



Fermanagh & Omagh  
District Council  
Comhairle Ceantair  
Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí

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**FERMANAGH AND OMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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Position Paper 16

**Sustaining Rural Communities**

February 2016

## **Sustaining Rural Communities**

**Purpose:** To provide members with an overview of sustainable patterns of development in the countryside, the need to sustain rural communities in the Fermanagh and Omagh area and the basis for identifying Dispersed Rural Communities (or their equivalent) in the Local Development Plan

**Content:** This paper provides information on:

- (i) The regional policy context for sustaining rural communities;**
- (ii) An overview of the settlement pattern of our rural area and sustainable rural communities;**
- (iii) The purpose of Dispersed Rural Communities in Northern Ireland and within the local context of the Fermanagh Area Plan 2007;**
- (iv) A review of the practice in other jurisdictions in sustaining rural communities; and**
- (v) Options for identifying Dispersed Rural Communities (or their equivalent) in the new Local Development Plan.**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This paper is one in a series of papers being presented to the Planning Committee as part of the preparatory studies aimed at gathering the evidence base for the new Local Development Plan (LDP).
- 1.2 The purpose of this paper is to provide members with an overview of sustainable patterns of development in the countryside and the need to sustain rural communities. In particular, the paper considers the current practice within other jurisdictions of the use of a Dispersed Rural Community (DRC) (or equivalent) tier within the settlement hierarchy as a local development plan designation to aid in sustaining rural communities; what criteria should be used to identify them; and if there is a need for this type of designation within the Fermanagh and Omagh LDP.
- 1.3 There is growing recognition that rural areas need to be not only protected, but also reinvigorated, particularly where primary economic sectors have been declining or population and loss of services has become an issue. Sustaining

rural communities means facilitating development including community facilities, and employment opportunities that respect local, social and environmental circumstances.

- 1.4 Position Paper 12, Strategic Settlement Evaluation, which was presented to Committee in November 2015, indicated that this paper would be brought forward in response to the differences in view about the role and purpose of a Dispersed Rural Community (DRC) designation as expressed by Members at a workshop held in October 2015. Paper 13, Housing Allocation, set out the position that whilst the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) has removed all reference to the designation of DRCs, this should not preclude the Council considering an alternative approach to their inclusion in the Local Development Plan.
- 1.5 The purpose of DRC-type designation within the Local Development Plan would be to assist rural communities in rural regeneration and local job creation. Identification of the particular rural areas with this need in the Fermanagh and Omagh District must be based on the assessment of available evidence. Policy formulation must be within the context of the SPPS whilst providing a slightly more permissive policy context for the assessment of applications for single rural dwellings and small scale enterprise schemes.

## **2.0 Regional Planning Policy Context**

- 2.1 The Regional Policy Context is provided by the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS): Planning for Sustainable Development.

### **The Regional Development Strategy (RDS)**

- 2.2 RG8 of the RDS provides strategic regional guidance in respect of the need to manage housing growth to achieve sustainable patterns of residential development. It states that the varied housing needs of the whole community need to be met, including the availability of affordable and special needs housing. Housing is recognised as the key driver of physical, economic and social change in both urban and rural areas. Strategic planning places emphasis on the importance of the relationship between the location of housing, jobs, facilities, services and infrastructure. This includes the need for development patterns that do not have an adverse impact on environmental resources and the built heritage and which mitigate the risk of flooding by avoiding those areas known to be at risk. The emphasis is on managing housing growth to ensure that there continues to be a focus on developing more high quality accessible housing within existing urban areas.
- 2.3 Spatial Framework Guidance in the RDS 2035 is aimed at achieving sustainable development and seeks to promote economic development opportunities and population growth in the hubs and clusters. In rural areas the aim is to sustain the overall strength of the rural community living in small towns, villages, small rural settlements and the open countryside, and to improve accessibility for rural communities. For the purposes of the RDS the

rural communities are considered to be those living in small towns, villages, small rural settlements and the open countryside.

- 2.4 Both the RDS 2035 and the SPPS place sustainable development at the heart of the planning system and use the United Nations Assembly definition of sustainable development as ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

### **The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)**

- 2.5 The SPPS states that Planning Authorities should deliver on the three pillars of sustainable development in formulating policies and plans and in determining planning applications and appeals. The three pillars are the needs and aspirations of our society, the economy; and the environment. The role of planning in furthering sustainable development is to balance the social, economic and environmental objectives as the SPPS does not promote any one of the three pillars of sustainable development over the other.
- 2.6 For the purposes of the SPPS the countryside is defined as land lying outside of settlement limits as defined in Local Development Plans. It is important to differentiate between ‘the countryside’ in the context of Local Development Plans and ‘rural areas’ as understood in the RDS and Rural Development Programme.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.7 The SPPS reiterates that the RDS recognises that to sustain rural communities, new development and employment opportunities are required which respect local, social and environmental circumstances of the countryside.
- 2.8 The SPPS directs that policy approaches to new development in the countryside should therefore reflect the differences within the region, be sensitive to environmental issues including the ability of settlements and landscapes to absorb development. This may involve recognising those areas that are particularly sensitive to change, and areas which have lower sensitivities and thus provide opportunities to accommodate sustainable development. The role and function of rural settlements and accessibility to services and infrastructure is an important consideration.
- 2.9 In the SPPS, the Regional Strategic policy objectives for development in the countryside are to:
- manage growth to achieve appropriate and sustainable patterns of development which supports a vibrant rural community;
  - conserve the landscape and natural resources of the rural area and to protect it from excessive, inappropriate or obtrusive development and from the actual or potential effects of pollution;
  - facilitate development which contributes to a sustainable rural economy; and
  - promote high standards in the design, siting and landscaping of development.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the Rural Development Programme, the rural area applies to settlements with a population of less than 5,000 as well as the open countryside. This means everything outside the two main towns of Enniskillen and Omagh.

- 2.10 The SPPS further expands that planning and other environmental policies must play their part in facilitating sustainable development in the countryside but not at the expense of the region's rich natural assets and not at the expense of the natural and built environment.
- 2.11 The SPPS instructs that in preparing LDPs, councils shall bring forward a strategy for sustainable development in the countryside, together with appropriate policies and proposals that *must reflect* the aims, objectives and policy approach of the SPPS, tailored to the specific circumstances of the plan area. The SPPS sets out strategic policy for residential and non-residential development in the countryside which should be taken into account in the preparation of LDPs.
- 2.12 With regards to residential development in the countryside, the SPPS clearly promotes a sustainable approach to development by reiterating several times the need to cluster, consolidate, and group new development with existing established buildings, and promote the re-use of previously used buildings. The emphasis is on facilitating new development which benefits from existing services whilst mitigating the potential adverse impacts upon rural amenity and scenic landscapes arising from the cumulative effect of one-off rural houses. All development within the countryside must be well designed, respect rural character and integrate into its setting, and should not mar the distinction between a settlement and the surrounding countryside, or result in urban sprawl. The SPPS also provides for the sympathetic conversion of a locally important building as a single dwelling where this would secure its upkeep and retention.
- 2.13 The transition from PPS 21 to the SPPS has resulted in a subtle change to the policy relating to New Dwellings in existing clusters. Under PPS 21, one of the criteria had been that "the cluster of development lies outside of a farm and consists of four or more buildings (excluding ancillary buildings such as garages, outbuildings and open sided structures) of which at least three are dwellings." The SPPS now contains a reduced test of an existing cluster of development which lies outside a farm provided it appears as a visual entity in the landscape. In addition, the SPPS is silent where PPS 21 defined what a focal point should be and set out specifications for degree of enclosure and the site being bounded on at least two sides with other development in the cluster. This apparent relaxation of the policy test gives more scope for development of new dwellings in existing clusters, particularly given the extensive rural nature of the Fermanagh and Omagh district.
- 2.14 As regards non-residential development, the SPPS enables social and economic development in the rural area, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises and community projects where appropriate, providing for a range of types of development in the countryside such as community uses, agricultural development, farm diversification, economic development, tourism, outdoor sport & recreation and renewable energy. This includes the conversion of locally important buildings for a variety of uses where this would secure its upkeep and retention.

### 3.0 The Settlement Pattern of Our Rural Area

- 3.1 For LDP purposes, the countryside is land outside of statutory settlement limits as designated within relevant Area Plans. This contrasts with the interdepartmental definition of the rural area which applies to settlements with a population of less than 5,000 and the open countryside which, when applied to Fermanagh and Omagh, is all of the district excluding Enniskillen and Omagh.
- 3.2 The Fermanagh and Omagh area has historically experienced a dispersed rural settlement pattern comprising a large number of small towns, villages and small settlements (see Table 1) alongside numerous, scattered single houses in the countryside, many of which are linked to family members wishing to remain on, or close to, the home farm. In more recent times, under the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (PSRNI), speculative planning applications resulted in a high number of approvals being sold off to those wishing to relocate from the urban area to the rural area.

Table 1: Breakdown of settlement type by Fermanagh and Omagh Area Plans.

<b>Settlement Type</b>	<b>Fermanagh Area Plan</b>	<b>Omagh Area Plan</b>
Main Town	1	1
Local Town	2	3
Village	39	9
Small Settlement/Hamlets	0	24
Dispersed Rural Community	11	0
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>37</b>

- 3.3 Whilst recognising that many of the designated small towns, villages and small settlements have significantly reduced service provision in recent years, it is as a result of the geographical spread of settlements across the Fermanagh and Omagh District that most parts of the countryside are within a reasonable travel distance of basic services such as a local shop. Only limited parts of the District are less accessible due to the road network which has been influenced or constrained by the local topography, lakes and waterways.
- 3.4 Paper 14, Landscape Character Assessment considered the scenic quality, sensitivity to change and the overall capacity of each of the Landscape Character Areas within Fermanagh and Omagh to absorb development. Given the wide range of landscapes within the district this capacity to absorb development varies significantly. The Paper also identified landscapes of particular merit and recommended that policy options for greater policy control should be explored for the following areas:-

- The shores and islands of upper and lower Lough Erne, the shores and islands of upper and lower Lough Macnean and the shores and islands of Lough Melvin – for all types of development.
  - The High Sperrins in relation to high structures such as wind turbines and telecommunication masts.
  - The Cuilcagh Mountain – for all types of development.
  - The Strule River Valley – for all types of development.
- 3.5 Paper 15, Rural Pressure Analysis provided analysis of the differing levels of pressure for single rural dwellings outside of designated settlement limits. It identified, for example, the central portion of the district, lying between the two main towns and accessible to the main transport routes as having experienced a consistent level of pressure for development, with other pockets of pressure for development identified in areas such as Monea, Clanabogan and north of Belleek. Two other hot spots coincided generally with the DRC designations for Knocks and Coa. In more isolated, less accessible areas of the district fewer speculative applications were received than in those areas with greater accessibility to a main town/transport network.
- 3.6 The 4,969 farms recorded in the legacy Fermanagh and Omagh District Council areas in the 2014 Agricultural Census, accounts for 12.25% of the total number of farms in Northern Ireland. It is particularly notable that nearly 85% and 80% of farms in Fermanagh and Omagh areas respectively are very small farms (as calculated against standard labour requirements). At a Northern Ireland level these small farms equate to 10.33% (Fermanagh) and 6.7% (Omagh) of all farms. The high incidence of very small farms, alongside the large geographical area of Fermanagh and Omagh has contributed significantly to the existing dispersed rural settlement pattern in the district. Farmhouses with associated farm buildings and outlying farm buildings alongside one-off single rural dwellings create and sustain a scattered form of development.
- 3.7 It should be noted that the policy provisions of PPS 21 provide a range of different categories of residential development including dwellings on farms, replacement dwellings, dwellings in existing clusters etc. The provision of permitting one dwelling per farm every 10 years could yield 4,969 dwellings based on the current number of farms in the district (DARD Agricultural Census, 2014). This is an average of some 500 dwellings per year across the council area.
- 3.8 Whilst this is the case, it should also be noted that trends in employment in agriculture show a continued process of shedding labour, with a shift away from full-time towards part-time and casual working patterns. In 2000, the total

agricultural labour force<sup>2</sup> in Northern Ireland was 57,823 but the 2014 Agricultural Census indicates that it had fallen to 47,864. The 2014 Census indicates that a total of 5,068 formed the agricultural labour force in Fermanagh, inclusive of Enniskillen, Irvinestown and Lisnaskea rural districts, with only 1,755 of these being employed full-time in farming. The equivalent figures for Omagh indicate a total of 3,447 being employed in agriculture with 1,254 of these being in full-time employment.

- 3.9 The number of farms in Northern Ireland has fallen by more than a third since 1980 from 42,000 to just over 25,000 in 2009. The number of holdings in Omagh and Fermanagh has also fallen from around 6,000 in 2000 to approximately 4,970 in 2014, representing a decline of approximately 17%. This reflects the on-going re-structuring of the industry in response to rising labour productivity and the decline in the relative price of agricultural commodities.

#### **4.0 Sustainable Rural Communities and Sustainable Rural Settlement Patterns**

- 4.1 Enabling the provision of housing combined with the other land use functions associated with the countryside such as agriculture, forestry, tourism and other rural based enterprises whilst providing suitable protection to the environment provides the environmental, economic and social potential to sustaining rural communities. It is important to recognise the interdependency between the rural and urban areas, not least in the services that local settlements provide to those residing in the open countryside and conversely the 'commercial activity/business' this generates for services within 'rural' settlements. A sustainable rural settlement pattern protects the functions of the countryside in terms of maintaining the quality and character of the rural landscape. It also means that development in the countryside should not be at a level that creates infrastructure demands which are disproportionate to the population within the rural area.
- 4.2 By its nature, a dispersed rural settlement pattern increases service delivery costs across those areas which ultimately has implications for the viability of services being delivered to rural communities. Therefore, a sustainable pattern of rural development, in line with the RDS, seeks to support and strengthen the role of existing villages and small settlements as an integral part of the rural community in providing essential local services, such as a shop, and increases the feasibility of public transport, local infrastructure and other services such as primary schools whilst minimising impact on the rural environment. For small rural communities to be sustained and to function well there is a need to maintain strong community infrastructures, such as a community hall or local shop. A proportionate approach to settlement size and the provision of services alongside consideration of outreach services to the countryside will increase the viability of these community infrastructures. This approach to sustainable rural settlement patterns centres on

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<sup>2</sup> Agricultural labour force includes farmers, partners and workers, both full-time and part-time plus casual/seasonal (DARD)



accommodating the majority of development within designated rural settlements such as small towns, villages and small settlements whilst still providing for other sustainable development within the rural area.

## **5.0 The Purpose of Dispersed Rural Communities in Northern Ireland**

- 5.1 The concept of DRCs was first introduced into policy in Northern Ireland in the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland (PSRNI) in 1993. Strategic Policies set down in the PSRNI were designed to provide a coherent framework for future development in Northern Ireland. It recognised that the opposing pressures of the continued development of a dispersed rural pattern being at odds with the need to reduce costs of providing services to the community. SP 5 Dispersed Rural Communities sought to identify and designate dispersed communities in certain rural areas and establish criteria for their future development. It sought to identify those areas displaying symptoms of economic and social disadvantage containing communities with a strong sense of identity. In order to promote rural regeneration Planning Service would, in consultation with District Councils and the Department of Agriculture, identify and designate such communities in development plans.
- 5.2 Criteria for the identification of a dispersed rural community included a traditional focal point (e.g. a church, school or shop), with a physical sense of place and convincing evidence of local community activity serving a wide rural area. DRCs would principally provide a location for single houses whilst some appropriate industrial and commercial enterprises and new community buildings would also be accommodated.

### **Dispersed Rural Communities in Fermanagh**

- 5.3 The Fermanagh Area Plan 2007(FAP 2007) identified and designated 11 Dispersed Rural Communities (Appendix 1). The intention in designating the DRCs was to promote rural regeneration and to provide scope for some additional residential development either at the focal points or in the surrounding townlands (Map 1, Appendix 2). Designation would also allow flexibility for small scale enterprise schemes. Within these areas, it was accepted that the rural character and traditional settlement pattern is one of individual houses scattered throughout the countryside together with clustering around one or more focal points. Therefore the FAP policy S5 draws a distinction between potential for consolidation of existing focal points and secondly, the scope for additional dwellings in the wider area subject to the constraints of avoiding (1) alteration of the particular rural character of the DRC, and (2) the creation of a build-up of development. The DRCs vary in size with Boho being the largest and Aghakillymaud and Knocks amongst the smaller areas. The majority of planning approvals within the DRCs have been for single houses with a small number of applications relating to business/commercial development (Appendix 3).

- 5.5 The policy context for assessing planning applications for development within DRCs changed over time. However, the core principle through the PSRNI, the FAP 2007 and PPS 21 was to enable rural regeneration.
- 5.6 The PSRNI gave discretion for the identification and designation of a DRC in the development plan. In the absence of such a designation, the PSRNI did not apply. Following adoption of the FAP 2007, applications inside identified DRCs were subject to consideration under the policies contained within the plan.
- 5.7 The publication of PPS 21 in 2010 resulted in the policy provisions within it taking precedence over the policy provisions for Dispersed Rural Communities contained in the FAP 2007. Policy CTY 2, Development in Dispersed Rural Communities, provides that planning permission will be granted for suitable proposals for a small cluster or 'clachan' style development of up to six houses at an identified focal point. Policy CTY 2 adds that proposals for individual dwellings in DRCs will be assessed against the policy provisions of PPS 21. Policy CTY 1 lists six instances where planning permission will be granted for an individual house in the countryside. None provide for individual dwellings within DRCs. With this in mind the approvals listed Appendix 3 will have been subject to assessment under CTY 1 of PPS 21. In respect of appropriate economic development enterprises within DRCs CTY 2 of PPS21 referenced schemes for tourism development, and new social or community facilities amongst those that could be accommodated.

## **6.0 A Review of Practice in other Jurisdictions**

### **(i) Republic of Ireland**

- 6.1 The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 provides the spatial policies for Development Plans in the Republic of Ireland (RoI)<sup>3</sup>. These policies recognise that rural and urban areas are intrinsically interdependent due to the complex flow of people and services. It provides specific strategies for rural areas, to strengthen rural communities, and how rural areas will support and drive forward a more balanced regional development.
- 6.2 In addressing rural communities the strategy recognises that the strength and integrity of many rural communities is being compromised by a decline in rural population. To address this settlement policies should be brought forward for those areas with declining populations as well as policies to deal with those areas in which there are overspill issues associated with proximity to urban centres.
- 6.3 The National Spatial Strategy identifies rural resources as being high quality agricultural land; water resources; forestry; and a world renowned landscape which is central to the tourism industry.

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<sup>3</sup> The National Spatial Strategy is the RoI's equivalent document to the Regional Development Strategy.

6.4 The NSS identifies five types of rural area:

- Areas that are strong
- Areas that are changing
- Areas that are weak (significant population decline)
- Areas that are remote
- Areas that are culturally distinct.

6.5 The following County Development Plans have applied a DRC, or equivalent tier, within their settlement hierarchy: Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020; Monaghan County Development Plan 2013- 2019; and Cavan County Development Plan 2014-2020. Table 5 below give a brief description of the function these designations fulfil within the relevant plans. The detail of the designations are set out in Appendix 4.

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Role of Designation</b>
Offaly County Development Plan	Sraid's are very small, embryonic rural settlements comprised mainly of housing with some services. An alternative to piecemeal development in the countryside to address rural depopulation and decline in certain areas. Considered to be a sustainable form of development and will create a greater sense of place and community in these areas. Helps to stabilise and consolidate population. The policy also provides limited opportunities for housing for 'urban dwellers' who wish to reside in a rural environment.
Monaghan County Development Plan	DRC's – these have a character which mirrors the rural countryside but have scattered individual housing with some clustering around one or more focal points. The current pattern of dispersed rural population is strongly established and impacts on growth and undermines the viability of existing towns and villages in the County. Dispersed rural settlement pattern and low population density pose significant challenges from an infrastructure and service delivery perspective. Overall the plan seeks to manage growth in Rural areas under strong urban influence. It is expected that the majority of development within DRCs will be single dwellings centred on the focal point –e.g. shop, church, post office etc.
Cavan County Development Plan	Smaller Community Areas – these are recognised as having what are described as proto-urban characteristics and may provide valued local services to the surrounding agricultural community. The Plan recognises the importance of a vibrant rural community and of sustaining small community areas in the long term.

## **(ii) Scotland**

- 6.6 Scottish Planning Policy (2014) sets out national planning policies for the region. In promoting rural development, NPF 3 sets out a vision for growing sustainable communities which recognises the differences in development pressure across the country. These vary from pressured areas of countryside around towns and cities to more remote and sparsely populated areas. Between these extremes are extensive intermediate areas under varying degrees of pressure and with different kinds of environmental assets meriting protection.

### **East Ayrshire Local Development Plan 2015 (Proposed Plan)**

- 6.7 The East Ayrshire plan recognises the important function that rural villages fulfil as centres of population which contribute to the vibrancy of the rural area and some small scale development is envisaged in a number of these settlements.
- 6.8 Similar to the National Spatial Strategy in ROI this plan identifies areas of development pressure. These are titled Rural Protection Areas where development is proactively managed through restrictive policy. This approach is also to help boost the economy in more remote rural parts of East Ayrshire in what are designated Rural Diversification Areas where the policy context allows for additional types of single houses and small scale residential developments, including where the proposed development would facilitate the establishment of a new innovative business in line with industrial policy.
- 6.9 The Northern part of East Ayrshire is under more pressure for (mainly residential) development than the remaining part from Mauchline southwards. For this reason the plan provides a Rural Protection Area in the north around Kilmarnock, Stewarton, Dunlop and the Irvine Valley where rural housing is more strictly managed. In the remaining rural areas, the plan provides more opportunity for new houses. This approach is to prevent the more pressured rural areas becoming suburbanised by houses for commuters travelling to the city and will help to boost the economy in the more remote rural parts of East Ayrshire<sup>4</sup>.

## **7.0 Establishing a Need for a Dispersed Rural Community Designation**

- 7.1 Justification for designating or recognising DRCs within Northern Ireland has historically been predicated on the desire to enable rural regeneration through policy provision for single dwellings or small groups of housing and community based development.
- 7.2 Within other jurisdictions, DRCs or similar plan designations have been brought forward to: tackle population decline; to provide a limited opportunity for rural housing as a sustainable alternative to piecemeal single rural houses; to seek to minimise the impact of dispersed rural settlement pattern on the

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<sup>4</sup> East Ayrshire Local Development Plan, Volume 1: Strategy and Policy

growth of settlements and on the viability of provision of services within settlements.

- 7.3 The key indicators for identifying those rural communities within Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, which would point towards a need for a focused approach to enable rural regeneration, are socio-economic. These relate to matters such as unemployment levels (Appendix 5), population age and population decline (Appendix 6), rural-urban split and access to services, some of which are measured within the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010. The NIMDM applies the inter-departmental definition of urban and rural therefore any references within it to rural is inclusive of intermediate settlements, small villages, hamlets and the open countryside.
- 7.4 The NIMDM recognises that whilst it will identify those areas with a large concentration of deprived people, those deprived people living in areas where only a small proportion of their population are deprived are not identifiable. For this reason the NIMDM recognises that its measures are best used in influencing or formulating policies which have a spatial element, rather than policies to target individuals.
- 7.5 The NIMDM assesses against indicators at Super Output Area (SOA) level which are based on an approximate population of 2,000 (Map 2, Appendix 7). As a result the socio-economic characteristics of the population of the larger rural geographical areas vary to a greater extent and as such concentrations of deprivation are identified less often in rural areas. The least deprived rural SOA is outside the most deprived decile (1-89) when all the SOAs in Northern Ireland are considered. The NIMDM indicates that it may be more appropriate when assessing deprivation in rural areas to focus on the smaller Output Area (OA) results. There is a total of 36 OAs in the Fermanagh and Omagh District within the 20% most deprived, with the majority of these falling within the urban area (Maps 3 & 4, Appendix 8).
- 7.7 The 2011 and 2001 Census provide a basis for analysing population trends within the Fermanagh and Omagh District at Ward level. Figures for population growth for settlements within each of the wards identifies where the population increase/decrease has been located in respect of the settlements and the open countryside between 2001 and 2011. The wards of **Ballinamallard**, Derrylin, Lisnarick, Rosslea and Owenkillew have experienced loss of rural population. Other wards such as Brookeborough, Fintona, Newtownsvaille, Sixmilecross, Termon and Donagh have experienced a growth in the rural population compared to a decline in population within the settlement limits. Other wards such as Tempo, Beragh, Clanabogan, Drumnakilly, Fairy Water, Gortin and Trillick have experienced proportionately higher growth in the rural area than in the settlements (Appendix 6).
- 7.8 The Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements 2015 not only brings forward a recommendation in relation to the classification of settlements but also includes a proposed line on an urban-rural classification for census purposes. The paper presents the use by the Scottish Government of a 30 minute drive-time from service provision locations to differentiate between accessible and remote settlements. Applying this principle but for 20 minute and 30 minute drive times, it was

established that 20% and 7% of Northern Ireland was outside of a service provision location – a settlement of 10,000+ population. This also included service provision locations in the RoI which found that small areas of Fermanagh are within a 30 minute drive-time of Cavan, a service provision location. Whilst the paper proposes that a prescriptive urban- rural classification is not produced, the analysis provides useful maps which identifies much of the peripheral areas of the Fermanagh and Omagh District as being more than 30 minute drive-time from either Enniskillen or Omagh (Appendix 9).

- 7.8 It is important to establish correlations between the available statistical information in order to demonstrate that any proposed policy direction will achieve sustainable development. As the NIMDM provides information on a number of domains of deprivation and provides an overall NIMDM ranking it is an important source of information. Comparison of the NIMDM rankings at SOA level alongside the drive-time mapping indicates a link between the 'remoteness' of portions of the district and increasing deprivation levels. Conversely, with the exception of the rural pressure hot spot located to the North of Belleek, all the other hot spots lie within the 30 minute drive-time. This, considered alongside a high proportion of wards which experienced either a decline in urban population or a disproportionately larger growth in rural population in the 2001-2011 period, is suggestive of a degree of urban influence on the countryside.

## **8.0 Options for general policy approach to Dispersed Rural Communities**

- 8.1 It is important in considering options for a policy approach for the overall rural area, or indeed for particular parts of the countryside, that a balance is struck between protecting landscapes, particularly those considered to be of particular merit or are vulnerable, and enabling appropriate development within the countryside in order to support both the rural economy and rural communities.
- 8.2 The SPSS establishes a prescriptive framework upon which any policy options tailored specifically to the Fermanagh and Omagh Council Area must build upon, including the provision of the Regional Strategic Policies which provide for a number of categories for a single dwelling in the countryside. Where there is an identified need to sustain rural communities, the regeneration of these areas of the countryside within the Fermanagh and Omagh District would be enabled by the development of a slightly more permissive policy context for residential development and appropriate forms of economic development within the LDP. However, the regeneration and location of economic development opportunities within the established settlements would still be considered a priority over those opportunities within the countryside.
- 8.3 The recommended approach to settlement growth strategy, set out as Option 2 of Paper 13, seeks to meet the RDS target of 60% of all new housing to be located in the two main hubs of Enniskillen and Omagh. This emphasis on

urban growth is considered appropriate given that the total number of households across all settlements increased by only 6.74% between the Censuses of 2001 and 2011 compared to a 25% growth in the number of rural households. In Option 2, the proportion for the smaller towns, villages and small settlements remains the same as the existing share of households in 2011(4,374), with the remaining balance allocated to the countryside which would amount to 2,304 dwellings over the plan period.

- 8.4 As indicated in Papers 2 and 13 the existing rate of permissions for rural dwellings achieved under the policies set out in PPS 21 give an annual average of 185 dwellings between 2012 and 2014 which could potentially provide 2,775 dwellings over the plan period, which is only slightly higher than the portion of the countryside set out in the agreed approach Option 2 to settlement growth strategy.
- 8.5 Therefore, to provide scope for some additional opportunities for dwellings and appropriate small-scale, enterprise schemes in the countryside, a slight deviation from the general policy approach set out in the RDS and the SPPS could be formulated. In doing so, it is important to pay particular regard to the available evidence in support of any options to be considered.
- 8.6 The four options for these proposed 'policy areas' are set out below:
- **Option 1 – Do Nothing.** Increased awareness of the lesser tests set out in the SPPS in relation to dwellings in existing clusters will facilitate additional dwellings in the countryside. The extensive open countryside within Fermanagh and Omagh combined with the many existing focal points associated with historic meeting points and rural communities, including those within smaller settlements, should provide ample opportunities for additional dwellings in the countryside. This is in line with the Councillors' viewpoint at the workshop in October 2015 that DRCs were 'clusters' of development within the rural area. As this approach does not deviate from the SPPS it would not be subject to soundness testing by the DOE. It is important to note that application of this approach is limited to existing clusters outside a farm.
  - **Option 2 – Designate policy areas in the rural output areas identified by the MDM 2010 as being in the 20% most deprived where the landscape has the capacity to absorb sustainable development.** As previously stated, the majority of output areas in the 20% most deprived category are within the two main towns. A variation of the policy in relation to dwellings within existing clusters - excluding the reference to existing clusters *outside a farm* - could provide additional opportunities for additional dwellings. This approach would identify a small number of policy areas. However, it would be a defensible position in regard to the RDS and SPPS and would be unlikely to impact significantly on the recommended settlement growth strategy.

- **Option 3 – Designate Rural Protection Areas and Rural Diversification Areas.**

Taking into account population changes between urban and rural areas, there is a need to actively manage population growth in certain parts of the Fermanagh and Omagh District. This may involve the identification of Rural Protection Areas where development would be strictly limited to what is provided for under the SPPS. Any housing pressure should be accommodated within the settlements in accordance with a growth strategy focusing most development within the two main towns. Beyond these areas, and excluding any European and local nature designations or sensitive landscapes and where there is evidence of rural decline, consideration should be given to variations of the SPPS provisions for development within the countryside to enable rural regeneration. Balancing the need to sustain rural communities through a more permissive policy context within identified Rural Diversification Areas whilst managing growth within Rural Protection Areas is unlikely to impact upon the recommended settlement growth strategy.

- **Option 4 – Designate policy areas based on a combination of the MDM 2010 deprivation ranking, the 30 min drive-time from Omagh or Enniskillen spatial data, the main service providers, and the census data available in relation to rural depopulation.**

Whilst this may initially identify large spatial areas, a further exercise to exclude vulnerable landscapes and lands subject to European and local nature designations, will reduce their extent significantly. The rural pressure analysis within these areas should also be considered and where there are rural pressure hot spots, these areas should be excluded. As in Option 2, the same variant of the policy in relation to dwellings within existing clusters could be applied. Other variations of the Regional Strategic Policies within the SPPS, such as the Replacement Dwelling could also be considered, alongside consideration of an appropriate policy context for the upgrade/extension of older/'unfit' dwellings within the identified rural areas. There is evidence available to support this approach and with protection of the prescribed landscapes it would be in line with the SPPS. It would be unlikely to impact significantly on the recommended settlement growth strategy.

## **9.0 Recommendation**

- 9.1 To support the policy provisions within the SPPS for economic development in the rural area and single houses in the countryside, Option 4 is recommended as this should allow for a self-sustaining rural economy and a stable population with an age profile in line with that of the rest of the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area.