



Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin
**Newry, Mourne
and Down**
District Council

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council: Response to the NPF

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) welcomes that the NPF acknowledges the special relationship Ireland has with Northern Ireland as its closest neighbour. It also welcomes that the NPF seeks to address the shared challenges it has with Northern Ireland in the preparation and implementation of the NPF through the setting of a number of specific National Policy Objectives to build and develop this relationship in the strategic planning and development of both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

In reference to the section of the NPF that specifically deals with Ireland's relationship with Northern Ireland, NMDDC accepts and agrees with the direction being established through the development of the National Planning Objectives 45 to 52. In doing so NMDDC wishes to make the following comments:

- Newry, Mourne and Down District shares a land and sea border with Ireland. It borders both County Louth and County Monaghan. In terms of the Regional Assemblies in Ireland, County Louth forms part of the Eastern and Midland Region (which includes Dublin), while County Monaghan forms part of the Northern and Western Region. The city of Newry together with the neighbouring port of Warrenpoint is strategically positioned on the Dublin – Belfast Economic Corridor.
- It is vitally important that in the preparation of and implementation of the NPF, and the forthcoming regional plans (Regional Spatial Economic Strategies), that through cross border co-operation and collaboration that the economic, social, and environmental interests of Newry, Mourne and Down District are fully taken in to account in the strategic planning and development of Ireland. In guiding future development and sustainable growth, and in the co-ordinated delivery of strategic development, infrastructure and services, the NPF must recognise, acknowledge and be ever mindful of the role and position of Newry, Mourne and Down District as it borders Ireland, in particular its placement on the Dublin – Belfast Economic Corridor and the contribution it makes to the whole of the island of Ireland.
- It is further requested that a diagram showing the Dublin/Belfast Corridor spatially is included in the final document. It is proposed that the diagram would show the economic corridor aligned with the linear rail and road network and would include the location of County Louth with reference to the large towns of Drogheda and Newry/Dundalk.
- Newry/Dundalk as the spatial location on the economic corridor to develop critical mass to compete with other larger cities. It is considered that the designation of Newry / Dundalk can potentially realise the objective of a gateway between the Dublin metropolitan region and the north east of the island as a counter action to BREXIT, as part of a linear network of urban centres strategically located along the corridor. We

believe this important as Newry, Mourne and Down District Council the ambition of a Belfast Growth Region to include this Council area.

- **National Policy Objective 45:**

- ***Work with the relevant Departments in Northern Ireland for mutual advantage in areas such as spatial planning, economic development and promotion, co-ordination of social and physical infrastructure provision and environmental protection and management.***

NMDDC welcomes the reference that the NPF will work in tandem with the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland (RDS) in addressing shared challenges. And also that this collaborative work will be supported by the Framework for Co-operation on Spatial Strategies between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Spatial Framework of the RDS recognises that in times of economic downturn places cannot afford to compete with each other, and that co-operation is important to reduce unnecessary duplication of services and facilities.

The European Spatial Development Perspective states:

'The creation of networks of smaller towns in less densely settled and economically weaker regions is also important. In these areas, co-operation between urban centres to develop functional complementarities may be the only possibility for achieving viable markets and maintaining institutions and services which could not be achieved by the towns on their own.'

The Spatial Framework of the RDS therefore promotes co-operation between places and encourages clustering of Hubs so that services do not need to be duplicated but rather shared.

The Spatial Framework of the RDS identifies Newry City as a Main Hub. Newry is the main settlement in the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. Its setting close to the Mourne Mountains makes it an attractive tourist destination. Newry is a significant employment centre with a strong retail offering and an acute hospital. It is well connected to both Belfast and Dublin being on the main road and rail links. Newry is identified in the RDS as the South Eastern City gateway due to its proximity to the land border and the major port of Warrenpoint. The RDS also acknowledges that in the delivery of services and functions it has the potential to cluster with Dundalk. They are both strategically located on the Dublin – Belfast corridor which has the potential to become a significant axis of development within the wider European context. This has provided the impetus for joint working to develop their roles as regional Gateways and to develop the wider eastern seaboard corridor. A joined-up approach assists in creating a critical mass to compete in the global economy and will support efforts to attract funding for wider regional infrastructure and regeneration initiatives. Such an approach to the strategic planning of the cross border relationship of Newry-Dundalk will enable it to collectively promote the development of a progressive and competitive twin centre sub region and promote sustainable development. Developing two strong sustainable centres will play a key role in regeneration strategies, transport infrastructure and connectivity, economic development and job creation, and in the delivery of services.

It is considered that the designation of Newry / Dundalk in the Draft Plan acknowledges the latent potential of creating centres of scale along the Dublin / Belfast corridor that will attract reciprocal flows of highly skilled employees from both the Dublin and Belfast

labour markets. Thus would be optimised existing transport infrastructure and potential new investment by fully utilising the capacity of the road and rail network in both directions.

In cognisance of the above the NPF should make reference to the 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MOU) that exists between Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Louth County Council, which commits the region to increased cross border co-operation. The MOU underpins the pivotal role of the greater Newry region. It establishes a strategic alliance between the two bodies and seeks to support and promote the economic development and competitiveness of the region.

The 2 Councils have developed an Action Plan which sets out the key projects which the Council are working on. These include infrastructure links, bathing water quality in Carlingford and tourism links as well as economic development initiatives.

It is also noted that the NPF makes specific reference to 'Cross Border Local Initiatives' and the opportunities for collaboration, in particular for the sub-regional areas on the Dublin - Belfast corridor, and recognises that the economic, infrastructural and developmental ties in these areas will be supported through local leadership and co-operation arrangements such as the coordination of statutory planning functions and corresponding infrastructural investment. The NPF states that the three key areas of focus include:

- Regional co-operation arrangements.
- Joint initiatives.
- Co-ordinated spatial planning.

However, while making this reference, it is disappointing that the NPF does not include any National Planning Objective in this respect. Building on the collaboration that already exists between NMDDC and County Louth Council it is considered that similar to the National Planning Objective 47, that the NPF should develop/include an additional National Planning Objective that promotes the development of the Newry - Dundalk sub region of the Dublin - Belfast Economic Corridor.

• **National Policy Objective 46:**

- ***In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, to further support and promote the sustainable economic potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and enhance its international visibility.***

As referenced above the RDS identifies Newry together with Warrenpoint as the South Eastern City Gateway with a port and strategic links to Dundalk and on to Dublin.

As a Gateway, Newry/Warrenpoint is a strategically important transport interchanges which is important for economic development, freight distribution activities and additional employment generation. The quality of connection from the sea port of Warrenpoint to the internal transport network is crucial for economic competitiveness and the convenience of commercial freight. Economic and social development depends on modern, efficient infrastructure.

Warrenpoint Port is an important commercial freight gateway and key employment generator strategically placed on the corridor. Warrenpoint Port is a central harbour for businesses in the midlands of Ireland. 70% of timber from the EU which enter the port

go to the South of Ireland. 50% of animal feed coming into the port go to the South. Killeel fishing harbour is also a major processor of fish from Howth Dunmore East and Clougherhead. This level of economic connectiveness needs to be supported within the economic strategy.

In its reference to the Dublin – Belfast Economic Corridor, the NPF, as well as referring specifically to the three major airports, should also refer to the major sea ports, including Warrenpoint. This should include details of passenger numbers in respect of their operation as ferry terminals and more importantly as commercial ports for freight services. Transport infrastructure, in particular improved road connectivity (e.g. proposed Newry Southern Relief Road) will continue to play a crucial role in the future growth and development of the port and Newry as a regional hub and as a gateway to both Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland.

- NMDDC acknowledges that Brexit poses a number of challenges. Despite the uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the implications this may have, the NPF recognises the strong economic, cultural ties between Ireland and Northern Ireland. It is vitally important that cooperation and joint development of cross border areas, particularly the Dublin – Belfast corridor is strengthened now if it is to be resilient and maintained. Post Brexit, it will be important that the NPF along with the RDS under the Framework of Co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland maximises the potential of the whole of the island of Ireland's economy, including initiatives to improve connectivity and integration of transport.