

Strategic Settlement Evaluation Paper 11

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PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Planning Committee with a strategic evaluation of all existing settlements as identified in the Ballymena, Larne and Belfast Metropolitan Area Plans (as far as it relates to the former Carrickfergus Council Area), and identify their role within a proposed new settlement hierarchy for the Mid & East Antrim Borough Local Development Plan. In addition, the paper identifies new potential settlement candidates for consideration.

At this stage the paper only aims to provide a foundation for future decision making which will need to be further informed by a Sustainability Appraisal, public consultation and stakeholder engagement.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

The paper provides:-

- i. a summary of the regional policy context for future physical development across a settlement hierarchy;
- an overview of the existing settlement hierarchies provided in the Ballymena Area Plan, Larne Area Plan and Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (in regard to the former Carrickfergus Council Area);
- iii. an evaluation of each existing settlement in the context of the Housing Evaluation Framework and the Hierarchy of Settlements & Related Infrastructure Wheel as set out in the Regional Development Strategy 2035;
- iv. an assessment of likely constraints for each settlement which may inform future land use decisions in relation to potential settlement growth;
- v. a proposed settlement hierarchy for Mid & East Antrim Borough Council taking account of the settlement evaluation.

RECOMMENDATION

That members have regard to the findings of this paper and consider the position of settlements in the proposed new hierarchy.



- 1.1 This paper is the latest in a series of Position Papers being presented to the Planning Committee in building the evidence base for the new Mid & East Antrim Local Development Plan (LDP).
- 1.2 The purpose of the paper is to evaluate the existing settlements within the Borough to provide a basis for a new settlement hierarchy which identifies settlements and the role of settlements therein in accordance with the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 Spatial Framework Guidance (SFG) and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS).
- 1.3 The first preparatory paper presented to the then Shadow Council in June 2014, focused on Population and Growth. Section 3 of this paper included details on the following:
 - Principles of Planning for Growth;
 - Existing Growth Strategies: Regional Context;
 - Existing Growth Strategies: Local Area Plans;
 - Existing Settlement Hierarchy within Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus Districts;
 - Suggested settlement hierarchy and strategy for accommodating growth for discussion.
- 1.4 That paper recommended that the settlement hierarchy for the new Council area should be reexamined to identify if any settlements need to be re-designated based on their function and services.
- 1.5 At the Local Development Plan workshops held on 8th October 2015, one of the sessions focused on Housing and Settlement. Theme 2 of this workshop dealt with the distribution of new housing growth and asked those in attendance to consider if changes were needed to the existing Settlement Hierarchy as defined in the existing area plans. While there was some discussion on this, no firm suggestions were made about the potential re-classification of particular settlements or the possible addition of new candidate small settlements to the hierarchy.
- 1.6 This paper provides detailed evaluations of all designated settlements below the Main Towns tier in the hierarchy and provides options to stimulate discussion and assist members to agree on an appropriate Settlement Hierarchy for the new LDP.
- 1.7 The main reason we need to establish a Settlement Hierarchy is to promote sustainable development, as LDPs are required to do by regional planning policy as set out in the RDS and the SPPS. Settlements that are sustainable places to live and work are generally those that integrate housing, employment and essential services such as schools, shops, community and recreational facilities and public transport close together, and readily accessible by local communities.





- 1.8 Bringing housing, employment and services closer together in settlements will contribute to their viability by;
 - Supporting existing and new services and facilities
 - Helping to create vibrant and lively places
 - Improving accessibility for communities, by reducing the need for travel and providing the critical mass to support public transport services

In addition, the RDS recognises that a strong network of Smaller Towns supported by Villages helps to sustain and service the broader rural community.



1.9 The settlement hierarchy will help us to decide the location of future development in the Borough and the broad proportion of the housing allocation that is appropriate for each tier. Other technical studies will then be used to determine the right amount of new development that is appropriate for each settlement within a given tier. This will help to ensure that the scale of any new development planned through the LDP is appropriate for the particular settlement and that it is adequately supported by physical infrastructure and services.

2.0 Regional Planning Policy Context

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2035

- 2.1 The Regional Development Strategy 2035 Spatial Framework, in providing for the future physical development of the region, identifies a hierarchy of settlements based on main hubs, local hubs and a strong rural community living either in small towns, villages, small settlements or in the open countryside.
- 2.2 Spatial Framework Guidance in the RDS 2035 which is aimed at achieving sustainable development, promotes economic development opportunities and population growth in the hubs and clusters. For the rural area outside of the main and local hubs the spatial framework guidance is to sustain the rural communities living in smaller settlements (small towns and villages) and the open countryside and to improve accessibility for rural communities. The RDS recognises that a strong network of smaller towns supported by villages helps to sustain and service the rural community. A sustainable approach to further development is important to ensure that growth does not exceed the capacity of the essential infrastructure expected for modern living.
- 2.3 Ballymena and Larne towns are recognised as main hubs. Larne is also identified as a gateway due to its strategic coastal location with a natural harbour and as it is the second largest port in Northern Ireland. The RDS 2035 also recognises that Ballymena and Larne have the potential to cluster with Antrim as they are well connected by road and rail and their proximity to the International Airport gives this cluster a potential advantage in attracting business.
- 2.4 Within the RDS 2035, Carrickfergus is grouped within the major conurbation known as the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area. Carrickfergus is identified as benefiting from its position on the estuary of Belfast Lough. With a vibrant marina, waterfront development and historic castle it has good transport links with Belfast and Scotland via Larne. The RDS 2035 recognises that it is important to promote regeneration of Carrickfergus town centre to extend its employment and retail base to serve its catchment and that Carrickfergus has an important complementary role to play within the BMUA. Whilst Belfast City will continue to provide job opportunities for many of its residents, the Strategy advises that it will be important for Carrickergus to widen its economic base as a means of reducing its role as a dormitory town.

Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel

2.5 The Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel in the RDS 2035 illustrates the patterns of service provision that are likely to be appropriate at different spatial levels including villages, small towns, regional towns and cities (Table 2.1). Small settlements and the rural area complete the hierarchy of locations where development may take place. The model recognises the strong relationship between settlement size and the levels of service that can be supported.



Table 2.1: Settlement Hierarchy Classification

Table 2.1: Settle	ement Hierarchy Classifi	cation		
Infrastructure	Principal City	Regional Town	Smaller Towns	Villages
Skills	•University	•Further Education, •Special Schools	•Library, •Post Primary	•Nursery, •Primary School
Health	Acute Hospital,A&E,Maternity	 A&E Hospital, Children's Home, Minor Injuries, Outpatients 	 Pharmacy, Health Centres, Social Services, Day Care Centres 	 Doctor, Ambulance, Outreach Services
Social	 Museums/Galleries, Conference/Concert Arena 	 Leisure Centre (pool) Visitor Centre, Advice Centres, Arts & Culture Centre 	 Community Centre, Sports Facility, Welfare Services 	Local Hall,Play Areas
Environment	 Power Generation, AONB/ASSI 	 Water & Sewage Treatment Plants, Waste-landfill, Waste-recycle 	 Recycling, Renewables, Water & Sewers Supply 	 Access to clean water, Sewage disposal
Commercial	 Department Stores, Specialist Shops, Arts & Cultural Facilities 	 Shopping Centres, Retail Warehousing, Range of Restaurants 	 Supermarket, Restaurants, Mix of Retail Facilities 	 Shop, Pub, Post Office, Petrol Station
Justice	 Police HQ, High Court, Prison Forensic Science 	 Police District, County Court, Probation Service 	•Police Station	 Neighbourhood Watch
Productive	 Tourism Signature Projects, Science Centre, Major Industrial parks, Strategic Development Zones 	 Industrial Park, Tourism Office 	•Enterprise Centre, •Information Office	•Workshop/ Business Unit
Networks	 Ports & Airports, Key Transport Nodes, Energy Generation Interconnector 	 Major Roads, Bus/Rail, Park & Ride, Cycle Network 	 Link Corridors/ Trunk Roads, Bus/Rail to larger centres 	 Local Roads, Broadband, Urban Street Lighting, Local Bus, Cycle

Source: Extracted from RDS 2035 Diagram No. 2.2: The Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel Pg. 24

- 2.6 The RDS also recognises that:
 - settlements often provide either a greater or lesser range of services than the core population may dictate. It is not appropriate therefore to consider 'urban' population alone in classifying service settlements within any district – the population of rural hinterlands can also support services in urban centres;
 - service centres tend to be hierarchical, with a large number of centres providing a smaller range of services, and a smaller number of centres providing a wider range. Each class of settlement provides services lower down in the hierarchy; and
 - access to services and facilities is important. Creating a critical mass to support a level of services raises challenges for service providers in meeting the needs of spatially dispersed populations.

Housing Evaluation Framework

2.7 To assist judgments on the allocation of housing growth, the RDS also provides a broad evaluation framework which takes account of the capacity of settlements based on the following six tests:

TUDIC	2.2. Housing Evaluation Framework		
1	Resource Test	Assessment of the existence of community assets and physical infrastructure such as water, waste & sewage, including spare capacity.	
2	Environmental Capacity Test	Assessment of the environmental assets of the settlement, the potential for flooding and the potential of the settlement to accommodate future outward growth without significant environmental degradation.	
3	Transport Test	Assessment of the potential for integrating land use and public transport, walking & cycling routes to help reduce the reliance on the car.	
4	Economic Development Test	Assessment of the potential to facilitate appropriate housing and jobs balance. Identify and detail any major strategic development opportunities.	
5	Urban & Rural Character Test	Assessment of the potential to maintain a sense of place and to integrate new development in a way that does not detract from the character and identity of the settlement.	
6	Community Services Test	Assessment of the existing community service role and function of the settlement and potential for such roles & functions to be reinforced.	

2.8 There is a degree of overlap in the Housing Evaluation Framework factors - for example, the community services and economic development tests are encompassed to an extent within the resource test and there is a strong relationship between the environmental capacity and urban and rural character tests.



- 2.9 The resource and transport tests are aimed at supporting sustainable development and settlements which have the environmental capacity for growth and score strongly in terms of the resource and transport tests should be considered to have strong growth potential in the context of this element of RDS direction.
- 2.10 In summary, when defining where each settlement sits in the hierarchy, account should be taken of a range of factors, including the RDS spatial framework, the population of individual settlements and an assessment of the role or function of settlements including retail base, employment opportunities and community services (e.g. social, religious, educational, recreational) and existing physical infrastructure (e.g. sewerage services, water supply, drainage) including spare capacity and public transport provision.



3.0 Existing Local Area Plans Context

- 3.1 The Ballymena Area Plan 1986-2001 and the Larne Area Plan 2010 are now well past their notional end-by dates and were prepared before the introduction of the first version of the RDS and in very different social and economic climates. Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP), was adopted on 9 September 2014 and DRD has determined, that it is in general conformity with the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2035. Each plan established a settlement hierarchy upon which future development or growth was based (Table 3.1).
- 3.2 In each on the three plans, the main town is identified as the focus for most development, with the smaller towns and villages seen as local centres serving the needs of their rural hinterlands. The fourth tier in the hierarchy comprised of the small settlements. Only two such settlements were identified in the Ballymena area and two in the Carrickfergus area, in comparison to eighteen in the Larne district. These small settlements were recognised as having potential to accommodate small groups of dwellings or single dwellings, as long as their size, character and identity were preserved.

Settlement Hierarchy	Ballymena	Larne	Carrickfergus
Main Towns	Ballymena	Larne	Carrickfergus
Local Towns			Whitehead Greenisland
Villages	Ahoghill Broughshane Cargan Clough Cullybackey Kells/Connor Portglenone	Ballycarry Ballygalley Ballystrudder Carnlough Glenarm Glynn	
Small Settlements	Grange Corner Martinstown	Browns Bay Carnageer Carnalbanagh Carncastle Crosshill Deerpark Drumcrow Ferris Bay Feystown Garron Point Glenoe Kilwaughter Magheramorne Mill Bay Mounthill Mullaghboy Raloo Straidkilly	Knocknagulliagh Trooperslane

Table 3.1: Existing Settlement Hierarchy for Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus Districts



- 3.3 Carrickfergus was the only area to have local towns designated but had no villages and only two small settlements. Ballymena and Larne had a similar number of villages (7 and 6 respectively) but these vary in terms of size, form, function and capacity to accommodate growth. The majority of villages in the Ballymena district were larger in terms of population and number of services compared to those in Larne. Some of the larger settlements, such as Ahoghill, Cullybackey and Broughshane are quite urban in character, accommodating small business centres and a range of shops and services. The smaller villages have a more restricted range of shops and services.
- 3.4 In relation to small settlements, Larne district has 18 in comparison to only 2 in Ballymena. Martinstown and Grange Corner, in Ballymena district, both have a greater population and range of services than those designated in Larne. One reason for the designation of a high number of small settlements with very limited facilities in Larne may be explained by the restrictive rural policy in place across the open countryside within the Larne Area Plan. At this time designating small settlements throughout the Green Belt and Countryside Policy Areas of the district allowed opportunities for small scale development in predetermined locations to help sustain rural communities. However, the publication of PPS 21 effectively removed these policy areas (save for the Undeveloped Coast CPA) and has generally provided further opportunities for suitable development in the open countryside. In preparing the new LDP, Council will be expected to bring forward a strategy for development in the countryside that reflects the aim, objectives and policy approach of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement tailored to the specific circumstances of the plan area.



4.0 Settlement Evaluation

- 4.1 The existing settlements located in the former Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne districts and listed in Table 3.1 have been evaluated for two main purposes:
 - 1. To assess the appropriate status of existing settlements in a new Settlement Hierarchy, and;
 - **2.** To inform future decisions on the allocation of growth, particularly housing, to individual settlements.

The remainder of this Paper is largely focused on the first purpose i.e. how the settlement evaluation has been used to inform the proposed settlement hierarchy. The use of the settlement evaluation in guiding the distribution of housing growth will be dealt with in a forthcoming Paper on 'Housing Allocation'.

- 4.2 The settlement evaluations include a mix of on-site survey work and desk-top research, the culmination of which is a short report for each settlement (Appendix A) incorporating the following main elements:
 - A brief overview of the settlement's current designation, population and household numbers, including change since the 2001 Census.¹
 - An evaluation framework, based on the headings from the RDS Housing Evaluation Framework. The eight sections from the Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel – Skills, Health, Social, Environment, Commercial, Justice, Productive and Networks have been broadly assessed under the heading of the Resource Test.
 - A map detailing the existing development limit of the settlement; location of various existing land uses e.g. commerce, health facilities, religious buildings; remaining undeveloped zoned housing land; substantial areas of undeveloped land within the settlement limit; areas at flood risk; landscape contours; location of listed buildings and scheduled monuments and the location of waste water treatment works.

Methodology for Assessing the Appropriate Status of Settlements in a Revised Settlement Hierarchy

- 4.3 The reasons for needing to bring forward a new Settlement Hierarchy for the Borough through the LDP have been referred to in Section 3 of the this Paper.
- 4.4 The first step in the methodology was to retain the three Main Towns of Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne at the top tier of the Hierarchy. All these centres have populations well in excess of any of the Local towns or Villages. They are also predominant in regard to the range of services they offer, their transportation links within and beyond the Borough and the strength of their economic base. All of these considerations underlie the regional status of these settlements, as set out in the RDS and referred to in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 of this Paper.
- 4.5 The second step in the methodology was to focus on the lowest tier in the Settlement Hierarchy i.e. the Small Settlements. The settlement evaluations revealed that some of the designated Small Settlements lacked any form of service provision and some displayed little form of physical cohesion or sense of place. In order to assess which Small Settlements should be considered for retention or removal from the Hierarchy, it was decided to apply the test that the Planning Appeals Commission applied in the BMAP inquiry, where they accepted that,

"...in order to constitute a settlement, there should be a concentration of buildings displaying an obvious sense of cohesion and place and offering one or more community facilities".

¹ Where data from the Census was not available for Small Settlements, the approximate number of dwellings within the settlement have been provided.



When this test was applied to the existing Small Settlements in the Borough it suggested that on this basis there was a rational argument for de-designating twelve of them from the proposed hierarchy (paragraph 5.2e refers).

- 4.6 The third step in the methodology was to consider the status of the remaining 25 settlements, i.e. below the Main Towns tier, down to and including those Small Settlements proposed for retention. The Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure Wheel in the RDS 2035 illustrates the patterns of service provision that are likely to be appropriate at different spatial levels including Villages, Small Towns and Regional Towns. However, the RDS does not provide any guidance on what distinguishes Small Towns from Villages or Villages from Small Settlements. Therefore, to determine which settlements should be classified as Small Towns, as Villages and as Small Settlements a detailed Sustainability Assessment of each of these settlements was carried out.
- 4.7 This involved carrying out survey work and desk-top studies to provide information on existing provision of education facilities, community facilities, retail provision and accessibility of all settlements, as indicators of their sustainability. Objective analysis of this information included the application of a scoring mechanism based on similar studies that have been done elsewhere in England and Scotland were applied. This exercise enabled the settlements to be ranked on the basis of their sustainability.
- 4.8 Whilst the sustainability ranking was primarily used as the basis for the hierarchy account was also taken of other relevant factors such as population size and economic development, to refine the overall assessment. This final step in the methodology was deemed necessary as a check and balance, particularly at the higher levels of the settlement hierarchy. For example, a Village scoring highly on sustainability in terms of the services on offer may still lack the population or economic base to justify its upgrading to a Small Town.

Settlement Workshop

- 4.9 At the Settlement Workshop held on 18th February 2016, Members discussed and suggested what classification each settlement should have as their preferred option in a new settlement hierarchy. The evaluation documents produced for each settlement and listed in Appendix A were used to inform this discussion.
- 4.10 There was strong support for the four existing Villages (**Broughshane**, **Cullybackey**, **Ahoghill** and **Portglenone**) having potential to become upgraded to Small Towns. In addition, there was unanimous support for the promotion of **Martinstown** from a Small Settlement to a Village. Discussion also centred on the de-designation of a number of existing Small Settlements and there was broad agreement from those who attended the workshop to support the rationale for de-designating the twelve listed in paragraph 5.2e from the proposed hierarchy.
- 4.11 Finally, the workshop requested that the following built up areas in the Borough be investigated as to whether they could be classified as Small Settlements:
 - Newtowncrommelin (to the north of Glenravel Road between Martinstown and Cargan)
 - Moorfields (located between Ballymena and Larne)
 - Glarryford (located off the A26 dual carriageway between Ballymena and Ballymoney
 - Woodgreen (located off Lisnevenagh Road)
 - Slaght/Slaght Corner (south of Ballymena)
 - Buckna (east of Broughshane)
 - Glenwherry (located between Ballymena and Larne)
 - Rathkenny (located on Cushendall Road between Ballymena and Martinstown)
 - Ballyboley (located between the A8 and Shanes Hill Road)

The consideration of this matter is set out in paragraphs 5.2c and 5.2d.



5.1 Following completion of a strategic evaluation of each existing settlement within Mid & East Antrim, consideration of potential new settlements and discussion with Members at the workshop a proposed settlement hierarchy has been compiled, see Table 5.1 below:

Settlement Hierarchy		
Main Towns	Ballymena Carrickfergus Larne	
Small Towns	Greenisland Whitehead Ahoghill Broughshane Cullybackey Portglenone	
Villages	Cargan Clough Kells/Connor Martinstown	Ballycarry Ballygalley Ballystrudder Carnlough Glenarm Glynn
Small Settlements	Grange Corner Newtowncrommelin Moorefields Buckna Glarryford Woodgreen Milltown Slaght Craigywarren	Carnalbanagh Carncastle Crosshill Glenoe Magheramorne Mounthill Mullaghboy Raloo

Table 5.1: Proposed Settlement Hierarchy for Mid & East Antrim Borough Council

5.2 The evaluation confirms Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne as the Main Towns of the Borough taking into account their level of service provision, potential for employment, population size and the spatial guidance in the RDS. The proposed new settlement hierarchy has suggested the reclassification of a number of existing settlements as follows:



- a. Taking into account the level of service provision, the potential for employment within the settlement, the population size and the spatial guidance within the RDS; the existing Villages of Ahoghill, Broughshane, Cullybackey and Portglenone are identified as having potential to be reclassified as Small Towns;
- b. Taking into account the level of service provision, the potential for employment within the settlement and its population size, the existing Small Settlement of **Martinstown** has been identified as having potential to be reclassified as a *Village*;
- c. Applying the test for the minimum requirements of a Small Settlement set out in paragraph 4.5, the following are proposed as suitable new settlement candidates and are therefore identified as having potential to be designated as new *Small Settlements*:
 - Newtowncrommelin
 - Moorfields
 - Buckna
 - Glarryford
 - Woodgreen
 - Milltown (located between Grange Corner and the shores of Lough Beg)
 - Slaght
 - Craigywarren (located off Cushendall Road between Ballymena and Martinstown)

These potential new Small Settlements came forward following analysis of built up nodes in the countryside², the local knowledge of the Plan team and Members input. As the LDP process evolves, further potential new Small Settlements may be identified.

- d. The following areas suggested by members at the workshop were investigated and found not to meet the test set out in paragraph 4.5 and have therefore not been included in the proposed new hierarchy:
 - Slaght Corner (south of Ballymena)
 - Glenwherry (located between Ballymena and Larne)
 - Rathkenny (located on Cushendall Road between Ballymena and Martinstown)
 - Ballyboley (located between the A8 and Shanes Hill Road)
- e. Taking into account the above-mentioned test, it was found that there are a number of existing Small Settlements, particularly in the lowest tier of the hierarchy that do not appear to have grown and offer little in the way of service provision. Some may even lack any physical cohesion in the existing built form and any type of focal point that might indicate a sense of place. Therefore, following consultation with councillors at the workshop it is proposed that consideration be given to de-designate the following existing Small Settlements:
 - Browns Bay
 - Carnageer
 - Deerpark
 - Drumcrow
 - Ferris Bay
 - Feystown

- Garron Point
- Kilwaughter
- Millbay
- Straidkilly
- Knocknagulliagh
- Trooperslane³
- 5.3 The outcome of this Paper will inform the Council's Preferred Options, to be brought forward at the 'Preferred Options Paper' stage of the LDP. This, along with other possible options will then be issued for public consultation.

² These were identified in Position Paper 10: Development Pressure Analysis

³ Given the proximity of Troopersplane to the existing development limits of Carrickfergus there is potential to subsume it into Carrickfergus and this will be investigated further at a later stage.



- That Members note the outcome of the Strategic Settlement Evaluation and accept this as the Council's preferred option for the proposed new Settlement Hierarchy for Mid & East Antrim.
- That Members accept the proposed new Settlement Hierarchy as the working framework for the future consideration of the strategic housing and other strategic land allocations.



Glossary

Dwelling Refers to detached, semi-detached, terraced and apartme	
Convenience Shops	Supermarkets, convenience stores, bakeries, butchers, greengrocers, confectioners, fishmongers, frozen foods, health shops, off licence, markets
Comparison Shops	Department stores, Clothes/shoes, jewellery/gifts, florists, toys/games, sportswear/cycle, mobile phone, books, charity, music/ hobbies, car parts, carpets, soft furnishings, furniture, electrical, DIY garden
Retail Services	Dry cleaners, Beautician, Hairdresser, Optician, Alterations, DVD rental, Travel Agent, Car rental, photographer, funeral directors, car repairs, dog groomers
Financial/Business Services	Banks, Building Societies, Employment and Careers, Estate Agents, Financial Services, Legal Services, business services/offices
Place of Worship	Church/chapel/Gospel halls etc
Community Hall	Including Church hall/Village hall/Orange hall/Masonic hall etc
Pub/Hot food/café/takeaway	Refers to pubs, restaurants, winebars, bistros, cafés, takeaways, fast food

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