two storey buildings standing among the others as reference points;
- the Corn Mill Stump at Kearney corner and the stone ditches and hedgerows along the approach road; and
- the physical linkages and fundamental associations between the village, the land and the sea.

Kearney is a small informal grouping of buildings located on the seaward coast of the Lower Ards Peninsula. Its date of origin is unknown but pre-dates by many years the early Ordnance Survey Series of the 1830s.

The character of the group is informal but tightly bound by affinities and uniformity of scale, materials, colouring, enclosure and common spaces. Typical features are common open space, private enclosures formed by low walls, hedges and traditional gates, gabled slated roofs and harled whitewashed walls with few and small openings.

Development proposals, where acceptable, will be expected to preserve or enhance the existing character and appearance of both village and / or host building. Special regard shall be had to sustaining the traditional and vernacular characteristics of the existing buildings in terms building practice, layout, ancillary provision, design, scale, materials, finishes and colour.

Kearney is considered to be of sufficient architectural, cultural, and historic note to merit designation as a Conservation Area. It is the Department's intention to do so, as and when resources permit.

Proposal COU 7 Historic Parks, Gardens & Demesnes

The following historic parks, gardens and demesnes of special historic interest are designated as indicated on the relevant Countryside Maps and in Appendix 7:

Ballywalter Park, Carrowdore Castle, Greyabbey House, Mount Stewart, Portavo House, Rubane House, Ballytrim, Castleward, Castlewellan Castle, Crossgar House (Tobar Mhuire), Delamont, Finnebrogue House, Killyleagh Castle, Mount Panther, Myra Castle, Rademon, Ringdufferin, Rowallane, Saintfield House, Seaforde House, Tollymore Park, Tyrella House.

Ballywhite House, Quintin Castle, Ballee House, Ballydugan House and Church Hill are identified as retaining only some elements of their original, historic form (supplementary sites).

The character and appearance of the modern landscape of Ards and Down Districts owes much to the division and enclosure of the landscape, and its management and planned enhancement, since the 17th century. These designed landscapes - parks, gardens and demesnes - have been changed through time, under management, neglect or new uses that in some cases, their historical character may not be obvious.

While the original house may have been demolished, the planned landscape of demesnes with their distinct boundary features still makes a valuable contribution to the quality and character of the local landscape. In addition, 6 sites within the Plan area are managed by Forest Service or the District Council as Forest or Country Parks or by bodies such as the National Trust to provide access

to the public and comprise an important recreational and tourist asset. Whatever their present individual character and condition, these designed landscapes continue to contribute to the distinctive appearance and character of the local landscape particularly along the fringes of Strangford Lough or in the vicinity of settlements.

Within the Plan area, six parks, gardens and demesnes (five within the countryside and one within Donaghadee Settlement Limit) retain some elements of their original character and design to an extent that they remain valuable for their special historic interest and these have been designated by the Department as supplementary sites.

These areas are detailed in a Register of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historic Interest in Northern Ireland, published by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. This Register summarises the historical significance of each site and the contribution such planned features make to the local landscape. It also seeks to encourage the public, as well as owners, to value and support the protection and maintenance of such sites.

Prevailing regional policy for the protection of historic parks, gardens and demesnes is set out in Planning Policy Statement 6, (PPS 6): Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage.



Countryside

Proposal COU 8 Areas of Constraint on Mineral Developments

Areas of Constraint on Mineral Developments are designated as indicated on the relevant Countryside and Settlement Maps, and include areas designated for their nature conservation importance and/or scientific value within the Plan area.

By their nature, scale, location and duration of operation, mineral developments frequently impact more severely on the environment than any other form of development. They can damage or destroy sites of nature conservation or earth science value and sites of historic and archaeological interest. They can also have a significant visual impact on the landscape and an adverse effect on the amenity of the people nearby.

Areas of Constraint on Mineral Developments have been identified in order to safeguard the most valuable and vulnerable areas of the environment within the Ards Borough and Down District from the detrimental effects of mineral extraction. Their identification has taken account of nature conservation interests, the archaeological and built heritage, landscape quality and character as identified in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000, visual prominence, amenity value, geological interest and beaches in the coastal zone.

Designated Areas of Constraint on Mineral Developments also include, in view of their nature conservation importance and/or scientific value:

- ASSIs, ASIs, Ramsar sites, SPAs, SACs, Nature Reserves and Strangford Lough Marine Nature Reserve as indicated on the Environmental Designations Map and in Appendix 4;
- Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance designated in the Plan (Proposal COU 5) as indicated on the relevant Countryside Maps, Newtownards settlement map and in Appendix 5, and including those designated by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency over the life of the Plan.

Proposals for the development of mineral resources within these areas will be determined in accordance with prevailing regional policy, which is set out in Policy MIN 3 of 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland'.

Proposal COU 9 Ballynahinch Informal Park and Ride and Park and Share site

A site with development potential for an informal park and ride / park and share site is identified on the A7 Belfast Road, Ballynahinch close to the intersection with the proposed Ballynahinch By-Pass as indicated on the relevant Down Countryside Map.

Prior to the completion of a feasibility study, conducted by or on behalf of Roads Service, into the suitability of the site for the proposed use, planning permission will not be granted for any other form of development which would prejudice the provision of Park and Ride or Park and Share facilities.

In order to encourage modal shift from private cars to public transport, the site is identified on a key commuter route into Belfast along which Goldliner bus services operate. It is anticipated that the site, if found to be suitable, should provide 20-50 car parking spaces.

It is intended that the feasibility study will be completed within 2 years of publication of the Plan. It is intended that the Department will continue to protect only those sites, which the feasibility study has shown to be suitable for the purpose.

Proposal COU 10 Clough Informal Park and Ride and Park and Share site

A site with development potential for an informal park and ride / park and share site is identified on the A7 Car park at Clough, adjoining the roundabout with the A25 Downpatrick Road as indicated on the relevant Down Countryside Map.

Prior to the completion of a feasibility study, conducted by or on behalf of Roads Service, into the suitability of the site for the proposed use, planning permission will not be granted for any other form of development which would prejudice the provision of Park and Ride or Park and Share facilities.

In order to encourage modal shift from private cars to public transport, the site is identified on a key commuter route into Belfast along which Goldliner bus services operate. It is anticipated that the site, if found to be suitable, should provide 20-50 car parking spaces.

It is intended that the feasibility study will be completed within 2 years of publication of the Plan. It is intended that the Department will continue to protect only those sites, which the feasibility study has shown to be suitable for the purpose.

Countryside

Proposal COU 11 Industrial Site, Ballynahinch Road, Crossgar

A site comprising 3.95 hectares is identified for industry at Ballynahinch Road and is indicated in Appendix 8 and on the relevant Down Countryside Map. Development of the site shall be subject to the following Key Design Considerations:

- entire site to be used for general or light industrial use as specified in Class 4, 5 and 11 of the Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004 and no other purpose;
- development layout and design to be of a high quality appropriate to this rural area;
- the provision of a satisfactory means of access and associated visibility splays onto the Ballynahinch Road; and
- retention of surrounding trees and vegetation, except those required to be removed to provide a satisfactory means of access, to reduce the impact of industrial usage in the rural setting.

The site includes a former sawmill and a building formally used as an egg packing store and now in use for poultry lairage. It is considered that the site may be required to service local specialised industry in keeping with current uses and will provide additional local employment opportunities within walking distance of the village of Crossgar. Planning applications within the site will be subject to the requirements of all prevailing planning policy.

Proposal COU 12 Existing Industrial Lands at Belfast Road, Downpatrick

Existing industrial lands at Belfast Road, Downpatrick are designated in accordance with Policy IND 1 in this Volume of the Plan and as indicated on the relevant Down Countryside Map.

Downpatrick has a large, 34.14 hectare, serviced industrial estate on the Belfast Road with 12.52 hectares of remaining developable land. 35 industrial units and a new office block have been built near the entrance to the estate, with a number of office blocks with storage and factories built further within the site. The remaining lands have been laid out, serviced and landscaped in accordance with the planning approval.