



Derry City & Strabane
District Council

Comhairle Chathair
Dhoire & Cheantar
an tSratha Báin

Derry Cittie & Stràbane
Destrict Council

DERRY CITY & STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP) 2032



DRAFT PLAN STRATEGY

DS-604 - Impact of Brexit & Covid on LDP – December 2021

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DERRY CITY AND STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP) 2032



Impact of Brexit & Covid on LDP

December 2021

This Document is one in a series which comprises the evidence base that informs the preparation of the Derry City and Strabane District Local Development Plan (LDP 2032) Plan Strategy.

This is a Submission document in accordance with Regulation 20 of the Planning (LDP) Regulations (NI) 2015.

DC&SDC LDP and Post-Covid & Post-Brexit World

1.0 Background

The purpose of this Paper is to consider, in mid-2021 - before formal submission of the LDP draft Plan Strategy (dPS) to DfI and the PAC for IE, whether the LDP dPS is still reasonably up-to-date and flexible, in adapting to changing circumstances since its initial preparation and publication in mid-2019.

During the course of preparing the LDP, the Council is expected to continue to monitor any changing circumstances and to update the Evidence Base and, if it is necessary, the LDP development plan document itself. The Council has been consulting and considering all the Representations since the end of 2019; now, in the autumn of 2021, we are preparing to conduct the final dPS consultation (on Proposed Changes) and then to formally submit the LDP dPS and associated documents to DfI and hence to the PAC for testing at Independent Examination (IE).

Moreover, the LDP dPS will be assessed against the tests of 'Soundness', as set out in Development Plan Practice Note DPPN 6 – Soundness. In accordance with Soundness test C4 on Coherence and Effectiveness, the LDP is expected to demonstrate that it is 'reasonably flexible to enable it to deal with changing circumstances'.

Therefore, this Paper seeks to assess the key 'changed circumstances', particularly related to Brexit taking effect in Spring of 2020 and also to the Covid 19 global pandemic since March 2020.

2.0 Changed Circumstances since 2019

The LDP dPS and its Evidence Base papers were prepared mostly during 2017 to 2019 and were finalised and published in December 2019. The documents are found at: [https://www.derrystrabane.com/Subsites/LDP/LDP-draft-Plan-Strategy-\(dPS\)/LDP-Plan-Documents](https://www.derrystrabane.com/Subsites/LDP/LDP-draft-Plan-Strategy-(dPS)/LDP-Plan-Documents)

Since that time, there has been 'quite a lot of changes', in the wider world and also locally in the District and Region. An overview of some of the key changes is summarised below:

- **Brexit** – Britain and NI have 'left Europe' in 2020, with consequent uncertainty over trade arrangements, supply chains, freedom of movement, immigration, staff shortages, workers' rights, cross-border workers - wages and tax arrangements, environmental standards, migration patterns – including cross-border travel, differential price rises, population shifts and housing demands (flows across the border). On the other hand, very many aspects of life and business are continuing regardless (no meltdown as some had feared) and some businesses are even reporting favourable trading arrangements for exports, etc.
- **Covid-19 global pandemic** – from March 2020, to present time in mid-2021, this has been unprecedented, with huge implications for all aspects of health, lifestyle and economy – positive and negative e.g. lockdowns / restrictions, more working from home, less retailing

in shops / more online, less socialising / hospitality / leisure or congregating or spending in town centres, more out-of-town, less traffic, less use of public transport, no air transport, staycations and local tourism, more pedestrianisation and active travel, possibly more people 'moving home' to Derry-Strabane/working in London/Dublin/Belfast/internationally, maybe more people wanting to live in the countryside than urban areas, what effect on university / NWRC student numbers, HMO impacts. Generally rising costs of development - of labour and materials.

- **Climate Change** – there has been ever-increasing recognition of the impacts, and that action is needed to tackle it – globally and locally. Activists from David Attenborough to Greta Thunberg to the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Recent IPCC report and similar 'Status of Ireland's Climate 2020' have confirmed the urgency and political awareness of the need for action. Derry City & Strabane District Council 'declared a Climate Emergency' in 2020 and published a Climate Adaptation Plan.
- **The City Deal & Inclusive Future Fund for Derry and Strabane** – the Heads of Terms was signed and launched in March 2021, thus significantly progressing it towards implementation of its £250 million funding and investment.
- **Transport Connectivity** – The A6 Dual Carriageway from Drumahoe to Dungiven is being implemented, as well as several sections opened further along the A6, thus improving safety and travel times on to Belfast. The A5 Dual Carriageway from Newbuildings and on to Strabane, Omagh and Dublin is still at Public Inquiry stage, which is due to be re-convened in early 2022. The planning of the key Donegal Ten-T Roads continues, with environmental reports having been prepared. The NW Transport Hub has been completed in Derry in 2020, as well as an upgraded train service from Derry to Belfast.
- **Broadband Connectivity** – has been steadily improving across the District, especially with Project Stratum starting to be rolled out across the more rural areas.
- **University Expansion** – the long-planned expansion of Ulster University at Magee is being progressed and implementation is starting. The government's New Decade New Approach (NDNA) Executive Formation Agreement in Jan 2020 referenced the further expansion of UU Magee towards 10,000 students. The School of Medical Sciences is being relocated to Magee with 850 extra students from 2022 and the Graduate Medical School has begun with 70 students entering in August 2021 and leading to 400 in Yr 4.
- **Key City Construction Developments** – The substantial 5–storey Grade A office building at Ebrington has just been completed, the new major Health Hub has been announced for Fort George and the city skyline has several 'cranes' – indicating sizeable ongoing development projects
- **Social and private sector housing** is continuing apace in the City and many settlements across the District, with demand and sales being strong.

- **Council-led projects** – including the Green Infrastructure Plan, North West Regional Energy Strategy, Climate Adaptation Plan and numerous construction projects such as greenways, play facilities and community centres across the City and District.

In practice, many of the post-Brexit and post-Covid trends and changes have over-lapping causes and they are still ongoing and bedding-in so it is generally agreed that it is still really too early to say which trends / changes are temporary or long-term and hence it is more important than ever that the LDP will be 'reasonably flexible' to enable it to deal with changing circumstances'.

3.0 Are the LDP Growth Targets still applicable? – UUEPC Report

Chapter 5 of the LDP dPS sets out the over-arching Growth Strategy for the City and District from the baseline year of 2017 up to the notional end-date of 2032. The chapter outlines the 'drivers for growth' including the strength of the North West Region initiatives, the City Deal investments, the expansion of UU Magee and NWRC, the strong tourism offering, investment in transport infrastructure and the possible opportunities for cross-border trading as a result of Brexit. Overall, the LDP's Growth Strategy was to provide enough land and policies to facilitate the sustainable provision of approximately 9,000 more dwellings, 15,000 jobs and 10,000 more people.

Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) has prepared a report (see document EVB 5d) to review these Growth targets as set out in the LDP dPS, and in the Strategic Growth Plan (SGP, Our Community Plan) for the District. The UUEPC report very usefully considers the impacts of Brexit and Covid as well as the positives such as City Deal and other recent societal trends. This report is referenced extensively with research and other expert reports to give a very up-to-date consideration of the current situation and best-estimate forecasts going forward. Whilst it is generally accepted that there are still so many uncertainties involving the post-Covid society / economy and the post-Brexit arrangements, this UUEPC expert report concludes that the projected Growth levels for jobs, people and homes were mostly on target from 2017 to 2020, before Brexit-Covid, and that the target levels still remain on course to be met by the LDP end-date of 2032.

Therefore, in light of this UUEPC report, there is a robust evidence base to conclude that the overall level of growth that the LDP seeks to accommodate is still reasonably realistic and achievable, particularly with strong growth in the second half of the LDP period as other developments take effect.

4.0 Specific Planning Topics in the LDP – any update and whether the dPS approach is still applicable?

This section of the Paper will now consider each of the main Planning Topics and briefly comment on any recent trends / changed circumstances since 2019 and then whether the current designations and policies remain valid and applicable, or whether they would necessitate a Change being made to the LDP dPS.

Planning Topic & Changed Circumstances	Any Implications for the LDP draft Plan Strategy?
5. Growth targets / expectations – of population, of jobs, of homes	See section and report above. Chapter 5 is still applicable, on track to achieve the target growth levels. Add UUEPC Report (and this Paper) to the Evidence Base.
7. General Development Principles / Policies – ongoing emphasis on sustainable development, biodiversity, health & well-being, residential amenity, etc.	These principles and policies are more important than ever – for climate change adaptation, biodiversity, well-being and peoples live/work-at-home lifestyles. Still applicable, no change required.
9. Economic Development / employment land	Future requirement may be more fragmented, lower densities, home-working and self-employment. More jobs are expected. Post-Brexit, lands at Port, Airport and border. The range of opportunities in Ch. 9 can accommodate all such future needs. An ED Land Monitor is underway, for the EVB.
10. Offices – home-working	There may be less demand for formal office space, hybrid home-working. May need central work spaces – accessible by active travel. The policies of Ch 10 are flexible to assess likely proposals. Office Study Monitor is underway, for EVB.
10. Retailing – more online, town centres, neighbourhoods, out-of-town. The long-term trends are not known, but several key shops have gone (e.g. Debenhams, Easons in Derry or Argos in Strabane)	A City / Town Centre Vacancy Monitor is underway, for the EVB. The policies of Chapter 10 are still considered robust to assess future retail proposals or alternative uses, especially central living and leisure uses. No change.
10. Town Centres and their uses. Recent vacancies	Increasing pedestrianisation, active travel, the most accessible and sustainable locations, more quality public realm and alternative town centre uses. Pavement cafés, etc. Boundaries will be decided at LPP stage.
11. Transport – less vehicular traffic, new roads, uncertain future for public transport (Covid), more pedestrianisation / active travel	Sustainable and active travel will be very important. The existing policies and ‘direction of travel’ are still applicable.
12. Tourism – staycations and local attractions have done well – when opened. Hospitality was mostly on-hold. Less flights from CODA – viability?	Policies in Chapter 12 can accommodate an increase in sustainable tourist proposals, including rural tourism and short-term-lets.

<p>15. Other Development in the Countryside – more or less pressure for open living / working / leisure?</p>	<p>A new range of uses may want to locate in the countryside. The policies in Ch. 15 are robust enough, as well as Green Belts and other development pressure areas, to accommodate sustainable proposals, yet sustain vibrant rural communities.</p>
<p>16. Housing – in settlements – the numbers, quality, space standards, social / private, city-living, centres/suburbs/neighbourhoods, towns or smaller settlements / communities</p>	<p>People’s homes are more important than ever, for living, recreation and home-working. There may be shifts in housing demand, still high levels of social need. The policies in Ch 16 are robust enough to deal with provision, ensuring delivery, in a sustainable manner.</p>
<p>16. Houses in the countryside – more or less demand, home-working, flexible workplaces</p>	<p>There may be shifts in rural housing demand, as people want more space and live/work more at home. The policies in Ch 16, including Green Belts, are robust enough to deal with provision, in a sustainable manner.</p>
<p>17. Open Space / Recreation – more important and valued than ever</p>	<p>The policies to protect existing OSR land and to ensure future provision, are adequate to ensure a quality standard.</p>
<p>21 & 23. Natural & Historic Environment - more important than ever to protect and enjoy, for work-life balance and sustainable development</p>	<p>Existing designations and policies are considered fit-for-purpose.</p>
<p>24 & 19. Renewable Energy and Utilities – still important, with changing electricity usage and increased Climate Change emphasis</p>	<p>Existing policies are considered fit-for-purpose.</p>
<p>25. Development and Flooding</p>	<p>As a consequence of climate change, flooding is more immediate concern, plus the memory of August 2019. The strict policies are in place</p>
<p>F. Place-making and Design – renewed emphasis on quality of designs, places and neighbourhoods.</p>	<p>Distinctive city and towns, smaller settlements and countryside remain very important ‘places’. These policies and guidance will ensure high standards across the District.</p>

5.0 Conclusion

This Paper has considered whether the LDP dPS is still reasonably up-to-date and flexible, in adapting to the considerable changing circumstances since its initial preparation and publication in mid-2019.

It can be concluded that it is generally too early to say definitively, what the level and nature of changes to lifestyles, businesses and development types will be over the medium to long term. However, the LDP dPS is always going to be at a certain point-in-time and, at the present, the LDP draft Plan Strategy is still fit-for-purpose, it has a reasonably robust evidence base and will be flexible enough to deal with further changing circumstances. It will be important to continue to monitor the wider environment and development trends, with an annual report and formal Review of the LDP every 5 years.