



**Ards and
North Down**

Borough Council

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Dear Conor

Response to Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council's (LCCC) Local Development Plan (LDP), draft Plan Strategy Consultation

I refer to the publication of your Council's LDP draft Plan Strategy (dPS) and opportunity to comment. This Council commends the work that has gone into producing the dPS and whilst in support of the majority of the aspects contained therein, makes these comments in relation to particular areas of concern, whereby the dPS may be considered to be at variance with regional policy and tests of soundness in discrete areas.

Development Plan Practice Note 7 (DPPN 7) references that the Plan Strategy should set out an ambitious but realistic vision for the council area as well as the objectives and strategic policies required to deliver that vision (para 1.3). The practice note further adds that the Plan should also 'ensure that its objectives are integrated with, add value to and assist in the delivery of national, regional and local policies and strategies within Northern Ireland, the council area and other district councils'.

The Plan Strategy should 'identify interdependencies and relationships between places both within and across administrative boundaries' (paragraph 5.4). A council must therefore have regard to relevant plans, policies and strategies, not only in its own district, but in the adjoining areas.

It is acknowledged that LCCC adopted a 'consultation and engagement strategy' for adjoining Councils. The dPS also refers to the LCCC Consultation and Engagement Strategy as an 'opportunity to discuss Cross boundary issues, matters of collective interest and possible resolution and mitigation in areas of disagreement'.

The latter part of the statement is slightly disingenuous as the workshop discussions were attended by Council officers, without any delegated powers, and not in the context of an agreement platform and not informed fully in respect of detail of policy direction to be proposed by LCCC.

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Furthermore, ANDBC and the other Councils taking part were not privy to any detail in respect of technical evidence being used to underpin forthcoming policies. Notwithstanding, the governance for LDP being a matter for Council and not delegated, it was clear that individual officers were not able to set out possible resolution or mitigation as the dPS suggests.

The Draft PS is accompanied by 8 technical supplements:

1. Housing Growth Study (Commissioned – Litchfields)
2. Urban Capacity Study (Commissioned – Arup)
3. Employment Land Review (Commissioned Litchfields)
4. Office Capacity Study (Commissioned – 'haa' design in conjunction with GVA NI)
5. Retail Capacity Study (Commissioned – Arup and Roderick MacLean)
6. Countryside Assessment (includes Commissioned Landscape Character Assessment review – Ironside Farrar)
7. Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation (Commissioned – Ironside farrar)
8. Local Transport Study (LTS) (Provided by Department for Infrastructure)

The dPS is also accompanied by

- A Sustainability Appraisal
- Rural Needs Impact Assessment
- Section 75 Screening Report

This representation may cross reference studies offered in support of the dPS.

ANDBC acknowledges the approach of the dPS volume comprising proposed Strategic Policies and a secondary volume of 'Operational Planning Policy'. This representation makes comment on aspects of both.

With regard to **Strategic Policy 07**, it is noted that LCCC intends to explore a collaborative Framework for Developer Contributions in conjunction with other councils. ANDBC welcomes the opportunity to engage in that process.

Strategic Housing – and Employment (page 58-87)

The Strategic Housing Allocation identified over the plan period refers to:

- A buffer of 10% over supply added to LCCC's 'HGI' baseline figure;
- The overall Strategic Housing Allocation figure of 11,550 units is noted which is just under the potential units remaining of 11,578.

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There is some confusion over the figures referred to on page 59 of the dPS and the figures included within Table 3. Whilst it is fully acknowledged that the Department for Infrastructure only issued its revised HGI figures in September 2019, the dPS makes reference to a revised 'HGI' but in the context of it being derived from a 'Housing Growth Study' commissioned by LCCC into the 2012 based Department's HGI. There is some confusion as to what 'HGI' the 10% buffer over-supply has been applied.

ANDBC welcomes the statement that LCCC is mindful of its responsibility to ensure housing growth aligns with the requirements for sustainable balanced regional growth. In that respect it is unclear why the site identified at West Lisburn/Blaris has attracted a housing allocation, when the site is specifically referred to within the RDS for employment of importance to the BMUA as a whole. This inclusion appears to be contrary to SPPS and RDS direction.

It is unclear the rationale proposed to reduce all figures across the allocation (Table 3 – page 64 including urban capacity and windfall), given that the Plan will be subject to monitoring which would identify any areas of concern with regard to sites not coming forward.

- **SMU 01 West Lisburn/Blaris** introduces housing on land which is identified in the RDS as 'major employment/industrial location' of importance to the BMUA as a whole.

In this respect ANDBC would suggest that the above allocation appears to be at odds with Soundness Test C1 – in respect of taking account of the Regional Development Strategy and also Test C3 in respect of taking account of policy and guidance issued by the Department.

Strategic Policy 13 - Mineral Development

ANDBC notes that the dPS highlights the Department for the Economy has commenced a data gathering exercise in order to enable an evidence-based approach to be developed in relation to mineral safeguarding regionally. Likewise, it is acknowledged that certain sensitive areas, because of their natural heritage or scenic value, may benefit from additional protection as 'Areas of Mineral Constraint' to protect them from further mineral extraction.

The inclusion of the impacts of minerals development within the LCA carried out by Ironside Farrar contained within the Countryside Assessment Technical Supplement is noted. It is important to acknowledge that development such as quarrying takes place within the locale of this neighbouring planning authority and this appears to be absent

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from recognition of cross boundary issues in the supporting technical information which has informed the approach to the dPS policy. ANDBC would refer to the following in this respect.

The Elevated Drumlin Farmland identified as 95/96 p30-32 of the Countryside Assessment adjoins Ards and North Down near existing Ballystockart Quarry and is described as sensitive to mineral development. (Countryside Assessment p31) and the Development comment is that *Quarry developments should be avoided within this landscape character area (p32)*.

The LCA comments on Craigtantlet (102/ 104) adjacent to Ards and North Down near Craigtantlet, Ballybarnes and Northstone Quarries, are that the exposed escarpment slope would be very sensitive to intrusion from minerals development because of the landscape's importance to the settlement of Belfast and that *Quarry developments should be avoided within this landscape character area (p71)*.

In this respect ANDBC would suggest that the above allocation appears to be at odds with Soundness Test C4 - Has the plan had regard to other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to the Council's district or to any adjoining Council's district and Test CE 2 - requiring 'strategy, policies and allocations' to be 'founded on a robust evidence base'.

**SP 14 Town Centres, Retailing and other uses,
SP 15 Evening/Night-time Economy and SMU03 Sprucefield Regional Shopping Centre
TC1-5**

Irrespective of the reasons at that time for its original approval at this location, Sprucefield is recognised in the RDS as an out of centre Regional Shopping Centre (RSC). The history of consideration through previous plan processes meant that Sprucefield remained outwith development limits and continued as what was referred to as an out of town RSC. Evidence presented by the previous planning authority related the function to that of a premier out of town retail park such as that as Fosse Park, Leicester. Legacy has shown that the shopping offer or trading has never performed as an RSC as compared to those in other UK jurisdictions.

The promotion of support of shopping outside the retail hierarchy at potential detriment to town centres is irrational, most especially in the context that the vacancy rates set out for the protected centres within LCCC are considered high.

The RSC has no defined retail core unlike town and city centres.

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Regional policy in the SPPS (like that of other jurisdictions such as the English NPPF) is silent on explicit policy for RSC. Regional policy in the SPPS points to the sequential approach supporting town centres first.

As the SPPS clearly indicates that retail cores remain first preference in the sequential approach, ANDBC remains unclear as to the need to include further land at Sprucefield.

**District Centre – Forestside and Local Centre - Dundonald
TC4 (Operational Planning Policy) page 57**

It is noted that the dPS refers to consideration of the status of each at the next stage in the LDP process and makes a statement with regard to extension of the boundary of Forestside and consideration of reclassification status as Dundonald town centre at LPP stage.

The proposal in the dPS to support non bulky comparison in a local centre does not appear to be founded on a sound basis, in the context that local centres are primarily for convenience goods.

The technical supplement prepared to support the policy approach is considered to be inadequate. The scenarios appear contrived for the treatment of Sprucefield and Forestside in that they appear to be limited in nature to the LCCC administrative area without adequately addressing the catchments. DPPN 7 advises that a council should work collaboratively with neighbouring Councils and relevant stakeholders to help ensure that its town and retailing strategy supports accessible and vibrant city and town centres within its council area and beyond. This appears lacking in the LCCC draft Plan Strategy.

In this respect ANDBC would suggest that the above appears to be at odds with Soundness Test C4 - Has the plan had regard to other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to the Council's district or to any adjoining Council's district, and also Test CE 2 requiring 'strategy, policies and allocations' to be 'founded on a robust evidence base'.

SP 15 Evening/Night-time Economy

Tension exists in the vision and plan objectives with regard to the promotion of regeneration of city and towns, the support for towns and villages and the promotion of town and city centres as the main location for growing the evening and night-time economy to enhance their vitality and viability and the SMU03 policy and key site requirements set out for Sprucefield.

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Evidence does not adequately examine promotion of Sprucefield as out of town location for non retail in competition with city and town centres.
ANDBC questions the lack of detail in this regard.

In this respect ANDBC would suggest that the above objectives and policy direction appears to be at odds with Soundness Test C4 - Has the plan had regard to other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to the Council's district or to any adjoining Council's district, and also test CE2 - requiring 'strategy, policies and allocations' to be 'founded on a robust evidence base'.

Cemeteries

ANDBC acknowledges the approach for future cemetery provision and the exploring of options with neighbouring councils for identifying future need requirements.

Strategic Policy 19 Protecting and Enhancing Natural Heritage

'These designations are carried forward from the existing development plan however further work in reviewing existing and future AoHSV, LLPAs, Landscape Wedges and SLNCIs will be assessed as part of the Local Policies Plan'.

ANDBC acknowledges that the designations shall be reviewed at LPP stage but comments that full account needs to be taken of neighbouring council areas.

Strategic Policy 23 Waste Management

*A joined-up approach between relevant government departments, agencies and the Council with responsibility for various aspects of waste management will be necessary in securing an overall sustainable approach to waste management. This joined up approach will also extend to **neighbouring councils** under the arc21 arrangements.*

ANDBC welcomes the joined-up approach indicated between relevant government departments, agencies and Councils with responsibility for various aspects of waste management and welcomes close engagement.

Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment:

Strategic Policy 14 and SMU03

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No reasonable alternatives were identified for the draft Plan Strategy. An alternative option (Option 13A) to retain and reinforce Sprucefield as Regional Shopping Centre (with no variations in use) was appraised in the Interim SA for the POP and was found to be equally sustainable. It was not considered necessary to re-appraise this alternative for the draft Plan Strategy. The option put forward in the draft plan Strategy has been selected on the basis of additional evidence in the form of a Retail Study which has identified that this option has a better chance of delivering more wide ranging economic benefits.

It is unclear in the SA of the reasoning not to re-appraise in light of LCCC now offering supporting evidence which was absent from that at the time of the Preferred Options Paper (albeit of limited nature).

Proposed Changes

The retail study provided as technical evidence upon which the dPS strategic and operational policy is reliant is considered inadequate. It appears wholly concentrated on a contrived catchment to show capacity in the LCCC administrative district only and provides extremely limited explanation of the supplemented trade draw from outside. It is not clear why the study makes minimal reference to other centres. The supporting technical information makes no comment on the expected regional draw nor defines a commensurate catchment of what a Regional Shopping Centre might expect.

The supporting retail study presents two contrived hypothetical scenarios relating to extension; the need for quantum of retail is unrealistic and commercial viability is considered an insufficient argument. In the current climate the continuing trend is for increased use of special forms of trading.

The technical supplement produced for BMAP asserted that the centre is not 'Regional' in the sense of other UK jurisdictions and accepted that Sprucefield has never traded at a regional centre level. The one distinguishing feature of Sprucefield is the size of the main operator and its homeware store offering the range of goods not found in its other stores in Northern Ireland.

LCCC should consider and provide further evidence in relation to policies with potential to impact adversely on neighbouring Councils in relation to all retail policy in the dPS.

Other comments

While the above represents current views in relation to the LCCC draft Plan Strategy, I am conscious that the Department for Infrastructure advice and guidance has evolved from the outset of the current legislation being enacted. In that context the position of

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ANDBC shall be kept under review in relation to impacts on this Council Area and forthcoming work ahead in preparation of ANDBC's dPS.

Please consider this as a representation to be treated in written form at any forthcoming Independent Examination in relation to the Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council draft Plan Strategy.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on behalf of the Council in this respect.

Yours sincerely

Head of Planning