



Comhairle Ceantair  
**an Iúir, Mhúrn  
agus an Dúin**

**Newry, Mourne  
and Down**

District Council

**Local Development Plan  
Preparatory Studies**

**Paper 1 (2<sup>nd</sup> Revision): Population and Growth -  
Settlement Hierarchy**

**October 2015**

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## **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to provide Newry, Mourne and Down District Council with an overview on the existing settlement hierarchy in the Council area and to consider formulating a settlement strategy for accommodating future growth across the District, while identifying any potential constraints to the expansion of the settlements.

## **1.0 Introduction**

**1.1** Paper 1: Population and Growth (August 2014) was presented to the Shadow Planning Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014. In presenting the paper it was recommended that the settlement hierarchy be reviewed to consider and identify proposed changes to the settlement hierarchy, subject to a sustainability appraisal. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Revision of Paper 1: Population and Growth to be presented to Council. The main aims of this paper are to inform the members on what preparatory work has been undertaken to provide an evidence base on the existing and proposed settlement hierarchy as well as outlining information on further studies which are proposed to commence shortly to expand on this process to allow a settlement strategy to be formulated for the Newry, Mourne and Down area.

**1.2** This paper sets out the regional context for the approach taken to defining the settlement hierarchy while outlining the current situation across the District. It will also outline the implications for the possible restructuring or re-designations of settlements within the hierarchy while comparing and contrasting the approaches detailed within the current policy context of the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) and other policy and guidance documents. A comparison study of the RDS against the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA) report 'Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements' (March 2015) has also been undertaken to help members formulate their opinions.

**1.3** This paper allows members to commence consideration on the settlement hierarchy strategy in the plan area and to define which level of the hierarchy each settlement should fall into while understanding the options and implications of any modifications.

## **2.0 Regional Policy Context**

The strategic policy context for the settlement hierarchy is provided by the Regional Development Strategy 2035 and the suite of regional Planning Policy Statements. A summary of how these documents relate to preparing a development plan and in particular the settlement hierarchy is provided in the following section.

### **(a) Regional Development Strategy**

**2.1** The Regional Development Strategy 2025 introduced a framework for the future physical development of the Region by providing an overarching strategic framework aimed at achieving balanced and sustainable development across the region through the implementation of a spatial development strategy which is designed to reinforce and strengthen the hubs, corridors and gateways of Northern Ireland. The main themes of this strategy centre around protecting and enhancing the environment while promoting a strong spatially based economy, promoting a healthy living environment and creating and maintaining an inclusive society. The strategy has been reviewed and these themes have been developed in the Regional Development Strategy 2035 – Building a Better Future (RDS).

**2.2** The RDS spatial framework identifies a settlement hierarchy based on main hubs, local hubs and a strong rural community living either in small towns, villages, small settlements or in the open countryside to guide and facilitate the future managed growth of Northern Ireland. In doing so the Spatial Framework Guidance aims to achieve sustainable development by promoting economic development opportunities and population growth in the hubs and clusters while sustaining the strong rural hinterland.

**2.3** Within the RDS the 'Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel' (Diagram 1) outlines the patterns of service provision that are thought to be appropriate at different spatial levels including villages, smaller towns, regional towns and cities and in doing so also recognise the relationship between settlement size and the levels of service that can be supported. This will be explored in greater detail within the body of this report.

**2.4** The RDS spatial framework is then to be implemented at a local level by the individual development plans for each District with current legislation requiring that development plans must 'take account' of this document taking into account the relevant guidance.

### **(b) Planning Policy Statements (PPSs)**

**2.5** The RDS is complimented by the DOE's suite of Planning Policy Statements which set out regional planning policies on particular and specific aspects of land use planning and play a fundamental role in informing the preparation of Local Development Plans and Plan Proposals.

### **(c) Planning Policy Statement 12 – Housing in Settlements (PPS12)**

**2.6** The purpose of this policy document is to provide strategic direction and guidance in the form of regional planning policy to assist the implementation of the RDS and is to be regarded as a material consideration in the preparation of development plans. Within this policy document it outlines that to achieve a settlement hierarchy it is imperative to understand the role and function of each settlement and alongside the RDS encourages the clustering of centre settlements as well as highlighting the importance of promoting co-operation between settlements.

**(d) Planning Policy Statement 21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside (PPS21)**

**2.7** This policy document sets out a range of planning policies for facilitating development in the countryside. With regards to the development plan process consideration must be given to the needs of the rural areas/communities while striking a balance against protecting the countryside. PPS21 highlights that through the development plan process Dispersed Rural Communities (DRCs) should be identified and designated alongside a Countryside Assessment which will be prepared as part of the development plan process.

**2.8** As per PPS21 the criteria for designating a DRC includes

- Location in a remoter rural area and away from areas of development pressure close to existing towns
- Association with a traditional focal point, where there is convincing evidence of local community activity, with the existence of social and recreational facilities, such as a church, hall, school, community centre or sports club
- Other facilities or services, such as a shop, public house or sewage treatment works
- A strong local identity. This could manifest itself through a local community association, church organisation or sports club, and
- A locally significant number of dwellings that have been built over time. Although these places are not nucleated settlements, they will have to be more than just open countryside. A build-up or cluster of recently built houses will normally not be considered as fulfilling this criterion

**2.9** It should also be noted that a development limit may not necessarily be drawn around the existing dispersed settlement pattern, as this may be an unnecessary obstacle in promoting the regeneration of the community.

**(e) Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)**

**2.10** The SPPS proposes to consolidate the 19 existing Planning Policy Statements (PPS's) publications into one document setting out the core planning principles required to support the reformed two-tier planning system along with setting out clear direction to bring forward detailed policies within future local development plans.

**2.11** The Draft SPPS which was published in February 2014. Following a 3 month consultation period the SPPS was finalised and published in September 2015. The SPPS expresses the importance of maintaining a sustainable approach to development which promotes economic prosperity, social cohesion with protection of

the environment. A strategic objective within the RDS is to sustain the overall strength of rural communities living in smaller settlements and the open countryside outside the main centres, and to improve connectivity of rural communities to services.

#### **(f) Existing Development Plans**

**2.12** Given that the new Newry, Mourne & Down District Council area is drawing on information from the relevant sections of two existing development plans, the Ards & Down Area Plan 2015 (ADAP) and the Banbridge/Newry & Mourne Area Plan 2015 (BNMAP), it is suggested that the settlement hierarchy for the new District be re-examined to identify where each settlement should sit within the new settlement hierarchy.

**2.13** With regards to the settlement hierarchy within the BNMAP, Newry was identified as a city, 4 towns were designated, (Crossmaglen, Kilkeel, Newtownhamilton and Warrenpoint/Burren), along with 14 villages, and 30 small settlements.

**2.14** In the ADAP 3 towns were designated (Ballynahinch, Newcastle and Downpatrick), along with 14 villages and 22 small settlements. ADAP also refers to Downpatrick as a 'main hub' or 'main town' in rural Northern Ireland in line with the RDS, with a strategic role as a centre of employment and services for both its urban and rural populations.

**2.15** The population of Newry, Mourne and Down District in 2011 census was 171,533 rising to 175,403 in the NISRA mid-year estimates published in June 2015. Based on census information approximately 16% of the household population of the District are living within the existing development limit of Newry city. With regards to the 7 towns designated in the two existing development plans, 6.3% live within the settlement limit of Downpatrick, Warrenpoint/Burren in 5%, 4.5% in Newcastle, 3.8% in Kilkeel, 3.3% in Ballynahinch, 0.9% in Crossmaglen and finally only 0.5% within the settlement limit of Newtownhamilton. In total these figures equate to 24% of the Districts population residing within the 7 towns.

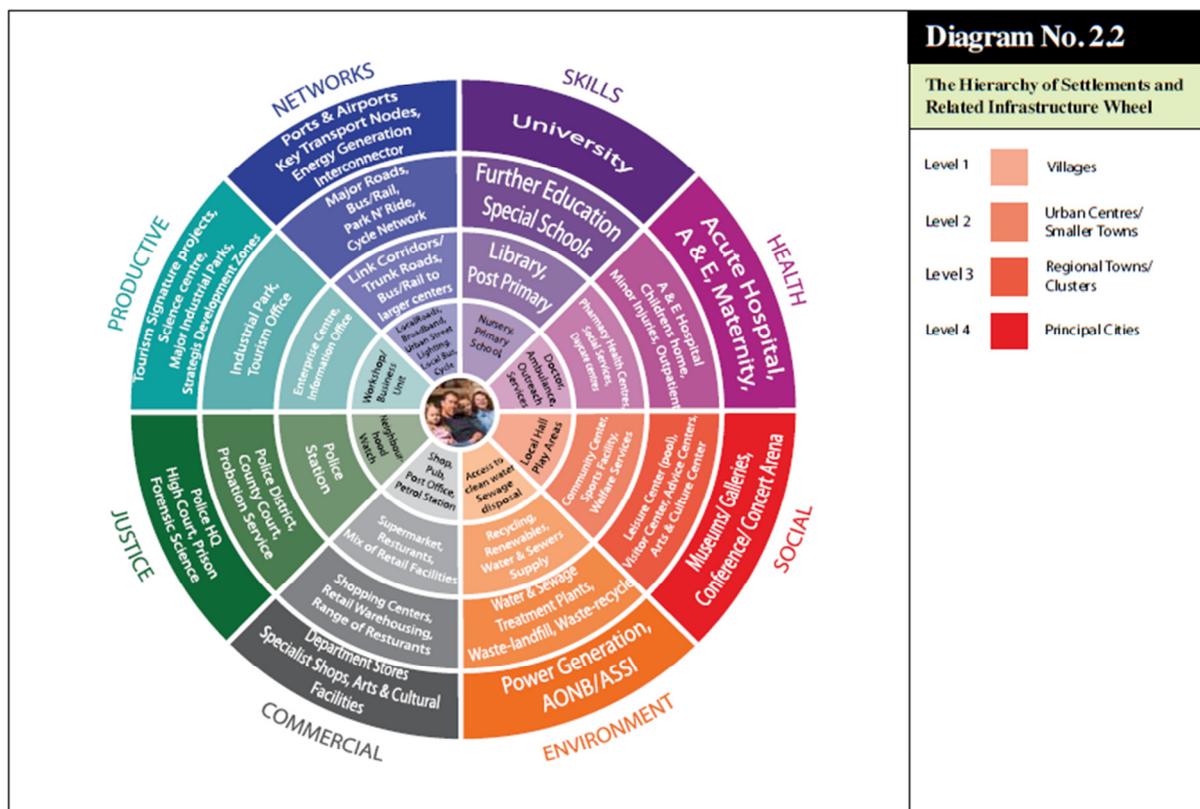
**2.16** With regards to the next tier of the settlement hierarchy 20% of the population live within the 28 villages as identified within the existing development plans with the remaining 40% of the population living within the remaining 52 small settlements or open countryside. It is therefore evident that approximately 60% of the population of Newry, Mourne & Down District live within settlements with a population of less than 5000 and could therefore be described as rural in nature.

**2.17** It should also be noted at this point that neither existing development plan designated any DRCs. The Council through this development plan process may however find it appropriate to identify and designate a number of DRC's throughout the district adding a further tier to the Settlement Hierarchy. These designations may allow for the promotion of rural regeneration while creating a strong sense of belonging as detailed within the PPS 21 and other planning policy statements and may feel it is appropriate to develop specific policies to be written accordingly to

allow for small scale housing, appropriate economic development enterprises and new social or community facilities at these locations.

**2.18** To achieve the RDS objectives of both promoting population growth and economic development in the appropriate locations a re-examination of the existing settlement hierarchy of the new Council area has commenced to identify whether it may be appropriate to re-designated any settlement based on their functions and service provision. It is therefore considered that the appropriate starting point for this exercise is the 'Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel' in the RDS which outlines the patterns of service provision that are likely to be deemed appropriate at different spatial levels.

**Diagram 1 – RDS Infrastructure Wheel**



**3.0 A Proposed Settlement Strategy for Accommodating Growth**

**3.1** The Spatial Framework which provides the structure for the future physical development of the District has identified a hierarchy of rural settlement based on urban hubs, comprising of Newry city and Downpatrick, the other main towns and small towns which in turn support a strong rural community living in villages, small settlements and the open countryside.

**3.2** The RDS Infrastructure Wheel in Diagram 1 illustrates the range of public and private services required to ensure citizens have access to the necessary economic, social and cultural opportunities as well as the infrastructure required to build a strong economy. These services include transport and communication networks, education, employment, health, social, environmental, commercial and justice. The wheel outlines the patterns of services provision appropriate at different levels.

**3.3** The model acknowledges the strong relationship between settlement size and the levels of service that can be supported. The wheel provides a forward perspective, providing an understanding of the levels of facilities and services anticipated at different spatial levels rather than necessarily reflecting the stock of services that are currently available in villages, towns, cities or regionally. However the RDS does not specify how many segments of the wheel are required at each level to qualify for each specific tier.

**3.4** Within the approach adopted by the RDS it recognises a number of key findings and these are detailed below:

- Settlements often provide a greater or lesser range of services than the core population may dictate. The RDS does not feel it is appropriate to consider 'urban' population alone in classifying service settlements with the rural hinterlands also supporting services in urban centres
- Service centres tend to be hierarchical, with a large number of centres providing a smaller range of services, and a smaller number of centres providing a wider range; and
- Access to services and facilities is important. Creating a critical mass to support a level of services raises challenges for service providers in meeting the needs of spatially dispersed populations.

**3.5** With reference to the Newry, Mourne & Down area consideration must therefore be given to the theme of creating a vibrant rural District which envisages continuing a balanced development spread across a polycentric network of hubs/clusters based on the main towns which will have a strategic role as centres of employment and services for urban and rural communities.

**3.6** The RDS has identified Newry and Downpatrick as the main hubs within the District. These two hubs currently act as important centres for retailing, commerce, business and health provisions while also serving a significant number of dispersed smaller settlements. The RDS states that both hubs have the potential to form clusters with neighbouring settlements. Newry is strategically located on the Belfast-Dublin corridor which provides the potential for it to cluster with its cross border neighbour of Dundalk as well as the neighbouring settlement of Warrenpoint/Burren. In respect of Downpatrick it also states that it is in a position to cluster with the neighbouring town of Newcastle. In respect of both Newry and Downpatrick clustering with their neighbouring settlements the physical separation between them must be considered.

**3.7** The other towns within the District vary in size, form and function but they all serve as local service centres for their resident population and rural hinterland. The

facilities and services contained within each settlement with the settlement hierarchy will be contained within the individual Settlement Appraisals which will be outlined in greater detail later in this report.

**3.8** Table 1 below gives a breakdown of the existing settlement hierarchy and population counts for each settlement as designated within the two existing development plans.

**Table 1 - Population of Settlements within Newry Mourne and Down District**

Settlement Hierarchy	Newry & Mourne	Total / % of NMD District Total	Down	Total / % of NMD District Total	Ballyward Area	Total / % of District Total
City	Newry (26,893)	26,893 (15.68%)				
Towns	Crossmaglen (1,608) Kilkeel (6,521) Newtownhamilton (800) Warrenpoint / Burren (8,721)	17,650 (10.29%)	Ballynahinch (5,715) Downpatrick (10,874) Newcastle (7,743)	24,332 (14.19%)		
Villages	Annalong (1,796) Attical (171) Ballyholland (664) Ballymartin (506) Bessbrook (2,739) Camlough (1,081) Cullyhanna (326) Forkhill (498) Hilltown (1,698) Jonesborough (465) Mayobridge (1,068) Meigh (770) Mullaghbane (596) Rostrevor (2,788)	15,166 (8.84%)	Annsborough (767) Ardglass (1,643) Ballykinler (447) Castlewellan (2,792) Clough (279) Crossgar (1,892) Drumaness (1,344) Dundrum (1,551) Killough (843) Killyleagh (2,928) Saintfield (3,406) Shrigley (437) Strangford (495) The Spa (583)	19,407 (11.31%)		
Small Settlements	Altinamacken *** Ballymadeerfy (69) Ballymoyer *** Barnmeen (136) Belleek (375) Creggan (227) Cullaville (232) Dorsey *** Drumintee (337) Dunnaval/Ballyardle (161) Glassdrumman, Co Armagh (165) Glassdrumman / Mullartown (110) Glen (147) Greencastle *** Jerrettspass *** Killean (108) Killowen (230) Lislea (180) Longstone (147) Lurganare (294) Mullaghglass (125) Newtownclohoge (457) Sheeptown (333) Silverbridge (112) Tullyharron *** Whitecross (352)	4,297 (2.51%)	Annadloy (318) Ballyalton (132) Ballyhoman (369) Ballynoe (169) Bryansford (306) Burrenbridge (199) Carrickinab *** Chapeltown *** Clonvaraghan (186) Coney Island (57) Darragh Cross (490) Derryboye *** Drumaghilis *** Drumacroad (183) Kilclief (191) Kilcoo (335) Kilmore (310) Loughinisland (218) Maghera (211) Raholp (315) Saul (97) Seaforde (263)	4,349 (2.54%)	Ballyward *** Dechomet *** Finnis *** Leitrim (121)	122 (0.07%)
Total Newry, Mourne & Down District Council		64,006 (37.31%)		48,088 (28.03%)		122 (0.07%)

Source: Headcount and Household Estimates for Settlements in Northern Ireland published 26/03/2015 <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/2011/results/settlements.html>

\*\*\* Output has been confined to those settlements exceeding the thresholds of 20 or more households and 50 or more usual residents.

Total Population of Newry, Mourne & Down District Council area 2011 - 171,533

Total Population of Down District Council area 2011 - 69,731

Total Population of Newry & Mourne District Council area 2011 - 99,480

Source: (Northern Ireland Census 2011 Key Statistics Summary Report September 2014)

## **4.0 The Proposed Settlement Strategy for Accommodating Growth as Outlined in the RDS**

**4.1** The methodology for identifying the hubs and clusters named within the RDS used two sources of information, NISRAs report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group on Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements and the Settlement Information Classification and Analysis Group (SICAG) Report along with the theory associated with the Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel.

**4.2** To achieve the RDS objectives of promoting population growth and economic development in the main hubs and sustaining rural communities living in small towns, villages, small rural settlements and the open countryside, a strategy for accommodating growth can be defined based in the following settlement hierarchy.

### **(a) Main City/Town**

**4.3** Newry city is the main settlement within the District and has been identified a main hub within the RDS as well as operating as the South Eastern City gateway due to its proximity to the Republic of Ireland and the major port of Warrenpoint. The RDS also recognises that Newry and Warrenpoint have the potential to cluster with Dundalk due to its strategic location on the Belfast-Dublin corridor. In addition to these classifications Newry has also been characterised as having an established sub-regional role – including high numbers of retail, financial and other businesses and a diverse provision of administrative, education, health and leisure services which must be considered within the Plan.

### **(b) Downpatrick**

**4.4** The RDS recognises Downpatrick, as a medium town, has a strategic role in rural Northern Ireland as a centre of employment and service provision for both its urban and surrounding rural populations. The RDS also acknowledges the environmental constraints on the town's outward growth but reaffirms the town as having the potential to become one of a number of 'growth poles' for the clustering of economic activity. The town has strong transport connections with Belfast via the A7 which has been designated as a Link Corridor in the RDS.

**4.5** As the main hubs both Newry and Downpatrick have the potential to continue developing as growth poles in part due to their strategic location along the transport corridors for the clustering of economic activity. They should therefore be fostered as the major locations providing employment, services and a range of cultural and leisure amenities while playing a leading role in accommodating the need for urban housing at the District level. The RDS also emphasises the need to sustain attractive town centres performing a multi-functional role which should be strengthened by retail, office and mixed use development.

**4.6** Warrenpoint and Newcastle have been identified as local hubs within the RDS and act as important centres for retailing, commerce and business while serving a substantial number of dispersed smaller settlements.

### **(c) Towns & Villages**

**4.7** The Strategic Framework Guidance in the RDS recognises the importance of sustaining the rural communities living in smaller settlements small towns, villages, small settlements and the open countryside and the importance of improving accessibility for rural communities. The RDS recognises that a strong network of smaller towns supported by villages helps to sustain and service the rural community and this remains of significant importance for this District given the rural nature of the area.

#### **Towns**

**4.8** Towns are important local service centres providing a range of goods, services, leisure and cultural facilities to meet the needs of their rural hinterland. Growth should be balanced across these towns to sustain, consolidate and revitalise them, focusing new retail and services within their town centres and providing opportunity for privately led economic investment in business and industry. These towns also can accommodate residential development in the form of housing estates, smaller groups or individual houses.

#### **Villages**

**4.9** Villages fall between the category of town and small settlement and perform a lesser but locally significant role to towns. These important local service centres provide goods, services and facilities to meet the daily needs of the rural area. They are also considered as good locations for rural businesses and can accommodate residential development in the form of small groups of houses and small rural businesses. It can be seen from Table 1 above that many of the villages vary in size. Furthermore they also vary in form, function and capacity to accommodate future growth. This must be taken into consideration while also acknowledging that the strategic focus and purpose of the village tier is to sustain and consolidate as local service centres whilst avoiding large scale expansion.

### **(d) Small Settlements**

**4.10** The small settlements are currently the lowest tier in the settlement hierarchy within the existing development plans and provide a community focus for their immediate rural hinterland. These settlements are more limited in their infrastructure, services and employment provision offering less growth potential than villages. In many instances they take the form of a rural cluster or cross roads development where consolidation of the built form can provide opportunity for individual dwellings and/or small groups of houses and small rural businesses.

### **(e) Dispersed Rural Communities (DRC's)**

**4.11** There are no DRC's identified in the Newry, Mourne & Down District. Within the remit of the Local Development Plan the Council may wish to consider identifying DRCs if and where appropriate ensuring that any development in the countryside integrates appropriately into its setting, respects rural character and is designed appropriately to the local area.

**4.12** DRC's take into account remoteness and evidence of community activity associated with focal points e.g. school, shop and an established dispersed pattern of settlement. Policies within DRCs may include provision for small scale housing, appropriate economic development enterprises, and new social or community facilities.

**4.13** A list of areas which may be considered as DRC's is listed below. It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive and has not been tested against the required policy test but has been drawn together on initial survey work, local knowledge and assessment of work carried out on the previous plans.

Aughlisnafin – East of Annsborough  
Ballinran, Mourne – East of Attical  
Balls Mills – South of Silverbridge  
Ballyveagh, Mourne – North of Ballymartin  
Bishops Court – West of Ballyhornan  
Corcreechy Road, Donaghmore – East of Jerrettspass and Lurganare  
Cranfield – South West of Kilkeel  
Drumnahushin Road/ Bessbrook Road junction  
Gargarry – East of Ballyward  
Lowtown – North of Ballyward  
Lisnalea – West of Whitecross  
Minerstown – East of Rossglass  
Raffrey – South east of Darragh Cross  
Saint Pious Hill – East of Ballymartin  
Tullydonnell – South of Silverbridge

**(f) The Open Countryside**

**4.14** Outside settlements, residential and other types of development will also be facilitated so long as it is balanced between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining vibrant rural communities. The rural area offers opportunities in terms of the potential for growth in new sectors, the provision of rural recreation and tourism, its attractiveness as a place to invest, live and work, and its role as a reservoir of natural resources and highly valued landscapes.

**4.15** Under the SPPS, the Council will be expected to bring forward a strategy for development in the countryside. This should reflect the aim, objectives and policy approach of the SPPS tailored to the specific circumstances of the plan area.

**4.16** In reviewing the settlement hierarchy account should be taken of a wide range of factors, including the RDS spatial framework, the population of individual settlements and an assessment of the role or function of settlements. Therefore as part of this paper a comparison analysis has been undertaken with the NISRA report 'Review of Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements' (March 2015)' and how NISRA have ranked the settlements.

## **5.0 Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements**

**5.1** In February 2005 NISRA published its 'Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements' report, a report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group. This report provides a classification of settlements using statutory Settlement Development Limits (SDLs) from the Department of the Environment to define the spatial extent of settlements. Within this study attention focused on larger settlements within the province with a population of 1,000 and above. A statistical classification of settlements above this limit was identified using rank-population size and a limited analysis of service criteria.

**5.2** In March 2015 NISRA published its 'Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements' report. Within the review the original population thresholds used in the 2005 publication were initially retained as a starting point for a new classification of settlements table. However following on from the 2011 Census information being released this information was reviewed and updated with some amendments being made to the classifications in terms of thresholds for each tier in the hierarchy. This was deemed appropriate as Northern Ireland's population has increased by approximately 7% between 2001 and 2011 and therefore some of the classifications should be amended accordingly to represent the uplift and these are outlined below.

### **(a) Settlement Development Limit Classifications**

**5.3** Within the 2015 Report 8 bands of classification (A-G) have been identified. With regards to this District, Bands A and B are not applicable as they relate to Belfast Metropolitan Area (Band A) and Derry Urban Area (Band B).

**5.4** Band C relates to settlements labelled as Large Towns, with only 1 settlement, Newry being assigned to this band within the District<sup>1</sup>. The definition of a large town is that which has a population of 18,000+ population.

**5.5** In the 2005 Report reference was made to the settlement of Newry/Bessbrook however this does not appear to have carried through in the 2015 Report as Bessbrook appears within Band F (Intermediate Settlement) having a population of between 2,500 and 4,999.

**5.6** Band D relates to settlements classified as Medium Towns. The definition of a medium town is that which has a population of 10,000 and less than 18,000 and is outside the Belfast Metropolitan and Derry Urban Areas. Of the 10 settlements included within this tier province wide only 1 settlement is within this District with Downpatrick being ranked 9<sup>th</sup> with a population of 10,874.

**5.7** Band E relates to Small Towns which have a population of between 5,000 to 9,999. For this District there are 4 settlements included within this band,

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<sup>1</sup> Newry was granted City status in 2002.

Warrenpoint/Burren (8721), Newcastle (7743), Kilkeel (6,521) and Ballynahinch (5,715).

**5.8** Within the 2005 report the threshold for the population boundary between Intermediate Settlements (Band F) and Villages (Band G) was a population of 2,250. This threshold was initially retained as a starting point for the new classifications within the 2015 report however it became apparent that this threshold had been principally based on the provision of post-offices in these settlements.

**5.9** In 2005 almost every settlement with a population over 2,250 had a post office however this provision has reduced significantly for a number of reasons and it was therefore felt that this criteria was no longer an appropriate gauge in 2015. Therefore, in line with the Northern Ireland population increasing by approximately 7% between 2001 and 2011 it proposed to uplift this threshold from 2,250 to 2,500.

**5.10** Band F relates to settlements classified as Intermediate Settlements requiring a population between 2,500 and 4,999. Within the District 5 settlements fall within this category Saintfield (3,406), Killyleagh (2,928), Castlewellan (2,792), Rostrevor (2,788) and Bessbrook (2,739). Within the 2015 review it was also felt appropriate to increase the threshold between the Intermediate Settlement (Band F) classification and small town (Band E) to a population of 5,000 (from 4,500) to provide a smoother transition to the higher tier Small Town/Medium Town threshold of 10,000 which remained unchanged.

**5.11** Band G is the final tier within the classification of settlements with the definition stating that a Village settlement has a population of between 1,000 and (2,499). Within the District there are 9 villages included within this tier ranging in size from Crossgar (1,892) being the largest to the smallest Mayobridge (1,068).

**5.12** Band H relates to all other settlements with populations of less than 1,000 which includes small villages, hamlets and the open countryside and no detailed information has been included within the NISRA report on this tier.

**5.13** The report also felt that it was appropriate to factor in the difficulties faced in defining the terms 'urban' and 'rural'. Presently within the Northern Ireland context no generic definition exists for either of the terms 'urban' or 'rural' which can cause considerable differences in the way both areas are classified. A number of NI Departments currently use ad hoc definitions as urban which are outlined below:

DARD & DCAL	Belfast Metropolitan Area, City of Derry/Londonderry and other towns of 5,000 or more population
DoE	Belfast Urban Area, Derry/Londonderry, Carrickfergus, Bangor and towns of 3,000 or more population
DRD	Urban areas of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry
DE	Belfast, Derry

**5.14** It is therefore accepted that different definitions of 'urban' and 'rural' may be appropriate on different occasions, for example when applying for grant funded aid.

Definitions and thresholds may change dependant on whatever criteria has been used to define the settlement such as population size, population density or service provision.

**5.15** Therefore for the purposes of this paper the NISRA Settlement Report Bands A-E have can be defined as urban with the remaining Bands F and G being classified as rural. These urban/rural groupings broadly reflect the consensus of previous Departmental usage across the province, in that the appropriate divide between urban and rural lies among settlements with populations between 3,000 and 5,000. Under this definition approximately 55% (94,800) of the District live within an urban area with the remaining 45% (76,730) residing in rural settlements or the open countryside.

**5.16** Table 2 gives a breakdown of the Newry Mourne and Down Settlements and how they would be classified with regards to the NISRA report against the 2001 & 2011 Census information.

**Table 2 - Statistical classifications of settlements for Newry, Mourne & Down District**

Classification	Settlement Development Limit	2001 Census Population	2011 Census Population	% Population change
Band A - Belfast		/	/	
Band B - Derry City		/	/	
Band C - Large Town (Population 18,000+)	Newry	27,300	26,893	-1.50%
Band D - Medium town Population 10,000 - 17,999	Downpatrick	10,320	10,874	5.40%
Band E - Small town (Population 5,000 - 9,999)	Warrenpoint/Burren	6,981	8,721	24.90%
	Newcastle	7,431	7,743	4.20%
	Kilkeel	6,297	6,521	3.60%
	Ballynahinch	5,334	5,715	7.10%
Band F Intermediate Settlement (Population 2,500 - 4,999)	Saintfield	2,955	3,406	15.30%
	Killyleagh	2,490	2,928	17.60%
	Castlewellan	2,367	2,792	18.00%
	Rostrevor	2,433	2,788	14.60%
	Bessbrook	/	2,739	/
Band G - Villages (Population 1,000 - 2,499)	Crossgar	1,542	1,892	22.70%
	Annalong	1,761	1,796	2.00%
	Hilltown	/	1,698	/
	Ardglass	1,659	1,643	-1.00%
	Crossmaglen	1,449	1,608	11.00%
	Dundrum	1,062	1,551	46.00%
	Drumaness	1,269	1,344	5.90%
	Camlough	/	1,081	/
	Mayobridge	/	1,068	/

Source: Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements March 2015

**5.17** The 'Settlement Information Classification and Analysis Group (SICAG) Report' published by NISRA also formed part of the methodology used within the RDS. It recognises that the level of services provided by a settlement cannot always be judged from its population size. SICAG collated data to determine a hierarchy of service provision and to identify locations which would constitute as 'service centres' within Northern Ireland. In total 26 service centres were identified and the service

classification listed as 1-5, with 5 being the highest level of service provision and 1 the lowest.

**5.18** Within the District four settlements have been identified as service centres, these being Newry<sup>2</sup>, Downpatrick, Newcastle and Kilkeel. Newry was ranked the highest settlement within the District and was graded as Settlement Band C and Service Class 4. Downpatrick and Newcastle were both identified as Settlement Band D and Service Class 4 settlements while Kilkeel was identified as Service Class 3 and Settlement Band E.

## **6.0 Analysis of Classification and Delineation of Settlements between the RDS and NISRA**

**6.1** From carrying out an analysis of the classification of Settlements within the District against the hierarchy of settlements outlined within the RDS and the Delineation of Settlements published by NISRA it is evident that in terms of the classifications considerable differences are apparent. It should be noted that there are additional bands/tiers within the classifications assigned by NISRA with towns being divided into large, medium and small with a further tier siting between small towns and villages, referred to as intermediate settlements.

**6.2** Within the Hierarchy of Settlements detailed in the RDS Newry is classified as a City due to the amount and type of services which it provides in terms of each of the eight strands of the infrastructure wheel detailed in Table 1 above. However within the Delineation of Settlements Newry is ranked as a large town rather than a city due to its population of 26,893. It should be highlighted at this point that a further 11 other settlements within Northern Ireland have populations greater than that of Newry and include Bangor (61,401), Lisburn City (45,410) and Newtownards (28,039). Both tables do however reflect that Newry is the major settlement within the District.

**6.3** With regards to the ranking of towns within the RDS framework, 7 settlements within the District have been considered as towns ranging in size from Downpatrick with a population of 10,874 to Newtownhamilton which has a population of only 800. These settlements have been considered as towns due principally to the provision of services that they offer when assessed against the RDS wheel. However when considered against the NISRA settlement report the findings show significant variances in these tiers.

**6.4** One of the most notable differences relates to Newtownhamilton which is designated as a town within BNMAP but which is not listed within any of the tiers within the NISRA classification table. This appears to be due to the limited population of the settlement being only 800 which is not only well below the population threshold for a town but also below that for a village. On analysis of this settlement it does however appear to provide a significant amount of services including the provision of healthcare, environmental, educational, social and

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<sup>2</sup> Warrenpoint is included in the Newry cluster as a local hub in line with its port function

commercial facilities to the town while also supporting a large rural hinterland which would support its designation as a town under the RDS criteria. A similar situation exists for Crosssmaglen which is also designated as a town within BNMAP, however with a population of 1,608, it is listed as a Village (Band G) within the NISRA classification but would be a town when considered against the RDS criteria.

**6.5** As part of the NISRA report the District has 5 settlements included within Band F (Intermediate Settlements) ranging in population size from Saintfield (3,406) to Bessbrook (2739). When assessed against the RDS table all 5 settlements of these are included within the village tier, albeit with a considerable number of additional settlements with substantially smaller populations. 12 of the 28 villages included within the RDS wheel at this tier have populations with less than 1,000 with Attical being the smallest village with a population of only 171.

**6.6** 8 of the 9 settlements included within NISRA criteria Band G (Villages) for the District would also be classified as Villages using the RDS. It can therefore be seen that an amalgamation of Bands F & G within the NISRA table appear to make up the majority of the villages as defined within the RDS.

**6.7** While NISRA's information refers to Villages as Band G settlements, a further tier Band H refers to those settlements of less than 1000 and open countryside. The RDS however makes specific references to small settlements. In the District 52 small settlements have been designated ranging in size from the largest, Darragh Cross which has a population of 490 to Ballymaderry which only has 69 residence. It should however be noted that figures for 13 of the existing settlements are not available as they appear to have less than 50 residents or less than 20 households.

## **7.0 Settlement Appraisals**

**7.1** To further develop the evidence base, settlement appraisals will be required for each settlement. This will require additional work in the form of producing individual assessments of all 88 settlements within the District. With regards to the Settlement Appraisals and also the Countryside Assessment Paper which will follow in due course each report will consist of a number of components including an identification of Environmental Assets, a Landscape Assessment and a Development Pressure Analysis.

**7.2** This survey and analysis work will be undertaken for each existing settlement and any new settlement identified or reclassified in the Newry, Mourne and Down District. Each settlement will be evaluated in the context of the following 6 tests as detailed in the RDS.

1. Resource Test – an assessment of the existence of community assets and physical infrastructure such as water, waste and sewage, including spare capacity
2. Environmental Capacity Test – an assessment of the environmental assets of each settlement and their potential to accommodate future outward growth without significant environmental degradation, the potential of flooding from rivers or surface water run-off.

3. Transport Test – consideration of existing infrastructure and the potential for integrating land use and public transport and walking and cycling routes to help reduce reliance on the car
4. Economic Development Test – consideration of the potential to facilitate an appropriate housing and jobs balance. Identify and detail possible major strategic development opportunities
5. Urban/Rural Character Test – an assessment of potential to maintain a sense of place and to integrate new development in a way that does not detract from the character or identity of the settlement.
6. Community Services Test – Details of existing community service role and function of each settlement, and potential for such roles/functions to be reinforced.

**7.3** This piece of work will also assess each settlement in detail against the 'Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel' as per the RDS and will involve a considerable amount of site survey work alongside desk-top research. The format of the proposed reports is outlined below.

- A brief overview of the settlement including population level and number of households
- An evaluation framework (assessment as per the 6 tests listed above).
- A settlement appraisal map identifying existing assets and any likely constraints upon potential future development.
- Aerial photography with existing development limits transposed.
- A summary of the key findings and a conclusion recommending the settlement classification (i.e. town, village, small settlement) for the new settlement hierarchy.
- Infrastructure capacity.

**7.4** Following the completion of the initial settlement appraisals being it is proposed to carry out a number of workshops to discuss the Settlement Hierarchy. These workshops are proposed to allow members the opportunity to discuss each settlement and its position in the new hierarchy for the District.

## **(8.0) Conclusions & Recommendations**

**8.1** The purpose of this paper has been to present the existing facts and to start the process of formulating a new settlement strategy for the Local Development Plan. In doing members are asked to consider the current position and to begin formulating their opinions on this process taking into account the facts which have been presented before them and summarised below.

**8.2** The overarching emphasis at a strategic level is on focusing development on the larger settlements, in particular on the hubs and clusters of hubs. The RDS stresses the need for the clustering of hubs so that services do not need to be duplicated but rather shared while providing an opportunity to develop complementary services allowing each settlement to play an important role within the district. Care is therefore required to ensure that the overall distribution of development across the settlement hierarchy is distributed appropriately to ensure

the plan has taken account of with the RDS as well as factoring in the predominantly rural population of the district.

**8.3** The principle of identifying a hierarchy of settlements in the Plan Strategy will be essential to the achievement of the RDS objectives for the District. Consideration must therefore be given to the existing growth strategy and suggestions on changes to the settlement hierarchy such as alterations to the status of existing settlements or the inclusion of additional tiers as per subdivision and distinction set out in the 2015 NISRA report between large, medium and small towns, intermediate settlements, villages and small village, hamlet and open countryside.

**8.4** Different approaches may have been taken to the identification of small settlements and villages within the two existing development plans therefore this process will provide an opportunity for the Council to rationalise this approach and assess the situation afresh in light of current policy and guidance.

**8.5** The important role of small settlements in sustaining rural communities is acknowledged in the RDS but fails to provide any guidance on what distinguishes villages from small settlements. Therefore while the RDS does not rule out small scale expansion at this tier it is recognised that the overarching emphasis is on growing the main and local hubs with consolidation rather than expansion for the lower settlement tiers. The approach taken within the NM&D plan must be mindful that the cumulative impact of growth must be in line with and balance with the overall growth strategy for each level of the hierarchical tiers

**8.6** Small settlements constitute the lowest tier of the settlement hierarchy. While the RDS acknowledges the importance of vibrant rural communities the overarching emphasis relates to focusing development on the larger settlements in particular on the hubs and clusters of hubs. It is acknowledged that there will be variations in the characteristics of small settlements across the plan area, not least in the availability of local services and community facilities.

