



## Conexpo (N.I.) Ltd Response to Consultation of the Lisburn Castlereagh Council draft Plan Strategy

January 2020

### Background

Conexpo welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Lisburn Castlereagh Council Draft Plan Strategy. This response focuses mainly on the sections dealing with Minerals Development.

Modern society is, quite literally, built upon mineral products. Whether it is our physical built environment, our transport links or the wider infrastructure on which we all rely, aggregates are absolutely essential to economic growth. If we want to improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland (and beyond), it is vital that the contribution of our local quarrying and minerals industry is fully understood by those with the power to influence it.

The Mineral Products industry in Northern Ireland directly employs some 5000 people, produces approximately 24 million tonnes of aggregates per year and has a turnover of around £650 million per year (2% of NI GDP). The Mineral Products Sector is a varied industry, with the majority of NI businesses family owned, alongside a number owned by large multinational companies, it is primarily a rural industry, supporting jobs in areas identified by Government as targeting social need (TSN). The full economic impact of the geoscience industry to the wider NI economy is calculated to be 83,700 jobs, £3.7 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) and £1.8 billion in wages. More information on the economic value of the Geo Science sector to the NI Economy can be viewed at [https://www.ulster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/406936/Economic-Impact-of-Geosciences\\_final-report-12th-April-2019.pdf](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/406936/Economic-Impact-of-Geosciences_final-report-12th-April-2019.pdf)

As the Council rightly states an adequate and steady supply of mineral products is essential to ensure economic growth in the future. We need them for construction, energy and for manufacturing, with each of us in Northern Ireland using more than 14 tonnes of aggregates per year, on average. Local industry offers sustainable solutions to the challenges of creating and maintaining our built environment, coping with climate change and providing for a growing population.

However, it must be noted, that some of the mineral deposits in LCCC area are unique, even in a global market.

NI's single largest export, by volume, is aggregates for Highway surface courses produced from County Down Gritstone deposits.

The geology in North and Mid Down is a fine grained sandstone which is particularly hard and resists polishing when subjected to wear from vehicle tyres.

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When aggregates, produced from Co Down Gritstone are included in asphalt mixes the road surface becomes less prone to skidding vehicles, and ultimately saves lives.

A huge global demand has resulted, as governments and road authorities strive to make roads safer and reduce accident rates.

Along with other technical advancements, road deaths in NI alone have fallen from 1 per day in mid 1970's to 1 per week in recent times on average.

Today, Conexpo produces and exports over 1 million tonnes per annum of gritstone aggregates from its purpose built 7.5 ha export terminal at Belfast Harbour.

Conexpo owns and operates one quarry site within LCCC. This site at Lisdoonan, just south of Carryduff, has produced aggregates for export for over 30 years and been a significant stream of Export revenue for NI during that time.

Conexpo also own other significant land banks within LCCC that could viably access the Gritstone mineral reserves.

Also, neighbouring quarry operators, within LCCC, supply Conexpo with aggregates they produce which can be fed into the global market via the Conexpo distribution/shipping routes.

### Comments on the draft Plan Policy

Conexpo welcome the Councils recognition of the contribution the Mineral Products Industry makes to the region's economy and the jobs it provides. We also welcome the recognition that minerals are essential to support sustainable economic growth and quality of life plus provide vitally important raw materials for manufacturing, construction, power generation, transportation and infrastructure in NI, nationally and globally.

We welcome the Councils consideration of the need to safeguard mineral resources through the identification of "mineral safeguarding areas". We believe Strategic Policy 13 is a balanced approach.

As identified above The Draft Plan Strategy significantly underestimates the value of and the economic contribution that the mineral products industry makes to the LCC economy.

We would ask the Council to recognise and consider the huge export revenue that stems from the global supply of Co. Down Gritstone aggregates, and the huge social benefits a local, indigenous, rural industry supports.

Therefore, we believe it would be prudent, for all concerned, if LCCC Planning strategy could protect the future expansion of quarries in the council area. Implementing this could be achieved by restricting other forms of strategic development around existing quarries (possibly 700m zones).

We understand this needs to be a balanced approach, but Developers and Planners need to be given clear policy to protect the sustainable future of mineral extraction sites.

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Within the operational policies document Minerals Development Section 5, page 51, Conexpo would question the use of wording under the Justification and Amplification within MD1 Environmental Protection where it states *"In all areas, decisions on mineral applications will be made with regard to the preservation of good quality agricultural land, tree and vegetation cover only be"*. Conexpo would question the use of this wording. What is the definition of "good" agricultural land? Minerals can only be extracted where they occur and will only be exploited if those mineral reserves are of sufficient quantity, quality and value to the local economy. We would also suggest that the comment in section 5, page 51 completely fails to recognise the positive contribution that mineral sites, both operational and appropriately restored can make to local biodiversity and wildlife. We would ask that the reference to "good agricultural land" is removed as it has no standing or definition within planning.

We welcome the approach under MD3 that Areas of Mineral Constraint will be dealt with in the Local Policies Plan.

Conexpo also welcome the proposal under MD 9 Restoration Proposals that each application must include satisfactory restoration proposals. However, restoration requirements, as part of planning conditions, must be enforced by the Council.

It is our opinion that if the changes and recommendations we have proposed above are adopted by Council then the Minerals Policy set out in the Plan Strategy is Consistent, Sound and Coherent.

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