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Response to: FODC Local Development Plan 2030 – Draft Plan Strategy

Setting the Context of this Response

1. Collapse of Credibility at the Heart of Government and Planning: This Consultation on the Draft LDP Strategy 2030 comes at a time when confidence in regional Government, in statutory regulation, management and policy enforcement is at rock bottom. The 2018 Public Inquiry on the Renewable Heating Incentive (RHI) [the Report by Rt. Hon. Patrick Coghlin, Dame Una O'Brien & Dr. Keith MacLean is expected in Spring 2019] exposed a litany of mismanagement, maladministration, corruption of initiatives promoting 'green policies', abuse of public monies, favouritism, systematic abuse of FOI/EIR procedures by government and civil service, incompetence and much more. The subsequent and emerging policy scandals enveloping Anaerobic Digesters (Ads) and factory pig and chicken farms have exacerbated the credibility gap. Furthermore, planning debacles including the Mobouy illegal 'Superdump' on the outskirts of Derry City, or the ongoing biggest illegal quarry in Europe extracting sand from Lough Neagh, do anything but suggest that the good people of Fermanagh & Omagh should follow the direction of Strategic Planning Division/DfI. The recent Appeal Court Judgement in Belfast, in the Case of Donnelly versus the Department for Infrastructure reinforced the view of the Judicial Review Court that 60 hectares, not 81 hectares at Cavanacaw benefited from Planning Permission as claimed in both courts by the Department and by Galantas mining. Once again stark questions about the Department's professional competence remain.

2. Lack of an Independent Effective Environmental Authority: There is no independent regional environmental authority in Northern Ireland and the subservience of environmental protection duties to supporting development within DAERA/NIEA has been repeatedly identified as a major issue including by former Ministers with responsibility for the environment. Whereas small scale business or farming operations are frequently forced to comply with environmental regulations and standards, it appears that bigger industrial companies are not held to the same standards, despite the fact that the big companies risk having a much greater negative impact on the environment.

3. This Fermanagh & Omagh Plan 2030 Consultation on the Draft Plan Strategy October 2018 has to be the most difficult of consultations for the public to engage in. For any member of the public brave enough to contemplate making a submission, the obstacles are excessive: the coded language, the rigid timetable, the warnings that if you don't write your submission in a specific way it will be disregarded, and the reference to other documents some of which in themselves are inaccessible. Is the intention to put off all except the professional lobbyists who have a financial interest? For those of us whose input at an earlier stage of the process has been all but ignored, it is especially difficult to retain hope that our submission will be afforded due weight. We had been enthusiastic to convey the potential of a unique rural tourism package with a difference in the Sperrins AONB and to convey the incompatibility with an industry using many tons of cyanide in the Owenkillew Valley and discharging mercury, lead, arsenic, zinc, copper, suspended solids, flocculants, etc. into the Owenkillew/Owenreagh Special Areas of Conservation. Despite referring to the need to afford environmental protection to areas such as the Sperrins AONB the Draft Plan goes on to propose allowing for the possibility of gold mining anywhere right throughout the District without regard to the environmental impact. Just like the Department for the Economy, Planning and DAERA, the authors of this document appear to be influenced by the industry in a disproportionate and unreasonable manner.

5.0 ENVIRONMENT

Draft Policy HE02 - Archaeology

Development proposals which would adversely affect archaeological remains of regional importance or the integrity of their settings should not be permitted in any circumstances because of the intrinsic historical and cultural value of such remains. No fiscal price can be put on the value of such archaeological remains and their settings. All recorded archaeological sites should benefit from statutory protection, not just designated sites.

Natural Environment - Context & Justification

It is heartening to see the Council acknowledge “the importance of protecting, conserving, enhancing & restoring the natural environment & seeking to halt the loss of biodiversity & habitats”. However, it is puzzling when these same sentiments are contradicted by Draft Policy NE01 - Nature Conservation, Draft Policy NE02 - Protected Species & their Habitats & Draft Policy NE03 - Biodiversity, where exceptions are made in each case.

5.46: NB. Corrections: Glenelly is not in FODC area but in Derry Strabane Council area!

Owenkillew is not a mountain valley!

Both the Owenkillew & Owenreagh Rivers are SACs due to the presence of freshwater pearl mussels, salmon spawning & otters.

5.47: It is surprising that only Mullaghcarn and Gortin are mentioned as being scenic - did the writers of this draft LDP visit Creggan, Greencastle, the Owenkillew Valley, Coneyglen, Glenlark, Glenhull & Broughderg and not consider them every bit as scenic?

NB. Correction: The Black Bog is not blanket bog but the largest area of raised bog in Europe and it is designated as a RAMSAR site. Furthermore, there is a Nature Reserve at Creggan which was designated a few years ago, but it doesn't seem to be included in your map or Plan.

5.48: I wish to enquire who carried out the Landscape Character Assessment of the area and when? Where is it available? How did the Council decide ‘the three areas which are the most important valued landscapes of the Council area’? Not meaning to take away from Fermanagh, what criteria were used to exclude the Sperrins AONB, including the Owenkillew Valley, Barnes Gap, Glenlark, Glenhull & Coneyglen?

Draft Policy L01 - Development within Sperrin AONB

5.50: What is meant by new development? Is it housing or industrial development?

Draft Policy L02 - Special Countryside Areas. Children of people who have lived in these areas for years should be allowed to build houses there if they wish. Otherwise these areas will become uninhabited.

Draft Policy L03 - Areas of High Scenic Value (AoHSV)

It is unbelievable that no areas of High Scenic Value have been identified in Tyrone. This proposal has to be examined again. The Sperrins AONB has been recognised by National Geographic as being in the top one hundred most scenic drives in the world yet FODC can't recognise it!

2.0 Status and Policy Context of LDP

I note that the legal status and policy context of the LDP require that it, “must be prepared within the context of the Council's Corporate Plan and the Council's Community Plan”. Further, in 2.7 Sustainable Development priorities emphasise that environmental priorities must not be treated as of secondary importance to short term economic factors. The proposed Regional Development Strategy 2035 sets a foundation based on sustainable development as essential. The Sustainable Water Strategy 2015-2040 (2.12) proposes “a sustainable and integrated approach to managing all our different water needs in a manner that promotes regional development without compromising the environment or increasing flood risk”. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) – Planning for Sustainable Development 2015 (2.13) again sets “sustainability” and “preserving and improving the built and natural environment” as fundamental planks for the LDP.

While the FODC Draft Strategy is careful to acknowledge all of the above policies, it fails to acknowledge the fact that precious mineral mining, specifically gold mining is an unsustainable activity. Moreover, and this is something that will be addressed further in this submission, the Draft Strategy totally fails to acknowledge the toxic impact of the highly poisonous substances involved in gold mining: cyanide, arsenic, mercury, cadmium, zinc, chromium and

the in perpetuity risk of discharge of these substances into waterways, land and into the atmosphere. It is disingenuous that a Policy Document such as this FODC Draft Strategy for the next decade that recognizes 'climate change' and environmental policy should fail to acknowledge the incompatibility of gold mining and 'preserving and improving the sensitive environment of the Sperrins AONB'.

Whereas, 3.4 states that the Draft Strategy has been subject to a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA), this needs to be clarified and I request a copy of the Terms of Reference for the HRA as well as a copy of the HRA itself. The lack of information regarding gold mining provided in the accompanying documentation is compounded by the fact that the draft document FODC Minerals Policy Oct. 2018 is clearly informed by gold mining interests and the Quarry Products Association in an unashamedly imbalanced way. The document quotes from a 'Curraghinalt Mineral Resource Statement' of May 2018 and presents as factual information projections that even Dalradian's Public Relations company surrounded with all sorts of caveats and conditions.

6.0 INFRASTRUCTURE

6.1 Flood Risk

Management: points out, "Climate change and global warming are resulting in sea levels rising at an accelerating rate and more periods of heavy rainfall and intense storms." It goes on to point out that this can lead to flooding and erosion and land instability resulting in wasteful expenditure for the public purse on remedial works. "This type of flooding is liable to be sudden with a response time likely to be short and so can potentially have devastating consequences."

6.2

It is not clear that the authors of this Strategy have taken on board the reality of local experience of such flooding events in recent years. Can I suggest examples of flash flooding: 22nd August 2017, 1st June 2018 and 8th June 2018? Each of these impacted severely on the Owenkillew River and Owenreagh River valleys. Regarding the extraction of precious mineral deposits and 'ancillary' development (FLD01b) it is incongruous to propose that such activity should be allowed in this situation on alleged grounds of 'exceptional benefit to the regional or sub-regional economy' (FLD01c).

FLD01 d) Minor Development. The heading on this section does not relate to the content?

Draft Policy FLD02. In view of the Policy Context provided, this proposed policy would be counterproductive and would exacerbate the situation.

Policy Clarification 6.10. Again in light of the acknowledged and stated policy context, the answer is to avoid development in such areas of flooding. Surely this District and others have witnessed too many examples of bad practice to ignore the obvious risk and make the public purse liable for the ongoing and repeated costs.

FLD05 Artificial Modification of Watercourses: The proposed Policy flies in the face of the policy clarification and of experience throughout the District.

Draft Policy RE01. Renewable & Low Carbon Energy Generation:

Wind Energy. The policy should include arrangements for ongoing adjustment to include taking on board emerging evidence of negative impacts on health and well-being. In light of new evidence and the experience of local people living near wind turbines of the impact of low frequency noise, shadow flicker, etc. the distance from dwellings should be greatly increased. Owners of windfarms should be required to prove that they have adequate public liability insurance to compensate people in forthcoming class action lawsuits; otherwise the liability will fall to the local authority.

Whereas Fermanagh & Omagh District Council embraced wind energy energetically when awareness of the downsides was unknown locally, the Council District has become overwhelmed with wind turbines and wind turbine farms. The scale of wind turbines appears to have grown exponentially and the proximity to where people live is clearly inappropriate. The negative impact on visual amenity, on the quality of life of people nearby including low frequency noise and shadow flicker and the detrimental impact on tourism potential of an area are some of the facts that are well known now. The negative impact on physical and mental health and well-being is a cause of major concern. It is not acceptable that this Council District should become a dumping ground for types of industry that are not wanted elsewhere. Furthermore, in light of the scandals that have come to surround all the 'green energy' schemes funded from the public purse, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive and independent review of the wind energy business in Northern Ireland before any further planning applications are recommended for approval.

Regarding "Wind Energy Proposals o)", this point is meaningless as written, perhaps a timetable is missing?

Draft Policy PU02 Overhead Electricity lines. The Policy should specify that overhead power cables and pylons carrying heavy duty electricity lines should not be permitted in the Sperrins AONB.

Waste Management Facilities Draft Policy WM01 Given the risks associated with poor management or abuse of waste management arrangements, future/new waste management operations should be owned and operated by the local authority. The details and cost to the public purse (including future costs) of abuses of dumping operations should be made public and form part of this consideration.

7.00 MONITORING & REVIEW

It is to be welcomed that the LDP is to be a flexible document capable of responding to new needs and circumstances as the evidence of climate change impacts continue to emerge. The Monitoring Report 7.3 should include a detailed data set on weather events, localized floods and land slippage events. It is not apparent that an adequate dataset is currently collected. Localised flooding, including blocking of the B46 road at Rouskey on June 1st 2018 and June 8th 2018, appears to have been occasioned by groundworks and interference with surface water drainage for wind turbine development. It is important that all such events are recorded and form part of the Monitoring Review for the District.

Soundness

I believe that this FODC Draft Plan Strategy falls short on the Soundness Test as described in the Procedures for Independent Examination of Local Development Plans. I wish to state that I would like to be heard orally at the Independent Examination as per the PAC Document Procedures.

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21/12/2018