

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

DRAFT



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council



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

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 concept 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

Three separate 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 Sperrin 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 additional protection to our existing peat resources and that measures need to be taken in order to regulate commercial peat extraction.

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. One way of addressing this would be via a strategy of identifying Tourism Opportunity Zones where potential growth could occur, balanced with a number of Tourism Conservation Zones where conservation interests would be paramount and tourism and environmental assets would be safeguarded. The timing and the methodology for designation of such areas will be a matter for each individual council.

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.

Accommodating Growth

The 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.

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 cohesive planning for the Sperrins Area.

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 areas of intrinsic landscape, amenity, scientific or heritage value from mineral development;*
3. *Provide appropriate policies to afford additional protection to our existing peat resources from commercial extraction and to regularise all commercial peat extraction.*
4. *Provide appropriate policies to facilitate improvements to the transport infrastructure to enable faster and safer travel across the region;*
5. *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;*
6. *Provide appropriate policies to resist major retail development outside of the towns;*
7. *Support the delivery of stable and secure digital communications infrastructure, including fibre optic technology, to improve broadband provision across the region;*
8. *Provide appropriate policies to encourage renewable energy schemes, in order to support a reduced carbon footprint for the central border region;*
9. *Encourage the delivery of enhanced connectivity to include cycling and walking routes, as well as blueways and greenways at appropriate locations.*

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

DRAFT