

# **Plean Forbartha Áitiúla 2035** **Dréacht-Straitéis an Phlean** **Local Development Plan 2035** **Draft Plan Strategy**

**Measúnú Tionchair ar Riachtanais na**  
**Tuaithe**

**Rural Needs Impact Assessment**  
**June 2025**



Comhairle Ceantair  
**an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin**  
**Newry, Mourne and Down**  
District Council

Ag freastal ar an Dún agus Ard Mhacha Theas  
Serving Down and South Armagh

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## How to Respond

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is consulting on the Newry, Mourne and Down Local Development Plan draft Plan Strategy 2035. The consultation period will be carried out over a twelve-week period, commencing on **Friday 27 June 2025 and closing at 5pm on Monday 22 September 2025**. Please note that representations received after the closing date will not be considered.

The draft Plan Strategy is published alongside a range of assessments which are also available for public consultation and comment over this period. These include:

- Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating a Strategic Environmental Assessment)
- Draft Habitats Regulations Assessment
- Draft Equality (Section 75) Screening Report
- Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

We welcome comments on this draft **Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)** from everyone with an interest in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.

During the consultation period, the LDP team will hold a series of drop-in sessions/exhibitions across the Council's seven DEAs. Details of these are published on the Council's website and in local newspapers from week commencing 30 June 2025.

## You can respond:

### Online

Use our online response form at Local Development Plan  
[www.newrymournedown.org/local-development-plan](http://www.newrymournedown.org/local-development-plan)

### Email

Email us or download the above response form at Local Development Plan ([www.newrymournedown.org](http://www.newrymournedown.org)) and email it to us at [ldp@nmandd.org](mailto:ldp@nmandd.org)

### Post

Write to us or send in a response form available at Local Development Plan ([www.newrymournedown.org](http://www.newrymournedown.org)) and post it to the following address:

Local Development Plan Team

Planning Office

Downshire Civic Centre

Ardglass Road

Downpatrick BT30 6GQ

## **Availability of the Draft RNIA**

A copy of this document and the draft Plan Strategy are available on the Newry and Mourne District Council website at [www.newrymournedown.org/local-development-plan](http://www.newrymournedown.org/local-development-plan).

This report can also be made available for viewing in the Council Planning Offices, at the addresses below, for those who do not have access online.

Should you request a copy of this document in an alternative format it can be made available, on request in large print, audio format or Braille. It may also be made available in other languages to meet the needs of those for who English is not their first language.

## **How will the Council deal with your comments?**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council will use this information to fulfil our policy development and statutory obligations. We will keep your information secure, accurate and for no longer than is necessary in accordance with data protection laws. If you wish to find out more about how we control and process your personal data please see the **Local Development Plan Privacy Notice**.

## **Introduction**

- 1.0** This document is the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) in support of the draft Plan Strategy of the Newry, Mourne and Down Local Development Plan 2035 (LDP).
- 2.0** The draft Plan Strategy is the first stage of the Council's LDP, prepared in accordance with Section 8 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011. As required by this Act, it sets out the Council's proposed objectives and aims in relation to the development and use of land in the district. In preparing the draft Plan Strategy, the Council has taken account of the Regional Development Strategy, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement and all other relevant policies and guidance issued by the Department for Infrastructure, as well as the Council's Corporate and Community Plans.
- 3.0** As a public authority the Council is required by the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services. The draft RNIA has been prepared in accordance with this requirement. Together with the draft Plan Strategy and other supporting documents, it will be subject to public consultation and independent examination, before being finally adopted by the Council subject to any recommended revisions.
- 4.0** The RNIA, and the consideration of rural needs, is only one element that requires to be considered when developing the draft Plan Strategy and its related policies. Other assessments include a Sustainability Appraisal, Equality Impact Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment.
- 5.0** The draft RNIA has been prepared by the Council's Development Plan Team, taking account of the documents listed above, as well as representations made during the consultation period of the Preferred Options Paper which was published by the Council in June 2018. It has been undertaken in accordance with the guidance and template issued by DAERA in relation to the Rural Needs Act.

## **SECTION 1 – DEFINING THE ACTIVITY SUBJECT TO SECTION 1(1) OF THE RURAL NEEDS ACT (NI) 2016**

### **1A Name of Public Authority**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

### **1B Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to the Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Local Development Plan 2035, draft Plan Strategy, to be produced in accordance with the Planning (NI) Act 2011

### **1C Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.**

Developing Policies and Strategies in the draft Plan Strategy

### **1D Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Local Development Plan 2035, draft Plan Strategy

### **1E Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.**

The Local Government Act 2015 introduced a statutory link between the Council's Community Plan and its Local Development Plan in that the preparation of the LDP must take account of the Community Plan. The LDP is the spatial reflection of the Community Plan, focused on land use and place making aspects of the various actions and priorities in the Community Plan. The LDP vision incorporates the Community Plan vision and builds on this to give it a spatial focus which centres on sustainable development:

**"Newry, Mourne and Down is a place with strong, safe, and vibrant communities, where people enjoy a good quality of life and equality of opportunity for all. A sustainable, well connected and high-quality place where our environment and cultural heritage are valued and protected to make the district an attractive place to live, work, invest and visit."**

The draft Plan Strategy is divided into two parts. Part 1 sets out the LDP strategic objectives relating to the countryside which are as follows:

- To provide for vital and vibrant rural communities, whilst protecting the countryside in which they live by accommodating sustainable growth.
- Provide for sustainable economic development in the countryside
- To protect our sensitive landscapes from inappropriate development.

Part 1 also contains the Spatial Growth Strategy and the following strategies and

strategic policies relating to the Plan's key subject areas:

- The Spatial Growth Strategy
- Settlement Hierarchy and Settlement Limits
- Housing Strategy
- Countryside Strategy
- Open Space Strategy
- Economic Development Strategy
- Retail Strategy
- Tourism Strategy
- Minerals Strategy
- Transport Strategy
- Telecommunications and Other Utilities Strategy
- Waste Management Strategy
- Renewable Energy Strategy
- Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy
- Historic Environment and Natural Heritage Strategy
- Coastal Development Strategy

Part 2 of the draft Plan Strategy sets out the operational subject policies which have been grouped under three headings. These are:

1. Social
2. Economic
3. Environmental.

### **1F What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

The default definition of rural used in Northern Ireland is that developed by the Interdepartmental Urban-Rural Definition Group. Initially proposed in 2005 and amended in the Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (NISRA 2015). This definition classifies those settlements with a population of less than 5,000 together with the open countryside as rural. Therefore, this RNIA is based on the following settlement types taking account of the 'Headcount and Household Estimates for Settlements' published in March 2015 by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The Settlement Hierarchy as set out in Policy SETT1 lists the following settlements as Villages and Small Settlements.

#### Villages

Annalong, Annsborough, Ardglass, Ballyholland, Ballkinler, Ballymartin, Bessbrook, Camlough, Crossgar, Cullyhanna, Drumaness, Dundrum, Forkhill, Hilltown, Jonesborough, Killough, Killowen, Mayobridge, Meigh, Mullaghbane, Newtownhamilton, Rostrevor, Strangford.

#### Small Settlements

Altnamacken/Cortamlet, Attical, Ballyalton, Ballyhornan, Ballymadeerfy, Ballymoyer, Ballynoe, Barnmeen, Belleek, Bryansford, Burrenbridge, Carrickinab, Chapeltown, Clonavarghan, Clough, Coney Island, Creggan, Cullaville, Darragh Cross, Derryboye, Dorsey, Drumaghlis, Drumaroad, Drumintee, Dunnaval/Ballyardle, Glassdrumman (Co. Armagh), Glassdrumman/Mullartown, Glen, Greencastle, Jerretspass, Kilclief, Kilcoo, Killeen, Kilmore, Lislea, Longstone, Loughinisland, Lurganare, Maghera, Mullaghglass, Newtowncloghogue, Raholp, Saul, Seaforde, Sheeptown, Shrigley, Silverbridge, The Spa, Whitecross.

#### Countryside

Paragraph 6.61 of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) defines “the countryside” as land lying outside of settlement limits as identified in Local Development Plans (LDPs).



## **SECTION 2 – UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE POLICY, STRATEGY, PLAN OR PUBLIC SERVICE**

### **2A Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?**

Yes

### **2B Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas?**

The draft Plan Strategy seeks to deliver sustainable development across the District, in accordance with the requirements of the Regional Development Strategy, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement, and other regional planning policies. The Strategy also takes account of the Council's Community Plan 2030 "Living Well Together," which is intended to provide a framework for collaborative planning to deliver positive change.

While the District contains significant urban areas such as Newry, Downpatrick and Warrenpoint, it has an extensive rural hinterland, in the 2021 Census, approximately 35.17% of the total population was normally resident in the countryside (64,038 people). When settlements with less than 500 persons normally resident are included, this figure rises to 40.73% (74,158 people)<sup>1</sup>. This large rural population also underlines the importance of agriculture to the economy of the district.

The draft Plan Strategy aims to achieve its objectives through the strategic direction set out by the Spatial Growth Strategy (SGS) and strategic policies, which link to the operational policies that form the basis for decisions on planning applications. These will include many topics specific to rural areas, such as Housing in the Countryside, Agricultural and Forestry Development, Tourism Development in the Countryside and Landscape Assets, while seeking to ensure that all development is developed in a sustainable manner.

The strategic direction in relation to rural areas is set out in the Countryside Strategy which is part of the Spatial Growth Strategy contained within Chapter 5 of the Plan. The SGS incorporates the Settlement Hierarchy (Policy SETT1) which will guide development to the most suitable locations ensuring that the scale of development is appropriate to the capacity and constraints of the relevant settlement. The Settlement Hierarchy has been drawn up in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Regional Development Strategy 2035 and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement and will provide a framework for the implementation of regional planning policy.

The SGS is complemented by three overarching strategic policies that are applicable to all development occurring in the district: -

- Policy SP1 – Sustainable Development and Climate Change

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<sup>1</sup> Source [NISRA Census 2023 - Table CT00046](#)

- Policy SP2 – Enhancing Design and Place Shaping
- SP3 Developer Contributions and Planning Agreements.

Policy SP1 requires that all new developments are located and designed in ways that minimise greenhouse gas emissions, utilise renewables and low carbon technology, encourage sustainable waste management practices and avoid areas that will be at risk from flooding or coastal erosion due to climate change. It is considered that rural housing is particularly suited to the incorporation of such principles as the selection of sites often isn't as constrained as in urban areas.

Policy SP2 requires that all new developments are designed and finished to a high standard and respect the character of the locality in terms of their design, materials and finishes. These are particularly relevant in rural areas which often have a distinctive style of buildings and use of materials such as the prevalence of dry-stone walls in the Mournes.

### The Countryside Strategy

The LDP Countryside Strategy seeks to facilitate sustainable development in the countryside whilst balancing this against the need to protect and conserve the countryside, recognising it as a unique and valuable resource.

The Strategy highlights the landscape quality of the district as being one of its most important resources and it is also of high community value as it provides opportunities for outdoor recreation and leisure activities. The development of these can be of benefit to rural dwellers by providing sources of income and employment, as well as benefitting everyone in the district by allowing them to avail of sports and recreation opportunities that can contribute to improving quality of life and health, both of which are goals of the Corporate and Community Plans.

The introduction to the Strategy sets out the LDP objectives for the countryside as discussed under 1E, these are supported by the Countryside Strategy CS1 and the operational policies. The Countryside Strategy aims to support development proposals in the countryside that comply with the Strategic Policies, the relevant provisions of the General Policy GP1 and the operational policies. It lists the types of residential development that will be permitted in the countryside and identifies the corresponding operational policy (Policies COU1-8 and HE14). It also sets out the types of Non-Residential Developments that are acceptable providing proposals comply with the corresponding operational policy.

Part 1 also contains the Transport Strategy which is supported by the Local Transport Study (LTS) that has been prepared for the District by DfI which will inform the subsequent Sub-Regional Transport Plan. The Strategy recognises that many parts of the district are served only by infrequent bus services and most rural residents are dependent on private cars, however the provision of such services is beyond the remit of the LDP.

The Operational Policies are set out in Part 2 of the Strategy. The General Policy GP1 applies to all new developments and seeks to ensure that proposals are designed so

they will not cause demonstrable harm to any of the criteria set out within the Policy. Operational Policy seeks to respect and enhance traditional rural settlement patterns by permitting new dwellings in suitable locations (Policies COU1-COU8). In so doing, it also seeks to prevent development which will either create or extend ribbon development (Policy COU6) or mar the distinction between settlements and the open countryside (COU11). Affordable Housing in the Countryside is provided for under Policy COU3. Additional requirements to ensure that new developments integrate into the countryside and do not erode rural character are set out in Policies COU9 and COU10.

Operational Policies relating to the rural area include Economic Development in the Countryside (Policies ED2-ED7) and Tourism Development in the Countryside (Policies TOU2-TOU7). Minerals Development (Policies MIN1-MIN7) are likely to only be relevant in such areas. Several policy areas are listed under Protecting and Enhancing the Environment which are relevant to the rural area, in particular Natural Heritage (Policies NH1-NH7), Landscape Assets (Policies LA1-LA4) and Coastal Development (Policies CO1-CO2). These are discussed and identified in this RNIA where relevant.

In addition, all new vehicular accesses serving developments in rural areas must comply with the relevant provisions under policies TRA1-11.

Overall, the draft Plan Strategy is considered to have a positive impact on rural dwellers and the rural area in terms of economic growth, social inclusion and its future sustainability. It will provide new rural housing in appropriate locations as well as creating opportunities for economic growth through start-ups, farm diversification and the expansion of established businesses, whilst also facilitating the development of new opportunities such as tourism (Policies TOU2-TOU7) and renewable energy development (Policies RE1-RE2). It also allows for the provision of new infrastructure such as telecommunications, and for the provision of community facilities in rural areas.

**2C If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.**

As required by the RDS, the Spatial Growth Strategy within the draft Plan Strategy is based upon a Settlement Hierarchy which consists of Hubs and Clusters of Hubs. Within the District the two most important Hub Clusters are Newry-Warrenpoint and Downpatrick-Newcastle. The former is a key gateway into the region due to its position on the Belfast-Dublin Corridor and being a major port. Both Hub Clusters are a significant source of employment, retailing and services to the rural population. The other significant urban settlements such as Ballynahinch, Crossmaglen, Kilkeel and Saintfield provide similar functions on a smaller scale.

While growth will be directed in the first instance towards the Hub Clusters, the draft Plan Strategy does allow for the development of retail and commercial enterprises in rural settlements and in the countryside itself subject to appropriate limits. Indeed,

there are some types of development which can only occur, or are more appropriately located, in a rural setting, such as Minerals development.

The draft Plan Strategy seeks to balance the need to achieve sustainable development with the need to protect and preserve many of the features of the rural landscape, including areas designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) or Special Countryside Areas (SCAs). While restrictions on development in SCAs are made, this needs to be weighed against the fact that these areas are often remote and inaccessible with small populations which provides a strong level of self-protection and limits the number of people adversely affected.

As referred to under 2B, there are several policies specific to the countryside such as Dwellings on Farms, Agricultural and Forestry Development and Minerals Development. These seek to balance the need for enterprises such as farm businesses to grow and develop within the wider public interest.

It is anticipated that several renewable energy projects will be applied for over the lifetime of the LDP, many of which are likely to be located outside of settlements. The draft strategic and operational policies seek to encourage the development of such projects to contribute towards the achievement of Net Zero while preserving the character of rural areas and landscapes. The harnessing of a significant level of renewable energy has the potential to allow rural communities to source a significant amount of their energy needs from local sources and is considered a significant positive.

In addition, the tourism policies seek to encourage the development of sustainable tourism and introduce new policies (such as Policy T0U7 New and Extended Glamping Accommodation in the Countryside) to ensure tourism development can be managed appropriately. Additionally, it is anticipated that a significant number of tourism proposals will form part of farm diversification schemes.

Overall, it is considered that the draft Plan Strategy supports rural dwellers, through the network of settlements and surrounding rural hinterland in terms of housing and economic opportunities supported by necessary infrastructure.

**2D Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.**

Given the interrelationship between urban and rural areas, the strategies and policies of the draft Plan Strategy will primarily impact upon the following social, economic and environmental aspects of rural areas:

- Rural Businesses.
- Rural Tourism.
- Rural Housing.
- Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas.
- Education or Training in Rural Areas.
- Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas.
- Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas.

- Poverty in Rural Areas.
- Deprivation in Rural Areas.
- Rural Crime or Community Safety.
- Rural Development; and
- Agri-Environment.
- The landscape (natural and built)
- Extraction of minerals
- Renewable energy provision

**2E Please explain why Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.**

The policies set out in the draft Plan Strategy will impact on people in rural areas in the ways described above. However, the overall aim and objective of the LDP is to promote the sustainable development of rural areas, providing housing and employment opportunities that will offset the negative impacts.

## **SECTION 3 – IDENTIFYING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NEEDS OF PERSONS IN RURAL AREAS**

### **3A Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

Yes

### **3B Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

The following methods/information and sources were used to inform the draft Plan Strategy:

- consultation with the community (as per the Council's SCI)
- consultation with other organisations (Stakeholder and Statutory/Non-Statutory Consultees)
- published statistics
- preparatory papers
- other council and government publications.

### **3C Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.**

A series of 16 evidence-based preparatory papers were produced alongside the Preferred Options Paper to inform the LDP process. Each preparatory paper covered a separate topic area and provided a summary of the current position in relation to it. This baseline was used to justify the policy direction for each topic area which is carried through to the draft Plan Strategy.

These papers were produced following extensive research that involved discussion with government departments, agencies and public bodies. Colleagues in the Planning Department's Development Management and Enforcement sections were also invited to highlight any issues they had encountered during implementing the existing policy. Research was also undertaken of a range of local and central government websites, published research and reports. Sources are identified within each preparatory paper which can be viewed on the Council's website<sup>2</sup>.

After being endorsed by the Planning Committee, the papers were published together with the Preferred Options Paper. The POP was published for consultation in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. This consultation included all interested parties, Community and Section 75 Groups and any other interested groups or individuals.

The public consultation opened on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, and concluded on August 24<sup>th</sup> 2018. Public consultation events were held at various venues/locations and at various times throughout the Council area. Council officers attended these meetings

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<sup>2</sup> [LDP Evidence Base](#)

to aid interested parties in understanding the Preferred Options Paper and how to respond to it. A total of 222 responses were received during this period.

Draft versions of the proposed policies were also forwarded to statutory consultees, including government departments, NI Water, DfI Rivers and DfI Roads, and all neighbouring councils for their comments. The policies were also subjected to a sustainability appraisal carried out in conjunction with the Shared Environmental Service<sup>3</sup> and comments received were used to amend the policies to improve their sustainability scores.

At all stages of the preparation process, the Council's Planning Committee has been kept involved through regular updates at the monthly meeting of the Committee, and at workshops on topic areas. As many of the Members represent rural areas and constituents they are particularly aware of the social and economic needs of those areas which play a pivotal role within the Council as a whole. The comments of members have been considered in the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy.

### **3D Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority.**

As previously stated, the District has a significant rural population, constituting approximately 35% of its total population in the 2021 Census. This is predicted to grow over the lifetime of the LDP, as the District has consistently experienced a significant number of applications for single houses in the countryside, having the highest level of such applications among Councils in Northern Ireland between 2010-2017.<sup>4</sup>

Table 3: Spatial analysis by local authority of approvals over the period from June 2010 – 2016/17

Local Authority	Replacement	Farm	Infill	Other	Total
A&N	220	352	78	301	951
A&ND	212	346	53	194	805
AB&C	645	803	155	950	2,553
B	24	8	1	9	42
CC&G	431	599	98	641	1,769
DC&S	197	228	11	312	748
F&O	530	574	34	855	1,993
L&C	342	479	108	340	1,269
M&EA	412	561	66	345	1,384
MU	648	897	201	1276	3,022
NM&D	1,008	937	195	823	2,963
Total	4,669	5,784	1000	6,046	17,499

This level of applications has resulted in significant development pressure in several areas, often along the main local distributor roads between rural settlements and in

<sup>3</sup> The Shared Environmental Service is a regionally funded service established to support all 11 Councils in NI with their environmental planning responsibilities.

<sup>4</sup> [Fleming Mountstephen - Review of Strategic Planning Policy on Development in the Countryside](#)

their vicinity. In some of these areas the level of development has reached the point where further developments may cause a degradation of their rural character and result in a more suburban type of development pattern with closely grouped dwellings served by individual accesses. The need to provide housing for rural communities in such a way that it respects the character of rural landscapes is a key consideration of the draft Plan Strategy.

The significant rural population in turn means that infrastructure, both in terms of transport and community facilities, such as playing fields and schools are needed to be provided in rural settlements and areas to accommodate the demands of the population. Opportunities for economic development must also be provided and in turn this requires supporting infrastructure in terms of telecommunications and energy requirements. The draft Plan Strategy seeks to provide these opportunities, in appropriate locations, while also preserving the distinctive character of the countryside.

The draft Plan Strategy seeks to improve the policy framework relating to planning applications in rural areas by clarifying issues that have proven to be contentious under the current policy regime, especially for single houses in the countryside. It also seeks to provide a greater range of opportunities for economic developments especially in farm diversification, sustainable tourism and community facilities.

**If the response to section 3A was yes go to Section 4A·**

N/A



## **SECTION 4 – CONSIDERING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NEEDS OF PERSONS IN RURAL AREAS**

### **4A Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

Both the Regional Development Strategy (regional) and the Council's Community Plan (local) emphasize the need to create vibrant rural communities. For this to happen there must be development of a sufficient scale to accommodate the social and economic needs of the rural population while preserving rural character, heritage and protected landscapes. The LDP has an important role to play in achieving the aims of these strategies and others because it provides the basis for land use planning decisions that provide the housing, employment land and infrastructure that communities require to remain vibrant.

#### Housing

This is the most important need and as stated under Paragraph 2B, approximately 35% of the District's population is rural. The draft Plan Strategy seeks to meet this need by allowing for a range of residential developments, in both rural settlements and the countryside subject to policy provisions. The permitted range includes appropriately sized, multi-unit developments in rural settlements (Policy HOU1), some of which will include social and affordable housing (Policy HOU5), as well as traditional rural forms of one-off housing such as replacements, infills, dwellings in clusters and dwellings on farms. The latter is particularly important as it can allow a farm business to remain in operation and be "passed down" to a descendant maintaining a family's links with that area. Provision is made in limited circumstances for more specialist forms of housing such as dwellings to meet personal circumstances and in connection with an established non-agricultural rural business (see Policies COU1-8).

#### Economic Development

While the Clusters and Hubs will be the main location of employment, it is recognised that there must be sufficient flexibility to provide employment opportunities in rural areas, especially in more remote locations. There are many established rural enterprises that will need to expand so that they can develop further, recognising that relocation to an urban environment is not always feasible. The draft Plan Strategy contains sufficient flexibility to enable expansion to occur within appropriate limits, although beyond a certain threshold relocation will be necessary (Policies ED2-5). The draft Plan Strategy also allows for farm diversification schemes that can provide opportunities for a new rural enterprise, run in conjunction with the existing farm, to become established (Policy ED6). This has significant potential for providing tourist accommodation through the sympathetic conversion of vernacular buildings. The expansion of existing farm and forestry enterprises to enable them to increase production or comply with new requirements is also facilitated (Policy ED7).

#### Transport and Infrastructure

As well as housing and economic needs, vibrant communities require sufficient community infrastructure, the draft Plan Strategy allows for the construction of Community Facilities such as halls in appropriate locations (Policy CF1) as well as for the provision of leisure facilities such as playing fields and playgrounds (Policy OS2). The District has several former railway lines and proposals to utilise them as Greenways are in various stages of progress. The development of Greenways is a key priority for the Council as set out in its Active Travel Plan<sup>5</sup>. The need to connect places physically and digitally has been acknowledged in the policies. These linkages all help reduce a sense of isolation and improve connectivity for businesses and people in the rural area.

### Environmental Protection

Finally, it is imperative that these needs are not met at the expense of the distinctive character of the rural area. Within the District, there are three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in which a higher level of protection is afforded (Policy LA2) as well as three Special Countryside Areas (SCAs) in which development will only be permitted for matters of public interest Policy (LA1). The draft Plan Strategy proposes to extend the SCAs that cover Slieve Croob and the Mourne Mountains into high mountain areas which were formerly part of Down District Council and have similar high-quality landscapes to the existing areas. This addresses an anomaly between the two extant Development Plans. The expanded SCAs will allow them to come under the same planning policy regime for the first time to ensure consistent decision making in such sensitive areas. There are numerous other areas and sites that are protected such as Local Landscape Policy Areas (Policy LA3), Areas of Special Scientific Interest, Ramsar sites, Sites of Local Nature Conservation Interest (Policies NH1-5) as well as heritage sites which include listed buildings and historic monuments (Policies HE1-HE15). Many of the latter form important local landmarks which contribute to the character and distinctiveness of landscapes and settlements.

Several policies, such as Agriculture and Forestry Development (Policy ED7) and Renewable Energy (Policy RED1) require applicants to demonstrate that the proposals will not adversely impact on the character of the landscapes or create unacceptable levels of pollution through issues such as ammonia emissions, noise, odours and glare. Such restrictions are justified in the wider public interest in protecting the countryside itself and important ecosystems such as river corridors and the marine environment.

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<sup>5</sup> [Newry Mourne and Down Active Travel Masterplan](#)

## **SECTION 5 – INFLUENCING THE POLICY, STRATEGY, PLAN OR PUBLIC SERVICE**

**5A Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?**

Yes

**5B Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy, or Plan or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

The draft Plan Strategy seeks to deliver sustainable growth across the District, in accordance with the principles of the RDS. While it is expected that much of the growth will be concentrated in the Hub Clusters, this will benefit the rural population as it will be able to avail of the opportunities for employment and services that will be created. The Strategy also envisions appropriate development occurring simultaneously in the rural area, in terms of employment and services in the rural settlements. Likewise, the draft Plan Strategy is sufficiently flexible to permit sustainable development in the countryside, particularly forms that seek to avail of existing assets.

Therefore, the draft Plan Strategy has been written in such a way that sees urban and rural as interdependent on each other and that it is only by the achievement of sustainable development that the needs of both can be delivered. Indeed, there are some forms of development that can only occur, or are better located, in a rural setting such as minerals extraction, forestry and large scale agriculture and renewable energy development. These forms of development in turn support the needs of urban dwellers as well as providing employment and income for their rural counterparts.

Several policies such as Housing in the Countryside and Farm Diversification, apply specifically to the open countryside and are devised to cater for the specific needs of these areas and those who live there. They are intended to ensure that the rural population remains vibrant and sustainable and that farm businesses remain in operation. Opportunities to create start-up businesses in appropriate locations, and for the expansion of established rural enterprises are contained within policies.

The draft Plan Strategy also has considered representations received from the consultation on the Preferred Options Paper, advice from statutory consultees and regional and local policy.

**5C Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

The delivery of key services to the rural area goes beyond the remit of the draft Plan Strategy and planning powers. Delivery of a range of statutory services depend on key stakeholders such as Government Departments/agencies who are responsible

for improvements (for example) to the road network, provision of public transport as well as education, health facilities etc.

**6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.**

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information complied with.
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Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Lois Jackson on behalf of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Position / Grade	Development Plan Manager
Date	June 2025
Approved by:	Jonathan McGilly, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Position / Grade	Assistant Director
Date	June 2025

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Comhairle Ceantair  
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**Newry, Mourne and Down**  
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