

## Planning

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**From:**  
**Sent:** 06 November 2020 16:49  
**To:** Planning  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** Consultation response - Local Development Plan 35

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Completed



### Response to Derry City and Strabane District Council draft Local Development Plan from

I am writing to express my support for the draft Local Development Plan. I wish to make a number of detailed points, which mostly are to stress the importance of elements of the plan.

- The development of third level education in and around Derry is core to building a stronger local and regional economy. This must involve institutions having at least 10,000 undergraduate and post-graduate students based within the city. In addition, we need to build the capacity and outcomes of vocational training through partnerships between the North West Regional College, employers and all local schools.
- Tourism can be an important part of the foundations of the local economy. It is my belief that the city can significantly build on those existing foundations. Specifically, Derry must be promoted as the connecting city between the Wild Atlantic Way and the Causeway Coast, as well as the entrance to the Sperrins. While this has been done to a limited extent, there is very much more to be undertaken in this regard.
- Recreational and activity tourism remains under-developed in Derry and Strabane. For this to be further developed we need to have more waymarked walking routes and promotion of these. What has been done so far deserves congratulations, but we are only at the beginning of creating a proper strategy and provision.
- As a result of Covid-19 we need to rethink urban centres. Much more consideration needs to be given to the shape and detail of urban centres, such as Derry. There will need to be more space for pedestrians as well as support for cafes, bars and restaurants operating outdoors in space next to their premises. This will need careful but fast work. Consideration will need to be given to the implications for traffic management, for example whether roads should be pedestrianised, part-pedestrianised, made one way and possible reprioritisation of traffic lights, to support the free flow of people.
- Despite Covid-19, we need to ensure that urban centres remain viable and sustainable. This means that Derry city centre must remain the heart of local retailing, with limitation on out of city retailing that threatens the city centre. It also means that efforts are needed to build the city centre residential population. This may include 'living over the shop', new build apartments and conversion of disused existing city centre properties into apartments.
- Ebrington and Fort George must be recognised as the signature development sites for the city and region. There must be close co-operation between the council and government departments to accelerate development on the sites.
- It is essential that the two Creggan reservoirs are monitored on a continual programme of assessment to ensure they meet rigorous safety standards, for reasons of public safety, protection of buildings and to enable approval of new signature projects, such as Fort George. This must be one of the council's absolute corporate priorities.
- Given its proximity to Fort George, Bay Park should similarly be recognised as a signature location for the city. While the existing park must be retained as part of the collection of green recreational spaces in the city, there needs to be careful consideration of the future of industrial units and coal yards adjacent to the

park. I believe those units and yards should be regarded as part of a greater Fort George development site, given the prime location on the riverside. It is unacceptable over the longer term that this area be a visual blight and a source of damage to air quality. That area should be subject to regeneration planning that is appropriate for a prime riverside location and which is complementary to development at Fort George. Compulsory purchase powers should be considered if necessary.

- While the LDP considers air quality in detail, it has to be conceded that current policy is not achieving the necessary rate of improvement. Derry has the worst air quality in NI and this is unacceptable. Stronger action is required to achieve improvement. This should include a programme of public warnings around air quality, encouraging the public to minimise their use of coal fires and the burning of peat, wood and plastics. The public should also be encouraged to switch from diesel to electric vehicles. Greater consideration should be given to how the process for consideration of planning applications can support the move to carbon neutral development.
- Consideration could be given to whether it is possible for more tree planting in urban areas, including Derry city centre, in support of net zero carbon objectives.
- Further investment is required across the council area in broadband, electricity and water infrastructure. It is essential that these investments support economic development. I am seriously concerned at the slow roll-out of broadband in rural areas.
- Foyle Port and City of Derry Airport are core parts of the infrastructure of the city and region. Their role needs to be recognised and supported as the city considers the impact of Brexit.