

Derry City and Strabane District Council

The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act) came into operation for government departments and district councils on 1 June 2017. The Act requires policy makers and public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing and implementing policies and when designing and delivering public services.

In fulfilling these obligations, the Council has taken rural needs into consideration in respect of the:

- Development of the Inclusive Strategic Growth Plan 2017-2032 (Community Plan);
- Establishment of Local Growth Partnership Boards and the development of Local Growth Plans;
- Ongoing development of the Derry City and Strabane District Council Tourism Strategy 2018-25;
- Preparation of the rural proofing baseline and interim report for the Local Development Plan (LDP) Preferred Options Paper
- Implementation of the Council's Revised Street Naming and Property Numbering Policy; and
- Ongoing development of the Derry City and Strabane District Council Arts and Culture Strategy 2019-24.

A core dimension of these initiatives has been ensuring that engagement processes have specifically included rural stakeholders in co-design processes.

At a strategic level, it is noted that the Inclusive Growth Plan has identified a number of specific needs pertaining to rural areas such as:

- The need for improved broadband connectivity in rural areas;
- The need for more direct transport links / connectivity with and to other regions and connectivity within and between local communities;
- The need to strongly improve and enhance rural social, economic and environmental regeneration; and
- The need to conserve, enrich and protect environmental and built heritage assets in rural areas.

In order to address these needs, the Strategic Growth Plan has incorporated the following actions:

- Maximise job creation and investment opportunities in our City and Town Centres, regionally significant regeneration sites and rural areas.
- Develop a pilot Rural Community Broadband Scheme and roll out in multiple locations.

- Deliver business start-up programmes and development support focused on areas of high economic inactivity and rural community hubs.
- Develop a heritage/conservation-led masterplan and renewal action plan for the village of Sion Mills and other settlements, including Newtown Stewart town centre conservation area.
- Protect and promote our natural and built heritage assets through the establishment of multi-sectoral heritage partnerships, heritage education programmes, skills specialisms development and integration with our tourism product offering.
- Provide quality social and private housing in sustainable urban and rural neighbourhoods to meet the needs of our growing population providing attractive places to live within easy access to local services and amenities.
- Promote neighbourhood and village enhancement through the development of local environmental improvement schemes and community play parks and facilities.
- Promote greater integration and inclusion within and between communities through animating shared spaces, services and facilities and the development of rural community clusters.

At a community /service level, addressing rural needs and implementing the objectives of the Inclusive Strategic Growth Plan is being facilitated by the development of eight local community plans. As part of this development process, consultation workshops were held in the three rural District Electoral Areas (DEA) of Sperrin, Derg and Faughan. As a result, needs were identified which are specific to the three rural areas and have been highlighted within the three local growth plans for these DEAs. In addition, the establishment of Local Community Growth Partnership Boards in each of the three rural District Electoral Areas ensures a focus on identifying and addressing rural needs, maximising the potential, and improving the quality of life in rural communities.

Commitment to having due regard to rural need has also be reflected in the process for the development of a Preferred Options Paper (POP) as part of the emerging Local Development Plan. Planning officials undertook a series of 2017 meetings with stakeholders, Rural Focus Groups and Elected Members to ensure the development of the POP had due regards to rural needs and pertinent issues where fed in to inform option development. The publication of the POP in May 2017 was also accompanied by a three-month consultation period and an extensive social media campaign to extract feedback from across the entire District. Hard copies of the POP documents were also distributed to all Council Sports facilities, community facilities, libraries, and health practices to ensure they were widely distributed to maximise potential feedback. Public consultation events (am & pm) were also held in Claudy, Donemana and Castlederg to gather feedback.

It is noted that the Rural Proofing – Baseline and Interim Report for the Local Development Plan, Preferred Options Paper stage addressed issues such as rural proofing, rural needs, definition of rural, rural statistics, rural planning- context and policy, and impact assessment.

The Council is committed to ensuring that due regard is given to rural needs when developing and implementing policies and when designing and delivering public services

and in this context, work is continuing to be advanced in terms of:

- embedding rural needs impact assessment with the Council's decision making processes
- developing training programmes and policy guidance / templates;
- identifying and sharing best practice and
- improving the monitoring of services and outcomes.

In order to fulfil its obligations under Section 3 of the Act, the Council will submit information to the Department and include information on the Rural Needs Act in its Annual Performance Report.