



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

Local Development Plan 2030 Draft Plan Strategy

Background Paper - Cross Boundary Working

December 2020

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper has been prepared by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council to outline how the council has engaged with local authorities within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland when developing its local development plan and taken account of strategic planning issues that impact across the boundaries.
- 1.2 The Council acknowledges that in preparing its Draft Plan Strategy, it has a responsibility to ensure that the plan is not in conflict with the Development Plan Document (DPD) of neighbouring district councils and that opportunities for co-operation with local planning authorities in the Republic of Ireland have been explored. These relate to the Soundness Tests for consistency and coherence and effectiveness as the Plan Strategy will be tested for Soundness in terms of content and the process by which it is prepared.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is bounded by Derry City and Strabane Council to the north and Mid Ulster District Council to the east. All three councils along with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, share part of the Sperrin AONB.
- 2.2 The Council also shares a significant boundary with the Republic of Ireland having a common boundary with four county councils – Donegal, Cavan, Leitrim and Monaghan. There is a long legacy of co-operation between local councils on both sides of the Irish Border dating back to the 1970s with the establishment of dedicated partnerships to address common issues experienced in the Border Region due to its predominantly rural nature, characterised by a dispersed population and distance from major urban centres.
- 2.3 One such network is the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN), which is made up of eight local authorities spanning the Irish border: Donegal County Council, Sligo County Council, Leitrim County Council, Cavan County Council and Monaghan County Council from Ireland and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Mid-Ulster District Council and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council from Northern Ireland. Issues highlighted through this network have included employment opportunities; connectivity (both broadband and road infrastructure), access to services and depopulation.
- 2.4 The potential for co-operating in spatial planning across separate jurisdictions is set out in the document 'Framework for Co-operation, Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland' published jointly by both jurisdictions. The framework is a non-statutory approach to providing advice and guidance at relevant spatial or

geographical scales. At a local level, suggested co-operative approaches may include the designation or protection of key environmental assets such as landscapes and designated sites but also through progressing specific cross border projects for urban and rural areas.

- 2.5 In the regional/national planning context, co-operation and collaboration on a north-south basis is encouraged in both the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS) and the National Planning Framework (Ireland 2040 – Our Plan). In the RDS, gateways and corridors are recognised for internal and external connectivity, strengthening economic competitiveness across the island of Ireland. In the NPF, reconfiguration of local authority and council structures on both sides of the border presents opportunities for collaboration, in particular for the sub-regional areas on the Dublin-Belfast corridor and more central border areas. The Council provided comments on the Northern and Western Regional Assembly’s Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy which was published in November 2018, acknowledging support of cross-border co-operation and collaboration in areas such as transportation, economic opportunities and tourism.

3. Cross Boundary Working in Practice

- 3.1 The Council is a member of two forums - the Sperrins Forum and Cross Border Forum - set up by Mid Ulster District Council in April 2017 - and which are composed of both planning officer and elected member representatives. The Sperrin Forum comprises all four district councils which share the Sperrin AONB – the remaining two are Derry City and Strabane and Causeway Coast and Glens. The Cross Border Forum is comprised of adjoining councils to Mid Ulster and as well as Fermanagh and Omagh, it includes Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Monaghan County Council. Both forums were created to ensure a high level of co-operation and communication on cross boundary issues.
- 3.2 Both forums have held several meetings culminating in the agreement to draft Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) (see Appendix 2)
- 3.3 Fermanagh and Omagh have also engaged with the four local authorities in the Republic of Ireland (Donegal, Cavan, Leitrim and Monaghan) which adjoin our district, in order to identify common issues. In addition, the Council provides responses to draft development plan consultations on a regular basis.
- 3.4 Council officers also attend cross border development plan group meetings which are jointly chaired by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPCLG). These bi-annual meetings involve all cross

border local authorities and the purpose is to focus on cross border issues facing them. Matters that have been raised that may be of common interest include environmental issues (SEA/ AA), tourism infrastructure and cross border economic activity.

- 3.5 A list of the dates of all meetings attended of these respective groups, is attached at Appendix 1.

4. Consideration of Issues with Cross Boundary Impacts for Neighbouring Authorities.

The Sperrin AONB

- 4.1 Designated in 2008 under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 and lying in the heart of Northern Ireland, the Sperrin AONB encompasses a largely mountainous area of great geological complexity. Stretching from the Strule Valley in the west to the perimeter of the Lough Neagh lowlands in the east, this area presents vast expanses of moorland penetrated by narrow glens and deep valleys. In its south, the Burren area is noted for its lakes, sandy eskers and other glacial features. The area is rich in historic and archaeological heritage and folklore.
- 4.2 All four councils on the Sperrin Forum recognise the importance of the Sperrin landscape and the need to ensure a sustainable approach to development within it. The following areas of common ground were identified:
- Protection of landscapes
 - Minerals Development
 - Sustainable Tourism
 - Road linkages and Infrastructure
 - Servicing Rural Communities

A draft Statement of Common Ground is based on co-operation and which will allow a cohesive planning approach for the Sperrins Area under which individual policies will be developed. It is recognised that whilst the four Councils may have slightly differing LDP approaches, there is a consensus in ensuring that there is a strategic policy compatibility across the AONB and that plans are broadly consistent and are not in conflict with each other. Officers from all four councils have continued to engage with each other as they progress their respective draft plan strategies and a recent meeting was held virtually on 3 November 2020 to provide updates on progress.

Cross Border

4.3 The Cross Border Forum identified the following areas of common ground:

- Road linkages and Infrastructure
- Protection of River/Canal Corridors
- Servicing Rural Communities
- North-South Interconnector
- Minerals Development

The draft Statement of Common Ground, as with the Sperrins draft SoCG, affirms the four council's commitment to cooperation in order to create cohesive planning in the central border region. The Cross Border Forum is also committed to Irish Central Border Area Network's (ICBAN) common aim to respond to the unique economic and social needs of the Central Border Region and recognising the importance of ICBAN as a coordinating body in the delivery of services, including shared services, across the region.

4.4 Fermanagh and Omagh also held a cross border planning meeting with Donegal, Cavan, Leitrim and Monaghan County Councils, at which the following common issues were identified:

- a) Wind Energy Developments and Protection of landscapes and environmental designations
- b) Road Linkages and Infrastructure
- c) Economic Development
- d) Tourism and Linkages, Greenways and Blueways.

a) Wind Energy Developments and Protection of Landscapes and Environmental Designations

4.5 The issue of intervisibility between council areas was raised and how protection offered on one side of the border may be inconsistent to the approach taken on the other side of the border. It was also highlighted that further consideration may need to be given to other emerging technologies, including solar farms and potential new cross border issues. In developing our policies in relation to renewable energy, Fermanagh and Omagh has been mindful of these comments. The Landscape Wind Capacity Study which was undertaken by consultants on behalf of the Council, took into account data on wind farm developments/wind turbines obtained from neighbouring authorities within 15km of the Fermanagh and Omagh district.

b) Road Linkages and Infrastructure

4.6 There are a number of specific projects with cross-border implications which include the Southern Relief Road (Enniskillen); N2/A5

Monaghan-Omagh-Letterkenny Transport Corridor; and N16/A4 Sligo-Enniskillen-Ballygawley Transport Corridor. Generally, it was considered important that these are recognised and protected within plans so that it would continue to highlight their significance for lobbying and funding purposes.

c) Economic Development

- 4.7 The importance of working with other economic development agencies was noted as well as cross-partnership working to improve funding opportunities. Furthermore, it was noted that the NPF recognises Cavan/Monaghan/Fermanagh as a potential economic group given the strong links in terms of agriculture and dairy industries. It was generally acknowledged that whilst there were existing strong links along the Letterkenny-Derry economic corridor, this was less so between South Donegal and Fermanagh and Omagh and therefore this could be an area for potential improvements.

d) Tourism and Linkages; Greenways and Blueways

- 4.8 Tourism is acknowledged as an important contributor to the local economy of councils on both sides of the Irish Border. The Marble Arch Caves Global Geo-Park is a major facility in the cross -border region and its management is shared jointly by FODC and Cavan County Council. A section of the Ulster Canal goes through Monaghan and Fermanagh and Omagh. The re-opening of the Ulster Canal is seen as a key strategic tourist initiative for the area which would have potential economic benefits and not just recreational. This project would have potential to link into development of the Lakeland's and Shannon Blueway region. The Shannon-Erne waterway flows through Leitrim, Cavan and Fermanagh.

5. Consultation on Neighbouring LDP documents (Northern Ireland)

- 5.1 In addition to the above, FODC have responded to the following consultation documents of neighbouring councils: -
- Mid Ulster POP on 20-01-2017
 - Derry City and Strabane POP on 11-08-2017
 - Causeway Coast & Glens POP on 10-09-2018
 - Mid Ulster LDP Draft Plan Strategy on 18-04-2019
 - Derry City and Strabane LDP Draft Plan Strategy on 23-01-2020

All responses acknowledged the areas of common interest/cross boundary issues and the need for continued engagement. The

responses also noted where policy approaches may have slightly diverged whilst affirming that there were no identifiable conflicts of interest. Likewise, the responses received from these neighbouring authorities at the POP stage were considered when preparing the dPS.

Appendix 1

Meeting	Date	Location
Sperrins Forum	27-04-17	Magherafelt
Cross Border Forum	27-04-17	Magherafelt
Cross Border Development Plan Group*	13-06-17	Monaghan
Cross Border Planning Meeting (FODC)	28-06-17	Omagh
Sperrins Forum	21-09-17	Magherafelt
Cross Border Forum	21-09-17	Magherafelt
Cross Border Development Plan Group*	30-11-17	Derry/Londonderry
Sperrins Forum	24-11-17	Magherafelt
Sperrins Forum	07-06-18	Magherafelt
Cross Border Forum	07-06-18	Magherafelt
Cross Border Development Plan Group*	29-11-18	Armagh
Cross Border Development Plan Group*	30-05-19	Letterkenny
Cross Border Development Plan Group*	19-12-19	Newry

*Jointly hosted by DHPCLG and DfI.

**CROSS BORDER FORUM SUMMARY PAPER
&
DRAFT STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND**



CONTEXT

The Cross Border Forum was first convened in April 2017 and consisted of both elected representatives and professional planning staff of the following councils:

- Mid Ulster District Council;
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council;
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council;
- Monaghan County Council.

This Cross Border Forum was created primarily to ensure a high level of co-operation and communication among neighbouring councils as we all work towards the creation of each of our Development Plans. This matter is of particular relevance to the newly created councils within Northern Ireland as the test of 'soundness' of Development Plans is a new aspect that has now been enshrined in legislation.

Soundness is the basis on which all Development Plans in Northern Ireland will be examined. One of the tests of soundness relates to consistency and whether we have had regard to other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to any adjoining council's district. Another aspect of the soundness test relates to coherence and effectiveness, ensuring that where cross boundary issues are relevant our Development Plan policies and allocations are not in conflict with the Development Plan documents of neighbouring councils.

It was to this legislative backdrop that the Cross Border Forum was primarily created, however, it was also understood to be a valuable means of creating strong networks with colleagues in County Monaghan and a means to ensure that each of our Development Plans pay due regard to each other.

ISSUES

Two separate meetings of the Cross Border Forum have been held to date. In each of these meetings the following shared strategic issues were discussed:

- Protection of landscapes through appropriate environmental designations;
- Protection of River Corridors from inappropriate development and safeguarding the Ulster Canal;
- Management of Minerals Development and the use of Areas of Constraint on Mineral Development;
- Improvement of road linkages and infrastructure;
- Improve energy infrastructure and provision;
- Improve broadband provision;
- Protection of water quality;
- Protection of sites of environmental/heritage/biodiversity importance.

OUTCOME

This statement addresses the following areas of common ground:

Road Linkages and Infrastructure

There was an acknowledgement among members, particularly from Northern Ireland Councils, that there is little this forum or individual councils can do to influence the provision of major roads infrastructure projects. In the Republic of Ireland councils are directly involved in the delivery of major roads. However there was general agreement that all members will continue to lobby central government to improve road networks and road linkages in the border region.

Protection of River / Canal Corridors

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) and the National Planning Framework (NPF) both require Development Plans to take into account the protection of linear open spaces and there was broad agreement among members that each of our plans should be used to designate and protect such assets. This would include the key rivers within each of our respective districts. In addition it was agreed that the Development Plans should be utilised to protect industrial heritage assets such as former railway lines and canals, for use as greenways/walkways.

Through the identification and/or designation within the Development Plans our key river corridors would be afforded additional protection from inappropriate development adjacent to them. Similarly industrial heritage assets, such as old railway lines and the canals through designation would be protected from inappropriate development which could potentially compromise the reinstatement of these former transport use or prevent them from being used as greenways / walkways at some point in the future.

Accommodating Growth

The key focus for the development of new housing and economic development should remain within the hubs/main towns, although the allocation of such growth is a matter for each council. Facilities for which people need to travel should remain within these hubs/main towns and all councils will provide a policy to resist major retail development outside of the towns and at major road interchanges.

North – South Interconnector

The need for a new interconnector between the electricity grids of Northern Ireland and Ireland was acknowledged by the Forum members as a project of common interest. We recognise the importance of a North-South Interconnector as a means of securing reduced energy prices, enhanced energy systems resilience and diversification away from a reliance on fossil

fuels. We also recognise the need for such an Interconnector to be implemented in an environmentally friendly manner reducing the impact on any nearby residents.

Protection of Landscapes

None of the four councils in attendance identified a need to introduce stringent controls on development across the wider area. However, concerns were raised on the potential impact of development on Slieve Beagh which contains one of the largest areas of intact upland blanket bog in Northern Ireland and carries various national and internationally recognised designations (RAMSAR, SPA, SAC, ASSI, NHA). Concerns were also expressed on the impact of high structures on our shared landscapes, namely the Clogher Valley ridge line along the Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Monaghan Borders.

General consensus was reached among members that there is a need to protect our most sensitive areas from high structures, including wind turbines. How this is to be achieved was not stipulated and it was considered that this would be a matter for each of the councils to address within their individual Development Plans.

Minerals Development

It was acknowledged by members that regional policy requires councils to identify areas to be protected from minerals development because of their intrinsic landscape, amenity, scientific or heritage value. The timing and the methodology for designating such areas of constraint will be a matter from each individual council. In addition there was general agreement among members that the Development Plans should seek to afford protection to our existing peat resources.

Cross Border Forum

Statement of Common Ground

All four councils of the Cross Border Forum are committed to the concept of sustainable development. In addition to this, this statement sets out the Forum's areas of common ground based on the cooperation between us and also includes some additional enhancements which all the members of the Forum have bought into. This cooperation will result in cohesive planning for the central border region.

The Cross Border Forum is committed to Irish Central Border Area Network's (ICBAN) common aim to respond to the unique economic and social needs of the Central Border Region and recognising the importance of ICBAN as a coordinating body in the delivery of services, including shared services, across the region. The four councils of the Cross border Forum have all bought into the framework for the central border region to improve the quality of life and prosperity of the area. In working towards this common aim the Cross Border Forum has proposed a spatial framework as demonstrated on the accompanying map.

This statement sets out the areas of common ground which were agreed by the members of Cross Border Forum. They include the Forum's commitment to:

1. *Provide appropriate policies to facilitate improvements to the transport infrastructure to enable faster and safer travel across the central border region;*
2. *Encourage the delivery of enhanced cross border connectivity to include cycling and walking routes, as well as blueways and greenways.*
3. *Promote the growth of the region's main towns as the key hubs for housing, services and employment, complemented by a network of small towns and villages;*
4. *Provide appropriate policies to resist major retail development outside of the towns;*
5. *Support the delivery of a stable power network through a 'North-South Interconnector' scheme and also the accompanying distribution and transmission networks to enhance the security of electricity supply in the region;*
6. *Support the delivery of stable and secure digital communications infrastructure, including fibre optic technology, to improve broadband provision across the region;*
7. *Provide appropriate policies to encourage renewable energy schemes, in order to support a reduced carbon footprint for the central border region;*
8. *Provide appropriate policies and/or designations to protect our most sensitive landscapes from inappropriate development;*
9. *Provide appropriate policies to protect our most sensitive areas from mineral*

development;

10. *Provide appropriate policies to afford protection to our existing peat resources from commercial extraction.*

Signed on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council
Date
Position
Signed on behalf of Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Date
Position
Signed on behalf of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council
Date
Position
Signed on behalf of Monaghan County Council
Date
Position

**SPERRINS FORUM SUMMARY PAPER
&
DRAFT STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND**

DRAFT



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council



Derry City & Strabane
District Council
Comhairle Chathair
Dhoire & Cheantar
an tSratha Báin
Derry Cittie & Strábane
Destrict Council



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



**Causeway
Coast & Glens**
Borough Council

CONTEXT

The Sperrins Forum was first convened in April 2017 and consisted of both elected representatives and professional planning staff of the following councils:

- Mid Ulster District Council;
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council;
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Derry City & Strabane District Council

This Sperrins Forum was created primarily to ensure a high level of co-operation and communication among neighbouring councils as we all work towards the creation of each of our Development Plans. This matter is of particular relevance to the newly created councils within Northern Ireland as the test of 'soundness' of Development Plans is a new aspect that has now been enshrined in legislation.

Soundness is the basis on which all Development Plans in Northern Ireland will be examined. One of the tests of soundness relates to consistency and whether we have had regard to other relevant plans, policies and strategies relating to any adjoining council's district. Another aspect of the soundness test relates to coherence and effectiveness, ensuring that where cross boundary issues are relevant our Development Plan policies and allocations are not in conflict with the Development Plan documents of neighbouring councils.

It is in this legislative backdrop that the Sperrins Forum was primarily created.

ISSUES

A number of meetings of the Sperrins Forum have been held to date. In each of these meetings the following shared strategic issues were discussed:

- Protection of landscapes and environmental assets through appropriate environmental designations;
- Management of Minerals Development;
- Improvement of road linkages and infrastructure;
- Sustainable tourism development.

OUTCOME

This statement addresses the following areas of common ground:

Protection of Landscapes

There has been recognition of the need for protection of our sensitive landscapes and environmental assets and, in particular, the integrity of the Sperrin AONB designation. Concerns were expressed on the impact of wind turbines and other high structures such as telecommunication masts on our

shared landscapes. A suggested approach was to protect our most sensitive areas within the Sperrins from such development. How this would be achieved would be a matter for each council to address within their individual Local Development Plans.

Minerals Development

It was acknowledged that sustainable minerals development is a key challenge in the Sperrins AONB with its resource of not only sand and gravel but also valuable minerals such as gold. There was acknowledgement that policy requires councils to identify areas to be protected from minerals development because of their intrinsic landscape, amenity, scientific or heritage value. There was acknowledgement that minerals development is important to the economy but the need for mineral resources must be balanced against the need to protect and conserve the environment. The timing and the methodology for designating such areas of constraint will be a matter for each individual council.

There was acknowledgement that Development Plans should seek to afford appropriate protection to our existing peat resources.

Sustainable Tourism

There was acknowledgement that tourism development is important to the local and regional economy and that the Sperrins are recognised as being a relatively undeveloped destination for tourists. Members acknowledged that there has to be a balance between protecting our most sensitive landscapes and environmental assets and accommodating sustainable tourism development. Each council will bring forward a strategy for tourist development which balances protection of the areas tourism/heritage assets with the economic and recreation benefits of the tourism industry. The timing and methodology for this will be a matter for each individual council. Councils will also take account of any Management Plan for the Sperrins AONB.

Road Linkages and Infrastructure

There was an acknowledgement among members that there is little this forum or individual councils can do to influence the provision of major roads and infrastructure projects. However there was general agreement that all members will continue to lobby central government to improve road networks across our respective areas.

Meeting Peoples Needs

Recognition is given to the importance of the hubs which will continue to operate as the main service centres. Major facilities servicing the region should be located in the main hubs where everyone has access to them, based on the town centre first approach. Recognition is also given to the importance of our smaller settlements which act as local service centres to meet the needs of the rural community complemented with other community services and facilities provided in the countryside.

Sperrins Forum Statement of Common Ground

All four councils of the Sperrins Forum are committed to the concept of sustainable development. In addition to this, this statement sets out the Forum's areas of common ground based on the cooperation between us and also includes some additional enhancements which all the members of the Forum have bought into. This cooperation will result in a cohesive planning for the Sperrins Area under which individual policies may be developed.

This statement sets out the areas of common ground which were agreed by the members of Sperrins Forum. They include the Forum's commitment to:

1. *Provide appropriate policies and/or designations to protect our most sensitive landscapes from inappropriate development;*
2. *Provide appropriate policies/and or designations to protect our most sensitive areas which are important for their intrinsic landscape, amenity, scientific or heritage value from mineral development whilst ensuring adequate supply of material to meet need;*
3. *Provide appropriate policies to afford appropriate protection to our existing peat resources from commercial extraction;*
4. *Provide appropriate policies to facilitate improvements to the transport infrastructure to enable faster and safer travel across the region;*
5. *Recognise the importance of hubs as main service centres whilst also recognising the importance of smaller settlements in serving our rural communities, complemented with other community services and facilities provided in the countryside;*
6. *Provide appropriate policies to resist major retail development outside of the town centres;*
7. *Support the delivery of stable and secure digital communications infrastructure and mobile connectivity, including fibre optic technology, to improve broadband provision across the region;*
8. *Provide appropriate policies to facilitate renewable energy to support a reduced carbon footprint;*
9. *Where appropriate work with adjoining member Councils to link policy designations and cross boundary proposals within our Local Development Plans;*
10. *Provide policy to encourage sustainable tourism without significant adverse impact on the tourism assets of the area.*

Signed on behalf of **Mid Ulster District Council**

Date

Position

Signed on behalf of **Fermanagh & Omagh District Council**

Date

Position

Signed on behalf of **Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council**

Date

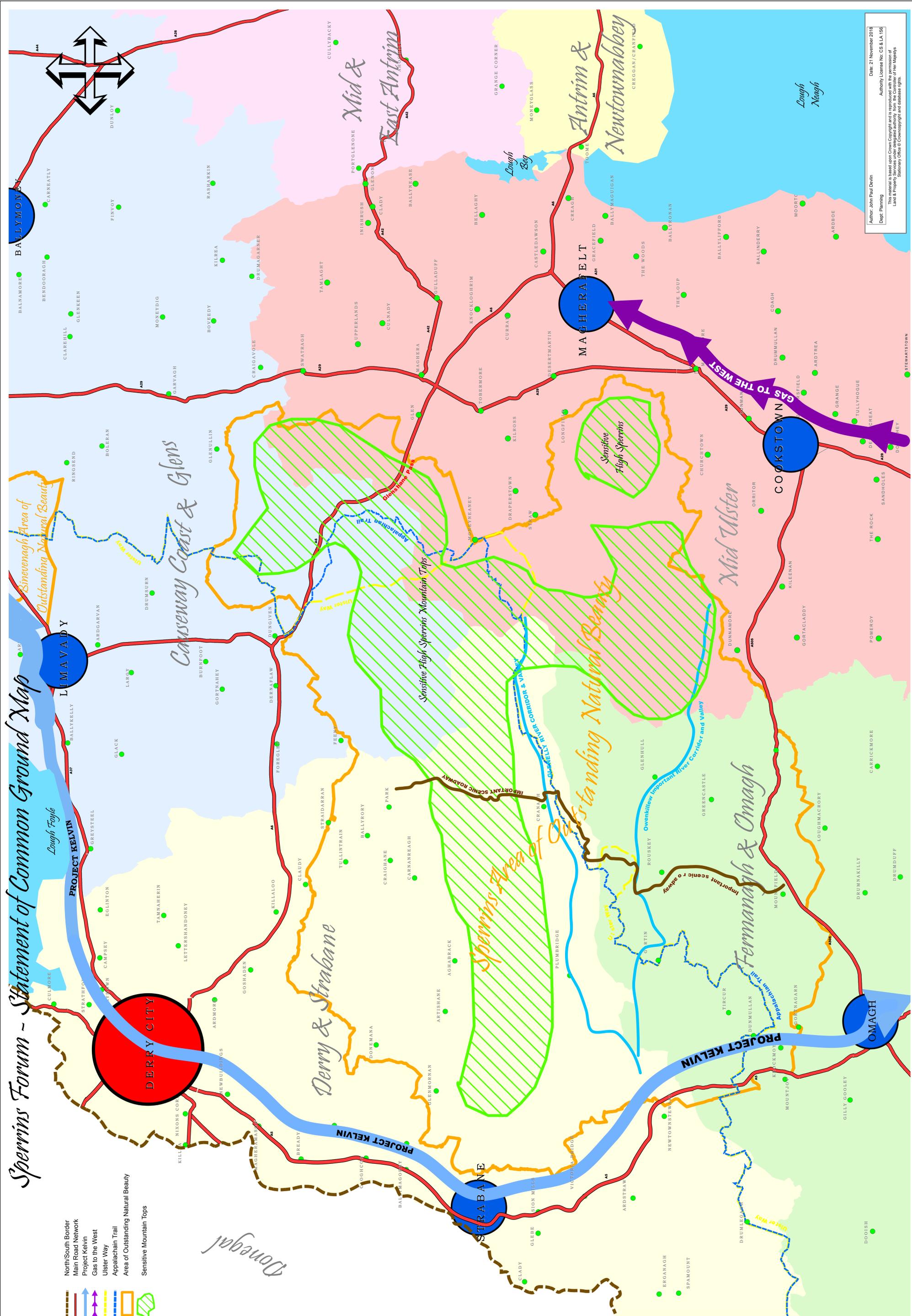
Position

Signed on behalf of **Derry City & Strabane District Council**

Date

Position

Sperrins Forum - Statement of Common Ground Map



- North/South Border
- Main Road Network
- Project Kelvin
- Gas to the West
- Ulster Way
- Appalachian Trail
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Sensitive Mountain Tops

Author: John Paul Devlin
 Date: 21 November 2018
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