



Belfast

Local Development Plan

Plan Strategy 2035

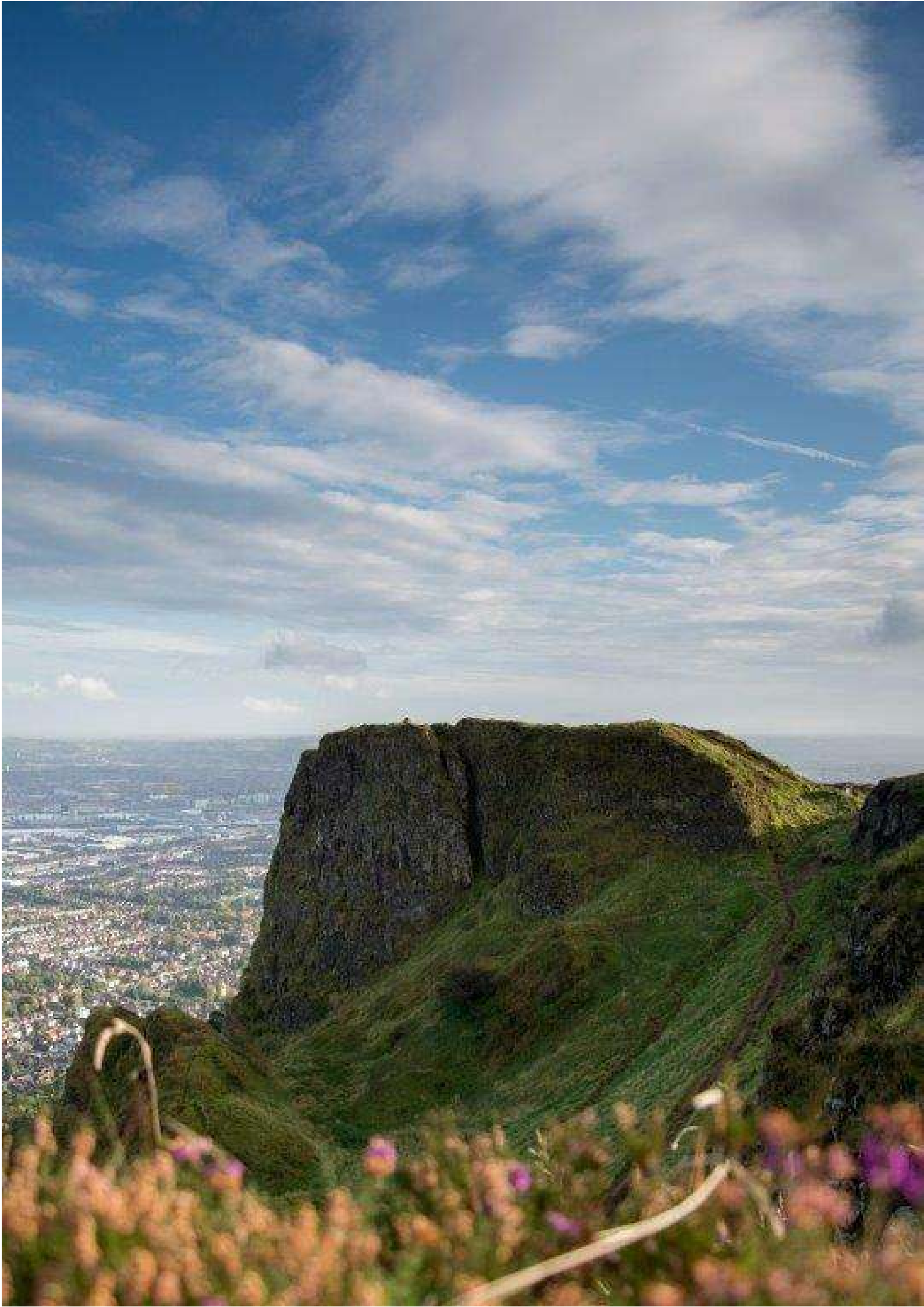
Rural Needs Impact Assessment
May 2023

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/LDP



Belfast
City Council





Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Belfast City Council

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Belfast Local Development Plan 2035 - Plan Strategy - in accordance with Part 2 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Belfast Local Development Plan 2035 - Plan Strategy

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The Belfast LDP Plan Strategy (PS) is the city's spatial plan up to 2035. It includes strategic and operational policies that seek to achieve the overall objective of sustainable development. The PS provides a planning framework to support economic and social needs in the city and to protect and improve the environment, in line with regional strategies and policies.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

The PS is made up of a high level strategic policies and more detailed operational policies that form the basis for the assessment of planning proposals. The overall aim of the PS is to secure the sustainable development of the city area. It is consistent with national and regional planning policy, including the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI (SPPS) and the Regional Development Strategy. It also generally consolidates existing planning policies that are contained in the various NI Planning Policy Statements.

The PS policies generally apply across the entire area of Belfast City Council and these will form the basis of development management decisions, including those relating to proposals in the countryside or rural settlements. Therefore, the PS will have an impact on people throughout the council area, including the rural area. There are also some policies that are specifically relevant to the countryside area outside of small settlements.

The PS does not zone areas for specific land uses, nor does it designate particular areas for development or protection. Zoning and designations and other site-specific policies form part of the next stage in the LDP process, which is the Local Policies Plan.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The PS policies generally apply across the council area and these will form the basis of development management decisions, including those relating to the countryside or rural settlements. There are also policies specifically relating to the countryside area, where the objective is to balance the interests of the rural community and economy with environmental and other interests. The policies for the countryside aim to protect and enhance its character and value, including for landscape, recreation and nature conservation, whilst providing for the essential needs of the rural communities and the rural economy. There are also other policies that apply across the entire council area, such as those relating to landscape and natural heritage, which may be of relevance to the rural area.

The overall aim of the PS is to facilitate sustainable development and, in particular, to support economic and population growth within the urban area. In addition, the PS makes provision for appropriate development in the rural settlements within the council area. However, the PS recognises the specific needs of the rural community in the wider countryside and includes policies that support appropriate development to meet rural needs. Such proposals should be supported by a justification of rural or site-specific need. This differs from the urban area where, in general, development proposals may not require to meet the additional justification of need (except certain types of proposal, such as certain economic or retail uses). Therefore, rural areas outside of small settlements may be impacted differently from urban areas. However, the PS also includes provisions to support the rural community and economy by facilitating development that meets specific rural needs.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text" value="Landscape and heritage, minerals and renewable energy."/>

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

N/A

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes No If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input type="checkbox"/>

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Research Papers & Statistics:

A series of topic papers and technical supplements were produced to inform the LDP and its Sustainability Appraisal. Each topic paper and technical supplement provides a summary of the evidence base for the LDP, including the Preferred Options Paper (POP) and the Draft PS. They establish a baseline position and identify the key issues that need to be addressed. The papers on development in the countryside are of particular relevance to this assessment, as is the separate detailed Countryside Assessment that was carried out at POP and draft PS stage. These papers include an audit of the planning policy context for the countryside, an appraisal of its key characteristics and consideration of key issues for the rural community.

Stakeholder Engagement:

The LDP POP, including the topic papers, Countryside Assessment, RNIA and Sustainability Appraisal, were published for wide public consultation from January to April 2017. This included an extensive public awareness programme, with information events, focussed meetings and an online survey to encourage responses from a wide cross-section of the community. Specific engagement with the rural communities included meetings with Hannahstown Community Association and Edenderry Residents' Association. A similar approach was taken at the draft PS stage based on the draft policy approach for the countryside.

Direct engagement enabled identification and clarity on key issues that are important to the rural communities. The responses to the extensive public consultation at the POP stage helped to inform the policy approach set out in the draft PS. Similarly, submissions on the draft PS were considered during the independent examination and have helped inform the final policy approach set out in the adopted PS.

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

Belfast City Council area is largely an urban area dominated by the built-up form of Belfast City. The rural population is modest in size compared to the overall council area population, being approximately 1,484 residents (0.43%) out of a total 339,579. The rural population includes the population of the small settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.

Belfast has a particularly striking landscape setting, lying at the head of Belfast Lough in the lower Lagan valley and flanked to the north, west and south-east by the mountains and hills. It is important to protect this setting for a variety of reasons, including for visual amenity, nature conservation, recreation, economic attraction and environmental resilience. It is also important to acknowledge that this area also comprises working landscapes, including for agriculture, rural enterprise and public infrastructure, and provides a setting for the three rural settlements. In the latter regard, the majority of the rural community live in the three small settlements, with only a relatively small number of houses outside of any settlement. Many of the rural residents will depend on jobs and services located in the urban area and, therefore, ease of access is important. The PS supports sustainable modes of travel and the overall development strategy seeks to ensure new development is accessible by a range of transport modes.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

N/A

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

The PS covers the entire area of Belfast City Council, including the countryside area and the rural settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview. The PS policies generally apply across the Council area and they will have an impact on people throughout the City Council area, including the rural area. The overall aim of the PS is to facilitate significant growth of the city's economy and population in a sustainable manner, focussing new development within the urban area and, in particular, to the city centre, inner city, existing centres and transport corridors/nodes. There is also a focus on securing redevelopment of previously used land within the urban area. The PS supports sustainable modes of travel and the overall development strategy seeks to ensure new development is accessible by a range of transport modes. There are also a number of policies that are exclusively relevant to the countryside area (excluding the rural settlements), where the objective is to balance the interests of the rural community and economy with environmental and other interests.

The three rural settlements are included in the PS Settlement Strategy as existing small settlements where some development may be appropriate. This is to be balanced against preserving the character of these small settlements and ensuring that they remain separate from the contiguous built-up area. Development proposals within these small settlements will be assessed against the relevant PS policies much in the same way as developments within the urban area, generally using the relevant criteria-based policies. Any specific local needs will, insofar as is consistent with the PS objectives and proportionate to the rural location, be taken into account in assessing planning proposals. This approach is consistent with the responses made at the POP and draft PS stages, including through the stakeholder engagement with the rural communities.

Outside of the small settlements, in the wider countryside, PS policies will generally support appropriate development proposals to meet a justifiable local or site-specific need. This includes provision for individual houses, agricultural/forestry development, tourism, outdoor recreation and farm diversification. In all cases, the policies also seek to protect the rural environment and the countryside resource for the long term.

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes No If the response is **NO GO TO Section 5C.**

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The PS aims, objectives and policies for the rural area facilitate development to meet specific local rural needs in the countryside, subject to all normal planning considerations. In this regard, whilst environmental protection considerations are of paramount importance, there is no prohibition of good quality location-appropriate development to meet local needs in the countryside. In relation to the three small settlements, any planning proposals are also assessed against the relevant PS policies that generally apply across the entire council area.

The PS acknowledges the importance of greater connectivity across the council area and beyond. It aims to improve travel choices for all, including by the integration of land use planning with transport and achieving a modal shift away from the private car to public transport, cycling and walking. In terms of the Belfast rural area, which is modest in geographical extent, most areas are relatively close to the urban area (including to services and jobs) and may be accessible to some residents by walking and cycling, as well as public transport. The PS can help to promote greater travel choices, including through an improved network of paths and cycleways. The Green & Blue Infrastructure Network policy in the PS acknowledges the existing and potential linkages from the urban area into the rural area and such improvements will help to provide better accessibility for the rural community.

Engagement with stakeholders and the evidence gathered in preparation of the PS have given no indication of any likely significant adverse rural impacts. This position has been reviewed after the public consultation on the draft PS and the independent examination process.

Following submission of the draft PS and all associated documentation, including assessments and consultation responses, the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) carried out an independent examination of the PS. This included public hearing sessions on all the policy areas in the PS and the relevant countryside policy hearings were in November 2020. Following consideration of all submissions and hearings, the PAC submitted its report of recommendations to DfI in September 2021. DfI issued a direction to the Council in February 2022 advising that the PS was generally 'sound' (acceptable), subject to some modifications. The majority of modifications reflected minor corrections and did not affect the overall policy approach. The direction required the addition of a strategic policy to flag the need for development to occur in line with available infrastructure. The implications of this for the RNIA were considered and this concluded that the proposed inclusion of the additional strategic policy, which is not spatially-detailed or site-specific, will apply equally across the City Council area, including the rural areas. However, the likelihood that the strategic policy will have a significant impact on people in rural areas is considered minimal in the context of the overall policy approach for such areas.

If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Mark Whittaker
Position/Grade:	Senior Planning Officer
Division/Branch	Planning & Building Control
Signature:	
Date:	April 2023
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Dermot O'Kane
Position/Grade:	Principal Planner
Division/Branch:	Planning & Building Control
Signature:	
Date:	April 2023



Belfast Planning Service

Belfast City Council
Cecil Ward Building
4-10 Linenhall Street
Belfast BT2 8BP

 www.belfastcity.gov.uk/LDP

 planning@belfastcity.gov.uk

 028 9050 0510

 @belfastcc

 @belfastcitycouncil

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