



West Tyrone Area Plan 2019

Public and Community Consultation

Community Technical Aid
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Executive Summary

The public and community consultation on the West Tyrone Area Plan, facilitated by Community Technical Aid, involved hundreds of people across the Omagh and Strabane districts. Community groups, environmentalists, equality groupings and members of the public voiced their opinions and comments as concerned citizens with strong feelings about the area in which they live and work. Feelings of anger and frustration mainly focused on the issue of rural deprivation, disadvantage and what people perceive to be inequitable treatment of the rural west by planning and other statutory agencies.

Throughout the consultation the same needs were expressed again and again: an adequate and targeted housing supply; road improvements and upgrades; sensitive and balanced protection of the environment; focused and appropriate economic growth and investment; and a rigorous and visionary approach to tourism.

By their very topography and geographical location parts of Omagh and Strabane council areas are extremely isolated. The people living in these areas told of the genuine hardship and disadvantage that results from such isolation. They said that parts of West Tyrone are so remote that housing, roads and economic investment decisions rarely affect them or improve their situation. They do however see the West Tyrone Area Plan as providing a unique opportunity to enable and facilitate a process whereby many of these problems can be addressed.

The Area Plan Team was asked to target housing zonings on the basis of need and to plan growth so that all settlements and the open countryside receive an equitable allocation of housing. An open space audit was asked for that would show where the gaps in the two districts really exist. In this way it is hoped that open space, play areas and recreational facilities will be provided for the communities who need them most.

The retailing core of Omagh is healthy it was said but needs assistance in the form of improved traffic flows and the provision of adequate car parking spaces in the town. Strabane town by contrast has a weaker retailing sector and the town centre itself needs regeneration and appropriate retail zonings and policies as well as more parking to address this.

Communities asked that the Area Plan promotes the delicate balance needed to protect sensitive natural environments in the area while at the same time allowing rural areas to become sustainable and capable of expansion. Wind farms and quarrying are of greatest concern to residents and they asked that West Tyrone's resources are not over-exploited.

The tourism potential of the two districts was seen as one of the main positive attributes of West Tyrone. The Area Plan Team was therefore asked to radically turn around the tourism potential of the area through the zoning of land and the introduction of strengthened and focused policies which will bring tourism providers, infrastructure and facilities to the area.

Finally an accurate and targeted assessment of the needs of equality groupings in the area is needed. These needs include accommodation for Travellers, ethnic minority groupings and older people as well as facilities and physical improvements in town centres for people with disabilities and more leisure and recreational facilities for young people.

The overall wishes of the people of Omagh and Strabane can be summarised very simply. They want and need sustainable communities. To be sustainable they said that the Area Plan needs to recognise and plan for reasonable housing growth and that this growth should be equitably and fairly distributed across the towns, villages and open countryside. The roads system, perhaps most importantly, needs to be upgraded and enhanced. People see this step as being critical to unlocking the economic growth and tourism potential of West Tyrone.

Communities of Omagh and Strabane asked that the Area Plan be an imaginative document that looks forward to 2019 by planning now for two districts that will be able to grow, develop and compete economically with other parts of the region.

I. Introduction

The West Tyrone Area Plan when published will provide up-to-date guidance and policies for future development and conservation in the Omagh and Strabane District Council areas up to 2019.

It is therefore an important strategic document and will be integral to the future development growth and investment decisions in the most western part of the region for many years to come.

The plan preparation process has many elements. This report presents one of these, consultation with the public and the community sector. Community Technical Aid undertook this consultation over several months, both before and after publication of the West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 Issues Paper. This report is an account of the entire consultation detailing the views of the hundreds of people who participated in numerous ways. CTA has used its judgement when collecting, analysing and summarising this information while ensuring the essence of the views expressed is not compromised.

This report was submitted to the Planning Service in December 2005 and copies sent to all who participated in the consultation thereafter.

2. Background

Consultation on the West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 has followed previous successful community consultation on other Area Plans across the region. Community Technical Aid has extensive experience of involving communities in consultation and we are pleased to have been appointed by the Planning Service to carry out this work on its behalf.

Including consultation on the West Tyrone Area Plan, we have now facilitated public and community involvement in seven Area Plans, in 15 council areas right across the region. We are therefore very aware of the importance of genuine involvement and we are even more convinced of the worth of involving people in shaping their futures. We have in the past presented the case for the adoption of a more proactive approach to engaging communities in Area Plan processes. The good practice approach which has ensued with the Issues Paper publication and involvement by communities at an early stage in the process is now starting to pay dividends. Draft Area Plans published in early 2005 - the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 and the Draft Northern Area Plan 2016 - have included key policies and proposals which directly address some of the concerns raised by communities. For example, apartment development on the north coast is now to be restricted and provision must be made for social housing in housing developments of a certain size in both the Belfast Metropolitan Area and on the north coast.

Consultation on the West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 has to date been especially positive. During the first stage of the consultation the views and comments expressed by the community sector were directly reflected in the Issues Paper. The views and comments in this report of the entire consultation will now be taken into consideration by the Planning Service when preparing the West Tyrone Area Plan.

3. Methodology

The public and community consultation had two distinct parts - a preliminary phase which ran from March to June 2005 and an intensive consultation phase which followed the publication of the consultation document - the Issues Paper - and ran from October to December 2005.

The main tasks and key steps undertaken during the preliminary phase (Stage One) included:

- identification of community, voluntary, environmental and equality groupings within Omagh and Strabane council areas using in-house information and local council, sub-regional and regional sources;
- preparation of an information paper on the West Tyrone Area Plan to inform groups of the process and help them engage in the consultation (the Planning Service also prepared a briefing paper for groups);
- writing to over 240 groups in March 2005 and encouraging them to get involved, register their interest in the process and send written comments and papers on the issues facing the community in the plan area;
- contacting representative organisations for the nine equality groupings identified by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and conducting structured interviews with those representing ethnic minorities and email or telephone surveys with the others;
- arranging and holding six community information and exchange meetings in April and May 2005 to facilitate initial dialogue between the community and Planning Service and to gather the main or strategic issues in the community. These meetings were held in Creggan (on 25 April 2005); in Omagh (on 26 April 2005); in Drumquin (on 28 April 2005); in Strabane (on 3 May 2005); in Castlederg (on 4 May 2005) and in Aghabrack (on 9 May 2005).

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

During the intervening period from June 2005 to the publication of the Issues Paper in October 2005, a series of community outreach and information sessions was held with community groups in areas of weaker community infrastructure. These sessions were designed to inform those groups who would not otherwise have participated in the process of the scope of planning, how an Area Plan works and why involvement in the consultation stage of the West Tyrone Area Plan was important. The rationale for these meetings was thus to give weaker communities an informed opportunity to participate. This links with CTA's belief that all communities should be given a meaningful opportunity to participate in the plan process. We held 16 sessions as part of the community outreach programme over the summer of 2005. The information gathered from these sessions is incorporated into the consultation findings.

The steps undertaken during the second stage of the consultation from October to December 2005 included:

- a comprehensive promotion and advertising campaign including letters to all participants from Stage One, newspaper advertisements in all regional and local papers promoting the consultation events and leaflet drops and poster displays in numerous buildings and venues throughout the area;
- a public information session held to coincide with the launch of the Issues Paper on 18 October 2005, to inform members of the public about the forthcoming consultation meetings and answer any queries, and to assist them in making relevant comments on the Area Plan;
- 12 consultation events including eight public meetings and four community drop-in sessions throughout the plan area from 24 October 2005 to 16 November 2005; and
- focus group meetings and face-to-face interviews with representatives of Section 75 groupings (to supplement the equality information already gathered from equality organisations during the preliminary stage of the consultation).

All of the above contributed to what was a wide ranging and inclusive consultation process. As many people and groups as possible were contacted, assisted, encouraged and given the opportunity to actively participate in discussion on the future needs of the West Tyrone area.

4. Consultation Findings - Area Wide Issues

The information in this section has been collated from a variety of sources: comments and views expressed during the community consultation meetings, drop-in sessions, written submissions, the public information session, focus groups, telephone interviews and face-to-face discussions. The essence of the comments made during the first stage of the consultation has also been incorporated here.

Findings specific to settlements within the two council areas are reported in the next section.

4.1 Housing

Debate on a wide range of housing issues dominated the discussion throughout the consultation. The responses varied from the need for more houses in the open countryside and more housing for all settlements generally in the interests of the sustainability of rural communities, to the need for more than just commuter housing and the problems associated with a dwindling stock of affordable housing.

For simplicity the information on all aspects of the housing debate has been categorised in the sub-sections below.

4.1.1 Rural Housing and Housing in the Countryside

It is hardly surprising, given the locale, that rural housing and single houses in the countryside were often-debated topics. Participants made no apology for introducing the subject many times. This, rather than becoming frustrating, showed not only the depth of feeling among participants, but the real impact and effect the struggle to obtain planning permission in parts of the countryside is having on rural dwellers, especially those in more remote but highly scenic parts of the West Tyrone area. One cannot over-emphasise the strength of feeling on the issue of rural housing. Whether accurate or not, there is a perception and belief that it is difficult for local people to obtain planning permission for houses in the countryside. The Area Plan's role here people clearly see is one of facilitating and nurturing the growth (or rebirth) of rural areas, especially rural settlements and small villages. These once vibrant locations now struggle to survive and housing allocations are seen as critical in this respect.

4.1.2 Social Housing

“planners need to be more proactive”

An overall plea was made for the Area Plan Team to realistically address the need for social housing in the West Tyrone area. Some areas are experiencing greater social housing needs than other areas and the Area Plan is seen as the vehicle for ensuring that there is a balance in future housing developments in the two districts. The percentage set aside approach as provided for in Planning



Policy Statement 12 - Housing in Settlements - and used in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 is needed in the two districts. Otherwise more and more private housing developments will swamp the area and will, in the opinion of local people, leave the market with little or no choice with regard to housing tenure. Again the main points made go back to and revolve around balance and sustainability. Participants queried whether the spirit or intention of the Regional Development Strategy which aims “to encourage the development of balanced local communities by providing a housing choice through a mix of housing tenures and types” would be rigorously followed in the preparation of the West Tyrone Area Plan. If not, they feared that the gaps will continue to widen between the sections in the local population which can afford to buy into private housing developments and those which cannot. The problem is that the latter grouping has little or no choice. It is precisely this issue that participants wish to see the Area Plan Team address.

4.1.3 Affordable Housing

The closely related issue of affordability in the housing market was often raised. Despite perceptions housing is not as affordable in parts of West Tyrone as it once was. The commuter phenomenon has had serious impacts especially in those parts of the Strabane District Council area en route to Derry/Londonderry and in those parts of Omagh that are close to the town. Young people (as is the case in other parts of the region) are experiencing difficulties accessing affordable housing. This is especially problematic given the economic development context and the weaker employment infrastructure. There is less money around and fewer jobs available. Recent factory closures and other investment announcements have adversely impacted on the wealth of people in this part of the region. House price rises are more keenly felt and affordable housing as a concept and a reality is more of a problem. Of course there is a resultant impact on the local community in other ways. The profile of communities is changing and the Area Plan Team was urged to look at creative solutions to this problem. Planning policy (Planning Policy Statement 12 - Housing in Settlements) does not allow for percentage set aside schemes within housing developments which would provide a number of affordable units.

“presumption is supposed to be in favour of development”

Notwithstanding this participants believed that there are other planning solutions available. The Area Plan could, for example, zone land for housing development in areas of high prices and, linking it to the Housing Needs Assessment, state that a range of house types and sizes must be provided so that there is a diverse range of house designs and thus prices available in the schemes. This would go some way to addressing the problem.

4.1.4 Housing Design

There were conflicting views regarding the design of new housing. Suburban type developments are being constructed throughout the area and local people fear that the character of their area is changing. Most often raised was the subject of the layout of new developments and the lack of open space and green areas. Participants were angry at the Planning Service’s seeming lack of control over this issue despite the policy tools available. Clear design guidelines via the key site requirements process were called for. Better use of the planning gain system - whereby developers should be encouraged via the Article 40 process to enter into legally binding agreements requiring, where needs exist, the provision of open space, sport, recreational and other community facilities - was also called

for in this regard. The two districts and Strabane in particular, were said to have a distinct lack of open space, leisure and recreational facilities. Developers in other parts of the United Kingdom are well accustomed to entering into agreements with planning authorities to provide community facilities where they are needed and participants argued that developers here should do likewise. Otherwise the trend of recent years will continue. New housing developments will emerge throughout the area with little or no thought given to the provision of facilities and communities will continue to suffer needlessly.

4.1.5 Housing Allocations and Housing Growth Indicators

While not available for discussion as such (as Housing Growth Indicators are the subject of a Department for Regional Development consultation exercise) participants at most consultation events discussed the need for an equitable distribution of housing allocations. The RDS approach in relation to targeting hubs and corridors was strongly criticised on occasion. The impact of this approach has been detrimental to the local economy and community infrastructure in West Tyrone. People are angry that government policy has resulted in stifled rural growth and development in the name of sustainable development. They asked who it is sustainable for as their rural communities are certainly not seeing sustainable futures ahead. The perceived over-emphasis on towns and urban centres to the exclusion of smaller settlements and the wider rural area is said to be taking its toll. West Tyrone as an area is suffering more than most in this respect and local people believe strongly that government should adopt a more creative approach. In terms of the Area Plan they see this creativity centring around the allocation and distribution of housing figures. Equity and fairness when making these decisions was called for. Equally people asked for a deeper and more thorough understanding to be applied to the complexities of living in rural West Tyrone. This part of the region, like few others, is truly dispersed in nature. This scattered approach to living should not be altered to artificially keep West Tyrone in line with the rest of the region if it results in permanent damage to community structures. The Area Plan should zone land for housing throughout the area, it was said. These zonings must apply to all settlements as well as taking appropriate account of the open countryside.

4.2 Roads, Traffic and Transportation

The condition of the roads throughout the West Tyrone area was the most often discussed issue apart from housing. Participants believe the issue to be one of equity and thus unequal treatment by government agencies in this part of the region.

The under-investment on roads improvements and road building is of major concern and people in West Tyrone believe that successive governments have failed them in this regard. The impact of such chronic under-investment is at best that local journeys and the movement of people and goods in and around Omagh and Strabane are fraught with difficulties and delays. At worst the impact on the economy, in regional terms, has been catastrophic. Job losses and economic downturns in the textile industry especially have depressed the economy. Local people believe that when investment decisions are being made (and have been made in the past) the rural west suffers and the spiral of decline continues. It is not only from an economic development viewpoint that under-investment in roads infrastructure is having a detrimental effect. Tourism is

“need for consultation specifically with landowners”

suffering; local people travelling outside their town or village to work face longer journey times; and the freight traffic (cross border especially) that does pass through the area slows traffic, leads to higher accident rates and generally detracts from the image of the area. As a result, West Tyrone - both visually and economically - is not as attractive as other parts of the region. Residents believe that until this is properly addressed there will never be fair treatment for them. Again the Regional Development Strategy was heavily criticised for the Eastern Seaboard approach. Irrespective of the strategic and adopted approach set down by the RDS, participants said that the Area Plan could and



should play its part here in terms of addressing the imbalances. This could be done for example through recommending that road improvements are required locally to boost tourism, local trade and housing growth. Park and ride facilities are especially important given the high percentage of people who travel elsewhere to work. Dedicated bus routes and public transport corridors are important in

this respect also, as are walking and cycling routes and associated facilities. Notwithstanding the need to “green” the transportation elements of the West Tyrone Area Plan, participants did say that by far the most far-reaching impacts will be achieved via serious investment in roads infrastructure.

While the provision of public transportation routes and services is not within the remit of the Area Plan, it was stressed many times that something must be done to address the limited availability of public transport services. Participants told of local people in Strabane town, for example, having to rely heavily on private taxis to access shops and other services. The fact that there is not even a bus station in Strabane is indicative of the low importance attached to public transportation.

Local people asked if the Planning Service could more radically address this issue, especially under the Quality Initiative, when zoning large housing areas. This was said from the point of view of ensuring that parts of the two districts do not grow and expand to the detriment of the local economy and with little or no thought given to sustainable development and greener and more integrated transport systems.

From a sustainability point of view more walking and cycling routes are needed throughout both districts. It is hoped that the Plan will have a general policy on this issue and that opportunities for providing more walking and cycling facilities are not lost in the future, such as the one missed when the Newtown Stewart Bypass was constructed.

4.3 Natural Environment

Many parts of West Tyrone are classified as areas of high scenic value. Because of this there are large swathes of land which have protective planning policy designations. The restriction that this is

“morale is very low in the district”

placing on the land, and thus the rural communities who live there, is keenly felt. There was an acceptance that the natural environment of the Sperrins needs protection from over development. But there was a lot of discussion about the genuine negative impact this is having on rural areas and the ability of farming communities to survive. While there would appear to be exceptions to every rule, and the ability or not to obtain planning permission for single houses in the countryside has not escaped this phenomenon, there were many cited examples of genuine hardship and difficulty experienced by farmers and their families when applying for planning permission on their land.

A lot of the discussion centred on wind farms and their location in areas of high scenic value. Local people are mostly opposed to wind farms in areas close to housing and where they have been placed in very prominent locations. Notwithstanding their merit in terms of providing more sustainable forms of energy, use of wind farms has become a contentious issue and one which local people hope the Area Plan will address. Many people wish to see turbines located in areas that are not as visually important. Often remote and breathtaking locations are chosen and people believe this must stop in preference to locations that are less scenic. This statement emanates from the strength of feeling over the treatment that the people of West Tyrone are receiving. The area is under-resourced in terms of jobs and infrastructural development, but over-utilised and insensitively so in terms of using the countryside for its wind power and energy generation. With applications for wind farms pending, potentially resulting in hundreds more turbines across the district, many people believe and fear that the private sector, backed by government, is seizing the opportunity to plunder the natural environment and its worth, without putting anything back. This is not acceptable in their eyes and must be addressed through the Plan which should have a balanced and fair approach to this issue and the use of planning agreements built into the process. If agreements were used private sector companies with plans for turbines could, through this process, provide community facilities and infrastructure where the community has identified needs.

“small villages are dying on their feet”

Staying with the theme of sustainable forms of energy it was mentioned several times that proposals for renewable energy and eco-friendly waste management facilities should be encouraged via the Area Plan. The issue of waste management and renewables needs to be dealt with more rigorously by the Planning Service it was said, and one of the best ways to achieve this is to zone more land for community recycling schemes. By giving people convenient and accessible facilities their decision to recycle is made easier and a more concerted and holistic participation by all results.

In terms of the natural environment Donaghanie Bog, including St Patrick’s lake, along Beragh Road out of Omagh, needs better protection. Peat cutting nearby is intensive and environmentalists do not want the bogland around the lake to be compromised.

The existence of natural mineral resources in the area is an important issue with local fears that over-quarrying and mining will deplete the natural environment especially with regard to too much gold mining in the Sperrins. Participants stressed the need to get the balance right between open cast mining and extraction of valuable mineral sources (of which there are many, especially in the Omagh district); and the need to protect the environment surrounding these mineral sources.

Other nature conservation issues raised focused on the need to conserve wetland areas (which are quickly disappearing); the need for bogland protection; the need to protect rivers with more policy

designations (especially given the fishing tourism in the area); the importance of woodland and hedgerows for wildlife; countryside access and nature trails.

4.4 Built Environment and Heritage

Many aspects of the built heritage and history of Omagh and Strabane districts have been lost. Participants told of a time when many fine buildings stood in the towns and villages giving them a sense of distinction and place. These have been lost, some as a result of the Troubles and some through demolition and redevelopment. Areas of Townscape Character as designations were not discussed much as a result, with some notable exceptions (see next section). Local people believe

“need to plan rather than react” that many mistakes of the past (in terms of loss of important buildings) should not be repeated. The Omagh and Strabane districts have a rich industrial past and this should be preserved and utilised in the future.

4.5 Retailing

West Tyrone has distinct sub sections in terms of retailing. Omagh town is a thriving retail location and a number of smaller towns and villages in the Omagh district do well as market towns. Strabane town on the other hand suffers from a poorer image and a distinct lack of anchor retail outlet units. While the town is busy during the week, at the weekends there is an exodus to Derry/Londonderry, Omagh, Cookstown and further afield for shopping trips. This contrasts sharply with the image of Strabane of years gone by where it was a popular town on a Saturday when market day was held and shops stayed open late into the night.

The lack of facilities and choice in the centre of Strabane and the difficult roads layout, congestion and lack of parking facilities in both Omagh and Strabane towns means that nowhere in the West Tyrone area can adequately compete with better retailing services and choice elsewhere. Strabane undoubtedly has particular obstacles to overcome in that edge-of-town retailing is having a detrimental effect on the town centre as is the lack of an adequate public transport system and the absence of national retailers.

4.6 Industry and Employment

As previously outlined the industrial base in West Tyrone has declined considerably. Recent job losses in the textile industry have exacerbated the situation and employment prospects in the more traditional sectors are looking bleak. Recognising that the Area Plan can do little to address larger economic issues such as these, particularly as they are being experienced globally, participants did urge the Area Plan Team to look at two things: the zoning of smaller scale industrial units; and flexibility within the planning process to allow agricultural diversification proposals to proceed where significant employment and job creation would result.

“inconsistencies in planning decisions”

Industrial growth and enhancement on a bigger scale would only come about it was said once the large scale infrastructural issues were resolved. Roads, water and sewerage improvements and investment were called for to provide the right conditions for industry to consider locating in West Tyrone. Such investment was seen as a real possibility from a cross-border perspective. The Area Plan could facilitate this by ensuring that adequate industrial zonings and potential for growth in the form of opportunity sites are catered for.



4.7 Community Facilities, Recreation and Open Space

There are many community centres and buildings but community facilities and services are lacking in parts of the West Tyrone area. Areas of recreation, sport and open space are either not provided at all or are beginning to be sold off for housing development. The latter is especially true in parts of the Strabane district. Without doubt the lack of open space and play areas throughout the whole of the two districts, but especially in Strabane, was the issue most commonly raised on this subject. Parents and other people responsible for children said that the lack of play space, recreational space and leisure facilities is having a serious negative impact on the health and wellbeing of their communities. Children especially are suffering as a result of this deficit and the Area Plan Team was encouraged to look more comprehensively at the problem when undertaking the open space audit for the Plan. A particular phenomenon has recently emerged, again especially in the Strabane district, where areas of open space and recreation are being sold off to private housing developers. This needs urgent attention. As does the fact that private housing developments themselves are being permitted with little or no space provided as play areas and landscaping. The lack of “greening” of new housing is a worrying trend and one which local people want to see reversed.

4.8 Tourism

The tourism potential of the West Tyrone area is huge. People appreciate that there is much to offer the tourist in terms of the natural environment, but that the tourism infrastructure is not developed enough to adequately cater for visitors. The Area Plan Team together with the two councils, it was said, should be properly assessing and catering for tourism needs. Facilities and services are needed - from better signage and access to areas worth visiting, to bed and breakfast accommodation and self-catering cottages. Participants were not surprised to learn that less than 3% of the total tourism spend for the region is attributable to the West Tyrone area. To address this issue and radically reverse the situation, the Area Plan Team was asked to zone more land for planned tourism projects and to include policies within the Area Plan which will facilitate growth and development in this important economic sector. Such policies could include leniency towards planning permission for advertising and signage pointing to the location of tourist attractions, services and facilities. The policy is currently very restrictive and local business owners believe that this is stifling growth and buoyancy in the tourism market. Policy solutions could also be found to ensure that applications for tourist accommodation would be acceptable, even in areas of

“planners not supporting communities”

restriction and conservation if the developers of such facilities were able to prove they would just be for the holiday market.

“third world infrastructure is a big problem” Throughout the consultation many people provided examples and accounts of the unique history of the West Tyrone area. Going back to the 17th Century wealthy European visitors came to the Strabane district, travelling along the rivers and waterways and the Derg Valley in particular, out to Lough Derg, as part of the Northern European pilgrimage trends of the time. This history, the associated buildings and artefacts dotted throughout the area are little known about and yet could provide fascinating material for tourist trails and stays in the area. The Area Plan has a core role to play in this respect and the Planning Service was asked to assess tourism and its potential in greater depth before preparing tourism policies and proposals.

Overall a lot more needs to be done with regard to enhancing the experience for the visitor to West Tyrone - from simple schemes such as walking routes and nature trails along canals and through woods and glens to wider promotion and development of the unique history of the area. There is much on offer at the Ulster American Folk Park and the Ulster History Park but more needs to be done to keep the visitors in the area. Proposals for redevelopment at the History Park (in the Glens/Cullion area) may help put Omagh’s natural assets on the map. Participants asked if Planning Service could consider designating the development areas as a Dispersed Rural Community to facilitate tourism, housing and other infrastructural improvements.

In Strabane for example Gray’s Printing Works and President Wilson’s house are great attractions but should be more widely promoted as should the house of Mrs C Frances Alexander (a local poet and writer), the story of “Half Hung” McNaughton and the development of a car park at Harry Avery’s Castle.

There are many American and German tourists already visiting the district. If more is done for them the tourism spend will increase significantly. Participants felt this alone will help solve the economic problems of the area. *“can’t get hold of planners over the ‘phone”*

4.9 Equality

A range of equality issues was discussed - from the needs of Travellers and people with disabilities to issues affecting women and older people.

- **Travellers** - The needs of Travellers in West Tyrone are changing with the population growing steadily. With this increase in population, especially in and around Omagh town, the need for housing increases. For example, there are 30 children living in Tattykeel in Omagh and they will need housing in 10-15 years’ time. The Area Plan should be zoning land for Traveller site expansion and should contain policies for assessing and meeting the need for new Traveller sites.

Other Traveller issues raised do not pertain to planning as such (such as adult literacy issues,

access to health and community services, and the need for improved community awareness of Traveller issues). However, the discrimination experienced by Travellers in terms of finding suitable accommodation sites and the subsequent integration of Travellers into the community structure in West Tyrone is a planning issue and one which the Area Plan must address.

There is a need to zone land for the provision of Traveller accommodation in both the Omagh and Strabane districts for both grouped housing and transit sites. As well as existing demand there is likely to be an increased demand for accommodation as Traveller families from other areas move to Omagh and Strabane.

- **Ethnic Minority Groups -**

Given recent rises in the ethnic minority population throughout the region, there are issues regarding the need for more affordable housing and social housing units for this section of the population. There are numerous nationalities represented in the region - Eastern European, Philippino, Chinese, Indian, African, Afro-Caribbean and others - and their specific housing and community needs



must be addressed. The greatest barriers that people from different ethnic backgrounds face are discrimination, prejudice and racism. Planning has an important role to play in terms of integrating all communities, just as envisioned by the Regional Development Strategy. In reality one may see difficulties with this and ask what planning can really do to promote and plan for more sustainable and integrated communities. One of the answers lies in the careful choice and zoning of housing land in the two districts which can be accessed by anyone. By that the land or territory must be seen as neutral, open and accessible to all. We can no longer talk of the “two sides” of the community here. We have a multi-faceted, diverse and fast-changing cultural profile. West Tyrone is no different from other parts of the region in this respect. If anything there are higher percentages of Eastern Europeans living in West Tyrone and working across the border. This is especially the case in parts of Strabane given the proximity to Donegal and the job opportunities there.

- **Women** - Affordable housing is especially needed by women who are classed as single/lone parents. This is an element of housing needs in the area that may go unnoticed and representatives of women (groups and networks) want the Area Plan Team to fully take account of this when assessing housing need in conjunction with the Housing Executive.

“why start consultation now when the Plan is out of date and the new Plan when ready will be out of date? - this is very poor planning”

In terms of the design of physical spaces women's needs should be addressed. They should also be taken account of when looking at housing developments and the need for open space and safe play areas for children. The built environment should be planned and built in such a way so that there is better lighting and safe places to walk. This could be factored into key site requirements for zoned sites in the Plan.

- **Older People** - As is the case with women, older people believe that planning should take account of their safety issues and the need for well designed and secure environments and physical spaces. The design of housing estates and town centres is important from this point of view as many older people feel unable to access certain areas at night and would certainly feel unsafe walking through certain areas.

“need to plan for elderly and disabled people”

The number and location of entertainment facilities is another important factor for older people which needs to be considered by planning. Such facilities attract young people at night and anti-social behaviour often results. Older people asked for more consideration of their needs and that the Area Plan Team plans for safer environments which all members of the community can access and enjoy.

Public transportation and bus services in particular are weak and at times completely absent from parts of the two districts. Older people therefore have difficulties accessing shops, services and health facilities. The latter of these is especially problematic for older people living in more remote and isolated corners of the West Tyrone area. The most south western parts of the Strabane district (for example, around Aghyaran) are so remote and removed from services that older people have to travel for many hours in a community ambulance to access the hospital in Omagh. This causes genuine hardship and older people living in these parts of the districts believe that the Plan could do more to address their needs.

- **Young People** - Young people also have affordable housing needs especially as house prices have been rising dramatically in the commuter belt areas in and out of Omagh and Strabane towns. They have concerns over future employment prospects in the area and they believe that they will have to go to Belfast or Derry/Londonderry to access employment. In terms of entertainment facilities and recreation young people currently travel to Derry/Londonderry, Omagh, Cookstown and further afield. Young people in Strabane in particular believe there is not much on offer for them in and around the town.
- **People with Disabilities** - Access and parking as well as public transportation issues are of most concern to people with disabilities. There is limited parking for people with disabilities in town centres and in particular in Strabane and Omagh towns. Adapted housing and lifetime housing units are also needed for people with physical accessibility needs.

5. Consultation Findings - Locational Issues

The information in this section has been collated from a variety of sources: comments and views expressed during the community consultation meetings, drop-in sessions, written submissions, the public information session, focus groups and telephone interviews. The essence of the comments made during the first stage of the consultation has also been incorporated here. The following sections pertain only to the issues affecting each location. The issues follow the same sequence as used in Section 4.

5.1 Strabane District Council

Strabane Town

House prices in Strabane have risen sharply in the last number of years. Where once Strabane town would have been seen as an affordable place to live this is now no longer the case. These house price increases have come about as a result of the relatively short commuting distance from Strabane to Derry City, Omagh town and Letterkenny.

One of the planning implications of this is the lack of affordable housing in the town as well as the need for more social housing units. Young people are finding it increasingly difficult to purchase a house and the social structure of communities in and around the town is beginning to change.

By contrast with those who said that there should be more rural housing permitted, people living in Strabane town said that there should be rejuvenation and regeneration in and around the town. Housing together with commercial development is critical to this rejuvenation it was said.

The roads and traffic issues were discussed at length. Strategically this is a huge problem for the district (as reported elsewhere) but this issue was also seen as a particularly important problem in the town. Main issues highlighted included: there is no bus station in the town; traffic levels are reaching chronic levels especially at peak times; car parking spaces are increasingly difficult to find; disabled drivers experience great difficulties accessing shops and services through a lack of available disabled spaces; and shops and other businesses are suffering from the ill effects that congestion and the lack of parking are having on the town.



“let people live in the country if they want to - don’t force them into towns”

Participants said a link across the river in the town would enable pedestrians to go from the old school to the planned new school as all new facilities will be located there. This is an important scheme and one which should be facilitated by the planning process.

Conservation of the built environment in Strabane town goes together with a drive to rejuvenate retailing and tourism. However many participants were sceptical saying that many of the important buildings in the town have already been lost. Older streetscapes have some worthy features it was said but urgent protection is needed now to ensure that more mistakes are not made, for example Strabane District Council's redevelopment of the SCORE site and the site which will soon house the new Arts Centre.

Local people feel aggrieved at these two schemes saying that there was limited consultation and that there is little public support for them. They feel public transport and other key services should have taken priority over the Arts Centre and other projects.

There is nowhere in the town where large scale public events can take place and the SCORE site and Arts Centre will not be adequate for what is needed.

There are numerous play parks in the town, especially on housing estates. But the bigger picture is bleak with young people having limited choices and scope for leisure and recreational activities.



Retailing as a commercial activity is not as vibrant as it could be in the town. Participants appreciate that there is a lot of underdeveloped, yet zoned, retailing space in the town and also appreciates the centre versus edge of town debate that has commenced amongst the Planning Service. However the main concern of people in this regard is that Strabane commercially is not the town it once was. Rather than accepting as some do that Strabane's "hey day" is over, many expressed the need for the Plan to zone land for retailing and commercial activity right in the heart of Strabane. To complement this they said that the roads, traffic and parking issues should be examined and rectified. National retailers should be encouraged into the town. Although this is outside the remit of the Plan as such, the Area Plan Team can zone appropriate areas (sizes) of retail space that would be attractive to national retailers. It was said that the bigger national retailers were kept out of town via fierce opposition from local retailers, family firms and the Chamber of Commerce and that this cannot be allowed to happen again.

“my only fear is that the Plan does not go far enough on major issues like transport, infrastructure and will be outdated”

From an industrial and economic development viewpoint there was a lot of reflective discussion on the mistakes of the past and the fact that Strabane is in a downturn that it may take years to get out of.

Recognising that the large scale manufacturing days for most of the region (and in Britain) are over, local people did ask for the Area Plan Team to zone small scale industrial sites in the town and on the edge of the town.

Tourism facilities in the town are relatively poor it was said. Basic amenities such as signage, points and places of interest, toilets and rest areas are not generally provided. Tourists therefore pass through the town and more needs to be done via the Plan to facilitate wholesale growth in this sector.

Equality issues and needs in the town range from the need for ramps, more accessible shops and public buildings in the town to seating for older people, the need for specific housing for ethnic minority groupings and sheltered housing accommodation for older people.

Overall the problems in Strabane may be too big for the Area Plan alone to address. People are angry at what they see as successive governments failing them with poor or no investment decisions and a Regional Development Strategy which only sought to reinforce and worsen the problem for the town.

“has anyone examined the effects of moving rural people to towns - social problems for example?”

The Area Plan has a challenge to face and overcome in this respect. Should it align with the RDS and not concentrate as many resources into Strabane or risk the “certificate of conformity” process and plan for a renewed and reinvigorated Strabane that is so desperately needed and wanted by its citizens. Most of all the image of the town must change. The fear and perception, and in many ways reality, of degradation and decline must end. Growth and investment alone will be the catalysts for this change. Just like other towns which were in decline in parts of England but have now been turned around through innovative and creative planning and regeneration, Strabane can do likewise.

The people of Strabane place their hopes in the hands of the Area Plan Team and wish that it and other statutory agencies will act accordingly.

Castledearg

There were mixed views on whether Castledearg needs more housing. Some local people believe it does not need any more housing because, as is the case with other towns near Strabane, it has become a dormitory settlement due to the lower house prices there. Others said that there is a need for more housing in some parts of the town, for example, in Millbrook at the western end of the town to take account of the imbalance toward the Omagh side of the town.

Both social and affordable housing units are now needed, particularly as a percentage of social housing has been sold and recent housing developments have all been private. There is a need for family housing in Castledearg and a broad range of house types, to include apartments and specific accommodation for older people.

“if we do not zone areas in rural villages then village life will disappear and the large towns will become a mass of concrete”

Public transport provision in the town is very weak even though it is one of the larger towns in the district and therefore needs an effective public transport service.

There is a need for a pedestrian crossing and general infrastructural upgrading in the town.

There is a lot of built history and social history in and around Castledearg worthy of protection. For example, Crawford's shop on the Main Street should be preserved as it was the old Coach Inn; as too should the old railway building on the Strabane Road as it is the last of its kind in the area; the area around Castledearg Castle; the old mill dam along Killeen-Killeter Road as it is part of the social history; and the Derg Valley Hospital site as it is the site of the original workhouse and pauper graves and forms an important part of Castledearg's past.

There are community facilities in the town however there is a need for a community hall. Young people have real and urgent needs in that there are few sport and recreational facilities and



therefore not a lot for young people to do locally. Given the community sectarian tensions in the town, especially amongst young people, there is also a need for the development of a neutral space for young people.

Health and educational facilities are suffering in the town although the local Health Trust is proposing a new 'super' surgery for the town. From a schools' perspective, the two local schools are struggling with dwindling numbers particularly since the inception of the 'super school' project in Strabane which will see the amalgamation of St Colman's and the Convent School. This new school will affect the numbers of children attending schools in Castledearg and local people fear their schools may close or lose some facilities.

In terms of industry Castledearg needs more small business units. The small economic base in the town at present revolves around retailing. Industrial expansion is needed in the west of the town especially to help economically disadvantaged people living in the Millbrook and Churchtown estates to access employment.

“the forgotten west is Tyrone”

There are religious barriers preventing people from estates from accessing jobs in the industrial park but zonings at the western end of town will help address this.

There is a need for tourism accommodation in Castledearg and concerted efforts to capitalise on the unique history of the Derg Valley and the strategic role that Castledearg played in that social history.

Equality issues in Castledearg are mainly confined to religious divisions. There are sectarian divisions in housing, open space and sport, and employment. Community workers from both Protestant and Catholic estates are working together to resolve community tensions but there are planning responses needed to address the issue of contested space and thus creation of a neutral open space.

Other equality issues relate to women and young people. Statistics show that 65% of women in the Castledearg area are economically inactive and 63% of children leave school with no qualifications. The Area Plan Team was urged to consider the employment and education needs of these two groupings when planning Castledearg's future.

Newtownstewart

Housing development in Newtownstewart has been so prevalent in recent years that the town is expanding rapidly and local people are concerned that house prices will continue to rise and force local people, especially young people, to leave. Some participants said, and this was a common issue in many of the discussions, that the Area Plan should not over-concentrate new housing and people into towns. Towns like Newtownstewart getting a sizeable portion of housing zonings will mean that rural communities will suffer further and yet paradoxically house prices in Newtownstewart will continue to rise.

“more rural housing for the people of the area”

Newtownstewart is an important location for new housing and is undergoing a housing development boom again because of the close proximity of the town to both Omagh and Strabane.

The bypass around the town has helped minimise the ill effects of heavy traffic levels and pollution but residents involved in tourism believe that Newtownstewart is now somewhat “off the map”. They urged the Planning Service to develop tourism policies for the Plan area that would facilitate and encourage growth within the tourism market in the Newtownstewart area. Innovations such as signage showing the availability of tourist accommodation and places of interest for tourists would be most welcome, it was said.

The built environment of Newtownstewart could be enhanced if it were easier and cheaper to renovate old buildings. The Townscape Heritage Initiative in the town, for example, is trying to improve the streetscape in the town. Grants however are difficult to access and the costs involved in renovating older buildings can be prohibitive.

“thank you for giving us the opportunity to express our views”

Equality issues in the town focus on the fact that there is currently a large number of migrant workers employed in the town. This growth in the employment sector in Newtownstewart is positive and welcome however the Planning Service needs to be able to plan for this rather than just react to it in terms of housing and industrial zonings.

Sion Mills

One of the biggest concerns in Sion Mills is the volume and rate of new housing development that has taken place and is planned for the town.

Concerns were expressed over Sion Mills merging with Strabane from the north of the village where the rate of development to the south side of Strabane has escalated in recent years. Local people in

Sion Mills want the development limit and boundary of the town clearly defined and protected. There was opposition to too much housing development while at the same time discussion regarding the percentage of affordable housing needed for young people and locals wanting to stay in Sion Mills.

It would seem that major changes are occurring in the town with more and more housing developments taking place and a lot of these developments being constructed on what was previously recreational land and areas of open space.

“we hope that all opinions are taken into account”

Facilities and services are being lost in Sion Mills as well as jobs. The recent closure of Herdman’s Mill together with redevelopment of football pitches, closure of the library and the doctor’s surgery are all taking their toll on community life in the town. People fear that the anomaly will occur whereby on the one hand the town would appear to be booming with more and more housing developments while on the other hand the effect of this will be rising house prices and fewer and fewer sport and recreational facilities and services needed for the community to survive.

The distinct setting of Sion Mills should be protected it was said. There is a unique character and historic pattern of development and the Planning Service has an important job to do in terms of ensuring Sion Mills does not merge with Strabane, Victoria Bridge or Glebe.

Traffic through the town is also a major concern. As it is on the through route from Omagh to Strabane and on to Derry/Londonderry and Donegal, there are a lot of heavy goods vehicles using the road through the town and local people believe that in some ways a bypass would solve the problem.

If feasible, such a bypass should not be built on the railway line it was said. The line of the old railway should be protected and developed instead as a river walk and cycle route.

As some community facilities have been lost (library, doctor’s surgery and sports pitches) and others may be lost, local people believe that the Plan should target efforts and thus policies to address the sustainability of the town. Such efforts would strategically place Sion Mills at the heart of a visionary planning framework for the Strabane district. The town has much to offer and the natural beauty and unique built heritage of the town should really be the cornerstone and one of the main selling points of the Strabane area - for local people and tourists alike. There are 41 listed buildings in Sion Mills but there is nowhere for the tourist to stop for refreshments. Development in tourism and in the promotion of the town is therefore crucial and the Area Plan has a critical role to play in this respect.

On a final point and from an equality perspective, Sion Mills has an older population with housing needs. The provision and zoning of housing as possible sheltered accommodation is therefore something which the Plan should address.

Artigarvan

People living in Artigarvan expressed concerns over the extent of the green belt around the town (to the north especially) and asked if this could be reviewed as part of the Plan process. More housing is needed in the village as the population has been expanding and more jobs have been created locally.

They described Artigarvan as a “lop-sided” village with development concentrated on one side but not the other and that more housing to the north would help to address this imbalance.

There are plans for a new school in the village and local people believe that new housing should be zoned to cater for what will be increased demand. Housing in the vicinity of the school will also help with the creation of a more sustainable village whereby children can walk to school. Adequate provision should also be made for buses and pedestrians to access the new school, it was said, again in the interests of sustainability.

Ballymagorry

Ballymagorry has experienced a lot of development pressure in recent years. Again the issue centres around the village being on the main route from Strabane to Derry/Londonderry. However this housing development has not been matched with infrastructural improvements. There are no play areas and no road crossings. Local people asked if the Planning Service could zone land in the new Plan and insist (through the key site requirements) that adequate play and open space is provided in the village. A road crossing is urgently required as the main road carries serious volumes of traffic every day and is becoming increasingly dangerous.

Local people in the village are concerned that developers are allowed to build substantial amounts of new housing without having to give something back to the village. They believe that developers are benefiting because of the economic boom. They are “cashing in” on that boom and yet are not being encouraged to provide facilities and village improvements as by-products. This should change and the Area Plan should insist that in expanding villages such as Ballymagorry developers should provide developments which meet community needs.

Donemana

Donemana was described as an imbalanced village with a lot of development in the south and little to the north. In terms of anticipated housing need participants asked if the development limit could be extended to the north.



Magheramason

Magheramason is also on the commuter belt corridor linking Strabane and Derry/Londonderry and has therefore expanded considerably in recent years. Local people believe there has been too much development with little or no provision made for a more sustainable community. Landscaping, play areas, open space and the upgrading of infrastructure were the main needs highlighted.

In terms of housing, Magheramason needs more development to re-balance what has become a one-sided settlement. A community hall is also needed.

Plumbridge

Plumbridge, like many rural villages, is struggling to compete with other parts of the district. Services, especially schools, are suffering and with a lack of recreational and play facilities, children are having to be transported to other areas. The impact on the environment of the number of car journeys to schools and recreational facilities in Strabane is destructive. In the interests of providing a more sustainable community it is hoped that the Area Plan can plan for and zone appropriately for open space and other recreational needs which exist in the village.

“why will it take up to 2010 to implement the new Plan if the old Plan was up to 2002?”

Aghabrack

The population of Aghabrack, a small hamlet to the east of Strabane, has declined in recent years and the area therefore needs more housing and some small scale industrial zonings.

Aghyaran

Aghyaran is a remote and extremely deprived part of Strabane district, a small hamlet to the west of Castlederg and closer to the Donegal border than almost anywhere else in the district. The people of Aghyaran feel very isolated and forgotten. Apart from some housing and planned wind farms local people spoke of an area where nothing happens and no-one cares. Aside from some limited housing needs the biggest problems are the infrastructural improvements and urgent repairs to roads that are required.

Roads in Aghyaran have not been resurfaced in many years and in winter they flood and do not get gritted. Travelling on such roads is therefore extremely difficult and with the planned hospital closure at Omagh, older people will be put into the terrible position of having to travel even further on unacceptable roads. Such difficult journeys can worsen their medical



conditions. The ageing population in Aghyaran believes that statutory agencies (Roads Service, Planning Service, Water Service and health service providers) have in effect abandoned their statutory duties in the area. Local people, many of whom have lived in the area for many decades, believe that the Area Plan is their last hope of any real change and improvement for the hamlet. Infrastructural upgrades, more housing, and facilities are required they say if there is any chance of Aghyaran becoming more sustainable and the self sufficient community that it once was.



Bready

Bready is another small settlement which has undergone change as a result of its location on the road between Strabane and Derry/Londonderry. The expansion experienced in recent years is welcomed but must be controlled. The Plan must take account of the need for more than just housing in the Bready area and how the community there needs facilities as well to survive.

Victoria Bridge

More land is needed in Victoria Bridge for housing.

5.2 Omagh District Council

Omagh Town

The biggest issues in Omagh town relate to housing, traffic and parking, and retailing and commercial activity. The Omagh hospital closure debate and campaign in many ways dominated the Area Plan consultation events in the Omagh district. It did this in two ways. Either the issue was raised and dominated the conversation or other meetings were being held to discuss the issue resulting in a poorer turnout at our Area Plan consultation events. Notwithstanding this people in Omagh town did participate and explained the significance of the closure of the hospital and the impact of this on the district from a planning perspective. This impact will be mostly experienced, it was said, in the housing sector and on local infrastructure. From a housing point of view the location of new housing developments and subsequent zonings will need to take account of the “corridor of growth” that will inevitably lead from Omagh to Enniskillen. Local people believe that there will be a desire for new housing along the roads linking Omagh south west to Enniskillen. Irrespective of this potential growth in housing the roads in this part of Omagh district need upgrading to cope with the additional pressure that will be placed on them with hospital journeys.

“our roads are third class, we’re losing our hospital - government has abandoned the west and no-one cares”

Aside from the hospital issue and its impact on housing the main housing issues in Omagh town relate to the need for affordable and social housing. The bulk of recent housing development has been private and local people believe that the expansion of the town is thus meeting the needs of only one sector of the market.

Housing growth allocation figures for the town are also out of touch with demand and may need to be reviewed for the town, it was said. The design of new housing developments was criticised particularly in terms of the lack of thought given to open space, play areas, landscaping and parking. The Planning Service was asked to zone housing sites in the town which must be developed to take these design factors into account. People want quality housing with a sense of space, not tightly constructed units with little or no amenity.

The roads through the town are heavily congested it was said with the bypass, in some people’s views, making a bad situation worse.

Traffic into and around the town at peak times is so heavy that businesses are suffering. The local economy, especially retailing, will be compromised if the issue of traffic and lack of car parking spaces is not resolved. When told that there is adequate car parking space in the town, as found by a recent Roads Service audit, local people refused to believe this. They cited many examples of lost trade as a result of the parking problem and did not see how and where these available car parking spaces are. Roads Service needs to examine this issue it was said as well as the public transportation needs of the town dwellers. There is a particular issue over competition between town retailers and edge-of-town retailers. Facilities on the edge of town are preferable in that there is adequate and accessible car parking. The same service needs now to be provided in the centre of town.

Provision of walking and cycling alternatives is also needed to make the town more accessible, modern and sustainable.

In the urban environment the biggest issue raised was the closure of Lisanelly Barracks and whether the site will be redeveloped as housing or for recreation. There were mixed views on this but many people asked that the site not be used to provide more housing for the town. They believed that recreational (eg football) or tourist facilities should be provided. Other aspects of the built environment needing protection include the Gaol Square and shop frontages in the older part of the town.

The natural environment at Lisanelly Wood and the old Scotts Mill at Cranny Bridge should be protected as should the mill at “Leap Bridge”, three miles outside the town.

The retailing sector in the town is healthy but with road and parking improvements it could be better.

Industrial facilities in Omagh are sufficient but as with other towns and villages in the district small start up business units are required to meet smaller scale employment needs.

From a tourism perspective one of the greatest needs is for more hotel facilities. Omagh is strategically placed along the North West Passage and yet for the visitor there is little on offer in the district’s main town. Omagh must play a key role in the tourism regeneration strategy that the district so desperately needs.

Equality issues in Omagh town include the need for more disabled car parking spaces as well as accessible physical environments; the need for fold-type accommodation for older people; adequately meeting the housing needs of the ethnic minority groupings in the town; accurately assessing and planning for the housing needs of Travellers; and taking into consideration the need for more recreational and leisure facilities for young people.

Fintona

More housing is needed in the town but only when the sewage and roads infrastructure is upgraded.

Fintona is a deprived area and yet in hierarchical terms it is one of the three “local towns” in the Omagh district. Inhabitants feel that they and their town are often neglected and that the Planning Service should take more notice of the fact that as a local town roads and facilities in and around Fintona should be of a higher quality and standard.

Participants said that Dromore and Omagh benefit from more infrastructural investment than Fintona. The town must be able to compete with other parts of the district and to do so it must receive more public expenditure and resources.

The single biggest issue in this respect is the poor condition of roads into and around Fintona especially the treacherous crossroads at the Green Spot Junction towards Seskinore. Local

“in general housing growth and accommodation should concentrate in Omagh”

people believe that the situation would be alleviated if this issue was properly addressed.

From an industry perspective, the town needs to grow and develop. Industrial proposals currently in the system should be facilitated by the Planning Service in the interests of fostering economic development and competitiveness in the town and enhancing its position in the district and small business units should be provided.

Fintona's tram heritage is unique and should be preserved.

Features of the natural environment needing protection include: Rathroggan Fort; fairy rings throughout the Fintona countryside including one at McCorry's Hill, Blackfort Hill and in the Crock area at Tattyreagh; Donnycavy Graveyard at Morely Mountain; and Seskinore Forest.

“perhaps the debate could have been widened if representatives of other departments had been in attendance”

Other facilities needed in the town include a hotel and fishing facilities.

Fintona is an integrated community and proud of this fact. The Area Plan needs to do more to foster this integration through appropriate land use zonings.

Dromore

Dromore town needs more housing land to encourage people to stay in or move to the town. By contrast with the majority of views expressed at many of the consultation meetings, people in Dromore said that the repopulation of the district town is required. They fear that the exodus to the countryside which has been such a feature in recent years will eventually destroy towns such as Dromore. More housing in the town is the key to ensuring shops and services are supported and encouraged to grow.

Roads around Dromore are in a poor condition and local people want footpaths on the main roads out of the town to enable them to walk in safety.

Retailing facilities in the town are restricted to convenience stores and it is recognised that this is the only type of shop that a small market town can sustain. However they said that these shops provide valuable local services and should be protected as important community amenities.

One of the greatest community needs is a neutral community hall or centre. Dromore, like any other community, needs somewhere at its core for the community to meet so that the sense of belonging can be nurtured and grown.

Another improvement needed, more from a tourism perspective, is the development of a walkway along the river at Crawford's Lane.

Carrickmore

More housing land should be zoned in Carrickmore as many young people and couples have had to move out of the area recently. With reference to sites previously zoned, the Planning Service was asked to assess the likelihood of such land being developed and whether alternative sites needed to be zoned.



Existing industrial land in the town has been developed and there is now a need for more industrial zonings during the new plan period.

Drumquin

Drumquin is one of the villages in the district with community division issues and people believe that the Planning Service needs to take account of these when zoning housing and land for industry. More housing land is especially needed to the north of the village to re-balance the village, it was said.

The village is also in need of more open space and sports facilities, road improvements between the village and Omagh town, and a more holistic view taken of the siting and location of wind farms in and around the village. This latter issue has been a controversial one and the Planning Service was urged to consider the visual intrusion, lack of integration and overall impact on the setting and economy of Drumquin.

Some villagers said that Drumquin is one of the most deprived villages in the entire West Tyrone area and that government has failed to adequately address community needs there.

“people have to live in the countryside and be employed there to sustain the countryside”

Gortin

Housing needs in Gortin include the need for alternative land to be zoned in other parts of the village other than the land which is currently zoned as some say this land will never be built upon.

Infrastructural improvements need to be carried out first in some areas otherwise housing will only put pressure on existing systems. The accommodation needs of older people were also highlighted by participants who asked that the Area Plan looks at this issue.

Tourism facilities and developments needed in the village include a caravan park (which a local community association hopes to develop) and more tourist facilities in general.

Greencastle

People in Greencastle, a small village to the north east of Omagh town, fear that they will be further disadvantaged in terms of access to services when acute hospital services at Omagh close.

Loughmacrory

Local people in Loughmacrory want to see the village expand with more housing land zoned and a facilitation of growth in the industrial and economic sector.

Seskinore

Seskinore's needs, especially in terms of infrastructural improvements, should not be overlooked by the Area Plan Team. It also needs expansion and growth in the housing market and therefore more land.



Sixmilecross

Sixmilecross like other villages and smaller settlements is struggling to compete with the more urban parts of the district. More housing land should be designated in the village as this is seen as the key to growth and sustainability.

Play areas and an upgraded sewage system are also needed as are road upgrades into and out of the village.

Tourism in the village will never grow and develop it is believed until and unless adequate signage for the village itself is provided. The Area Plan Team was urged to facilitate changes in this area.

Creggan

People in Creggan want the settlement to grow sensitively and do not want to suffer the same ill effects of other places in the “dormitory settlement” category. From a sustainability viewpoint the community needs some growth but not too much. Hand in hand with this expansion roads improvements and an enhancement of tourism facilities are needed.

Drumduff and Drumnakilly and Dunmoyle

The Drumduff and Drumnakilly areas need more housing (particularly around the community centre), road improvements, and the creation of river walks and cycle paths. Dunmoyle also needs more housing.

Gortnagarn

Gortnagarn is a small hamlet in the Omagh district where a lot of development proposals have been submitted recently. Some local people do not want the settlement limit extended and believe the hamlet should not be allowed to over expand. Others however said it should be allowed to expand.

Killyclogher

Killyclogher is currently included within the settlement unit for Omagh town but it has its own identity and community and some people said it should be recognised as a small settlement or Dispersed Rural Community in its own right.

Stralongford

Stralongford is in need of more community facilities and an enhanced roads infrastructure. The community there also wants more housing development but not overdevelopment.

Tattyraw, Eskragh, Newtownsaville and Knockmoyle all need expansion and more housing land.

6. Evaluation of the Consultation

Participants at each public meeting were given an evaluation form to complete. The information supplied on these forms is valuable feedback for CTA. It helps with future planning of consultation events and provides data on the profile of participants enabling us to see if we are achieving our desired outcomes regarding equality, equity and inclusiveness.

The participant data showed:

- A total of 124 people attended the public meetings and 57% completed an evaluation form (although hundreds of people in total participated in some way during the consultation).
- 80% of participants were male and 20% were female.
- 59% of participants were from the Catholic community and 33% from the Protestant community (the remainder perceived themselves as belonging to neither community or declined to respond).
- 4% of participants were under 25; 34% were in the 26-45 age group; 36% were between 46-60 with the remaining 26% falling into the 60+ age group.
- 97% of participants described their ethnic background as 'white' while the remaining 3% of participants described their background as 'Traveller'.
- 10% of participants regarded themselves as having a disability.

Feedback on the promotion and implementation of the public meetings included:

- 24% of the participants found out about the events through letters from CTA or from seeing a flyer or poster, 54% from newspaper advertisements and 22% by word of mouth.
- 93% of participants found the events excellent or good, 6% rated them as average (the remainder did not respond).
- 90% of participants thought the events had given them adequate opportunity to express their views (1% said they had not and 9% said that they were not sure).

Overall this feedback shows a considerable imbalance in the make up of the people who attended the public meetings. All eight of the meetings were very male dominated with females making up only one fifth of all participants, and only two of all in attendance regarded themselves as being of an ethnic minority background. This information reinforces the importance of carrying out additional consultation with equality groups to ensure that the process is inclusive and that all sections of the community have the opportunity to have their needs addressed in the Area Plan.

The feedback also highlights how valuable and effective the use of newspapers advertisements and fliers were as methods of promoting the meetings to the public.

7. Concluding Comments

We were proud to have been involved in the consultation on the West Tyrone Area Plan. The communities of the area gave their time willingly and spoke with passion about the real issues which affect their daily lives and their futures. We are thankful to them for their valuable input and to the Planning Service for its commitment to the process.

We have endeavoured to capture the flavour of the comments made and the range of issues discussed and in doing so to assist the communities in the Omagh and Strabane areas to make their voices heard and understood.

The communities of West Tyrone have high hopes for the outcome and hope that this Plan is responsive to their needs.

Appendix - Consultation Events and Participants

Consultation Events

Community Information Meetings

- An Creggan Visitor Centre, **Creggan** - 25 April 2005
- Omagh Community House, **Omagh** - 26 April 2005
- The Old Mill, Main Street, **Drumquin** - 28 April 2005
- Strabane Library, **Strabane** - 3 May 2005
- Mournederg Partnership Hall, **Castledearg** - 4 May 2005
- Aghabrack Parish Hall, **Aghabrack** - 9 May 2005

Public Information Session

- Mellon Country Hotel, **Omagh** - 18 October 2005

Public Meetings

- The Tara Centre, **Omagh** - 24 October 2005
- Strabane Community Library, **Strabane** - 25 October 2005
- The Ecclesville Centre, **Fintona** - 3 November 2005
- Gortin Centre, Main Street, **Gortin** - 7 November 2005
- Newtownstewart Centre 2000, **Newtownstewart** - 8 November 2005
- Altamuskin Community Centre, **Sixmilecross** - 9 November 2005
- Ballylaw Community Hall, **Artigarvan** - 15 November 2005
- Sion Mills Community Centre, **Sion Mills** - 16 November 2005

Drop In Sessions

- Dromore Archways Centre, **Dromore** - 26 October 2005
- Strabane Community Library, **Strabane** - 2 November 2005
- Omagh Community House, **Omagh** - 3 November 2005
- Mournederg Partnership Hall, **Castledearg** - 8 November 2005

Participants in the Consultation

Community Group Participants

- Altnamuskin Community Group
- An Creggan Visitors Centre
- Aghabrack and District Community Association
- Ballylaw Farmers' Group
- Ballymagorry and District Development Group
- Ballymagorry Community Association
- Baronscourt and District Cross Community Development Association
- Baronscourt Community Development Initiative
- Beragh Care and Development Association
- Camowen Partnership Limited
- Campsie Residents' Association
- Castleberg and District Community Development Association
- Community Relations Council
- Culmore O'Kane Tenants' Association
- Cuts
- Derry Raphoe Action Group
- Disability Action
- Donemana and District Community Development Association
- Douglas Bridge Cross Community Association
- Douglas Bridge Football Club
- Dromore 2000 Limited
- Drummond Centre Project
- Drumquin Development Association
- Dunmoyle Planning
- Dunteague Residents' Association
- East Ward Partnership
- Evisk Cross Community Group
- Fintona Regeneration Initiative
- FOCUS
- Gillygooley Youth and Community Development Association
- Glenelly Development Trust Limited
- Glens Development Group
- Gortin Afternoon Club
- Jack and Jill Community Playgroup
- Kilcroagh House
- Killydart House
- Leckpatrick Residents' Group
- Loughmacrory Community Development Association
- Magheramason Community Development Association
- Magheramason Presbyterian Church
- McCann Architecture
- Melmount Forum

- Mid Tyrone Accessible Community Transport
- Millbrook Community Association
- Mournederg Community Care
- National Union of Students
- Newtownstewart Development Association Limited
- Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association
- OECSG
- OGMAG
- Omagh Arts Committee
- Omagh Cycling Initiative
- Omagh District Council
- Omagh Ethnic Communities
- Omagh Forum for Rural Associations
- Omawest Development Association
- Owenkillew Community Development Association
- Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied (PHAB)
- Plumbridge Community Toy Library
- Retreat Residents' Association
- Rouskey Community and Development Association
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- SEARCH
- Senior Citizens Consortium Sperrin Lakeland
- Sion Mills Recreation Club
- Sion Swifts Youth Football Club
- Sixmilecross Enterprise Limited
- Spamount and District Cross Community Association
- Strabane and District Citizens Advice Bureau
- Strabane and District Community Initiative
- Strabane and District Community Network
- Strabane and District Women's Network
- Strabane Women Together
- Techno Tyrone Limited
- Termonmaguire Community Association
- Trillick Chamber of Commerce
- Trillick Enterprise Group
- Trillick Senior Citizens
- Tyrone Farming Society
- Ulster Wildlife Trust
- Villages Together
- Women's Resource and Development Agency
- Youth Action Northern Ireland

Outreach Group Participants

- Churchtown Community Association
- Drumduff and Drumnakilly Community Association
- Hospital Road Community Association
- Hunter Crescent Community Association
- Kelvin Community Group
- Killycurragh Regeneration Group
- Leckpatrick Community Association
- Mary Gray Rural Community Association
- Mournederg Partnership
- Seskinore Rural Community Group
- Sion Mills Buildings' Preservation Trust
- Sion Mills Community Association
- Stralongford Education and Rural Community Help (SEARCH)

Submissions Received

- Dunteague Residents' Association
- Drumduff and Drumnakilly Community Association
- FOCUS
- John McCullagh (individual)
- Loughmacrory Community Development Association
- Mary Gray Rural Community Association
- Mournederg Partnership
- Omagh Cycling Initiative
- Omagh Forum for Rural Associations
- Omawest Development Association
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Ulster Wildlife Trust

Leaflet Drops

- Artigarvan
- Ballymagorry
- Bready
- Castledearg
- Donemana
- Dromore
- Fintona
- Gortin
- Magheramason
- Newtownstewart
- Omagh
- Plumbridge
- Sion Mills
- Sixmilecross
- Strabane

Section 75 Organisations Consulted and Interviewed

- Age Concern Northern Ireland
- Blind Centre Northern Ireland
- Chinese Welfare Association
- Chest, Heart and Stroke Association
- Community Relations Council
- Derry Omagh Travellers' Support Group
- Disability Action
- Equality Commission
- Get Going (Omagh)
- Gingerbread Northern Ireland
- Help the Aged
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Branch, National Union of Students
- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
- Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group
- Omagh PHAB
- Omagh Travellers Support Group
- Omagh Women's Area Network
- Omagh Volunteer Centre
- PHAB and Access Forum
- Playboard (Northern Ireland)
- Sensory Team, Drumcoo Centre
- Spina bifida and Hydrocephalus (Omagh Access Committee)
- Strabane District Caring Services
- Strabane Youth Association
- Traveller Movement (Northern Ireland)
- Women's Resource and Development Agency
- Youth Action

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

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