

Armagh City, Banbridge &
Craigavon Borough Council

Local Development Plan 2035

Draft Plan Strategy

Draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment

September 2026



armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk



Armagh City
Banbridge
& Craigavon
Borough Council

Contents

	Page
Consultation Arrangements.....	3
Introduction.....	5
SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016...	6
SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.....	9
SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas.....	15
SECTION 4 – Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas.....	18
SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.....	20
SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording.....	22

Consultation Arrangements

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council is undertaking public consultation on the Local Development Plan draft Plan Strategy (dPS) 2035. This represents a statutory stage in the Local Development Plan process and provides an opportunity for the public and stakeholders to comment on the Council's proposed planning framework for guiding development across the Borough.

The draft Plan Strategy is published for public consultation alongside a range of supporting assessments, which are also available to view and comment upon. These include:

- Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment);
- Draft Habitats Regulations Assessment;
- Draft Equality (Section 75) Screening Report; and
- Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

Have your say

The consultation will take place over a period of 8 weeks, commencing on 13 October 2026 at 5pm and closing at 5.00 pm on 8 December 2026. Representations received after the closing date on 8 December 2026 will not be considered.

Public Engagement

During the consultation period, the Council will facilitate a series of public engagement / drop-in sessions across the Borough. These events will provide an opportunity to engage with members of the Local Development Plan Team and to view the draft Plan Strategy and its supporting documents.

Details of these events are published on the Council's website, in the dPS information leaflet, and in local newspapers in the week commencing 28 September 2026 or can be obtained by contacting the Council's Local Development Plan Team.

Availability of the Rural Needs Impact Assessment

A copy of this document and the draft Plan Strategy including all supporting documentation are available to view on the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council website:

www.armaghibanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

This document along with the draft Plan Strategy and supporting documentation are also available to view in hard copy to view during normal office hours 9am - 5pm at the following locations:

- Banbridge Civic Building, Downshire Road, Banbridge, BT32 3JY
- Craigavon Civic and Conference Centre, 66 Lakeview Road, Craigavon, BT64 1AL
- Palace Buildings, The Palace Demesne, Friary Road, Armagh, BT60 4EL

Alternative Formats

All documentation can be made available in different formats on request and alternative languages where possible, by contacting the Council's Planning Office:

By telephone: 0300 200 7830 (NI General Planning Line);
0300 0300 900 (Main Council Line)

If for any reason a particular alternative format cannot be met, other possible solutions will be explored.

How to respond

Responses to this public consultation should be submitted to the Local Development Plan Team by the following options:

Online Consultation Portal: www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

Email: ldp@armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

Post: Planning Department
Local Development Plan LDP Team
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Banbridge Civic Building
Downshire Road
Banbridge
BT32 3JY

When submitting a response to the consultation on this document and the draft Plan Strategy, the public and stakeholders are encouraged to submit representations via the online portal.

What happens next?

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council will use this information to fulfil the Council's policy development and statutory obligations. All responses are public documents and will be made available for public inspection and will be held on a database in accordance with the provisions of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

Introduction

This document is the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) prepared in support of the draft Plan Strategy for the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Local Development Plan 2035 (LDP).

The draft Plan Strategy is the first of two development plan documents that together will comprise the Council's LDP. It has been prepared in accordance with Section 8 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and it sets out the Council's vision and strategic objectives for the future development and use of land within the Borough.

In preparing the draft Plan Strategy, the Council has taken account of the Regional Development Strategy, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement, and other relevant policies and guidance issued by the Department for Infrastructure. It also reflects the Council's Corporate Plan and Community Plan.

Under the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, the Council, as a public authority, must have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing, or revising policies, strategies and plans, as well as when designing and delivering public services. This draft RNIA has been prepared to meet that requirement.

The draft RNIA will be published alongside the draft Plan Strategy and other supporting documents. All documents will be subject to public consultation before the Plan Strategy is finalised and adopted by the Council, subject to any required amendments.

Consideration of rural needs forms one part of the overall assessment process for the draft Plan Strategy. Other key assessments include the Sustainability Appraisal, Equality Impact Assessment, and Habitats Regulations Assessment.

The draft RNIA has been prepared by the Council's Local Development Plan Team. It takes account of the documents outlined above, as well as representations received during consultation on the Preferred Options Paper, published in March 2018. The assessment has been carried out in line with guidance and templates issued by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) under the Rural Needs Act.

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

1A. Name of Public Authority: Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough 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.

Local Development Plan 2035 Draft Plan Strategy (draft PS) which includes a spatial growth strategy and suite of operational policies that will guide development in the Council area over the plan period, produced in accordance with the Planning (NI) Act 2011.

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

Developing Strategies and Policies in the draft Plan Strategy

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

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Local Development Plan 2035 (draft PS)

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

Aim

The aim of the draft PS is to set out the Council's spatial development framework for the period up to 2035. It has a statutory link to the Council's Community Plan. *The LDP is the spatial reflection of the Community Plan, focused on land use and placemaking aspects of the various actions and priorities in the Community Plan. The LDP vision builds on the Community Plan vision to give it a spatial focus.*

The LDP vision is:

'Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough will be a place of choice to live, work and visit, with a vibrant and sustainable economy, healthy and connected communities and a high quality natural and historic environment.'

Objectives

The draft PS is a plan-led policy framework that seeks to achieve its vision through a series of Plan objectives and strategic approaches along with a suite of operational policies. The Plan objectives form an approach that offers appropriate balance between improving quality of life and economic prosperity for all, whilst protecting environmental assets and seeking to ensure that development is sustainable in the Borough in the interests of future generations. The draft PS sets out strategic approaches and operational planning policies that will be used in the assessment of all planning applications to ensure the objectives of the Plan are secured.

The dPS is structured into four Parts. The strategic policies and strategies set out in Part 1 of the Plan Strategy must always be referred to in the first instance. The strategic policies and strategies set out in the dPS are as follows:

Strategic Policies:

- SP 1: Furthering Sustainable Development and Climate Change Resilience
- SP 2: Positive Design and Place-making

Strategies:

- SGS 1: Spatial Growth Strategy
- SGS 2: Settlement Hierarchy
- SGS 3: Strategic Housing Allocation
- SGS 4: Management of Housing Supply
- SGS 5: Strategic Economic Development Lands Allocation
- SGS 6: Retail Hierarchy
- SGS 7: Tourism Strategy
- SGS 8: Transport Strategy
- SGS 9: Open Space Strategy
- SGS 10: Sustainable Development in the Countryside
- SGS 11: Strategic Landscape Policy Areas
- SGS 12: Heritage Strategy

These components of the Plan Strategy (PS) are largely strategic in nature and these strategies and associated policies provide guidance on the general locations where development, or particular types of development, are broadly regarded as appropriate or inappropriate.

Part 2 of the draft Plan Strategy sets out general and design and placemaking policies, along with operational subject policies which have been grouped under three headings:

1. Social
2. Economic
3. Environmental.

Part 3 of the draft Plan Strategy sets out Other Specialised Areas while Part 4 is the monitoring and review framework.

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

The default definition of rural used in Northern Ireland is that developed by the Interdepartmental Urban-Rural Definition Group. The definition was initially proposed in 2005 but subsequently amended in the Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (NISRA 2015). This definition classifies settlements with a population of less than 5,000 together with the open countryside as rural.

For the purposes of the RNIA, the following settlements together with the open countryside fall under the definition of rural:

Small Towns

Keady, Markethill, Tandragee, Gilford, Rathfriland

Villages

Blackwatertown, Charlemont, Darkley, Glenanne (Lisdrumchor) Hamiltonsbawn, Killylea, Laurelvale/Mullavilly, Loughgall, Middletown, Milford, Mountnorris, Poyntzpass, Richhill, Tynan, Kinallen, Lawrencetown, Loughbrickland, Scarva, Aghacommon, Aghagallon, Bleary, Clonmore, Derrymacash, Dollingstown, Donacloney, Drumnacanvy, Magheralin, Scotch Street, Tamnamore (Co. Armagh part), Waringstown.

Small Settlements

Acton, Aghory, Annaghmore (Teagy Rd), Annaghmore (Moss Rd), Annahugh, Ardress, Artasooly, Auglish, Lisnadill, Loughgilly, Madden, Milltown (Aghory), Milltown (Benburb), Mullaghbrack, Salters Grange, St. Mary's Terrace, Stonebridge, Kilkinamurray, Lenaderg, Moneyslane, Tullylish, Waringsford, Ballymacmaine, Derrylee, Ballynabragget, Ballymacnab, Broomhill, Carrickaness, Cladymore, Clare, Collegeland, Derryhale, Derrynoose, Derryscollopy, Drumhillery, Edenaveys, Eglish, Glenanne, Granemore, Kilmore, Tassagh, Tullygoonigan, Tullyroan Corner, Annacloy, Ardtanagh, Ashfeld / Gowdystown, Ballela, Ballyroney, Closkelt, Corbet, Glasker, Glen, Katesbridge, Blackskull, Charlestown, Derryadd, Derrymore, Derrytrasna, Gamblestown, Gibson's Hill, Maghera, Milltown (Co. Armagh,) Milltown (Co. Down), Tartaraghan, The Birches.

Countryside

Paragraph 6.61 of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) defines "the countryside" as land lying outside of settlement limits as identified in Local Development Plans (LDPs).

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

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

The draft PS contains a Spatial Growth Strategy including a Countryside Strategy which seeks to direct and manage growth within the Borough. These strategic approaches are supported by a suite of operational policies designed to guide development across the Borough.

The draft PS also includes two overarching strategic policies that are applicable to all types of development within the Borough as follows:

- SP 1: Furthering Sustainable Development and Climate Change Resilience
- SP 2: Positive Design and Place-making

Policy SP 1 will facilitate sustainable development that mitigates and adapts to climate change. It supports developments that are located and designed in ways that reduces environmental impacts and supports the wider climate change agenda.

Policy SP 2 requires all new development where appropriate, to contribute to the creation of successful and sustainable places by adhering to the principles of good design and positive place-making.

As these strategic policies and the Spatial Growth Strategy cover the entire Borough, it is therefore likely to have an impact on what is defined as the rural area.

The overall aim of the draft PS is to further sustainable development across the Council area. The Spatial Growth Strategy for the Borough provides the strategic framework for delivery of the LDP vision and strategic objectives. This includes facilitating growth in the small towns to provide appropriate opportunities for housing, business, retail and services, leisure and cultural facilities. In addition, the Spatial Growth Strategy facilitates sustainable development in the open countryside (areas outside SDLs) while also sustaining rural communities in villages and small settlements.

The LDP Countryside Strategy seeks to facilitate sustainable development in the countryside whilst balancing this against the need to protect and conserve the countryside, recognising it as a unique and valuable resource. It supports a range of types of development in the countryside that are considered, in principle, to be acceptable.

The draft PS also highlights the value of landscape quality and SGS 11 - Strategic Landscape Policy Areas identifies two broad areas which are particularly unique. These areas are also recognised for their scenic quality and environmental vulnerability and are therefore considered to be more sensitive to change and are therefore worthy of additional recognition and protection.

The draft PS aims to deliver on the main pillars of sustainable development, which are the economy, the environment and the societal needs and aspirations. In so doing, the potential

impact upon the rural area can be considered to relate to these themes. The draft PS sets out spatial and strategic objectives related to social, economic, environmental considerations. Through operational policies including, but not limited to, those related to housing, economic development, retailing and town centres, tourism, the natural and historic environment and infrastructure, the draft PS will have a direct influence on development. The policy aims are to contribute towards positive improvements, for example, sustaining and providing for job opportunities in the rural area. Ultimately the Plan Strategy shall help towards sustaining rural settlements and hinterlands as vibrant communities.

Overall, the implementation of the draft PS is likely to contribute to a positive impact on rural dwellers and the rural area in terms of supporting economic growth, social inclusion and seeking to underpin its future sustainability. It is considered that some policies will have a more direct impact on the rural areas while other policies may be more indirect in their outcomes.

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 draft PS aligns with regional policy contained in the RDS with the focus of growth being on settlements as identified in the Settlement Hierarchy. Therefore, the spatial strategy and policies in the draft PS seek to ensure appropriate sustainable development opportunities across the council area, including urban and rural areas. Similarly, the LDP seeks to support and sustain all our communities within the Borough, both urban and rural.

Whilst the policies may make distinctions between the application of policy in settlements and the countryside, the overall aim is to deliver sustainable development irrespective of location.

Therefore, the aim of the policies is not to impact urban and rural people differently, but to deliver positive outcomes across the full range of land use areas, such as housing and economic development, in a sustainable way that benefits everyone across the council area. The Council area has a diverse mix of both urban and rural areas, with approximately 77.5% of the total population residing in settlements and 22.5 % outside settlements in the rural area (based on the 2021 census).

The interdependence in the relationship between urban and rural areas needs to be recognised. Settlements, irrespective of size, provide support to the wider rural hinterland in terms of service, facilities, entertainment and employment. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that the needs of people in rural areas can be met both in an urban or rural context. The fact that a policy is viewed as a rural or urban policy does not mean that the outworkings of that policy are confined to the rural or urban area of the Council but viewed in the wider context of delivering the overall vision of the draft PS.

The LDP has the important aim of supporting rural communities by providing appropriate and sustainable opportunities for development in the countryside. To achieve this aim, the Countryside Strategy will seek to:

- facilitate development which supports rural communities and contributes to a sustainable rural economy in the Borough;
- protect, conserve, and where possible enhance the rural landscape, natural environment, and historical and cultural heritage assets associated with the countryside of the Borough; and
- promote high standards in the design, siting, and landscaping of development in the countryside.

Rural industry and employment differ from that of towns and cities. Difficulties with access to services, and issues with connectivity, social and digital, can have a disproportionate impact

on rural dwellers (DAERA Key Rural issues, Northern Ireland 2024).

The Countryside Strategy seeks to set out the range and types of development which are considered to contribute to the aims of sustainable development and are therefore considered in principle to be acceptable in the Countryside. The Countryside Strategy sets out opportunities for a range of types of residential and non-residential development and links to related operational planning policies.

Social

The Housing Strategy seeks to create balanced communities with high quality sustainable residential environments to meet the housing needs of everyone. While the Housing Strategy seeks to deliver approximately 64% of the Borough's housing within its main settlements and small towns that benefit from high accessibility to public transport, it also seeks to support rural communities by facilitating sustainable, well-designed residential development in the countryside. Rural housing has been considered extensively through the development of the draft PS; for example, in the strategic allocation and the drafting of the related operational planning policies. Opportunities have been afforded to the rural area and in the countryside provided the relevant planning criteria have been met.

Open space, sport and outdoor recreation facilities play an important role in improving health and wellbeing not limited to location. The protection and enhancement of sporting and outdoor recreational facilities in urban areas may also reduce the demand for such activities in the countryside and may have an impact on rural dwellers. This can sometimes help provide relief for more fragile environments in the rural area. Those policies for outdoor recreation in the countryside will impact on the people in the rural area positively and will improve the service provision of the rural area as well as improving the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers. Open space enriches the character of the Borough and can contribute towards civic pride and community cohesion. Outdoor recreation in the countryside is important not only to the local community but benefits the rural economy and can promote tourism. The key purpose of the LDP in relation to outdoor recreation in the countryside is to ensure it operates as sustainably as possible.

Economic

The Economic Development Strategy and policy direction generally reflects the Spatial Growth Strategy for the LDP. The draft PS balances planned economic development growth with the sustainability objectives of the LDP to ensure the environmental quality of the countryside is not prejudiced. Whilst there may be a perception that the rural policies are prohibitive, they reflect the importance of sustaining vibrant rural communities. The draft PS recognises the role economic development and small enterprise can play in rural life and provides a degree of flexibility for a number of uses, provided that the established rural character is retained.

Proposed policies in relation to Retailing and Town Centres reflect the overall thrust of the draft PS in that development is directed to appropriate locations. A retail hierarchy is proposed and for the consideration of development proposals outside town centres, a sequential test approach is applied. The LDP acknowledges the role of village and other rural settlements which help sustain rural communities by meeting daily shopping and service needs of residents. This has a variety of positive and negative impacts on the rural area.

The Tourism Strategy promotes sustainable tourism development in hubs, small towns and settlements where it can enhance regeneration and economic growth. However, appropriate tourism development will also be facilitated to sustain rural communities and strengthen the local economy. The Tourism policies which support the Tourism Strategy are influenced by a

range of matters including the need to protect our natural heritage for future generations. The Tourism policies in the countryside have potential to impact differently on people living in urban and rural areas. The policies include a specific policy in relation to safeguarding tourism assets, as well as policies for tourism development in the urban and countryside areas. Such policies will create the potential to attract more visitors resulting in a beneficial impact on the rural economy as well as employment opportunities that will benefit the rural community.

The minerals industry, through extraction and processing, makes a significant contribution to the local and wider economy as a valued provider of employment, particularly in rural areas. There are also a number of challenges arising from this form of development. A suite of policies in relation to Mineral Development is included in the draft PS. Specific proposals can have potential adverse impacts on the environment and on the amenity and wellbeing of people living in proximity to extraction and processing sites. The scale of extraction can present a visual intrusion and degradation of the landscape. Minerals can only be extracted from sites where they occur thus presenting a challenge as there may be limited opportunities for consideration of alternative sites. The extraction sites in the Borough are all located in rural areas and are mainly involved in the extraction of sandstone and limestone.

Environmental

Policies for the Natural Environment have the potential to impact on the rural area more than urban areas as much of our natural environment is in rural areas. The impacts largely stem from the level of protection given to the conservation of natural assets, such as habitats and landscapes.

The Borough is rich in varied landscapes, habitats and landscape features. The greatest Natural Environment assets are in the rural area. The Borough also contains natural environment designations both international, for example, Ramsar, Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), and National, for example, Areas of Special Scientific Interest. The proposed Natural Environment policies aim to conserve, protect and where possible enhance the Borough's designated natural environment assets.

There is little which separates the impacts of Historic Environment policies on the rural area from the urban area. The policy provisions are the same for rural and urban areas and so no meaningful differential exists. Two new designations of an Area of Significant Archaeological Interest have by virtue of their rural siting and related policies a slight differential impact.

Flood risk can be a potential issue for all areas as it can emerge from several sources. Deforestation, agricultural drainage and changing land use practices can lead to increased flows in watercourses and increased potential from fluvial flooding. If there is a significant differential impact, it would favour the rural area given that less development of a certain nature could have reduced potential for surface water flooding. It is therefore considered that the proposed flood risk policies are not more impactful on the rural area.

Renewable and low carbon energy and minerals policies by virtue of the nature of the existing or likely location of proposals related to that form of development will have a potential impact in the rural area. All forms of renewable energy have potential impacts on the rural area that are not arguably matched at present in urban areas. Wind energy development proposals are more likely to be located in rural areas. Therefore, there are more likely impacts – both positive and negative – on the rural area. A degree of visual impact and impact in relation to landscape character is to be expected, but there will also be financial benefits to individual landowners (who are normally resident in the affected area) in terms of renewable energy for their own operations and for selling to the national grid.

The draft PS seeks to maximise the Borough's full potential for generating renewable and low carbon energy development in locations where associated development proposals are not likely to cause unacceptable adverse impacts. A cautious approach will be adopted within those areas considered to be most sensitive to proposals for renewable energy and storage.

Solar energy schemes, by their nature, are also more likely to be in rural areas and, like wind energy, can have associated amenity issues such as visual impact. To comply with policy, applications for development should include assessments and reports in relation to impacts on priority species and habitats. Similarly, biomass energy - particularly through combustion, can impact on such things as air quality and water quality (through emissions) and can produce significant noise. However, it also has financial benefits for the local economy; and biomass fuel can secure a long-term income for farmers, forestry owners and contractors, and transport operators in rural areas.

There are differential impacts associated with Transportation policies as the provision of public transport and transport infrastructure is mostly focused on the Borough's urban centres. Rural areas in particular face accessibility challenges and often lack frequent or reliable public transport services. Private transport is therefore a necessity in many rural areas in terms of access to employment and basic services. There is a lower amount of public transport provision to the rural areas; however, this needs to be considered in the context of the level of population these public transport services support. The draft PS has an Active Travel Policy. Provisions for active travel and high levels of connectivity may be considered more difficult to achieve in rural areas; however, it is anticipated that such requirements will be applied in a way that is proportionate and appropriate to the scale and locational context of a proposal.

There are some differential impacts associated with development related to waste management in the rural area. Waste management policy can direct certain types of waste disposal development to rural areas, for example, re-use of former mineral extraction sites. Given the low likelihood of such developments, the impact is likely to be negligible over the Plan period. Due to the location of some developments, there is likely to be no access to mains sewerage and thus non-mains sewerage is required usually through a septic tank. This can have an additional cost attributed to it whilst an accumulation of these types of developments can have an impact on the environment.

The Strategic Policy for Furthering Sustainable Development & Climate Change Resilience applies to proposals across the entire Borough. It signposts to relevant operational planning policy.

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

Given the interrelationship between urban and rural areas, the strategies and policies of the draft PS will primarily impact upon the following social, economic, and environmental aspects of rural areas:

Rural Businesses
Rural Tourism
Rural Housing
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas
Education or Training in Rural Areas
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas

Poverty in Rural Areas
Deprivation in Rural Areas
Rural Crime or Community Safety
Rural Development
Agri-Environment
Other: Renewable Energy and Low Carbon Energy
Development, Landscape, Natural and Historic Environment, Minerals Development

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

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.

The following methods/information and sources were used to inform the draft Plan Strategy:

- consultation with the community (as per the Council's SCI)
- consultation with other organisations (Stakeholder and Statutory/Non-Statutory Consultees)
- published statistics
- research papers
- other council and government publications

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.

- NISRA Census 2011 and 2021;
- Local Government Election Results;
- Household Estimates, NISRA;
- Household Projections, NISRA;
- NIHE House Condition Survey 2023;
- Northern Ireland Housing Market Review 2024/25;
- NIHE – Housing Investment Plans 2023-26;
- DfI annual planning statistics;
- DfI draft Transport Strategy 2035;
- Department for the Economy Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation Statistics 2026;
- DfI Flood Maps
- NISRA –Tourism Statistics;
- Extant Development Plans related to the Council area
- The Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council Community Plan and related reports and statistics produced.;
- The Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council Housing Monitor produced by LDP team;

Preferred Options Stage:

A series of Preparatory Papers were produced to inform the LDP process at the Preferred Options Paper stage. Each paper identified a separate topic area and provided an executive summary of the current position in relation to that topic area. Baseline reviews took place along with consideration of regional strategic planning policy and any locally distinct need identified, used to justify the policy direction for each topic area which is carried through to the draft PS. Information for these papers was collated through research, consultation and discussion with government departments, agencies and public bodies. Desk based research was undertaken of local and central government websites,

published research and reports. Topic papers were published as part of the Preferred Options Paper (POP) following consultation with Elected Members.

The POP was published with a full public consultation exercise inviting comments from all interested parties. Public consultation events were held at various venues/locations and at various times throughout the council area. Council officers from the LDP team attended these engagement opportunities to aid interested parties in understanding the POP and how to respond to it. At these events various topics were discussed and expanded upon. Views expressed largely included the specific housing, economic and social needs relating to the rural areas of the Borough. Statutory consultees, including government departments, were also consulted on the POP. At the end of the consultation period all the responses received were collated and a Public Consultation Report produced to inform the LDP process going forward.

Engagement with Elected Members:

The preparation of the draft PS for the LDP was informed by a high level of engagement with Elected Members, primarily through a series of topic-based workshops. Members who represent District Electoral Areas which are rural in nature are particularly aware of the social and economic needs of those areas which play a critical role within the Council as a whole.

Informal Engagement with key statutory consultees:

Draft versions of operational policies were forwarded to key statutory consultees including government department for consideration. This included DAERA.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA):

During the SA process the approach and policies of the draft Plan Strategy have been considered in detail with the aim of ensuring the overarching aim of sustainable development is considered throughout the document.

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

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 sets out at a strategic level the approach to the delivery of growth across the whole of Northern Ireland which includes rural areas. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland, Edition 2, 2025 (SPPS) sets out the planning requirements for the whole of Northern Ireland. The SPPS sets out rural policy and the delivery of sustainable development across a range of topics including employment, housing and economic growth. The Council is required to have regard to these strategic documents along with other government advice and guidance to ensure that the needs of the entire Council area are delivered in a sustainable manner.

The RDS seeks to sustain rural communities living in the smaller settlements and the open countryside and to improve accessibility for rural communities (SFG13 and SFG 14). Key considerations of the RDS are the role and function of rural settlements and accessibility to services. The RDS in respect of the rural area identifies the need to:

- Establish the role of multi-functional town centres. These should be the prime locations for business, housing, administration, leisure and cultural facilities both for urban and rural communities.

- Connect rural and urban areas. This is necessary to widen the economic base of town, village and countryside, provide support and networking opportunities to encourage the formation of local alliances to exploit complementary resources and facilities.
- Revitalise small towns and villages. This is particularly relevant to those towns and villages which have been static or declining and contain areas of social need. Deprivation happens in different ways in different places. An integrated approach between government departments, agencies and communities will ensure that regeneration plans reflect the specific needs of each community.
- Facilitate the development of rural industries, businesses, and enterprises in appropriate locations. Farming plays a major part in sustaining rural community networks, as employers, consumers and producers. Forestry and fishing also contribute to communities, in employment and commercial terms, as well as in terms of recreation opportunities. Other industries such as tourism and renewable energy can provide further jobs and opportunities in rural areas as long as they are integrated appropriately within the settlement or rural landscape.
- Encourage sustainable and sensitive development. The expansion of rural tourism and development, which is both sustainable and sensitive to the environment, should be encouraged. This includes the ability of settlements and landscapes to absorb development.
- Improve the overall connectivity of rural communities to services and other parts of the Region by exploring innovative ways of bringing these services to the communities. Using the community hall, local school or church hall for visiting service providers will help keep people living in rural areas connected. Different service delivery approaches could include outreach and mobile services or increased use of digital technology.
- Integrate local transport. Promoting integrated rural transport initiatives which meet the needs of those living in isolated areas and in particular elderly and disabled people.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area comprises vibrant rural areas with active communities and sectors that contribute to the overall employment base. That employment base is required to be supported and sustained to remain vibrant. That can be achieved by bringing forward a range of planning policies that address appropriate levels of development in housing and employment opportunities whilst protecting the character and heritage of rural settlements and the open countryside.

If the response to section 3A was yes go to Section 4A.

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.

In the formulation of the Spatial Growth Strategy, Countryside Strategy and the suite of policies for the draft PS, the future sustainability of the rural area has been considered.

As aforementioned, to enable communities in the rural area to be sustained, an appropriate level of housing and economic opportunities are required to be provided. Policies contained in the draft Plan Strategy offer appropriate and sustainable uses in rural locations and seek to maintain the existing population and offer opportunities to future residents to live and work there.

Housing:

The Council will aim to meet the Borough's housing need over the Plan period through appropriate land and housing provision across the settlement hierarchy. An allocation to rural settlements shall consolidate their role and function as local centres for housing, employment and services whilst sustaining and maintaining the villages and the smaller settlements. The provision of an allocation to the open countryside is in line with the aim of facilitating sustainable rural development of an appropriate scale.

The Countryside Strategy sets out the range of types of development which are considered to contribute to the aims of sustainable development and are therefore considered in principle to be acceptable. In the countryside, the draft Plan Strategy shall continue to provide opportunities for people who need to live in the countryside to continue to do so, to ensure, for example, that active farm holdings have opportunities for new residential development to maintain the active farm business.

The draft PS has considered the housing needs of other rural dwellers that are not farmers or associated with a non-farming business. The draft PS provides a number of opportunities for the non-farming community through policies for infill dwelling proposals, clustering and replacement and conversion of existing buildings (subject to other relevant material considerations).

As mentioned above, the draft PS also provides for opportunities for housing within settlement limits of the Borough's rural settlements.

Economic Need:

There is a need to balance the provision of opportunities without harming the character and amenity of the countryside. The draft PS acknowledges the need to support existing businesses in the rural area and allow sufficient flexibility to facilitate their expansion. The policies allow diversification to help sustain farming, with potential for new employment opportunities to present themselves in the rural area.

Balance between Housing and Employment:

There is a need for employment opportunities and housing provision to be balanced to deliver a sustainable rural community. The housing and economic policies contained in the draft PS are aimed at ensuring that balance is achieved. The key challenge in the draft PS is facilitating development which can deliver social and economic benefits while also protecting the environment.

Protection of Rural Areas:

To protect the natural and historic environments of the countryside from inappropriate development requires the management of housing and economic uses in a sustainable manner that also supports and sustains rural communities. In addition, the protection of natural and historic environments in rural areas will be achieved through appropriate designations, for example, the Blackwater Valley and Lough Neagh and Portmore Lough Environs, to ensure the countryside is maintained for future generations to enjoy. This will be identified at the next stage of the LDP process, i.e. Local Policies Plan.

The draft PS sets out strategies and policies for housing, employment and historic/natural environments in the countryside. The draft PS contains operational planning policies with key policy tests which development proposals must meet to ensure appropriate, sustainable development can be accommodated whilst offering the highest possible protection of rural areas.

Transportation Infrastructure and Service Provision:

This is an ongoing issue in rural areas with rural dwellers dependent for the most part on private vehicle usage and the limited services delivered by the public transport provider. The provision of public transport is particularly important for people who do not have access to a car. The draft PS seeks to address this issue, in conjunction with Department for Infrastructure (DfI) as the competent transport authority, through a Transport Strategy which takes account of a Local Transport Study, wider regional policy and council plans. The Transport Strategy aims to integrate land use and transport planning to support sustainable development. It promotes a shift away from private car dependency by encouraging inter alia a modal shift to active travel and public transport. The use of technology is vital for rural people and to allow rural businesses to succeed.

The need to connect places physically and digitally has been acknowledged in the policies. These linkages all help reduce a sense of isolation and improve connectivity for businesses and people in the rural area.

Community:

The Council's Community Plan "Connected" recognises the importance of community belonging and of taking pride in the Borough. The operational policies in the draft PS provide a framework for development that will build and support the delivery of vibrant, well connected and safe urban and rural communities. For example, it will enable daily shopping and service needs to be met, community and cultural facilities to be developed, and the vitality of rural settlements to be enhanced commensurate with their position in the settlement and retail hierarchies.

Tourism:

There is a need for appropriate tourism facilities with links to the wider area through walking and cycling provision (active travel). Strategic Greenways are also key to encouraging sustainable growth and connectivity between places, attractive to residents and visitors alike. This area of economic activity can ensure the long-term viability of the rural area and rural businesses. The growth in various forms of tourism and the appropriate use of the rural area as a resource for tourism is encouraged. The linkages to the overall protection of the existing historic and natural assets of the rural area are retained in the draft PS.

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

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 Spatial Growth Strategy, Countryside Strategy, other subject strategies and planning policies as set out in the draft PS are aimed at encouraging sustainable growth across the rural area to sustain rural communities. The draft PS seeks to ensure that the entire Council area and its residents have the opportunity for better access to employment, housing, transport, public services and facilities and that the historic and natural heritage is safeguarded for future generations.

The objectives and planning policies in the draft PS will encourage sustainable growth across the rural area to help sustain vibrant rural communities in the Borough and prevent economic and social decline. The draft PS makes provision for housing proposals across the settlement tiers which include rural settlements and also to the countryside, subject to normal planning considerations. In relation to housing in the countryside, the draft PS contains a policy provision for dwellings on farms, dwellings for established rural businesses restoration and replacement of rural dwellings and the conversion and reuse of other rural buildings. Provision is made in the draft PS for clustering, infilling, special personal and domestic circumstances and affordable housing in the countryside. All these opportunities are subject to meeting the relevant policy tests and criteria set out in the draft PS.

In terms of economic development in the rural area, the Countryside Strategy and Economic Development Strategy, along with operational planning policies, have been designed to support vibrant rural communities. Local policies and proposals will provide opportunities for farm diversification, agricultural development and tourism development of an appropriate nature, scale and location.

The draft PS recognises the importance of connectivity and the need to ensure that rural areas remain linked both via physical roads and infrastructure and through improvement in telecommunications infrastructure. The direct provision of such infrastructure is beyond the remit of the LDP. However, the Council will continue to work with government departments and stakeholders in relation to these matters. The draft PS will facilitate telecommunication development where it is appropriate, without causing negative environmental impacts or adverse effects on human health. In relation to environmental protection, all rural development proposals will be subject to criteria-based policies as well as strategic designations which will protect the most environmentally sensitive landscapes from inappropriate development.

In relation to mineral development, the draft PS balances facilitating minerals development against the need to protect the environment and the most vulnerable and scientifically important landscapes. The draft PS acknowledges the importance of continuing to permit the extraction of minerals in the rural area, as this is an area which provides rural employment both directly and indirectly through associated manufacturing and construction industry.

The draft Plan Strategy also has considered representations received from the consultation on the POP, advice from statutory consultees and regional and local policy.

If the response to Section 5A was YES go to 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.

Confirmation	I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained, and relevant information compiled.
Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by	Helen Stoops
Position	Principal Planning Officer
Department / Directorate	Planning Department
Date	September 2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by	Robbie McNaugher
Position	Head of Panning
Department / Directorate	Planning Department
Date	September 2026

INTERESTED IN DEVELOPMENT

in the Armagh City,
Banbridge and
Craigavon Borough

Please contact

ABC Planning Department - Local Development Plan Team
at Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council

☎ 0300 0300 900

✉ ldp@armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

🌐 armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

📘 Find us on Facebook and Twitter