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Chapter 15 Introduction and Policy ODC 1

15.0 OTHER DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

15.1 Similar to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI (SPPS), this LDP defines the countryside as the land lying outside of the identified settlement limits. It recognises the countryside as one of our greatest assets, with its highly valued landscapes, an outstanding coastline, a complex variety of wildlife, rich built and cultural heritage, for the ecosystem services it provides, and for its sense of place and history. In addition to its role and function as a recreational and tourist asset, the countryside also supports our important agricultural industry, offers potential opportunities for sustainable growth in new sectors, and is home to a considerable rural population. Similar to the Regional Development Strategy (RDS 2035), the Council recognises that sustainable new development is required in order to maintain and enhance the attractiveness of the countryside as a place to invest, live and work.

15.2 Derry City and Strabane District Council also recognises that to sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities are required which respect our local, social and environmental circumstances. Facilitating development in appropriate locations is considered necessary to ensure proposals are integrated appropriately within rural settlements or in the case of countryside locations, within the rural landscape. Within this District, the countryside has a range of economic, social and environmental characteristics, with varying levels of development pressures and many different landscapes and varying environmental sensitivity. Some parts are particularly sensitive to change and other areas have lower sensitivities and thus provide opportunities to accommodate sustainable development. It is also important to take into account the role and function of rural settlements and accessibility to existing services and infrastructure.

15.3 As set out in Paragraph 2.4, the District's countryside accounts for approximately 1,200 km² with around 16% or 24,000 people living there. In 2018, 1,771 farms were registered in the District of which a majority (75%) were classified as 'very small'. The Council recognises that as agriculture and other development in the countryside continues to change, it is important that the Planning process continues to support the operational needs of farm families and other non-farm rural dwellers and businesses, as well as enhancing the attractiveness of the countryside as a place to grow, invest and work. Accordingly, the LDP's Vision and several of its spatial, economic, social and environmental Objectives in Chapter 4 relate directly to the countryside, seeking to 'to provide for vital and vibrant rural communities elsewhere, including in our small settlements, whilst protecting the countryside in which they live by accommodating appropriate development so as to sustain and service these rural communities'.

15.4 Chapter 6 sets out the District's Spatial Strategy, including a settlement hierarchy of 47 settlements and the remaining open countryside. Policy Sett 2 establishes that each settlement will have a defined development limit, beyond which

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there will be presumption against further urban development (subject to development in accordance with the other relevant policies). The chapter goes on to identify the rural Strategic Development Pressure Areas (GBs, DPAs and WECAs) and Strategic Environmental Spatial Designations (SCAs and AHLIs), in addition to the Natural Environment designations referenced in Chapter 21. The various other topic-based Chapters contain the relevant policies for the assessment of proposals for those respective developments in the countryside. The General Development Principles and Policies of Chapter 7 also apply in the countryside, as well as the Place-Making & Design Vision / Policy for the countryside in Chapter 32.

15.5 Therefore, consistent with the SPPS and the RDS, the aim of this LDP with regard to the countryside is to manage development in a manner which strikes a balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining vibrant rural communities.

The Council's LDP Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Countryside is to identify the various types of developments that are acceptable in principle in the countryside, including agriculture / forestry, farm diversification and re-use of buildings as set out in this chapter, as well as the various development types set out in the respective topic chapters. Other types of development will only be permitted where there are overriding reasons why that development is essential and could not be located in a settlement, particularly protecting the Green Belt and other development pressure areas and designated areas. The general policy approach is to cluster, consolidate, and group new development with existing established buildings, and promote the re-use of previously used buildings. This sustainable approach facilitates essential new development, whilst simultaneously mitigating the potential adverse impacts upon rural amenity and scenic landscapes. All new development in the countryside must integrate, respect rural character and be appropriately designed.

Policies for Other Development in the Countryside

15.6 This LDP intends to deliver its vision, objectives and strategy for Other Development in the Countryside through sustainable management of development through the following policies. All proposals will need to be particularly cognisant of the LDP principles to promote sustainable development and being resilient to climate change, as well as the respective LDP sections.

ODC 1 Other Development in the Countryside

There are a range of types of development which in principle are considered to be acceptable in the countryside and that will help sustain rural communities and contribute to the aims of sustainable development. The main types of sustainable rural housing and non-residential developments are covered in the respective chapters of this LDP dPS.

Other types of development will only be permitted where there are overriding reasons why that development is essential and could not be located in a settlement, or it is

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otherwise allocated for development in this LDP. This presumption against such other developments will be particularly important within the defined Green Belt areas.

Justification & Amplification

15.7 All proposals for development in the countryside must meet the requirements of Policy GDPOL 1 (General Development policy) and Chapter 32 (Design for the Countryside). In particular, they must be sited and designed to integrate sympathetically with their surroundings and to meet other sustainability and planning & environmental considerations including those for drainage, accessibility and road safety.

15.8 Where there are specifically designated areas of the countryside (see Chapter 6 and 21 designations and policies – SCA, AHLIs, Green Belts, DPAs, WECAs, AONB, LLPAs and Nature Conservation Sites), development should be in accordance with the policy requirements for that area.

15.9 Proposals for sustainable dwellings and their associated ancillary developments will be assessed against the respective policies set out in Chapter 16, particularly Policies 18 to 26.

15.10 The range of other types of sustainable non-residential development that may be acceptable in principle in the countryside will be considered in accordance with the respective relevant dPS chapter and GDPOL 1, including applicable:

- farm diversification proposals – in accordance with Policy ODC 2;
- agricultural / forestry development – in accordance with Policy ODC 3;
- re-use of existing buildings – in accordance with Policy ODC 4;
- tourism development – in accordance with Chapter 12 policies;
- industry and business uses – in accordance with Chapter 9 policies;
- retailing – in accordance with Policy RP 7;
- minerals development – in accordance with Chapter 13 policies;
- outdoor sport / recreational uses – in accordance with Chapter 17 policies;
- renewable energy projects – in accordance with Chapter 24 policies;
- a necessary community facility to serve the local rural population, essential infrastructure, pathways, utilities or telecommunications development – in accordance with their respective relevant chapters.

15.11 Other than the above types of sustainable residential and non-residential developments, any other use or development will need to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Council why there are overriding reasons why that development is essential in this countryside location and could not be located in a settlement, or it is otherwise allocated for development in this LDP. Over development in the open countryside would have the potential to bring with it significant environmental, financial and social impacts. These can be manifest through for example suburban sprawl, habitat loss and adverse impact upon water quality particularly from the increased use of non-mains sewerage systems. It also has the potential to impact upon the sustainable growth of our city, towns, villages and small settlements.

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15.12 In cases where there is an overriding site-specific reason or other reason to justify the development in the countryside, a careful and sustainable siting will be essential in order to minimise its impact in the countryside. It may be desirable to locate immediately adjoining a settlement rather than a remote, less-sustainable location, whilst taking care to avoid the impression of urban sprawl.