



To: **Development Plan Principal Planning Officers**

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12 November 2025

Dear Colleagues,

**PLANNING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME – UPDATE OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN PRACTICE NOTES**

As part of ongoing work for the Planning Improvement Programme, the review of the existing suite of Development Plan Practice Notes (DPPNs) was discussed at the LDP meeting in June 2025. I subsequently wrote to you in August 2025 regarding the update of the DPPNs and outlining that this review will incorporate the learning and best practice of the Local Development Plan process to date.

The review of DPPN 2, Statement of Community Involvement, DPPN3, Timetable, and DPPN 5, Preferred Options Paper, has now been completed and I have enclosed a copy of the latest revision for your information. These DPPNs have mainly been updated to reflect factual changes since the initial publication or revision including references to legislation. The Departmental website will be updated in due course to reflect these latest revisions.

Following on from this, the review of DPPN 7, The Plan Strategy, DPPN 8, The Local Policies Plan and DPPN 10, Submitting Development Plan Documents for Independent Examination, is also underway. This review will incorporate learning from our collective experience to date and there will be an opportunity to comment on the revisions to these practice notes prior to their publication. I will keep you informed of the timescale for this.

E-mail: [planning@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](mailto:planning@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)

Website: [www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/planning](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/planning)

I would be grateful if this correspondence could be brought to the attention of your officials.

Yours sincerely

**SUSAN WILKIN**  
**Deputy Director**  
Regional Planning Policy & Casework

**cc: Heads of Planning**

# Development Plan

## Practice Note

02

### Statement of Community Involvement

Revised November 2025

Version 3

## Preamble

This Practice Note is designed to guide planning officers and relevant users through the preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and deals primarily with procedures as well as good practice. It forms part of a series of new practice notes published by the Department<sup>1</sup> stemming from the **Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011** (herein referred to as “the 2011 Act”) and any related subordinate legislation. The emphasis is very much on advice but where explicit legislative requirements must be followed these will be made clear.

Where appropriate this practice note will therefore highlight:

- Relevant legislation;
- Procedural guidance;
- Definitions;
- Best practice examples / relevant case law

This guidance is not intended to replace the need for judgement by planning officers involved in the plan making process or those making planning decisions. Nor is it intended to be a source of definitive legal advice. Reference should be made to the actual legislation referred to in this document and if any discrepancy or conflict exists between the Practice Note<sup>2</sup> and legislation the provisions of the legislation will prevail.

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<sup>1</sup> Department means the Department for Infrastructure unless otherwise stated. The Department for Infrastructure came into being on 8 May 2016 and the Department of the Environment was dissolved in accordance with the Departments Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and The Departments (2016 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Please ensure you are considering the most up to date version of Development Plan Practice Note 02 on the Department’s website at [www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk) and the Planning Portal at [www.planningni.gov.uk](http://www.planningni.gov.uk) and the most up to date planning legislation on the UK legislation website at [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk), which is also available via the Department’s website.

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1** The purpose of the SCI is to outline how a council proposes to engage the community and stakeholders in exercising its planning functions. The SCI should set out a council's policy as to the involvement, in the exercise of a council's functions under the development management and local development plan provisions of the **2011 Act**, of persons who appear to a council to have an interest in the matters relating to development in its area. The Department has published its own statement of community involvement and can be found on the Department's website.
- 1.2** The SCI explains how the community and stakeholders will be involved in the development management process as well as the preparation of the local development plan. It should also set out the steps that a council will take to facilitate community involvement. It allows everyone to know with whom, what, where and when participation will occur in the planning process. When finalised, it should present a vision and strategy for involving the community and stakeholders at various stages of the planning process. The SCI should set out the standards to be met by a council in terms of community involvement, building upon the minimum requirements set out in both the **Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (NI) 2015** (herein referred to as "the LDP Regulations") and the **Planning (Statement of Community Involvement) Regulations (NI) 2015** (herein referred to as "the SCI Regulations").

## **2.0 Legislative Context**

- 2.1** This practice note focuses on the legislative requirements for a council's SCI.
- 2.2** **Section 4** of the 2011 Act requires a council to prepare a SCI. The SCI Regulations set out the requirements for the preparation, form and content and publicity for the SCI.

### **3.0 Community Involvement in the Planning Process**

#### Identification of and engagement with key groups and organisations in the delivery of planning services

**3.1** A council should involve the community at an early stage in the planning process and anyone who wishes to get involved is encouraged to do so at the opportunities provided. The following groups of people are most likely to become involved:

- People living within the area / neighbourhood;
- Elected representatives;
- Voluntary groups;
- Community forums / groups / umbrella organisations;
- Environmental groups;
- Residents groups;
- Business interests;
- Developers / landowners;

**3.2** It should be noted that the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and in no way restricts other individuals, groups and organisations from participating in the planning process.

**3.3** The planning system can be difficult to understand which means some groups of people may find it difficult to get involved. These under-represented groups can include young people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and disadvantaged communities. A council may therefore wish to liaise with community representatives to help identify under-represented groups within its area and develop strategies and specific consultative methods in order to encourage engagement with these groups in the planning process. This may include targeting participation through workshops, focus groups or mapping exercises

and ensuring venues for consultation events are as accessible as possible to all groups of the community, that events are held at locations within the community and at varying times which appeal to a wider range of people.

**3.4 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998** requires a public authority, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependents and persons without.

**3.5** In addition, without prejudice to the above obligations, public authorities are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or race. The above groups, commonly referred to as “Section 75 groups”, are important participants within the planning process and can provide valuable insights into the consideration of equality issues.

#### Community Input into the Local Development Plan Process

**3.6** Strengthening community and stakeholder involvement in planning is a key objective of the local development plan system. There are widespread benefits of involving communities and stakeholders in the preparation of local development plans. ‘Front loading’ of the local development plan process will help encourage and facilitate a higher level of meaningful community and stakeholder involvement earlier in the process. Front-loading also offers an opportunity for communities and stakeholders to influence plan content by sharing their knowledge and views with planners.

**3.7** This will help to ensure that any issues can be considered and

addressed accordingly at the point the Plan Strategy and/or Local Policies Plan is subject to independent examination. This will also help achieve a sense of local ownership and community buy-in for the policies that will shape the places in which communities and stakeholders have an interest.

- 3.8** Councils will need to be proactive when involving stakeholders and the community, through setting out their approach in the SCI. The SCI will help to raise public and stakeholder awareness and should ensure better community involvement throughout the entire local development plan preparation process. A council should propose an appropriate level of involvement and use suitable methods of engagement in relation to the local development plan. Otherwise, the SCI may become counter-productive by unnecessarily prolonging the plan process, particularly as the LDP progresses through the various stages of preparation and adoption.

#### Community Input into the Development Management Process

- 3.9** The two-tier planning system seeks to enhance local democratic accountability in the planning system. The vast majority of planning applications are determined by councils giving local politicians the opportunity to shape the areas they are elected to serve. The Department will determine regionally significant applications and also has powers to call in applications from councils, although this will be used exceptionally rather than routinely.<sup>3</sup>
- 3.10** New provisions within the 2011 Act not only aim to improve efficiency in determining applications but enhance community consultation at the appropriate points in the planning process.

### **4.0 Principles for Community Involvement**

- 4.1** A timely and proactive approach to community involvement should be adopted through a process of providing clear information and

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<sup>3</sup> Further information on 'call in' can be found in Development Management Practice Note (DMPN)13 Notification and Call In.

encouraging participation through both plan preparation and the delivery of development management functions. The process must therefore be informative, user friendly, as inclusive as possible, and conducted in an open and transparent way.

#### **4.2 Community involvement should:**

- build on a clear understanding of the needs of the community and be fit for purpose;
- be front loaded – there should be opportunities for early community involvement and a sense of local ownership of local policy decisions;
- use methods of involvement which are relevant to the communities concerned, for example:
  - Media: local newspapers, TV and radio stations can carry stories about local development plan proposals as can social media sites;
  - Leaflets/ Brochures: can publicise an outline of the plan and inform the public about further opportunities to get involved;
  - Public Exhibitions/ Displays/ Roadshows: are a good medium for disseminating information, allowing communities to air their views however they are fairly resource intensive and attendees are self selecting;
  - One to One Meetings with selected stakeholders: are a useful means of identifying key issues, getting key people involved and achieving alignment with other strategies and initiatives;
  - Public Meetings: are an open and inclusive way for people to engage in robust debate on issues although attendees are self selecting;
  - Focus Groups: are useful for area based discussions and

presentation of options and may help a Council to gain a better understanding of public concerns and provide an opportunity to explore issues in-depth;

- Workshops: are useful for identifying and focusing discussion around difficult issues and key themes and is a means of engaging local communities and developing ownership of proposals;
- Provide opportunities for ongoing involvement as part of a continuous programme, not a one-off event;
- Be transparent and accessible; and
- Be planned into the process for the preparation and revision of the local development plan.

## **5.0 Updating a SCI**

- 5.1** All councils in Northern Ireland have adopted a SCI since the handover of the majority of planning functions in 2015: This section provides a reminder of the legislative requirements to establish a SCI and the steps necessary to update it.

### Form and Content

- 5.2** Within the context of Section 4 of the 2011 Act, reference to ‘the statement of community involvement’ should be interpreted as one SCI to cover all functions under Parts 2 and Part 3 of the 2011 Act.
- 5.3** Regulation 4 of the SCI Regulations sets out the requirements for the form and content of the SCI. The SCI must include the following matters;
- a) the principles of how a council will involve the community in exercising its local development plan functions under Part 2 of the 2011 Act;

- b) the timing of, and the method by which
  - i. participation will occur at each stage of the local development plan procedure, and
  - ii. how a council will respond to the participation process referred to in sub-paragraph (i);
- (c) details of how a council will use those responses at each stage in developing the content of its local development plan;
- (d) the principles of how a council will involve the community in exercising its planning control functions under Part 3 of the 2011 Act.

**5.4** A council should ensure that their SCI is ‘fit for purpose’, recognising the limits of a council’s resources. Councils should ensure that they propose appropriate types and scales of involvement in relation to the development management and local development plan functions. It would be counter-productive for SCI’s to specify particularly complex processes of community involvement. A council should achieve appropriate balances in terms of SCI content. If the SCI is too general, it will fail to provide communities with sufficient guidance as to what type of involvement they can expect. Alternatively, over-prescription may have considerable resource implications for all parties involved in the planning process. A SCI should be concise and should be written in plain English with the use of tables and diagrams where appropriate.

**5.5** It should recognise and express the need for front-loading and it should reflect community needs by identifying the range of groups and stakeholders that have been or need to be involved. The SCI may also include specific consultation groups and focused consultation workshops in an endeavour to elicit responses on a particular issue which needs to be addressed.

**5.6** The SCI should set out how communities can be involved in a timely and accessible way and also identify suitable involvement techniques

required to facilitate and encourage meaningful community and stakeholder engagement.

- 5.7** The SCI should be clear about the different stages of involvement such as information, consultation, participation and feedback and demonstrate how these will be done in different ways at various stages and with different communities/ stakeholders. The SCI should also show that the process of involvement can be resourced and managed effectively, and how the results will feed into the planning process. A council should also build flexibility into their SCI to allow additional work to be undertaken if substantive issues emerge.

#### Development Plan

- 5.8** In relation to a council's local development plan functions, it is a statutory requirement that the local development plan must be prepared in accordance with the SCI. Therefore, before a council can consult on its preferred options paper, it must have an agreed SCI in place in order to inform the general public and all stakeholders of how, where and when they can become involved in the local development plan preparation process.
- 5.9** The SCI should set out the programme for community involvement throughout plan preparation from the initial stages through to adoption and should also stipulate appropriate methods of involvement relevant to the community, the stage of plan preparation and the timing and scope of community involvement. The SCI should set out a council's vision and strategy for community involvement and may also identify the key consultees and the stages in the LDP process when they will be notified and /or consulted.
- 5.10** It is important to note that if a council gives a commitment to go beyond the minimum statutory requirements in its SCI, it must comply with that commitment.

## Development Management

**5.11** In addressing the delivery of development management functions the SCI should include the following matters:

- how the council will handle representations on planning applications;
- how the community can become involved in the new pre-application community consultation process; and
- the principles of the process for involving the public in its planning control functions including the method by which the community may comment on and input to the determination of planning applications.

As with the development plan process, the SCI should cover the minimum requirements for consultation and publicity.

**5.12** The SCI should inform developers that they must undertake pre-application community consultations on major applications as prescribed in the 2011 Act.

**5.13** Under **Section 50 of the 2011 Act** a council must decline to determine a major application where the community consultation requirements as set out in Section 27 have not been complied with. The SCI should therefore highlight that a council is unable to determine a major application where the legislative requirements for community consultation have not been met.

**5.14** The SCI should state how a council will publicise planning applications and how anyone who wishes to make a representation to the application may do so. It should also make clear how a council will handle representations and how they will be taken into account in the determination of the application. Reference should also be made to the pre-application community consultation process carried out by developers and how the public can become involved in those consultations.

- 5.15** Whilst **Sections 8(4)(b) (Plan Strategy) and 9(4)(b) (Local Policies Plan)** place a statutory requirement on councils to prepare their Development Plans in accordance with their SCIs, there is no equivalent provision with regard to the exercise of a council's functions under Part 3 (Planning Control) of the 2011 Act. The management, handling or processing of planning applications by a council should therefore not be delayed until such time as the council's SCI is agreed and in place.
- 5.16** Further details on the suggested form and content of a SCI covering both development plan and development management functions is provided at Annex 1.

#### Consultation on the SCI

- 5.17** An effective SCI should set out a policy for community involvement which meets the statutory requirements for consultation while at the same time being tailored to a council's circumstances. The SCI should set out the methods a council will use to enable people to properly engage and contribute to the process of preparing LDPs. A variety of methods are likely to be utilised by a council to ensure this process is as productive as possible. The techniques should be fit for purpose for the different stages of preparation of LDPs and for different groups.
- 5.18** A council may already have established methods of community consultation at the local level which they can build upon in preparing their SCI. A council should seek to integrate consultation exercises and co-ordinate their activities as much as possible with other consultation programmes or initiatives, in particular, those relating to the development of the Community Plan.
- 5.19** Regulation 5 of the SCI Regulations requires a council to consider whether it is appropriate to invite representations from persons who have an interest in development in its area. Therefore, the decision whether to undertake public consultation on the SCI is at the discretion of a council. If a council does decide to undertake a public consultation exercise, it must make arrangements for inviting representations as it

thinks appropriate and take account of any representations received.

#### Agreement of the SCI

**5.20 Regulation 6** of the SCI Regulations sets out the requirements for the agreement of the SCI. The SCI must;

- (a) be approved by resolution of the council prior to submission to the Department for its agreement;
- (b) the Department must respond within four weeks of receipt of the statement of community involvement unless it has, before the expiry of that period, notified the council in writing that it requires more time to consider the document;
- (c) if before the end of the period mentioned in paragraph (b), the Department has failed to respond to the receipt by it of the statement of community involvement, its agreement will be deemed to have been given at the end of that period;
- (d) until such time as the Department agrees the statement of community involvement, the council must not take any steps under Regulation (7) to advertise its proposals;
- (e) the council must keep the statement of community involvement under regular review and any revision must comply with the requirements of this regulation.

**5.21** In the event that a council cannot reach agreement with the Department, the Department may direct a council to revise its SCI and re-submit it to the Department for approval.

**5.22** When undertaking a submission to the Department in accordance with **Regulation 6** the following is advised:

- Changes to an extant SCI should be highlighted in order to aid expedient processing by the Department.
- The covering letter should enclose details of where the extant

SCI can be located on the council's website.

- Indicate the legal provision under which any change is being undertaken and provide the reason for an update being made.

#### Availability of the Statement of Community Involvement

**5.23** Following agreement of the SCI, Regulation 7 of the SCI Regulations requires a council to make a copy of the agreed SCI available for inspection at its principal offices during normal office hours and also to give notice by local advertisement that the SCI is available for inspection and the place and times where it can be inspected. A council must also publish the SCI on its website.

#### The Local Development Plan Timetable

**5.24** It may be necessary to periodically update a SCI, including in circumstances where a council has undertaken a regular review in line with Regulation 6(e) of the SCI Regulations. This may also be necessary when changes have been made to the council LDP timetable and a council must be satisfied that any changes made to the timetable are, where necessary, reflected in the SCI. The publicity requirements regarding availability of the timetable under regulation 8 of the LDP Regulations also apply.

#### The Department for Infrastructure SCI<sup>4</sup>

**5.25 Section 2 of the 2011 Act** requires the Department to prepare and publish a SCI. This covers those aspects of planning management that the Department has responsibility for and these responsibilities are contained within Part 3 of the 2011 Act.

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<sup>4</sup> The Department's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is available at [www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/departments-statement-community-involvement-sci](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/departments-statement-community-involvement-sci)

## **Annex 1: Example<sup>5</sup> of a SCI for a Council's Development Plan and Development Management Functions**

### **1.0 What is the Statement of Community Involvement?**

#### **Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this statement is to set out policy for involving the community in the production of **XXXXX** Local Development Plan and the consideration of planning applications. It describes who, how and when the community will be invited to participate in the different stages of both Local Development Plan formulation and the determination of planning applications

#### **A Vision of Participation**

- 1.2** *"A sustainable society must be instilled with democratic values. Its citizens must share a sense of effective participation in the decision making process. They must feel they have a say in their society's development and the skills, knowledge and ability to assume responsibility for that development."*

The Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland – First Steps Towards Sustainability (DOE, 2006).

- 1.3** This is a shared vision of participation in decision making and it is therefore aimed to ensure that:
- (i) Everyone has an early and informed opportunity to express their views on the development of the area and have it considered before decisions are made;
  - (ii) All groups in our community, regardless of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, sex, marital status, physical ability, sexual orientation, and those with and without dependants are enabled and empowered to participate;
- 1.4** It is intended to adopt a proactive and timely approach to community

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<sup>5</sup> Example is based upon the legislative requirements for SCI, however may contain additional provisions in the interest of suggested good practice. A council should refer to relevant legislative requirements and determine whether any additional provisions are necessary and if so, tailor these to meet their objectives for local community involvement.

involvement through a process of providing clear information and encouraging participation during plan preparation and planning application submission, assessment and determination. The process must therefore be informative, user friendly, as inclusive as possible, and conducted in an open and transparent way. Every effort is to be made to engage the community, record views and provide feedback.

## **2.0 Local Community Involvement in the Preparation of the Local Development Plan**

### **Purpose**

- 2.1 The purpose of the **XXXXXX** Local Development Plan, comprising the Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan, is to inform the general public, statutory authorities, developers and other interested bodies of the policy framework and land use proposals that will implement the strategic objectives of the Regional Development Strategy and guide development decisions within **XXXXX** up to 20**XX**.

### **Who can get involved?**

- 2.2 Anyone who wishes to get involved in the preparation of this local development plan will be encouraged to do so at the opportunities provided. In particular the views of the following *groups of people* will be sought:

- People living within the area / neighbourhood;
- Elected representatives;
- Voluntary groups;
- Community forums / groups / umbrella organisations;
- Environmental groups;
- Residents groups;
- Business interests; and
- Developers / landowners.

- 2.3 Elected members, forums, community and residents groups provide a voice for the local community. Other voluntary and interest groups also bring a

special knowledge and can ensure that important concerns are addressed.

### **Empowering disadvantaged and under-represented groups**

2.4 The Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires a public authority, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

2.5 In addition, without prejudice to the above obligations, public authorities are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or race. The above “Section 75 groups” are important participants within the planning process and include people who traditionally have been under represented or disadvantaged. These groups will be targeted through the consultation process on the local development plan in order to obtain their views and contribute to the consideration of equality issues under Section 75. Their views on any equality screening documents or Equality Impact Assessments will also be sought within the specified period for comment along with the Draft Plan Strategy and Draft Local Policies Plan.

2.6 To ensure that local development plan and consultation documents are accessible to everyone they will be made available upon request in different formats upon request, including electronic, Braille, large text print, audiocassette. Plain English is to be used for all publications. A telephone, fax number and a text phone number will be stated on each document for people with hearing or speech impairments. If for any reason, a request for a document in a particular alternative format cannot be met, other possible solutions will be explored.

## **How and when will the Community be Involved**

- 2.7 A local development plan is made at different stages, each presenting opportunities for community involvement. Each of these stages is identified with the actions that are to be taken to involve the community. The actions will fulfil and in some cases exceed the statutory requirements on public consultation. The Timetable for when the different stages are to be reached is obtainable from the Council Office and on the website.

### **A. Data Collection**

- 2.8 Surveying and information gathering will be an ongoing function of the Council, however, it will be particularly important at this early stage of plan preparation. Information obtained at this stage will be used to establish the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the plan area and enable the Council to determine the issues which need to be addressed and the options for addressing them. This will be undertaken using a topic-based approach accompanied with a Countryside Assessment.

### **Actions**

- Set up a **Steering Group** comprising the Council Planning Committee, with the Council Chief Executive and Head of Planning. This is the high-level co-ordinating body that will ensure overview and strategic input on behalf of the whole community, as well as from the planning professionals;
- Set up a **Project Management Team** comprising Senior Council Officers from the Council(s), the Principal Planning Officer and representatives from the key statutory/government departments. The purpose of the team is to ensure key consultees co-operate in the plan making process. The Project Management team will be consulted on and act as the screening and scoping group for the Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and Equality Impact Assessment;
- This **Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)** is prepared at this

initial stage, listing the key consultees, Community Groups and under-represented (Section 75) groups who will be actively encouraged to participate in the process. These lists will be kept under review and written requests for inclusion from additional bodies will be considered;

- **Key consultees** will receive written invitation requesting them to participate in the plan making process by providing information on the key strategic issues that the local development plan should address;
- **Under represented (Section 75) groups** will be invited to identify whether there are any types of planning policies which are likely to have a significant impact on the groups they represent. They will also be provided opportunity to identify any particular issues or needs which they feel the plan should address. Where requested this can be done through a face to face meeting with a planning official. Any comments received will be taken into account when screening and scoping the Equality Impact Assessment;
- The **Scoping Report of the Sustainability Appraisal incorporating SEA** will be sent to the statutory consultation body and if necessary, the Department may be requested to undertake trans-boundary consultation with the Republic of Ireland.

## ***B. Draft Plan Strategy Preparation***

- 2.9** This stage represents the start of work on a **XXXXXX** Local Development Plan. It commences with the publication of Preferred Options Paper (POP) setting out the key plan issues and the preferred options available to address them. The POP is a consultation paper to promote debate on issues of strategic significance which are likely to influence the shape of future development within **XXXXXX**. The intention is to stimulate a wide-ranging, yet focused, debate and encourage feedback from a wide variety of interests. Any representations or views received as a consequence of its publication will be considered whilst formulating the Draft Plan Strategy. The POP will also be subject to the initial stages of Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating SEA, and

## Equality Impact Assessment.

### Actions:

- Issue a **public notice** in the local newspapers for two consecutive weeks , Belfast Gazette and on the website of:
  - (i) The intention to prepare a local development plan, accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating SEA and an Equality Impact Assessment;
  - (ii) Publication of the POP inviting comment within 8 to 12 weeks ;
  - (iii) Community meetings, exhibitions and pop-in information sessions;
  - (iv) Publication of the initial stages of Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating SEA, and Equality Impact Assessment and invite comment as considered necessary.
- Make the **Countryside Assessment and Topic Papers available** on the website and provide hard copy at a specified price;
- Issue a **press release** about the intention to prepare a local development plan and drawing attention to the POP and the public consultation;
- Hold a **launch and exhibition** to announce the publication of the POP;
- Hold **public meetings** and **exhibitions** with drop-in sessions in XXXXXX;
- **Write to key consultees and elected members** providing them with a copy of the POP and inviting them to; attend the launch; provide comments within 8 to 12 weeks; inform them of the public meetings, exhibition and drop-in information sessions;
- **Write to local community groups and under-represented (Section 75) groups** providing them with a copy of the POP and inviting them to; comment within 8 to 12 weeks; attend the public meetings, exhibition and drop-in information sessions; and offering the opportunity of a meeting with a planning officer to record their views;
- A **Public Consultation Report** will be presented to elected members following the 8 to 12 week consultation period. This will contain a

summary of each representation and professional comment, recording where members take a different view and the rationale for that view. This will be taken into account whilst formulating the Draft Local Development Plan;

- The **Project Plan Team** will be given an opportunity to comment on emerging policy for inclusion in the Draft Plan Strategy and will be an integral part of testing emerging policy through the Sustainability Appraisal, incorporating SEA and Equality Impact Assessment process;

### **C. Publication of Draft Plan Strategy**

2.10 The Draft Plan Strategy will set out the Council's objectives and strategic policies regarding the future development of the area. It will be a public consultation document and form a key part of the public participation process.

#### **Actions:**

- Issue a **public notice** in the local newspapers for two consecutive weeks, Belfast Gazette and on the website of:
  - (i) Publication of Draft Plan Strategy and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal Report<sup>6</sup> and Equality Impact Assessment and how to view or obtain copies;
  - (ii) The dates and locations of public exhibitions;
  - (iii) The 8 week consultation period and closing date for receipt of representations to the Draft Plan Strategy and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal Report and Equality Impact Assessment;
- **Make the Draft Plan Strategy and any supporting documentation including the Sustainability Appraisal Report and Equality Impact Assessment available on the website and at the Council Office and provide hard copies upon request at a specified price;**

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<sup>6</sup> Sustainability Appraisal Report incorporates SEA Environmental Report

- Hold **launch and exhibition** to announce the publication of the Draft Plan Strategy and issue press releases;
- Hold **public exhibitions** in **XXXXXXX** (Towns, Villages, Settlements etc). Planning Officers will be available to answer any questions;
- **Write to key consultees and elected members** to inform them of; the publication of the Draft Plan Strategy, the dates of the public exhibitions; the 8 week consultation period and the closing date for representations and provide them with a copy of the document;
- **Write to all who submitted a representation to the POP** informing them of the publication of the Draft Plan Strategy and accompanying documents; advising how they can view or obtain copies; the dates of the public exhibitions; the 8 week consultation period and closing date for representations;
- Representations received will be **reported to elected members**.

#### ***D. Public Inspection of Representations***

2.11 All representations are to be made available for public inspection as part of the public consultation process. Interested parties may also comment on site specific representations that have been received (counter representations). These will also be considered at the Independent Examination.

#### **Actions:**

- **Make copies of representations available for inspection** in the Council Office and on the website;
- **Write to key consultees and elected members informing them that representations are available for inspection** and the places and times at which they can be inspected;
- Issue a **public notice** in the local newspapers for two weeks, Belfast Gazette, and on the website of the availability of representations for inspection and the 8 week consultation period including closing date for

counter representations;

- **Make copies of counter representations available for inspection** in the Council Office and on the website;
- Counter representations will be **reported to elected members**.
- **Representations and counter representations will be fully considered by the Council** before it submits the Draft Plan Strategy to the Department for independent examination.

#### ***E. Independent Examination***

2.12 The Council will not submit the Draft Plan Strategy to the Department unless it considers that it is ready for independent examination (IE). The purpose of the IE is to determine whether the Draft Plan Strategy satisfies relevant statutory requirements and whether it is sound.

#### **Actions:**

- Continue to **make the Draft Plan Strategy, and any accompanying documentation available** on the website;
- **Advertise dates, times and venues for the IE at least 4 weeks before the IE** is to be held indicating that representations and counter representations are available for inspection;
- **Notify all persons who submitted representations and counter representations to Draft Plan Strategy** of the arrangements for the IE indicating that representations and counter representations are available for inspection;
- **Request key consultees to provide comment on the representations and counter representations** for consideration at the IE.

#### ***F. Adoption of Plan Strategy***

2.13 Following the IE, the Department will issue a Direction to the Council,

requiring it to adopt the Draft Plan Strategy as originally prepared or with modifications. The Council may also be directed to withdraw the Draft Plan Strategy. In either scenario, the Department will be expected to give reasons for their decisions.

**Action:**

- Issue a **public notice** in the local newspapers for two weeks, in the Belfast Gazette and on the website of the:
  - (i) adoption of the Plan Strategy;
  - (ii) where to get copies of the Plan Strategy and any accompanying documents, the Department's Direction and the Independent Examiner's Report;
- **Make the Plan Strategy and any accompanying documents, the Department's Direction and Independent Examiner's Report available** on the website with hard copy available on request for a specified price;
- **Write to key consultees and those submitting representations and counter representations** advising them of the adopted Plan Strategy, and where to obtain copies together with the Department's Direction and the Independent Examiner's Report. Also advise them of the commencement of work on the Local Policies Plan.

**G. Local Policies Plan**

2.14 The Local Policies Plan will be the second document comprising the Local Development Plan. It will be consistent with the adopted Plan Strategy and set out the Council's more detailed policies and proposals regarding the future development of the area. The Draft Local Policies Plan will be a public consultation document and form a key part of the public participation process.

**Actions:**

Issue a **public notice** in the local newspapers for two consecutive weeks,

Belfast Gazette and on the website of:

- (i) Publication of Draft Local Policies Plan and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal Report<sup>4</sup> and Equality Impact Assessment and how to view or obtain copies;
  - (ii) The dates and locations of public exhibitions;
  - (iii) The 8 week consultation period and closing date for receipt of representations;
- **Make the Draft Local Policies Plan and any supporting documentation including the Sustainability Appraisal Report and Equality Impact Assessment, available** on the website and at the Council Office and provide hard copies upon request at a specified price;
  - Hold **launch and exhibition** to announce the publication of the Draft Local Policies Plan and issue press releases;
  - Hold **public exhibitions** in **XXXXXX** (Towns, Villages, Settlements etc). Planning Officers will be available to answer any questions;
  - **Write to key consultees and elected members** to inform them of; the publication of the Draft Local Policies Plan, the dates of the public exhibitions; the 8 week consultation period and the closing date for representations and provide them with a copy of the document;
  - **Write to all who submitted a representation and counter representation to the Draft Plan Strategy** informing them of the publication of the Draft Local Policies Plan and accompanying documents advising how they can view or obtain copies; the dates of the public exhibitions; the 8 week consultation period and closing date for representations;

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<sup>4</sup> Sustainability Appraisal Report incorporates SEA Environmental Report

- Representations will be **reported to the elected members**.

#### ***H. Public Inspection of Representations***

2.15 All representations to the Draft Local Policies Plan will be made available for public inspection. Interested parties may also comment on site specific representations that have been received (counter representations).

##### **Actions:**

- **Make copies of representations available for inspection** in the Council Office and on the website;
- **Write to key consultees and elected members** informing them that representations are available for inspection and the places and times at which they can be inspected;
- **Issue a public notice** in the local newspapers for two weeks, Belfast Gazette, and on the website of the availability of representations for inspection and the 8 week consultation period including closing date for counter representations;
- **Make copies of counter representations available for inspection** in the Council Office and on the website;
- Counter representations will be **reported to the elected members**;
- **Representations and counter representations will be fully considered by the Council** before it submits the Draft Local Policies Plan to the Department for independent examination.

#### ***I. Independent Examination***

2.16 The Council will not submit the Draft Local Policies Plan to the Department unless it considers that it is ready for independent examination (IE). The purpose of the IE is to determine whether the Draft Local Policies Plan satisfies relevant statutory requirements and whether it is sound.

**Actions:**

- Continue to **make the Draft Local Policies Plan, and all accompanying documentation available** on the website;
- **Advertise dates, times and venues for the IE at least 4 weeks before IE** is to be held indicating that representations and counter representations are available for inspection;
- **Notify all persons who submitted representations and counter representations to the Draft Local Policies Plan of the arrangements for the IE** indicating that representations and counter representations are available for inspection;
- **Request key consultees to provide comment on the representations and counter representations** for consideration at the IE.

***J. Adoption of Local Policies Plan***

2.17 Following the IE, the Department will issue a Direction to the Council, requiring it to adopt the Draft Local Policies Plan as originally prepared or with modifications. The Council may also be directed to withdraw the Draft Local Policies Plan. In either scenario, the Department will be expected to give reasons for their decisions.

**Action:**

- Issue a **public notice** in the local newspapers for two weeks, in the Belfast Gazette and on the website of the;
  - (i) adoption of the Local Policies Plan; and
  - (ii) where to get copies of the Local Policies Plan and accompanying documents, the Department's Direction and the Independent Examiner's Report.

- **Make the Local Policies Plan and accompanying documents, the Department's Direction and Independent Examiner's Report available** on the website with hard copy available on request for a specified price;
- **Write to key consultees and those submitting representations and counter representations** advising them of the adopted Local Policies Plan, and where to obtain copies together with the Department's Direction and the Independent Examiner's Report.

### **3.0 Local Community Involvement in the Council's Development Management Function**

#### **Purpose**

- 3.1** The Council as the local planning authority for the area deals with all planning and listed building applications in the district. It also deals with applications for works in conservation areas, works to protected trees, advertising consent and applications for hazardous substances. Development management is the process through which such applications are considered. An important part of the process is to provide information and advice to applicants and to seek and take into account the views of the general public and statutory consultees on all planning applications. The statutory requirements for consultation on planning applications are set out in legislation. These requirements vary according to the type of proposal but include notification to specified bodies and general publicity.
- 3.2** The Council receives a wide variety of planning applications and therefore needs to involve the community to differing degrees, according to the scale and complexity of the application.

This section looks at:

- how the public can become involved at the various stages of the application process; and
- how the level of community involvement will depend on the scale of the application.

## **Pre-Application Stage**

### Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

- 3.3** Pre-application discussions are encouraged for a range of types of applications, both major and local. The objective of pre-application discussions should be to confirm whether the principle of development is acceptable and to clarify the format, type and level of detail required to enable the council to determine an application. For major applications it will also enable the applicant to discuss with the council details of how the community should be involved in the decision-making process.

### Pre-Application Community Consultation (PACC)

- 3.4** The council strives to inform and involve the wider community in helping to create better quality developments and place making. Applicants submitting major applications to the council or as the case may be the Department must undertake community consultation before submitting their application.

The Council will require the following actions to be undertaken before the application is submitted-

1. Notify the council, at least 12 weeks in advance, that an application for a major planning application is to be submitted.
  2. Hold at least one public event where the community will be afforded the opportunity to make comment.
  3. Publish details of the proposal in the local press, outlining where further details can be obtained and the date, time and location of a public event.
  4. Submit a pre-application community consultation report.
- 3.5** Pre-application consultation is likely to be more successful if the applicant makes significant efforts to open lines of communication with, and provide feedback to, local communities and work with them to secure development proposals which are acceptable to everyone.
- 3.6** As previously stated the Council would recommend all applicants considering

submitting development proposals that fall within the definition of major development to seek a Pre-Application Discussion with planning officers.

Where applicants fail to fully meet the pre-application community consultation requirements the Council will decline to determine the application.

### **Application Stage**

- 3.7** When a planning application is submitted for determination the Council will involve the community in the decision making process. If you feel you will be affected by development proposals you will have an opportunity to consider what is proposed and how it will affect you. You will also have the opportunity to make your views known before a final decision is made on the application.

### Advertising and Neighbour Notification

- 3.8** The Council undertakes statutory publicity in accordance with current legislation. Government may change the statutory publicity requirements and our future approach will reflect any changes that are made.

### Advertising

- 3.9** The Council will advertise all new applications on a weekly basis in at least one local newspaper (in accordance with **Section 41 of the Planning Act**).

### EIA Development

- 3.10** Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a method for ensuring that the likely effects of new development on the environment are fully understood and taken into account before consent is given for the development to proceed.

The Environmental Statement (ES) produced as part of an environmental impact assessment, brings together in a single document or series of documents information about a proposed development and its effects on the environment.

- 3.11** In most cases it will fall to the council to determine if the application is an EIA application. It should be noted that if an application is an EIA application it cannot be processed until the ES is received. When a developer submits an

ES in support of a planning application, the Council will publish a notice of its receipt in a local newspaper and indicate where it may be purchased and the address of the Council Office where it may be inspected. The Council will also allow 4 weeks from the date the notice is first published for representation to be made.

#### Neighbour Notification

**3.12 The 2011 Act** states that any affected occupier of land neighbouring the land to which the application relates shall be notified by serving a notice on them. Under the Council's Neighbour Notification Scheme, the Council will ensure that planning applications are brought to the individual attention of the occupiers of buildings on neighbouring land which are within 90m of the boundary of the application site. Neighbouring land is defined as 'land which directly adjoins the application site or which would adjoin it but for an entry or road less than 20m in width'.

**3.13** The Case Officer when carrying out a site inspection will also check the accuracy of the neighbour notification details supplied on the application form and may add details as considered appropriate.

**3.14** The period for responding following receipt of a neighbour notification letter is 14 days, though any late representations received before a decision is made will still be considered.

#### **Obtaining further information and getting involved in planning applications**

**3.15** Planning applications including supporting documents and corresponding plans can be viewed online as well at the council offices during normal office hours. Planning Officers are available to give advice on current or proposed applications (you are advised to make an appointment if you wish to speak to a particular officer).

#### Public Register

**3.16** The Council will make the application, plans and any associated environmental statement available on a public register in accordance with **Section 242 of the Planning Act**. Each register will contain the following

information:

- a copy( which may be photographic) of each application together with copies of plans and drawings submitted in relation thereto;
- the decision notice, if any, in respect of the application, including details of any conditions subject to which permission or consent was granted;
- the reference number, the date and effect of any decision of the PAC in respect of the application; and
- brief details of any revocation or modification relating to any permission or consent, including date of issue.

#### File Inspection

**3.17** The Council will make the application file available for inspection, by appointment. The amount of information on the file, will of course, be dependent on the stages the application has completed.

#### Submitting Comments

**3.18** Individuals, groups and organisations can comment on a planning application even if they have not been neighbour notified by the Council. All comments will be carefully considered. Care should be taken when making comments to the council to ensure that no personal data is included.

**3.19** When a decision is made on a planning application only certain issues are taken into account, these are often referred to as 'material planning considerations'. Material considerations must be genuine planning considerations. The basic question is not whether owners and occupiers of neighbouring properties would experience financial or other loss from a particular development, but whether the proposal would unacceptably affect amenities and the existing use of land and buildings that ought to be protected in the public interest.

**3.20** Generally greater weight is attached to issues which are supported by evidence rather than solely by assertion. If an identified problem can be dealt with by means of a suitable condition the Council is required to consider this

as an alternative to refusing an application.

**3.21** You can make comments in a variety of ways, these are as follows- Online at: .....

By email ..... (Please quote the application number)

By post to: .....

**3.22** All written comments on an application will be acknowledged within five working days, however the Council may be unable to respond to each comment made due to the large number it receives. All comments will be summarised and fully considered within the Planning Officer's report. The acknowledgement letter will set out who is dealing with the application and who to contact if there are any questions. The Council will not normally contact the respondent again until after a decision is made unless the application is to be determined by the Planning Committee, is significantly altered or is withdrawn.

**3.23** The Council may, if it considers it appropriate to do so, stage public exhibitions, issue press releases or arrange public meetings to provide information about major developments or proposals which are particularly significant or have wide-spread effects on communities.

**3.24** You may also wish to contact your local councillor, who has the ability to request that the application is determined by the relevant planning committee. Oral, anonymous or defamatory comments cannot be taken into account. You should ensure that your comments relate to relevant planning matters.

**3.25** The Council will consult with a range of Statutory Consultees (see annex 1) to assist in the determination of an application. If a representation raises issues that are relevant to the responsibilities of the consultee (e.g.road safety) the representative will be copied to the appropriate consultee for consideration and comment. The council will carefully take any comments made into account before a decision is made. All comments are scanned and added to the web site once email addresses and hand written signatures have been removed (it should be noted that typed names and addresses remain visible).

- 3.26** The council may negotiate changes to applications where these are expedient. Re-consultation (for 14 days) will take place on minor changes if the council considers that they raise new issues that could lead to further comment. If any change is considered to be substantive, the council may decline to treat it as an amendment and a new application may be invited.

### **Community Involvement at the Planning Committee Stage**

- 3.27** Planning applications are usually determined by officers using delegated powers. The circumstances under which an application can, or cannot, be determined using delegated powers are set out in the Council's Scheme of Delegation, which is subject to regular review.

#### Pre-determination hearings and speaking at the Planning Committee

- 3.28** For those major applications that have been notified to the Department but have been returned to the Council for determination the Council will afford the applicant the opportunity of appearing before and being heard by the Council.
- 3.29** If an application goes before a planning committee, the council will also offer people who have made representations the opportunity to speak and make direct representation to elected members. Requests to speak must be made in writing, which includes emails, and must be received by 2pm on the day of the committee meeting.

### **Community Involvement after a Planning Application has been determined (Post Application Stage)**

- 3.30** A notification of decision letter is sent to the applicant/agent and all people who have responded to the consultation on the planning application, informing them of the decision and the reason for that decision. The decision is recorded on the council's website and in the statutory Planning Register.

If it is a case that has been considered by the Planning Committee, it can be found either by contacting the Development Management team the day after the Committee meeting, or by viewing the minutes of the meeting which will be published on the Council website within three to five working days.

## **Involving the Community When an Appeal is Made Against a Planning Refusal/Granted Conditions/Enforcement Notice**

- 3.31** Only applicants and those upon whom notices have been served have the right of appeal. There are no third party rights of appeal. Where an applicant is unhappy with the Council's decision on an application or a condition attached to a permission, he/she may appeal to the PAC. An applicant may also appeal to the PAC where the Council has not determined an application within the relevant period prescribed by the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (NI) 2015, where such an appeal is lodged, the application is deemed to have been refused. Appeals must be lodged with the PAC within four months from the date of notification of the Council's decision, or expiry of the prescribed period as the case may be.
- 3.32** All those people who responded on the original planning application that is the subject of appeal will be advised that an appeal has been received, and provided with an opportunity to make their views known. Copies of letters already submitted will be forwarded to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC). For hearings and public inquiries, the interested parties have the opportunity to make their views known verbally to the PAC.

## **Community Involvement in Planning Enforcement**

- 3.33** The council encourages the community to report cases where they believe there has been a breach of planning control. A breach of planning control occurs when development or other certain activities take place without the necessary planning permission or consent from the Council or the Department. This may also include failure to carry out development in accordance with the approved plans or conditions.
- 3.34** All planning enforcement related complaints are treated confidentially. If the complaint results in a planning application being submitted, then this will be publicised in the normal manner and adjoining neighbours and complainants notified. Complainants are given leaflets explaining enforcement notices.
- 3.35** In cases where planning enforcement action is taken, complainants are informed of the action. In cases where enforcement action is not taken, a full

explanation providing the council's reasons will be sent to the complainants. Many initial complaints relate to non-enforcement issues in the district, such as householder permitted development type extensions or alterations to a dwelling house. In such cases, the council will provide the complainant with the guidelines for 'permitted development' which do not require planning permission.

- 3.36** The Council's priorities for enforcement action are contained within the Council's Enforcement Strategy. The Enforcement Strategy is subject to regular review and a public consultation exercise will form part of this review process.

### **Community Involvement in Supplementary Planning Guidance**

- 3.37** The Council will also prepare non-statutory planning guidance to support its development plan. Supplementary planning guidance includes for example design guides and advice notes. These will be published for public consultation and comment prior to the publication of the final draft, there will however be no opportunity for formal objection to this type of document. Comments received will be published on the Council web site.

### **Community Involvement in Conservation Area Designation**

- 3.38** A Conservation Area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance. The Council considers that consultation with, and the involvement of local people is important when undertaking work associated with Conservation Areas. This will help encourage greater ownership of the concept and greater co-operation and commitment to achieving the aims of the designation. The Council will involve the community in the designation, variation or cancellation of a Conservation Area. This will entail formal consultation with the Historic Buildings Council and Department for Communities, advertising by way of a public notice in the local press and public meetings to discuss and present proposals. Upon formal designation the Council will publish a public notice in the local press and hold a public launch and exhibition.

## **Community Involvement in the Designation of a Simplified Planning Zone**

- 3.39** Where the Council proposes to commence work on a simplified planning zone it will undertake consultations with the neighbouring district council, the land owner and occupier, the Department for Communities and will notify the Department for Infrastructure.
- 3.40** Once details of a scheme have been prepared the Council will make copies available for inspection at the Council's office, give notice by way of an advertisement in the local press and on the Council's website, and will serve a notice on those it has consulted with.
- 3.41** Following advertising of the proposed planning zone(s) details there will be an eight week period when representations can be made to the Council. If the Council subsequently decides not to proceed with the proposed planning zone it will publish a further advertisement to that effect and will notify all those have made representations.
- 3.42** The Council may cause an independent examination to be held to consider the representations received. Where it is proposed to hold an independent examination detail including the time and place of the examination will be published in the local press. Where it is decided not to hold an independent examination the Council will notify all those who have made representations.
- 3.43** Following the independent examination the Council will produce a report and statement detailing its decision and outlining reasons for its decision. Notice of publication will be advertised in the local press and the report and statement will be available for public inspection in the Council offices.

## **Appendix 1 - Consultees**

Where a Council undertakes consultations on a planning application the consultee will be required to respond within 21 days, or any other date as agreed in writing, after which time the Council may determine the application whether or not a response has been received. In the case of those developments which are subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) the Council will not make a determination until 28 days have passed.

The Council will undertake consultations with a number of key bodies-

**Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs – NI Environment Agency** in respect of proposals that may impact on natural habitats and built heritage, entail the redevelopment of contaminated land, developments which require storage and processing of controlled waste materials and/or proposals resulting in discharges to the natural environment.

### **Department for Infrastructure:-**

**DfI Roads** in respect of proposals which impact on road and rail infrastructure.

**DfI Rivers** where it is considered that there is potential for flooding or increased surface water run-off and/or impact on existing watercourses or flood defences.

**NI Water** in respect of proposals impacting on water and sewerage infrastructure.

**Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment** on all major energy infrastructure projects.

It should be noted that the above is not intended to be a definitive list of consultees nor cover all circumstances under which a consultation with a statutory consultee may be carried out. Due to wide range of development proposals submitted to the Council each application will be carefully considered and consultations will be undertaken in line with statutory requirements. The need for consultations will vary between applications depending on the on the nature and scale of the proposal. Further information

on the consultation process is contained within the Department's Development Management Practice Note 18 (The Consultation Process and duty to respond).

## DPPN 2 Review – Schedule of Changes

| Page Number | Paragraph Number | Summary of change                                                         |
|-------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cover page  | N/A              | Revised date and version number                                           |
| Page 2      | 2.1              | Revised para 2.1                                                          |
| Page 5      | 3.9              | Reworded paragraph                                                        |
| Page 7      | 5.0              | Reworded heading                                                          |
| N/A         | Section 5        | Removal of “Requirements for the Preparation of the SCI” graphic          |
| Page 7      | 5.1              | Reworded paragraph highlighting that all councils now have an SCI.        |
| Page 12     | 5.22             | New paragraph highlighting Regulation 6 requirements.                     |
| Page 13     | 5.23             | Amended numbering                                                         |
| Page 13     | 5.24             | New paragraph highlighting review of SCI in accordance with regulation 8. |
| Page 13     | 5.25             | New paragraph to reference DfI SCI.                                       |
| Page 27     | 3.1              | Inclusion of HSC and advertising consent                                  |
| Page 33     | N/A              | Revisions to post 2015 reorganisation of central government departments.  |
| N/A         | N/A              | Update to footnotes                                                       |

**Department for Infrastructure**

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# Development Plan

## Practice Note

03

### Timetable

Revised November 2025

Version 2



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

Department für

Infrastruktur

## Preamble

This Development Plan Practice Note (DPPN) is designed to guide planning officers, and others engaged in the planning system, through the key requirements for the preparation and submission of a Timetable to the Department<sup>1</sup> for agreement. It deals primarily with procedures as well as good practice. It forms part of a series of practice notes stemming from the **Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011** (the 2011 Act) and any related subordinate legislation. The emphasis is very much on advice but where explicit legislative requirements must be followed these will be made clear. In this practice note, any references to sections are references to sections of the 2011 Act and any references to regulations are references to regulations of the **Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015** (the LDP Regulations), unless otherwise stated.

Where appropriate, this practice note will therefore highlight:

- Relevant legislation;
- Procedural guidance;
- Definitions;
- Best practice examples/relevant case law.

This guidance is not intended to replace the need for judgement by planning officers in the plan making process. Nor is it intended to be a source of definitive legal advice. Reference should be made to the actual legislation referred to in this document and if any discrepancy or conflict exists between the Practice Note<sup>2</sup> and legislation, the provisions of the legislation will prevail.

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<sup>1</sup> Department means the Department for Infrastructure unless otherwise stated. The Department for Infrastructure came into being on 8 May 2016 and the Department of the Environment was dissolved in accordance with the Departments Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and The Departments (2016 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Please ensure you are considering the most up to date version of Development Plan Practice Note 03 on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk) and the Planning Portal at [www.planningni.gov.uk](http://www.planningni.gov.uk) and the most up to date planning legislation on the UK legislation website at [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk), which is also available via the Department's website.

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The timetable is a public statement of a council's programme for the production of its local development plan (LDP). The timetable will help ensure that the plan process is efficiently managed and that the key stakeholders such as the consultation bodies and the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) are kept informed and can manage their own resources to facilitate their involvement in the LDP process.

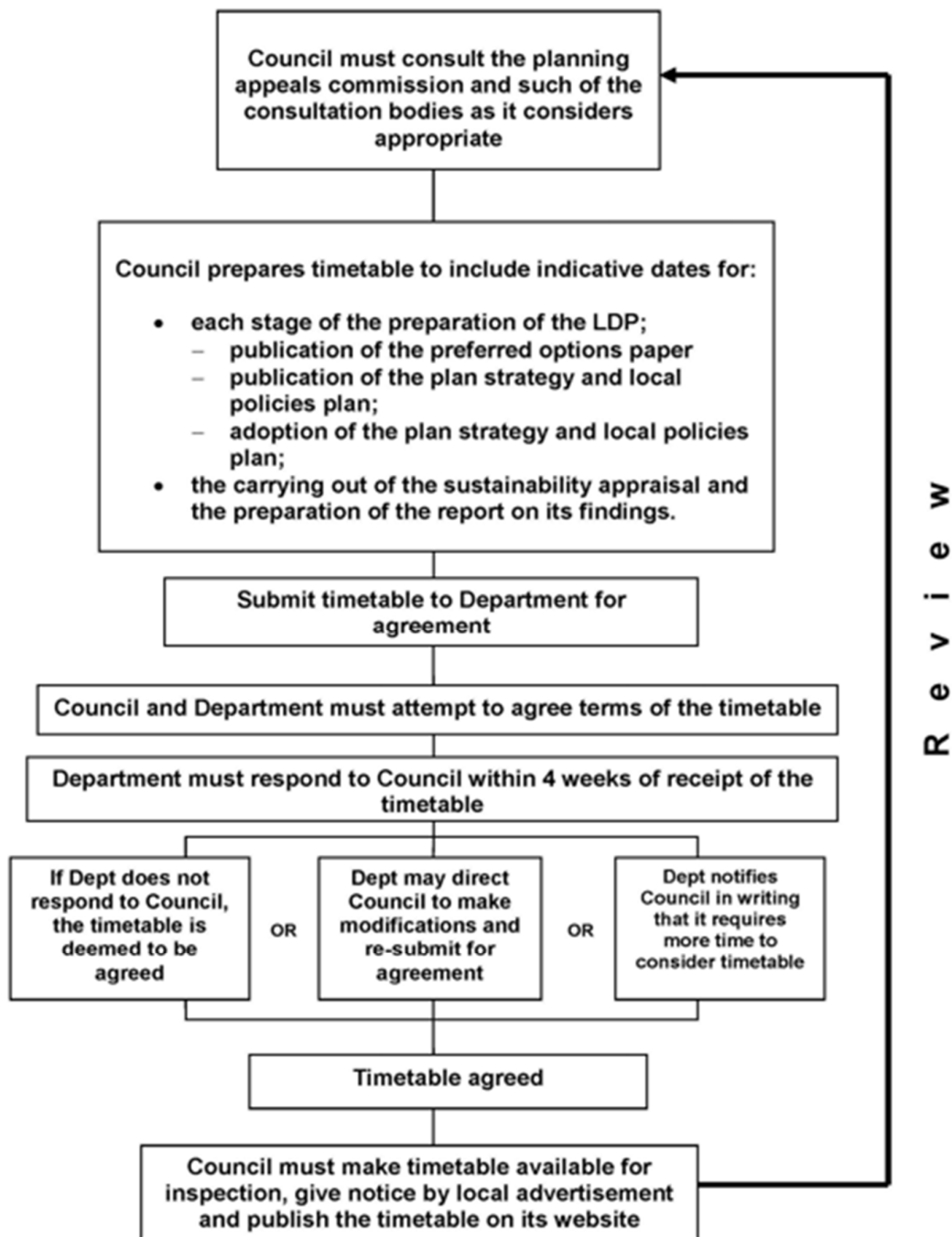
## **2.0 Legislative Context**

- 2.1 **Section 7** of the **2011 Act** requires a council to prepare, and keep under review, a timetable for the preparation and adoption of the LDP. Sections 8(4)(a) and 9(4)(a) require both the Plan Strategy (PS) and Local Policies Plan (LPP) to be prepared in accordance with the timetable.
- 2.2 **Regulations 5 to 8 of the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015** (LDP Regulations) sets out the requirements for the preparation, form and content, agreement and availability of the timetable.

## **3.0 Requirements for Preparation of the Timetable**

- 3.1 In relation to a council's LDP functions, it is a statutory requirement that the LDP must be prepared in accordance with the timetable. Therefore, before a council can consult on its Preferred Options Paper (POP), it must have an agreed/approved timetable in place in order to inform the general public and all stakeholders of the key dates of the LDP process from the initial stages of the POP through to the preparation and adoption of the PS and the subsequent LPP. The process for the preparation and agreement of the timetable is broadly outlined in the Figure 1.

Figure 1: Requirements for preparation of the timetable



3.2 Regulation 5 of the LDP Regulations requires a council to consult the Planning Appeals Commission and such of the consultation bodies as a council considers appropriate.

- 3.3 It is important that consultation bodies are consulted as their input is required to inform the preparation of the LDP. They may also be required to attend the Independent Examination. Furthermore, as the PAC or appointed persons will have to undertake an Independent Examination into each development plan document, a council must also seek agreement on the timing of the Independent Examination early in the preparation process, particularly as the PAC or appointed persons may have to conduct more than one Independent Examination at any given time. Seeking consensus from all parties involved in the key stages of the LDP will allow for effective programme management by allocating sufficient time and resources and prioritising work where necessary in order to avoid unforeseen delays in the preparation process.

#### Content of the Timetable

- 3.4 Regulation 6 of the LDP Regulations requires a council to include indicative dates for:
- a) each stage of the preparation of the LDP including indicative dates for;
    - (i) publication of the POP;
    - (ii) publication of the PS and publication of the LPP;
    - (iii) adoption of the PS and adoption of the LPP; and
  - b) the carrying out of the appraisal under sections 8(6)(a) and 9(7)(a) of the 2011 Act and the preparation of the report on the findings of the appraisal under sections 8(6)(b) and 9(7)(b) of the 2011 Act.
- 3.5 The timetable should set out a council's programme for the production of its LDP. The LDP Regulations provide that the timetable must include indicative dates from the commencement of the LDP process up to its conclusion at the adoption of the LPP. It must set out the timings of the publication and public consultation for the POP and the development plan document as well as accompanying documents such as the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) including Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). A council may also wish to include timings for the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), and Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) reports which will also be published alongside the development plan documents. A council may also wish to include the tasks

that might require the input of others such as statutory consultees in advance of formal consultation on a development plan document. This may include the timings at which a council expects to engage with, or seek the views of stakeholders in policy development, share topic papers, or attempt to agree Statements of Common Ground. This may be particularly important at the LPP stage of plan preparation whereby a council is required to set out its local policies and site-specific proposals, designations and land use zonings required to deliver its vision and strategic objectives which will ultimately require greater involvement from statutory consultees. The inclusion of this information in a LDP Timetable could greatly assist consultees who are required to input on all eleven LPPs. The timetable should also make the public aware of the plan preparation and public consultation programme well in advance of the events.

- 3.6 It is recommended that indicative dates, on a quarterly basis are used as it may be difficult for a council to provide specific dates for the key stages of the plan process from the outset of the preparation of the LDP. Indicative dates also allow for a degree of flexibility to enable a council to effectively manage the LDP preparation process whilst reducing the potential need for the constant review and/or revision to the timetable.
- 3.7 The length of time allocated to a specific stage of the LDP will depend on a number of factors such as the availability of resources (council, statutory consultees, Department, and PAC or other Independent Examiner), the input of statutory consultees, the number of representations received, and the assessment of those representations, the work load of the Planning Appeals Commission and the subsequent changes to the draft PS/draft LPP stemming from the Independent Examination and direction issued by the Department.
- 3.8 Timescales should be realistic to reflect the resources available and the nature and complexity of the task. It may be helpful to undertake a skills audit of staff to identify strengths and weakness which will in turn help to prepare a suitable work or training programme for the preparation of the LDP. In preparing the timetable, a council should also carry out an analysis of the risks associated with the targets of LDP preparation.

3.9 Any revisions to the timetable should state the plan preparation progress to date, what remains to be completed, reasons for slippage of the timetable, and the implications this may have for the subsequent stages of plan preparation.

3.10 Annex 1 provides an example of a timetable for a LDP.

#### Agreement of the Timetable

3.11 Regulation 7 of the LDP Regulations sets out the requirements for the agreement of the timetable.

1. The timetable must be:
  - (a) approved by resolution of the council prior to submission to the Department for its agreement; and
  - (b) submitted to the Department.
2. The Department must respond within four weeks of receipt of the timetable unless it has, before the expiry of that period, notified the council that it requires more time to consider the timetable.
3. If before the end of the period specified in paragraph (2), the Department has failed to respond to the receipt by it of the timetable, it will be deemed to be agreed at the end of that period.
4. Until such time as the Department agrees the timetable, the council must not, in the preparation or revision of the LDP, take any steps under Regulation 10 to advertise its POP.
5. Paragraphs 1 to 3 apply to the revision of a timetable as they apply to its preparation.

3.12 It is important that a council liaises with the Department to agree the timetable to ensure that it is robust and realistic. It is good practice to keep both formal and informal communication channels open and update the Department and relevant stakeholders as and when necessary. This allows

the Department to determine whether it might be necessary to make arrangements to schedule further work or appoint an independent examiner other than the Planning Appeals Commission.

- 3.13 Once the timetable has been agreed by the Department, a council must comply with it when preparing all future documents in the LDP preparation process. In the event that a council cannot reach agreement with the Department, the Department may direct a council to revise its timetable and re-submit it to the Department for approval.
- 3.14 Legislation requires a council to keep the timetable under review to ensure that the preparation of the LDP is proceeding in accordance with the timetable. The Chief Planners Update 6 (1 May 2020) allows a council up to 6 months flexibility to formally revise its existing agreed timetable. It is recommended however, that a council should revise its timetable at the earliest available opportunity. Following any such review of the timetable, adjustments that may be required must be set out clearly and an explanation provided. A council should also consider the need to update its timetable prior to submission to the Department for Independent Examination (Chief Planner Update 7 (16 December 2020)). A council should also consider the need to update its evidence base and notional plan end date to take account of any slippage in its timetable. The revised timetable must be submitted to the Department for agreement. Any review of the timetable must be subject to the same agreement/approval requirements as set out in Regulation 7 above.

#### Availability of the Timetable

- 3.15 Following agreement of the timetable, Regulation 8 requires a council to make the agreed timetable publicly available for inspection at its principal offices and such other places within its district as it considers appropriate. A council must also give notice by local advertisement that the timetable is available for inspection and the place and times at which it can be inspected. A council must also publish the timetable on its website.

## **Annex 1: Example of Timetable for the Local Development Plan**

### **Timetable for XXXXXX Local Development Plan**

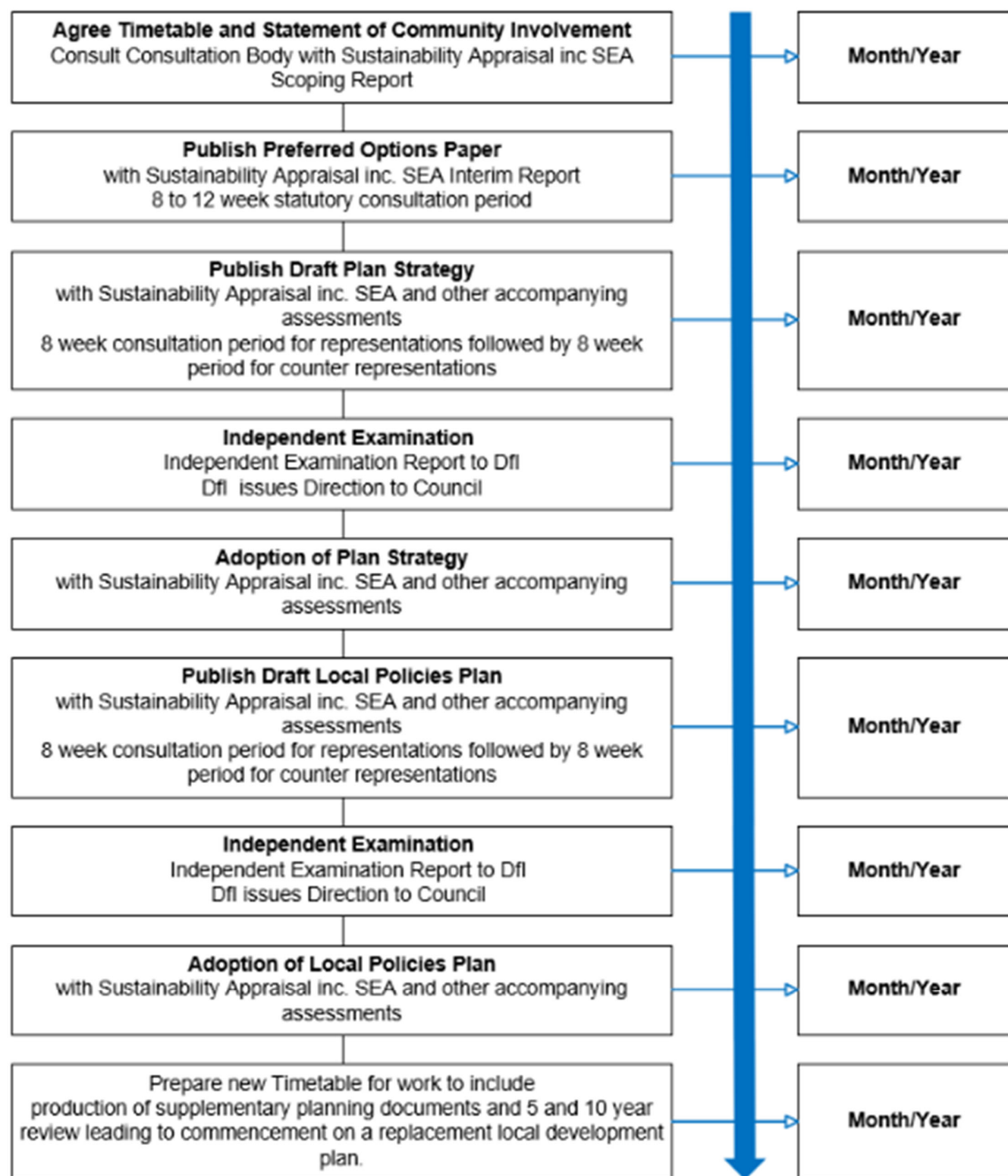
The purpose of the timetable is to set out the key stages in the production of the XXXXXX Local Development Plan and accompanying documents. An explanation is given, as to how the project is to be managed, the resources required, how risks of delay are to be minimised, and monitored arrangements.

The purpose of the XXXXXX Local Development Plan, comprising the Plan Strategy and Local Policies, is to inform the general public, statutory authorities, developers and other interested bodies of the policy framework and land use proposals that will implement the strategic objectives of the Regional Development Strategy and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement and guide development decisions within XXXXXX up to 20XX.

### **Status**

The Local Development Plan will replace the XXXX Area Plan(s). The Plan will be produced in two stages consisting of first a Plan Strategy followed by Local Policies Plan. The Plan Strategy will set the aims, objectives overall growth strategy and associated generic policies applicable to the Plan Area. In contrast the Local Policies Plan will deal with site specific policies and proposals associated with settlement limits, land use zonings and environmental designations.

## LDP Timeline



## **Project Management**

Meeting the timetable is dependent upon Member involvement, adequate resourcing and risk management.

### *Member Involvement*

Progress on the XXXXXX Local Development Plan will be reported to the council on a monthly basis. In addition to the attached timetable there are a number of critical dates for Members involvement:

- The Preferred Options Paper will be presented for Members agreement in (Date) to allow for (Date) publication.
- The findings from the public consultation exercise, the Sustainability Appraisal and Draft Plan Strategy will be presented for Members agreement in (Date) to allow for publication in (Date).
- Member's authorisation will be sought in (Date) to forward the Draft Plan Strategy with any representations to the Department for Infrastructure to request an Independent Examination. Any counter representations will be forwarded eight weeks later.
- Member's authorisation will be sought in (Date) on whether to accept or rebut the representations and submissions made to the Independent Examination by the date set.
- The Direction from Department for Infrastructure will be presented to Members to allow adoption in (Date).
- The Draft Local Policies Plan will be presented to Members in (Date) for authorisation of publication.
- Member's authorisation will be sought in (Date) to forward the Draft Local Policies Plan with any representations to the Department for Infrastructure to request an Independent Examination. Any counter representations will be forwarded eight weeks later.

- Member's authorisation will be sought in (Date) on whether to accept or rebut the representations and submissions made to the Independent Examination by the date set.
- The Direction from the Department for Infrastructure will be presented to Members to allow adoption in (Date).

#### Adequate Resourcing/Expenditure

The staff required to undertake the Local Development Plan is as follows:

XXXXXX

*Include any additional inputs / consultancy.....etc.*

Annual expenditure will be XXXXXX to cover all administrative, equipment and mileage allowances. The cost of publications and advertising as required by legislation is estimated as follows:-

*(for each key milestone in local development plan process)*

#### Risk Management

As already stated, the timetable is challenging and there are a number of risks that could slow down the Plan Programme. In order to manage risk, a Risk Management Log (Table 1) assesses a variety of risks, processes and countermeasures to mitigate delay.

Table 1 Risk Management Log

| Area of Uncertainty / Risk | Effect | Likelihood | Impact | Response/ Countermeasure | After response |        |
|----------------------------|--------|------------|--------|--------------------------|----------------|--------|
|                            |        |            |        |                          | Likelihood     | Impact |
|                            |        |            |        |                          |                |        |
|                            |        |            |        |                          |                |        |
|                            |        |            |        |                          |                |        |

## Key

| Definition |           | Likelihood  | Impact                                                             |
|------------|-----------|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1          | Very Low  | Rare        | No notable impact identifiable                                     |
| 2          | Low       | Unlikely    | Short term delays with no major impacts on stakeholders (months).  |
| 3          | Medium    | Likely      | Significant delays (up to one year) impacting on investment.       |
| 4          | High      | Very likely | Long term delay (excess of a year) impacting on most stakeholders. |
| 5          | Very High | Certain     | Failure to prepare a plan or deliver sustainable development.      |

## Annual Monitoring

It is good practice to monitor progress periodically. Development Plan Practice Note 12 provides useful guidance on annual monitoring and review. An annual monitoring report will be produced by the council to inform Members and the Department for Infrastructure on progress in meeting the timetable and on the land availability for housing and employment. If progress on plan production has slipped, the timetable will need to be revised and agreed with the Department in accordance with the Development Plan Regulations.

## DPPN 3 Review - Schedule of changes

| Page Number | Paragraph Number | Summary of change                             |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Cover page  | N/A              | Revised date and version number               |
| Page 2      | 3.1              | Correction of grammatical error               |
| Page 4      | 3.2              | Correction of grammatical errors              |
| Page 4      | 3.3              | Inclusion of Appointed Persons in addition to |

|         |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         |                               | the Planning Appeals Commission                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Page 4  | 3.5                           | Correction of grammatical errors and explanation of additional tasks that a Council may wish to include in the Local Development Plan Timetable, and the benefit in doing so, particularly at the Local Policies Plan stage of plan making when consultees are required to input on all eleven draft Plan Documents. |
| Page 5  | 3.6                           | Recommendation that a timetable includes indicative dates on a quarterly basis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Page 5  | 3.7                           | Correction of grammatical errors and change of reference from a "binding report" to a "direction".                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Page 6  | 3.11                          | Correction of grammatical errors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Page 6  | 3.12                          | Reposition of paragraph and elaboration of the importance of good communication with the Department and relevant stakeholders and its use in considering the need to schedule further work or appoint Independent Examiners                                                                                          |
| Page 7  | 3.13                          | Reposition of paragraph                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Page 7  | 3.14                          | Elaboration that the Chief Planners Update allows up to six months flexibility to formally revise a timetable and a reminder that a Council should consider the need to update its evidence base and notional plan end date to take account of any timeframe slippage.                                               |
| Page 8  | Annex 1<br>Example Timetable  | Correction of typographical errors and the inclusion of a reference to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement in addition to the Regional Development Strategy                                                                                                                                                      |
| Page 9  | Annex 1<br>Example Timetable  | Replacement of previous table with a clearer version                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Page 9  | Annex 1<br>Example Timetable  | Replacement of Habitats Regulations Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment etc with other accompanying assessments                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Page 9  | Annex 1<br>Example Timetable  | Replacement of Advisory Report with Independent Examination Report and updated references to the Department for Infrastructure                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Page 9  | Annex 1<br>Example Timetable  | Replace reference to "binding report" with "direction"                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Page 10 | Annex 1<br>Project Management | Replacement of Department of Environment with Department for Infrastructure, updated references to draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan, replacement of the phrase "binding report" with "direction" and correction of typographical errors                                                             |

|         |                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Page 12 | Annex 1<br>Annual Monitoring | Additional text on plan monitoring and review and reference to the appropriate Development Plan Practice Note, replacement of Department Of Environment with Department for Infrastructure and correction of typographical errors. |
| N/A     | N/A                          | Updates to footnotes                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

**Department for Infrastructure**

James House

2 - 4 Cromac Avenue

Belfast

BT7 2JA

# Development Plan

## Practice Note

05

### Preferred Options Paper (POP)

Revised November 2025

Version 3



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

Department für

Infrastruktur

## Preamble

This Development Plan Practice Note (DPPN) is designed to guide planning officers, and others engaged in the planning system, through the key requirements for the preparation of the Preferred Options Paper. It deals primarily with procedures as well as good practice. It forms part of a series of practice notes published by the Department<sup>1</sup> stemming from **the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011** (the 2011 Act) and any related subordinate legislation. The emphasis is very much on advice but where explicit legislative requirements must be followed these will be made clear. In this practice note, any references to sections are references to sections of the 2011 Act and any references to regulations are references to regulations of **the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015** (the LDP Regulations), unless otherwise stated.

Where appropriate, this practice note will therefore highlight:

- Relevant legislation;
- Procedural guidance;
- Definitions;
- Best practice examples/relevant case law.

This guidance is not intended to replace the need for judgement by planning officers in the plan making process. Nor is it intended to be a source of definitive legal advice. Reference should be made to the actual legislation referred to in this document and if any discrepancy or conflict exists between the Practice Note<sup>2</sup> and legislation, the provisions of the legislation will prevail.

<sup>1</sup> Department means the Department for Infrastructure unless otherwise stated. The Department for Infrastructure came into being on 8 May 2016 and the Department of the Environment was dissolved in accordance with the Departments Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and The Departments (2016 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Please ensure you are considering the most up to date version of Development Plan Practice Note 05 on the Department's website at [www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk) and the Planning Portal at [www.planningni.gov.uk](http://www.planningni.gov.uk) and the most up to date planning legislation on the UK legislation website at [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk), which is also available via the Department's website.

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Preferred Options Paper (POP) provides the basis for consulting with the public and stakeholders on a series of options for dealing with key issues in the plan area. It aims to stimulate public comment and help interested parties to become involved in a more meaningful way at this earliest stage of plan preparation. Public and stakeholder participation as part of the preparation of the preferred options paper is regarded as crucial, particularly in identifying relevant local issues which need to be considered from the outset of plan preparation. Effective community and stakeholder engagement also strengthens the evidence base for plans and strategies which in turn, is used to inform the preparation and help justify the 'soundness' of the local development plan.
- 1.2 While the POP stage of local development plan preparation has passed for all councils and will not be repeated in the current cycle of development plans, this DPPN has been updated as part of a wider review of DPPNs and reflects changes made to NICS Departments and legislation since powers were transferred to councils upon the creation of the two-tier planning system.

## 2.0 Legislative context

- 2.1 **Part 2 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the 2011 Act)** sets out the requirements for local development plans. **Section 3 of the 2011 Act** Survey of District requires a council to keep under review the matters which may be expected to affect the development of its district or the planning of that development. Those matters include the principal physical, economic, social and environmental characteristics as well as population, communications, transport and traffic. A council may also consider any other matters if they so wish or if the Department directs them to do so e.g. climate change. Furthermore, a council may also consider any changes which are likely to occur and the effect such changes will have on the development of its district.

2.2 **Part 3 of the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (the LDP Regulations)**, sets out the requirements for the preparation of the POP. **Regulation 9** requires a council to engage with the consultation bodies for the purpose of generating alternative strategies and options and to take account of any comments received in the preparation of the POP. **Regulation 10 and 11** set out the requirements in relation to availability and public consultation on the POP, respectively.

### 3.0 The purpose of the POP

3.1 A council must prepare a POP to inform interested parties and individuals on the matters that may have a direct effect on the plan area and to set out possible options for development as well as a council's preferred option. The purpose of the POP is to set out:

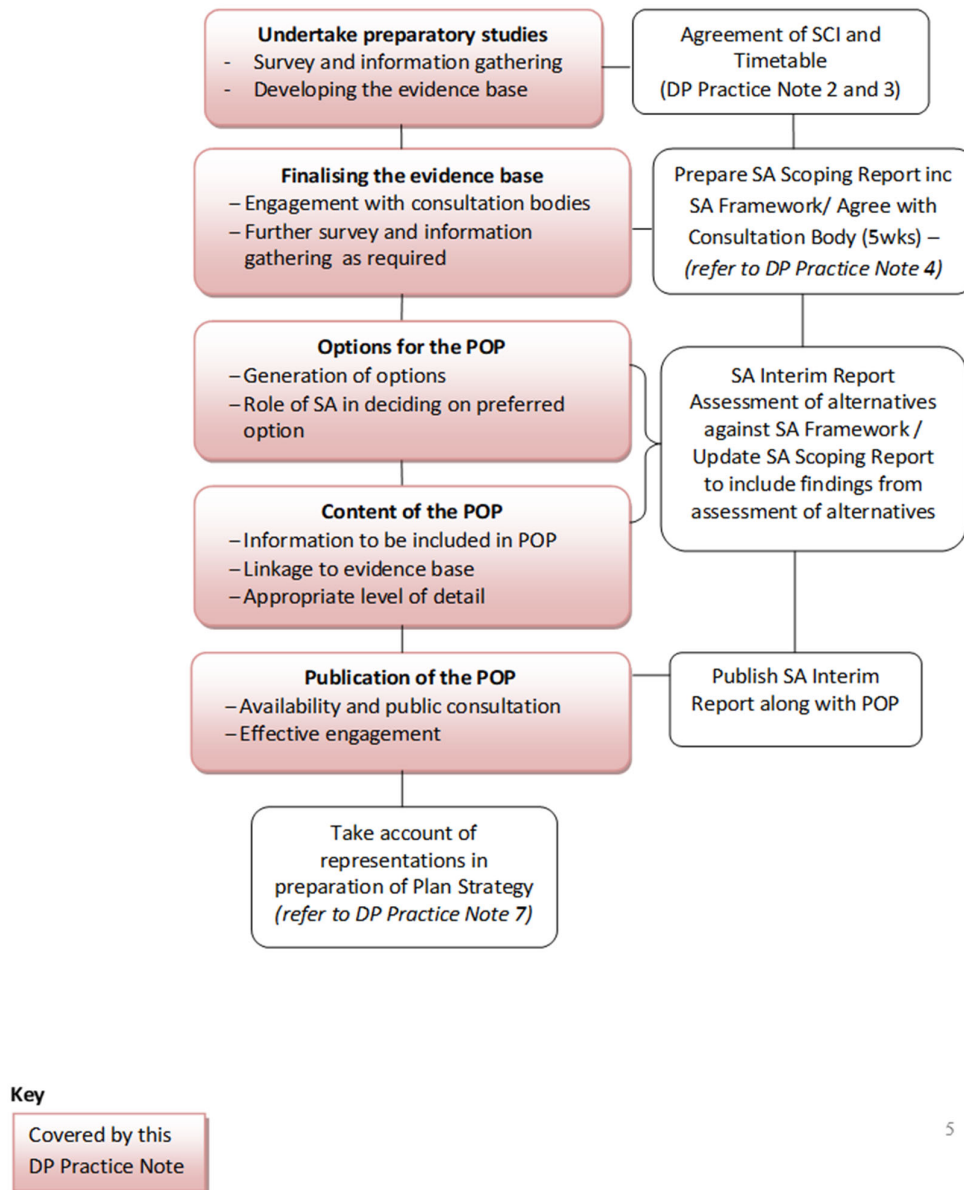
- a series of options for dealing with key issues in the plan area;
- evidence to appraise the different issues and options; and
- a council's preferred options and its justification.

### 4.0 Key stages in the preparation of the POP

4.1 The key stages in the preparation of the POP are broadly set out in Figure 1. A council should publish its POP in accordance with the agreed Timetable and Statement of Community Involvement. **Regulation 6 (2)** of the LDP Regulations requires a Timetable to include an indicative date for the publication of the preferred options paper.

4.2 Although a Timetable and SCI must be agreed with the Department prior to the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan, a council should undertake the majority of preparatory work for its POP in advance or in parallel with the Timetable and SCI approval process in order to maximise time savings and expedite the publication of the POP. A council should publish its POP approximately 4 months following the agreement of its Timetable and SCI.

**Figure1: Key Stages in the preparation of the Preferred Options Paper**



5

## 5.0 Undertaking preparatory studies

5.1 Undertaking preparatory studies early in the process should enable a council to establish the main social, economic and environmental characteristics, key

issues and needs of the plan area prior to the agreement of the Timetable. This will also enable a council to be in a position to focus on generating options and drafting the POP as soon as the Timetable has been agreed.

#### Survey and information gathering

- 5.2 There are various sources of information depending upon the nature and detail of the evidence required. These include existing council data, other strategies and research work, use of consultants/working with external stakeholders, joint working with adjoining council(s), information from relevant Departments, a council's Community Plan and any other local knowledge through community and stakeholder engagement.
- 5.3 Whilst surveying and information gathering will be an ongoing function of a council, it will be particularly important at the early stage of plan preparation. Information obtained at this stage will be used to establish the baseline of the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the plan area and enable a council to determine the issues which need to be addressed by the LDP. In doing so, this will help to inform and develop a council's vision for the plan area which will steer the general direction for the aims and objectives for the LDP.
- 5.4 It is recommended that survey and information gathering should therefore be carried out for a range of topic areas which will enable it to formulate policies and proposals whilst taking account of the 'Regional Development Strategy 2035' (RDS) and also any policy issued by the Department such as 'A Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland' (SPPS). These include:
- **Population** - gathering demographic information e.g. Census etc
  - **Settlements** – information on the character, development potential, areas of protection etc;
  - **Housing and urban capacity** - identifying areas of land with potential for development;
  - **Archaeology, built and natural heritage** – gathering information on designations and identifying areas of protection;

- **Economic development, industry and commerce** – identifying areas of land with economic potential;
- **Town centres and retailing** – to determine the vitality, viability of towns and settlements;
- **Open space and recreation** – information on existing open space and recreation requirements for plan area;
- **Countryside/rural area** – information on landscape; environmental designations, areas of development pressure etc;
- **Coast** – where relevant, gathering information to facilitate appropriate development and/or to determine areas of protection;
- **Tourism** – identifying tourism demand and growth areas whilst safeguarding tourism assets;
- **Renewable energy** – gathering information on renewable energy development / areas of protection;
- **Transportation** – gathering information on issues, requirements and proposals for future transport development;
- **Waste Management** – information on the need for future waste management facilities;
- **Telecommunications, public services and public utilities** – information to identify needs of the community and plan area;
- **Development constraints** – e.g. identification of areas of flood risk, hazards, minerals constraint etc. where relevant.

5.5 The list above is not exhaustive. A council may also need to address particular issues relevant to their local area and this should be reflected in the information gathered for the preparation of the POP and LDP. A council must exercise judgement as to the appropriate individual sites that may require such information at this early stage in the plan process. Evidence should be proportionate and inform what is in the plan, rather than being collected retrospectively in an attempt to justify the content of the LDP. A council should have an idea of what it is needed for, how it is going to be used and how much detail is needed.

- 5.6 The nature of the evidence will vary according to the document being prepared, the nature of the area and the type of issues that need to be addressed. Information gathered by surveys, research and from the consultation bodies is likely to be required on a settlement by settlement basis. However, information on very large individual sites that may require master planning should also be gathered at this stage. Some evidence will be pivotal in developing and testing options at the early POP stage, other types of evidence may be more detailed e.g. information on smaller individual sites that will be required to make adjustments to settlement boundaries.

#### Developing the evidence base

- 5.7 Effective survey and information gathering will be vital to the plan preparation process as it will be used to establish the context and provide a reliable and comprehensive evidence base for the preparation of the POP and DPDs as well as undertaking the sustainability appraisal (SA).
- 5.8 A council should develop its evidence base with a view to fulfilling the requirements of SA and strategic environmental assessment (SEA). In particular, survey and information gathering will inform the social, economic and environmental baseline as well as highlight any problems and issues which the LDP may need to address. SA should aim to show how policies and proposals in the development plan document help to achieve the social, economic and environmental objectives for the plan area. Section 7 provides further detail on the stages of SA which should be carried out in parallel with the preparation of the POP.
- 5.9 The evidence base should therefore provide the justification through research/fact finding and community participation to support the choices made not only in the POP, but also the subsequent policies and proposals contained in the draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan. The preparation of the evidence base should therefore be regarded as a process with information being reviewed and kept up date to ensure that it remains reliable and relevant, particularly as policies and proposals evolve through the subsequent stages of the plan preparation process.

## **6.0 Finalising the evidence base**

- 6.1 Following the agreement of the Timetable and SCI, a council should have completed the majority of the plan preparatory work on a range of topic areas. Once a council has established its baseline position, it should engage with consultation bodies and undertake further survey and information gathering as required in order to finalise the evidence base which in turn, will be used to generate options for the POP.

### Engagement with consultation bodies

- 6.2 Regulation 9 of Local Development Plan Regulations requires a council to engage with the consultation bodies for the purpose of generating alternative strategies and options. In preparing the POP, a council must also take account of any representations received from the consultation bodies.
- 6.3 Regulation 2 lists the consultation bodies which are;
- Northern Ireland government departments;
  - Adjoining council(s);
  - Water/sewerage undertaker;
  - Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
  - Civil Aviation Authority;
  - Any person to whom the electronic communication code applies by virtue of a direction given under Section 106(3) of the Communication Act 2003(c);
  - Any person to whom a licence has been granted under 10(1) of the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992(a);
  - Any person to whom a licence has been granted under Article 8 of the Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996(b);
- 6.4 Whilst the majority of consultees will fall within the above list, a council may also consult other bodies depending upon the nature of the information required and the issues that need to be addressed by the LDP. A council should therefore exercise judgement in relation to whether they wish to

engage additional consultees in the preparation of the POP and LDP.  
Information on how and when a council proposes to engage the community and stakeholders in exercising its planning functions must be set out in its SCI.

- 6.5 Once a council has identified the consultation bodies, it should initiate the consultation process by writing to each of them to request strategic information and to highlight any relevant issues which should be considered at this stage of plan preparation. This information could be gathered through written correspondence or meetings, whatever method is deemed appropriate. A council should request consultees to respond in line with the agreed Timetable and relevant service agreement (where applicable) to enable efficient progress in the preparation of the POP and LDP.
- 6.6 As the preparation of the POP involves formulating options for growth and deciding on a preferred option, it is not necessary at this stage to request or gather detailed information on smaller individual sites. The receipt of more detailed information from consultees as well as research and survey information can be carried out in stages in line with the level of detail required for each plan document being prepared.

#### Further survey and information gathering

- 6.7 As surveying and information gathering will be an ongoing process, a council should regularly review its findings to ensure that the evidence remains reliable and up to date. In particular, a council may wish to review its findings and/or undertake further research in light of any responses received following engagement with statutory consultees and/or any additional consultation body.

## **7.0 Options for the POP**

### Generation of Options

- 7.1 The preparation of the evidence base should enable a council to develop a strong understanding of the social, economic and environmental characteristics as well as any specific issues and challenges facing the plan

area. By analysing this information, a council should be able to develop a distinctive vision and identify the main issues which need to be addressed by the plan.

- 7.2 Options at the POP stage should concentrate on key plan issues which are capable of implementation and represent a range of different approaches within the realm of the plan. Options should set out the approach that could be taken on a range of issues such as urban and rural housing, industry and business, retailing and related activities, health education and community facilities, public utilities, transportation, recreation leisure and tourism, conservation, minerals and the countryside.
- 7.3 As the POP will influence the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan, the options and alternatives contained in the POP, should focus on how the draft Plan Strategy or draft Local Policies Plan will implement the strategic vision and objectives whilst taking account of the regional planning framework provided by the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035, prevailing planning policy and any other policy and advice issued by the Department. A council must also consider other information such as the Community Plan and any other local strategies in order to ensure that the subsequent LDP is locally distinctive and as comprehensive as possible to facilitate an integrated and co-ordinated approach to the planning and development of the area.
- 7.4 The options considered should be realistic and deliverable. Therefore, in some cases there may only be one reasonable option available. Under these circumstances, the alternative would be to consider the scenario without the implementation of the plan i.e. 'do nothing' option. If a council considers that there are no alternative options available, then this should be explained and justified.

#### Role of Sustainability Appraisal in deciding the preferred option

- 7.5 The purpose of SA is to promote sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of the LDP. SA must incorporate the requirements of the

European Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of effects of certain plan and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive). **The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004, (EAPP (NI) Regulations)** set out more detailed requirements for the process and content of the environmental assessment of plan and programmes.

- 7.6 Sustainability appraisal (SA) should be a continual process running in parallel with the preparation of the POP and LDP, starting from the options and alternatives being considered at the POP stage, all the way through to the policies and more detailed proposals being considered in the draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan. At the POP stage, the information and evidence base prepared for the generation of options and alternatives will also fulfil part of the requirements of EAPP (NI) Regulations.
- 7.7 Information gathered for the POP will help to set the context and framework for the sustainability appraisal and provide the basis for the preparation of a scoping report. Although a formal scoping report is not mandatory, it is considered good practice to set out the evidence base and framework of sustainability objectives against which the social, economic and environmental effects of implementing the local development plan can be appraised.
- 7.8 The scoping phase of SA should commence and run concurrently with the preparation of the preferred options paper. It should include:
- a review of other policies, plans, programmes, and objectives relevant to the plan with information on synergies or inconsistencies;
  - baseline and other information, either already collected or still needed with notes on sources and any problems encountered;
  - social, environmental and economic problems/issues identified as a result of work undertaken;

- the SA framework, including the suggested SA objectives and indicators (and targets where these are proposed), and how they were chosen; and
- consulting on the scoping report in accordance with EAPP (NI) Regulation 11 and setting out the proposals for the structure and level of detail of the subsequent SA report on the
- draft plan.

7.9 Once the SA Scoping Report has been agreed with the Consultation Body as required by EAPP (NI) Regulation 11, it can be used to inform the decision making process by appraising options and alternatives in order to assist a council in deciding upon its preferred option in light of the alternatives considered and the sustainability objectives of the draft Plan Strategy or draft Local Policies Plan.

7.10 The SA process<sup>3</sup> should help a council to decide on its preferred option, by highlighting the sustainability implications of each option and by putting forward recommendations for improvement. The appraisal needs to compare all reasonable alternatives including the preferred option and assess these against the baseline environmental, economic and social characteristics of the area and also the likely situation without the implementation of the plan.

7.11 In preparing the SA Interim Report (consisting of SA Scoping Report and assessment of alternatives), a council should focus upon the performance of different options against the objectives of the sustainability framework as agreed with the Consultation Body. The assessment of alternatives should articulate how a council has arrived at its preferred option and if possible, include technical evidence to make the decision making process more transparent and justify any comments provided. In doing so, a council should use the results of the SA to help provide a sound evidence base to justify their preferred option in light of the alternatives considered.

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<sup>3</sup> Development Plan Practice Note 4 Sustainability Appraisal incorporating SEA

- 7.12 The SA Interim Report should be published along with the POP for consultation. This will help stakeholders and the public to compare the sustainability implications of the options and a council's preferred option and contribute to a more meaningful and informed public consultation process.

## **8.0 Content of the POP**

- 8.1 The POP should set out a council's vision and overall objectives, a series of options for dealing with key issues in the plan area and a council's preferred options. The options considered should be set within the regional and prevailing planning policy as well as other relevant regional and local plans and strategies e.g. Community Plan.
- 8.2 The POP should also provide a description of the plan area's needs, issues, natural resources and constraints as well as a description of the characteristics of each settlement in order to identify strengths, opportunities, constraints and existing development potential. Options should set out the approach that could be taken on a range of issues such as urban and rural housing, industry and business, retailing and related activities, health education and community facilities, public utilities, transportation, recreation leisure and tourism, conservation, minerals and the countryside.
- 8.3 The preferred options should be outlined and the justification of those options should be indicated. It is recommended that the POP should contain the following:
- Regional and local context;
  - A council's vision and objectives for the plan area;
  - Linkages to regional and planning policy and any other relevant matters such as the Community Plan;
  - Options including a council's preferred options consisting of broad proposals for plan issues such the settlement hierarchy, housing in settlements, natural and built heritage, economic development, industry

and commerce, town centres and retailing, open space and recreation, development in the countryside, tourism, transportation, renewable energy, waste management, telecommunications, public Services and public utilities and any other issues as considered relevant e.g. minerals and coastal development.

- Justification and use of evidence base for options considered as well as for a council's preferred option;
- Maps to show the plan context, settlements, countryside, protected areas/environmental designations, key infrastructure and transport networks etc.
- Maps and diagrams to illustrate the options and preferred option for growth e.g. settlement hierarchy, linkages to neighbouring district council(s) and any other information as considered relevant.

8.4 A council should also consider highlighting strategic issues or including topic questions to instigate and encourage focussed discussion and engagement to provide constructive comments on the options and preferred options during the consultation process. The POP may also contain the following information:

- Details of specific consultation arrangements;
- Information on how to respond;
- Response form for the submission of representations to the POP;
- Reference to the Timetable and Statement of Community Involvement.

#### Linkage to evidence base

- 8.5 As the evidence base will be used to test the 'soundness' of the development plan document, it is important to provide transparency in the process by linking the evidence used to justify the preferred option over the other alternatives considered in the POP and the subsequent policies and proposals contained in the draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan.
- 8.6 A council should also refer to the performance of different options in the assessment of alternatives in the SA and highlight relevant baseline information and evidence in order to facilitate meaningful public and stakeholder feedback. If a council can demonstrate that its preferred options are the most appropriate having gone through an objective appraisal process, it will pay dividends in terms of helping to provide the justification to defend the Draft Plan Strategy and Draft Local Policies Plan at Independent Examination. It will also provide a benchmark for seeking changes to the plan, as potential objectors will be required to challenge the soundness and sustainability of the Draft Plan Strategy or Draft Local Policies Plan and demonstrate why any proposed change(s) would be more appropriate in terms of meeting the tests of soundness.

#### Appropriate level of detail

- 8.7 In preparing the POP, a council will need to consider the most appropriate level of detail of information. Whilst the POP should concentrate on strategic issues and options, insufficient detail will prevent stakeholders and the community from providing constructive input into the consultation process. However, too much detail may lead to an increased focus on site specific issues which should be dealt with at the later stages of plan preparation. There should be a sufficient level of detail/technical evidence about the various options to enable a clear understanding of the different outcomes of options considered and how a council's preferred options are justified.

## 9.0 Publication of the POP

### Availability and public consultation

9.1 Regulation 10 and 11 of the LDP Regulations sets out the requirements for the availability and public consultation on the POP. The publication of the POP should also be undertaken in accordance with the requirements set out in a council's agreed SCI and Timetable for the LDP.

9.2 Regulation 10 requires a council to:

- make available for inspection during normal working hours at its principal office and such other places as a council considers appropriate;
  - a copy of the POP;
  - such supporting documents as in the opinion of a council are relevant to the POP;
  - a document containing a statement indicating the period within which representations may be made on the POP;
  - notice of the address to which representations are to be sent.
- send the above information to the consultation bodies;
- give notice by local advertisement of the following;
  - the title of the local development plan;
  - a statement of the fact that the POP is available for inspection and the places and times at which it can be inspected;
  - a brief description of the content and purpose of the POP; and
  - details of how further information on the POP may be obtained.
- publish on its website;
  - the POP;
  - such supporting documents as in the opinion of a council are relevant to the POP; and
  - the local advertisement mentioned above.

9.3 Regulation 11 sets out the requirements for public consultation on the POP. Any person may make representations about a council's POP. Any

representation must be made within the period and sent to an address specified by a council. A council must make the POP available for public consultation for a period of not less than 8 weeks and not more than 12 weeks starting from the day it makes the documents available for inspection under Regulation 10.

- 9.4 It is important to note that representations made at the POP stage under Regulation 11 must be taken into account before the preparation of a development plan document. Therefore, representations made at the POP stage will not be taken forward as representations to be considered later at the Independent Examination on the draft Plan Strategy or draft Local Policies Plan.
- 9.5 As the POP aims to stimulate public comment and views that will inform the content of the LDP, it is important that all those who may wish to comment on the POP are made aware that they have an opportunity to do so. Before a council prepares and submits its development plan document to the Department, it must publicise its POP and make it available for public consultation.
- 9.6 The publicity requirements are a statutory minimum and therefore a council may do more to publicise the availability of its POP, if it chooses to do so. It is important to note that if a council gives a commitment to go beyond these minimum statutory requirements in its SCI<sup>4</sup>, it must comply with that commitment otherwise, the development plan document may be found to be 'unsound' at Independent Examination.

#### Effective engagement

- 9.7 A council should aim to build consensus through early stakeholder and community involvement. Early engagement and front-loading at the preferred options stage is vital to the effective delivery of the LDP as it provides stakeholders and the public an opportunity to influence the policies and proposals contained in the LDP by sharing their knowledge, particularly of local issues and problems in the plan area.

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<sup>4</sup> Development Plan Practice Note 2 Statement of Community Involvement

- 9.8 A process of community engagement must be carried out in accordance with the agreed SCI. The purpose of public consultation is to provide anyone who wishes to submit a representation to the POP an opportunity to do so. This may include advertising in the local and regional newspapers, public exhibitions, meetings/discussions, focus groups and workshops the facilitate engagement and encourage feedback on the issues and options set out in the POP and also any associated documents such as the accompanying SA Report.
- 9.9 Effective engagement with stakeholders and the community can help to identify issues that need to be considered early in the process, refine and improve options to build consensus and encourage a higher level of ownership which should in turn lead to fewer representations to the LDP as it progresses to adoption. This process of community and stakeholder engagement will also help to ensure that any further issues or potential impediments to the plan are highlighted and considered as necessary in order to help avoid unexpected delays to the agreed Timetable for the preparation of the draft Plan Strategy and the draft Local Policies Plan.
- 9.10 Following consultation on the POP, a council must take account of any representations received before it prepares the draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan.

## DPPN 5 Review – Schedule of changes

| Page Number | Paragraph Number | Summary of change                                                                       |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cover page  | N/A              | Revised date and version number                                                         |
| Page 1      | N/A              | Updated preamble text and footnotes with links to the relevant legislation              |
| Page 3      | 4.2              | Insertion of draft Plan Strategy and draft Local Policies Plan                          |
| Page 5      | 5.2              | Correction of typographical errors                                                      |
| Page 7      | 5.9              | Correction of typographical error                                                       |
| Page 8      | 6.3              | Correction of typographical errors                                                      |
| Page 11     | 7.6              | Correction of grammatical errors                                                        |
| Page 13     | 8.3              | Correction of typographical errors                                                      |
| Page 15     | 8.6              | correction of grammatical errors                                                        |
| Page 15     | 8.7              | Correction of typographical errors                                                      |
| Page 17     | 9.4              | correction of grammatical errors                                                        |
| Page 17     | 9.6              | Correction of typographical errors                                                      |
| Page 18     | 9.8              | Correction of typographical errors                                                      |
| Page 18     | 9.9              | Correction of grammatical error                                                         |
| Backpage    | N/A              | Replacement of DOE with Department for Infrastructure and updated address of Department |
| N/A         | Where necessary  | Reference to “draft” Plan Strategies and Local Policy Plans has been made               |
| N/A         | N/A              | Updates to footnotes                                                                    |

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