

**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 notion 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

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. 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 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, although the allocation of such growth is a matter for each council. Facilities for which people need to travel should remain within these hubs 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. In particular there was support expressed for the North-South Interconnector as a means of securing reduced energy prices, enhanced energy systems resilience and diversification away from a reliance on fossil fuels.

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). 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.

At the latest Cross Border Forum meeting (November 2017) 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 for each individual council. In addition there was general agreement among members that the Development Plans should seek to afford additional protection to our existing peat resources and that measures need to be taken in order to regulate peat extraction.

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 common aim to respond to the unique economic and social needs of the Central Border 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 the '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 additional protection to our existing peat*

resources from commercial extraction and to regulate peat extraction commercial extraction.

Signed on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council
Date
Position
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