



Belfast Local Development Plan

Rural Needs Impact Assessment – Draft Plan Strategy

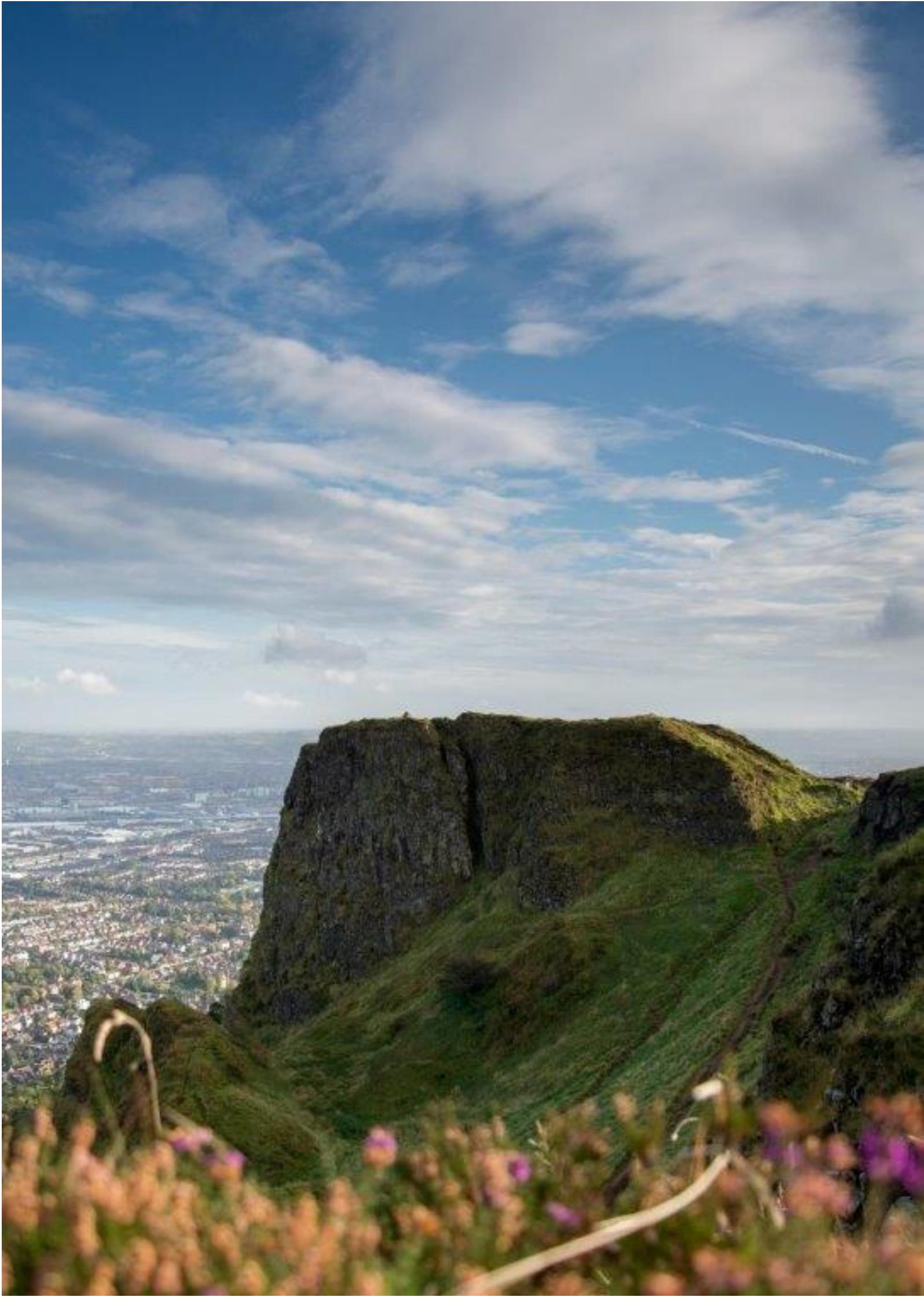
August 2018

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Belfast
City Council

Energising
Belfast



Rural Needs Impact Assessment Template (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 the Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Belfast Local Development Plan 2035 – Draft Plan Strategy
– in accordance with Part 2 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

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

Developing a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input 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 for Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Belfast Local Development Plan 2035 – Draft Plan Strategy

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

The Belfast LDP Draft Plan Strategy (DPS) 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 DPS 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.

The DPS sets out a growth strategy for the city that supports 46,000 additional jobs and accommodates 31,600 additional homes by 2035. Within this context, the DPS sets out key strategic policies, which include: improving health & wellbeing and community cohesion; positive placemaking; environmental resilience; greater connectivity; and an enhanced green & blue infrastructure network.

The DPS's spatial development strategy sets out a settlement hierarchy, focussing on the existing urban area and, in particular, the city centre, district & local centres and transport corridors/nodes. This also acknowledges the city's three rural settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.

The DPS also sets out topic-based operational planning policies that form the basis for making decisions on planning applications. These are arranged under the four key themes of: Shaping a liveable place; Creating a vibrant economy; Building a smart connected and resilient place; and Promoting a green and active place.

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 DPS 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 DPS 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.

Whilst Belfast City Council area is predominantly urban, it also contains countryside areas outside the urban settlement area, including the Belfast, Castlereagh and Holywood Hills and the Lagan Valley Regional Park. Belfast's rural area accounts for approximately 30% (40.75 km²) of the total Belfast City Council area.

The default definition of "rural" used in Northern Ireland is those settlements with populations of less than 5,000, together with the open countryside. The rural population of Belfast (2016 mid-year population estimates, NISRA) is approximately 1,484, including the small settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.

Edenderry is a small settlement located within the Lagan Valley Regional Park. The mill industries on the River Lagan led to the development of the settlement and it is now a mix of traditional terraced redbrick and newer semi-detached suburban dwellings. Hannahstown is located in the Belfast Hills to the west of the urban area. It comprises three nodes of development and is generally of a linear form along Hannahstown Hill Road and the Upper Springfield Road. Loughview is a small settlement located south east of the urban area in the Castlereagh Hills. It is located along Church Road and includes Loughview Integrated Primary and Nursery School.

The DPS 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 DPS 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 DPS 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.

As stated at 2B above, the DPS policies generally apply across the council area and these will form the basis of development management decisions, including those relating to proposals in the countryside or rural settlements. There are also policies specifically relating 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 policies for the countryside aim to protect and enhance the character and value of the countryside resource, including for landscape, recreation and nature conservation, whilst providing for the essential needs of the rural communities and the rural economy. Particular consideration will be given to:

- Facilitating appropriate rural uses and associated development where demonstrated to be necessary at a particular location or site to meet local rural needs;**
- Appropriate protection of natural heritage resources, including nature conservation and landscape designations and biodiversity; and**
- Integration of any permitted development with the landscape and environmental context.**

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 DPS is to facilitate sustainable development and, in particular, to support economic and population growth within the urban area. In addition, the DPS makes provision for appropriate development in the rural settlements within the council area. However, the DPS 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 (with the exception of 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 DPS 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"/>
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."/>

Please note that a number of the above impacts may be secondary impacts of the DPS, such as transport/infrastructure, poverty, deprivation and crime.

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 – LDP Topic Papers and Countryside Assessment.

A series of topic papers was produced to inform the LDP and its Sustainability Appraisal. Each topic paper provides a summary of the evidence base for the LDP, including the Preferred Options Paper (POP) and the DPS. They establish a baseline position and identify the key issues that need to be addressed. The topic papers are focussed on a variety of individual topics and each considers the entirety of the council area. Therefore, all are of relevance to the city's rural area. However, the topic paper on development in the countryside is of particular relevance to this assessment. This paper includes 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 and economy.

The topic papers were first prepared for the POP launch in January 2017. They have been further reviewed and updated to support the DPS as technical supplements.

The Countryside Assessment also reviewed the environmental baseline data for the rural area and included development pressure analysis for the countryside, focussing on single houses and renewable energy developments. In addition, it included settlement appraisals for the rural settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.

Stakeholder Engagement & Surveys

The LDP POP, including the topic papers, Countryside Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal, were published for public consultation from January to April 2017. The consultation period was supported by an extensive public awareness programme, including city-wide events, meetings and information sessions. This enabled public participation by all residents and interests across the entire council area. In addition to seeking comments by letter and email, an online survey tool (Citizen Space) was used to encourage responses and assist in collating submissions. A special version of the POP and the online survey were designed specifically for younger members of the population and this was also used by a number of by schools across the area.

Further to the above, and in order to specifically engage with the rural communities, council officials met directly with Hannahstown Community Association and Edenderry Residents' Association. A community group was not identified in Loughview - however, Lagan College, located near the Loughview settlement, participated in the POP consultation. Direct engagement enabled identification and clarity on key issues that are important to the rural communities. In addition, in response to the wider POP consultation, submissions were received from statutory bodies, agencies, interest groups, community & residents' groups and individuals where issues that affect rural areas were raised.

The responses to the extensive public consultation on the POP has helped to inform the policy approach set out in the DPS.

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

As stated above, the 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 DPS supports sustainable modes of travel and the overall development strategy seeks to ensure new development is accessible by a range of transport modes.

The stakeholder engagement outlined above identified a number of concerns and issues. These are summarised as follows (POP references used):

- **GR1 Supporting Economic Growth – level of growth not to put pressure on the countryside.**

- **LP1 Accommodating New Homes – as GR1 above. Importance of keeping Belfast’s rural settlements unique, maintaining the unique function and purpose of the villages. A balance between development and preserving and maintaining the countryside is required.**
- **LP8 Promotion of Health and Wellbeing – there was general recognition that linkages to the environment are crucial for urban living including the green and blue network e.g. towpath and encouraging better and safer access to the Belfast Hills.**
- **LP16 Local Distinctiveness – encouraging the sense of place through the retention of maintaining the uniqueness of Belfast’s rural villages.**
- **SCR4 Walking, cycling and sustainable modes of transport – New developments should have the appropriate level of footpaths and should link into the existing cycling network.**
- **SCR5 Public Transport - Public transport in some rural villages are poorly serviced and is irregular and expensive.**
- **SCR7 Parking Demand Management – the lack of joined up government is a contributing factor to people wanting more parking in the city centre rather than thinking about better public transport into and around the city.**
- **GA2 Provision of New Open Space and Green Corridors – there was recognition that green networks are vital to the city. Safe and continuous access that links the city to the hills will encourage positive health and economic benefits. Current access to the hills is poor and there is a need to explore greater and safer linkages between the city and countryside.**
- **GA3 Natural Heritage – The Belfast Hills and Lagan Valley Regional Park are Belfast’s biggest assets. Appropriate protection should be afforded to protect the natural environment and to retain the integrity of the villages.**

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 DPS covers the entire area of Belfast City Council, including the countryside area and the rural settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview. The DPS 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 DPS 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 DPS 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 DPS 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 DPS 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 DPS objectives and proportionate to the rural location, be taken into account in assessing planning proposals. This approach is consistent with the responses made to the POP, including through the stakeholder engagement with the rural communities.

Outside of the small settlements, in the wider countryside, DPS 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**.

5A. 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 DPS 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 DPS policies that generally apply across the entire council area.

The DPS 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 DPS can help to promote greater travel choices, including through an improved network of paths and cycleways. The Green & Blue Infrastructure Network policy in the DPS 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 DPS have given no indication of any likely significant adverse rural impacts. This position will be reviewed after the public consultation on the DPS and we welcome comments from all stakeholders, including views from rural communities.

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.

N/A

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
Date:	13 August 2018
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Dermot O’Kane
Position / Grade:	Principal Planning Officer
Division / Branch:	Planning & Building Control
Date:	13 August 2018

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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