

Item/Min Ref: 11	Title of Report: Natural Environment, Countryside Assessment and LDP - Options for POP	Officer presenting: Principal Planning Officer
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of this Paper is to present a summary of the salient issues, discussed at the LDP Workshops or supplied by Members in subsequent responses, that dealt with the respective LDP Topics. The Paper also seeks agreement from Members as to how best to progress these Topics towards the Preferred Options Paper (POP) stage of the LDP in Spring next year.

2 Background

- 2.1 As previously explained, the various technical aspects of Planning which comprise the LDP are each being considered systematically, each marked by the series of councillor Workshops and meetings of this Planning Committee. In accordance with the Workplan, this Committee meeting is a further stage in that Plan-making process. The meeting summarises the Discussion Papers from the above-mentioned Workshop, combines feedback from the wider body of Councillors and points towards the identification of Options. The Committee is asked to make preliminary decisions on the proposed Options, regarding these aspects, that the LDP is considering, as we proceed towards further evidence gathering, consultee and stakeholder input and then further Committee meetings (plus full Council approval) to finally decide on the LDP Preferred Options, to be published in the Spring of 2017.

3 Key Issues

Natural Environment

- 3.1 The Workshop and Discussion Paper at Appendix 5 has reviewed the European and national and regional legislation and requirements and / or opportunity for the LDP to consider the natural heritage designations within the District. The Paper details the various European, National and local designated areas, namely the 1 International (RAMSAR) site, 6 European (SPA's / SAC's) designated sites, 27 ASSI's (Map 2 to be updated and finalised), 3 National Nature Reserves, 4 Local Nature Reserves, 7 Areas of Local Nature Conservation and Amenity Importance (defined within the DAP 2011), as well as the Sperrin AONB (part of) and 3 Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSV). The main rivers were also highlighted, in addition to the rich marine environment and the wider need to recognise, protect and promote bio-diversity generally across the District.
- 3.2 There was consensus at the Workshop on the potential and importance of identifying, utilising (sensitively) and protecting (within reason) the District's natural heritage assets, as a key element of the LDP's overarching objective of promoting appropriate development whilst protecting our environment.

Landscape Assessment

- 3.3 The Workshop and Discussion Paper at Appendix 6 presented an assessment of Derry and Strabane District's Landscape Character Areas and considers how the LDP should seek to protect and enhance them, possibly through LDP designations such as Green Belts and Countryside Policy Areas, as well as through policies.
- 3.4 The Paper has reviewed the requirements / guidance regarding the LDP and the landscape, from the Regional Development Strategy (RDS 2035), the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI (SPPS), PPS 2 - Natural Heritage and PPS 21 - Development in the Countryside, as well as in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. It has also set out the landscape protection designations in the existing Derry Area Plan 2011 and Strabane Area Plan 2001; these include the Areas of High Scenic Value, Areas of Local Nature Conservation and Amenity Importance, a Green Belt around Derry and Strabane / Sion Mills, as well as Countryside Policy Areas and Highway Policy Areas. The Sperrin AONB is also highlighted.
- 3.5 The Paper summarises the current assessment reports on the District's landscape, namely the 14 Landscape Character Areas (NI LCA 2000) or the 5 Regional LCAs (NIRCLA 2015). The need for consideration of the LDP and the Marine seascape is also covered. Over the coming months, a GIS-based statistical analysis will be undertaken of the recent Development Pressure across the District's landscape.
- 3.6 There was an appreciation at the Workshop of the importance of the District's landscapes, but opinions were reserved about how designations or policies should be used to protect those features.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement and Other Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial, equality, legal, HR, Improvement or other implications arising from this report, beyond those already outlined.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 Members are requested to accept the contents of this Paper (both natural environment designations and landscape assessment) as part of the Council's 'evidence base' and SA 'environmental baseline'.
- 5.2 Members are also asked to agree that Planning officials proceed to develop options in line with this Paper and in consultation with key consultees and stakeholders, especially the NI Environment Agency (NIEA, of DAERA). The further landscape analysis by officials and the Development Pressure Analysis will also assist in ensuring that these options can then be firmed up as part of the subsequent LDP Preferred Options stage.

Background Papers

Appendix 5 - 'Natural Environment and LDP' Discussion Paper, 25th July 2016

Appendix 6 - 'Countryside Assessment and LDP' Discussion Paper, 25th July 2016