

# Regional Development Strategy

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**RDS**  
2035  
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## Executive Summary

*Building a Better Future*





## Foreword

I am very pleased to publish the Regional Development Strategy 2035 which is the spatial strategy of the Executive. Its purpose is to deliver the spatial aspects of the Programme for Government. It complements the Sustainable Development Strategy and informs the spatial aspects of the strategies of all Government Departments.

The Strategy is a long-term plan which recognises the important role Belfast plays in generating regional prosperity and that Londonderry is the focus for economic growth in the North West region. To ensure that all places benefit from economic growth, the Strategy reflects the Programme for Government approach of balanced sub-regional growth and recognises the importance of key settlements as centres for growth and investment.

It recognises there is a need to understand the role and function of settlements and their role in serving rural communities and the importance of promoting co-operation between places. It encourages clustering of towns and cities so that services can be shared and do not need to be duplicated. It identifies those settlements within close proximity to each other which have the potential to cluster.

We must also plan to deal with climate change as a key environmental and economic driver. It is important that we in Northern Ireland play our part by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and that we plan for the impacts which climate change brings. The Strategy sets out measures on transport, energy and the location of jobs and houses to help address and adapt to these important issues.

Sustainable communities are at the heart of what we do. It is important that we maximise the use of existing infrastructure and services and that we create places which are safe and inclusive and offer equality of opportunity. The Strategy is not limited to land use but recognises that policies for physical development have far reaching implications. It therefore addresses economic, social and environmental issues aimed at achieving sustainable development and social cohesion.

I am committed to working in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders in the delivery of this Strategy for the benefit of all the people in Northern Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danny Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**DANNY KENNEDY, MLA**  
**Minister for Regional Development**

# Executive Summary

## Background

1.1 The revised document, approved by the Executive on 26 January 2012, will replace the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) that was published in 2001 and amended in 2008. The RDS has a statutory basis. It sets out the framework for the spatial development for the Region up to 2035. The RDS is cross-cutting with linkages to other key government policies and statutory legislation.

## Developing a new RDS

2.1 An analysis of significant spatial trends was carried out as part of the review process. In Chapter 2 this has been set out under the 3 sustainability headings of Environment, Society and Economy. This analysis explained the trends and new challenges along with the key policy directions.

2.2 The main points from the analysis are:

- The importance of the Metropolitan area centred on Belfast as the driver for regional economic growth; its population has declined but it remains the regional focus for administration, commerce, specialised services and cultural amenities.
- The significant role which Londonderry has to play as capital of an expanding North West; its recognition as the UK City of Culture 2013 will add impetus to the integrated approach to regeneration being taken forward through the One Plan.
- The importance of key centres which are well placed to benefit from and add value to regional economic growth, and that critical mass to attract growth can be created by the identification of clusters of settlements.
- The need to build on the approach to urban renaissance of developing compact urban form by integrating key land uses with transportation measures with a focus on the use of land within existing urban footprints.
- The need for a new emphasis on how to reduce dependence on the car and to change travel behaviour.
- The importance in all aspects of forward planning to address the consequences of climate change which means an even greater focus on where people live and work and how transport and energy needs are planned.

## Public Consultation

2.3 Consultation on the 10 Year Review of the Regional Development Strategy commenced on 6 January 2011 for a three month period, concluding on 31 March 2011. During this period the Department held a series of public meetings, met with stakeholders and received written responses from consultees.

Thirteen public meetings were held during the public consultation period. In addition to the public meetings, the Department met with a number of stakeholders during the consultation period to provide further clarification of the strategy proposals. A total of 129 written responses were received to the public consultation. Copies of all the responses are available on the DRD website.

## Vision and Aims

2.3 In broad terms the Strategy aims to take account of the economic ambitions and needs of the Region, and put in place spatial planning, transport and housing priorities that will support and enable the aspirations of the Region to be met. Chapter 2 details the Vision and aims. The RDS vision is:

**“An outward-looking, dynamic and liveable Region with a strong sense of its place in the wider world; a Region of opportunity where people enjoy living and working in a healthy environment which enhances the quality of their lives and where diversity is a source of strength rather than division.”**

2.4 This is supported by 8 aims:

- Support strong, sustainable growth for the benefit of all parts of the Region.
- Strengthen Belfast as the regional economic driver and Londonderry as the capital of the North West.
- Support our towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential.
- Promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities.
- Improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information between places.
- Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake.
- Take actions to reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate adaptation to climate change.

- Strengthen links between north and south, east and west, with Europe and the rest of the world.

## The Spatial Framework

2.5 In Chapter 2 a Spatial Framework is developed to enable strategic choices to be made in relation to development and infrastructural investment. The components of the Framework are:

- **The Metropolitan Area centred on Belfast**

The Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA) is defined as the continuous built up area centred on Belfast with an arc from Jordanstown to Knocknagoney and includes the City of Lisburn, and towns of Bangor, Carrickfergus and Holywood. The BMUA is at the centre of the regional transport network and the major gateway for national and international trade. The capital of the Region is Belfast with a population of 268,000 which has been in decline. The evidence is however that over 50% of those who work in Belfast live outside it.

- **A North West Region centred on Londonderry**

The North West is defined as Londonderry, Strabane and Limavady, along with the greater part of County Donegal. Derry City is the core settlement and is a key cross-border and international gateway providing access by road, rail, and sea to the North West. Securing a strong and vibrant Derry City is important to the economic and social wellbeing of the North West.

- **Hubs and Clusters of Hubs**

Main and Local Hubs which have the greatest potential for growth and which provide a range of services to the surrounding areas are identified. They are Enniskillen, Omagh, Coleraine, Strabane, Limavady, Ballymena, Antrim, Larne, Cookstown, Dungannon, Craigavon, Banbridge, Armagh, Newry, Downpatrick, Newtownards, Ballycastle, Ballymoney, Magherafelt, Newcastle and Warrenpoint.

- **Clusters of cities and towns**

To encourage co-operation clustering of towns is promoted in the framework. The proposed clusters are:

- Coleraine, Limavady, Ballymoney and Ballycastle
- Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt
- Craigavon and Banbridge and Armagh
- Ballymena, Larne and Antrim

- Newry and Warrenpoint
- Downpatrick and Newcastle

- **The rural area**

The need to sustain rural communities living in smaller towns, villages and the open countryside requires new development and employment opportunities which respect local, social and environmental circumstances. A key consideration is how these communities access services.

- **Gateways and corridors**

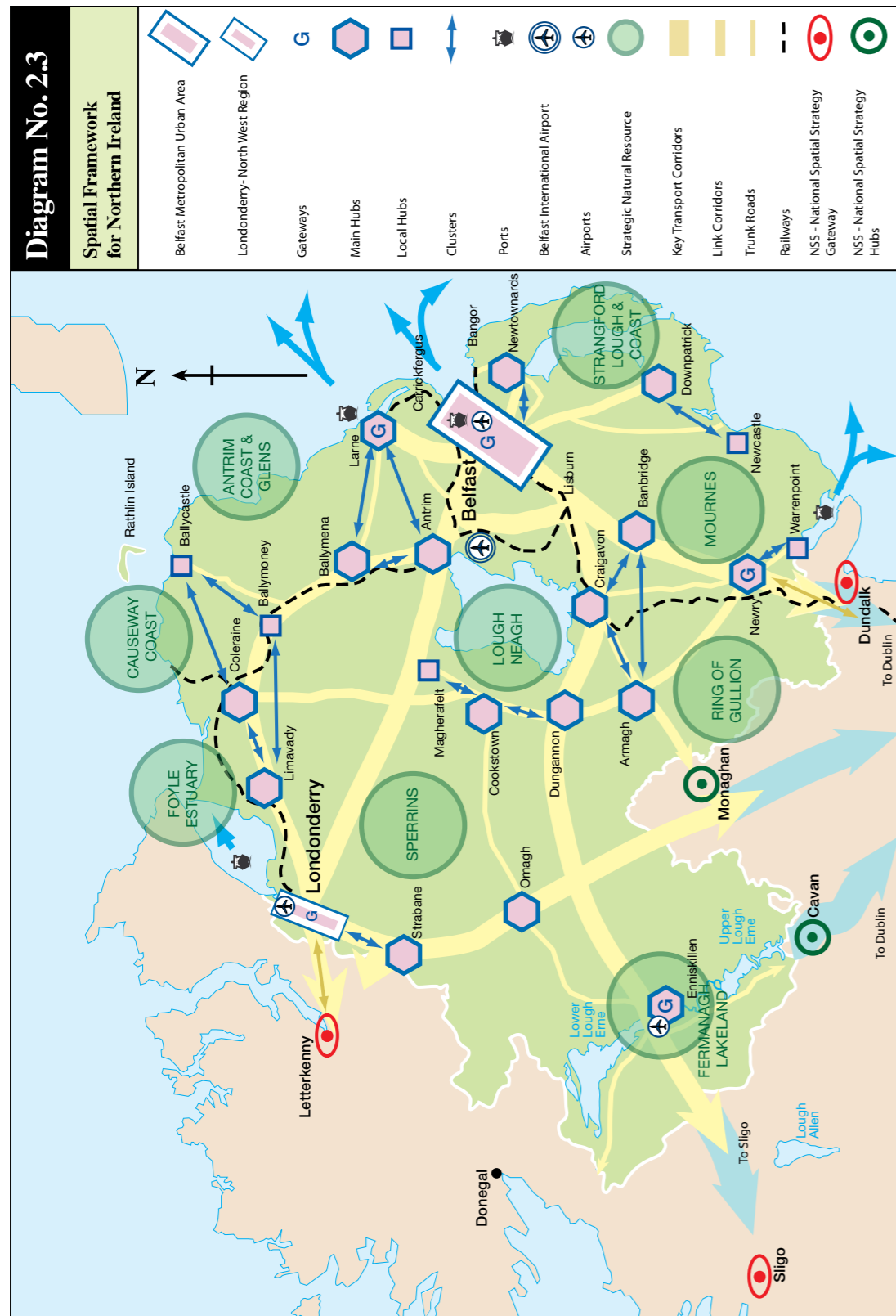
Gateways are strategically important transport interchanges which are important for economic development, freight distribution activities and additional employment generation. The Gateways are:

- Belfast (including the sea port and George Best City airport);
- Belfast International Airport;
- Larne;
- Derry (including the sea port and a regional airport);
- Newry (including Warrenpoint); and
- Enniskillen.

2.6 Economic corridors have been identified based on the Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN). The Economic Corridors connect Belfast and Derry and main centres of economic activity and the external gateways.

2.7 The Framework will also provide opportunities which should be taken to work with our nearest neighbours in deciding where development should go.

2.8 The Diagram below describes the elements of the Framework.



### The Strategic Guidance

3.1 Strategic Guidance has been developed to provide long term policy directions to guide the public, private and community sectors. There are two types of Strategic Guidance outlined in this chapter;

- Regional Guidance (RG) – This applies to everywhere in the region and is presented under the 3 sustainable development themes of Economy, Society and Environment.
- Spatial Framework Guidance (SFG) - This is additional to the region-wide guidance and is tailored to each of the 5 elements of the Spatial Framework.

#### 1. ECONOMY

- RG1 Ensure adequate supply of land to facilitate sustainable economic growth
- RG2 Deliver a balanced approach to Transport infrastructure
- RG3 Implement a balanced approach to telecommunications infrastructure that will give a competitive advantage
- RG4 Promote a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism infrastructure
- RG5 Deliver a sustainable and secure energy supply

#### 2. SOCIETY

- RG6 Strengthen community cohesion
- RG7 Support urban and rural renaissance
- RG8 Manage housing growth to achieve sustainable patterns of residential development

#### 3. ENVIRONMENT

- RG9 Reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate mitigation and adaptation to climate change whilst improving air quality
- RG10 Manage our waste sustainably
- RG11 Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment
- RG12 Promote a more sustainable approach to the provision of water and sewerage services and flood risk management

#### 4. THE METROPOLITAN AREA CENTRED ON BELFAST

- SFG1 Promote urban economic development at key locations throughout the BMUA and ensure sufficient land is available for jobs
- SFG2 Grow the population of the City of Belfast
- SFG3 Enhance the role of Belfast City Centre as the regional capital and focus of administration, commerce, specialised services and cultural amenities
- SFG4 Manage the movement of people and goods within the BMUA
- SFG5 Protect and enhance the quality of the setting of the BMUA and its environmental assets

#### 5. A NORTH WEST REGION CENTRED ON LONDONDERRY

- SFG6 Develop a strong North West
- SFG7: Strengthen the role of Londonderry as the Principal city of the North West
- SFG8 Manage the movement of people and goods within the North West
- SFG9 Protect and enhance the environmental assets of Londonderry and the North West

#### 6. HUBS AND CLUSTERS OF HUBS

- SFG10 Identify and consolidate the roles & functions of settlements within the clusters
- SFG11 Promote economic development opportunities at Hubs
- SFG12 Grow the population in the Hubs

#### 7. THE RURAL AREA

- SFG13 Sustain rural communities living in smaller settlements and the open countryside
- SFG14 Improve accessibility for rural communities

#### 8. GATEWAYS AND CORRIDORS

- SFG15 Strengthen the Gateways for Regional competitiveness

#### Regionally Significant Economic Infrastructure

4.1 The RDS provides the flexibility to accommodate unforeseen imaginative proposals for economic development that are clearly in the public interest. The Strategy is intended to be sufficiently flexible to allow the private sector to bring forward original development proposals which are of significance to the whole or substantial part of the North and create employment, wealth and important assets for the Region. Similarly, major economic development proposals which contribute to meeting local needs and provide wider public benefits may also be acceptable. The RDS aims overall to facilitate development projects in tune with the spirit of the Spatial Framework for the Region.

4.2 In Chapter 4 projects that the RDS considers as being of strategic significance are discussed as those that:

- deliver strategic improvements in external and internal communications;
- contribute to the achievement of renewable energy targets;
- contribute to the achievement of waste management and climate change targets; and
- raise issues of more than regional importance.

#### Implementation

5.1 The RDS is a key document within the planning system. It sets out strategic guidance which is used in the preparation of development plans, planning policy statements and urban regeneration initiatives. The relationship with planning documents is set out below.

5.2 As explained in Chapter 1, the current (July 2011) legislative requirement is that development plans, planning policy statements and development schemes are required to be “in general conformity with” the RDS. There is also a requirement for DRD to issue statements to DOE as to the general conformity of plans at two stages in the development plan process.

5.3 Changes to the legislative requirements will be made under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The bulk of the Act will not come into force until planning powers transfer to councils at a time to be decided by the Northern Ireland Assembly. When planning powers transfer the DOE will continue to be responsible for planning policy and guidance. The requirement for these policies to be in general conformity with the RDS will remain.

5.4 Responsibility for the preparation of development plans and development schemes will transfer to local councils, these must 'take account' of the RDS. Development plans will consist of a Plan Strategy and a Local Policies Plan. The proposal is that Councils must submit the development plan to DOE for independent examination. The purpose of this examination is to test the soundness of the Plan Strategy and the Local Policies Plan. This soundness test will include the extent to which the Council has taken account of relevant guidance in the RDS.

5.5 DRD will work with DOE to develop guidance for new Councils which will set out and explain relevant central Government policies and strategies. This guidance will be relevant in the consideration of the soundness of the development plan.

5.6 New plans and policy introduced subsequent to the publication of the RDS must fulfil the statutory requirement to take account of, or be in general conformity with, the strategy. The RDS is material to the processing of planning applications and it **may** take precedence over existing development plans and policies particularly where the new guidance is materially different and of significance to a development proposal.

### **Delivery Mechanism**

5.7 As the spatial strategy of the Executive the RDS complements the key objectives of the Programme for Government and seeks to influence both it and the Investment Strategy. Because of its cross-cutting nature a number of stakeholders will be involved in delivery. Many of the policies can only be implemented through individual departments and their strategies. DRD propose to set up formal structures to help stakeholders take account of the guidance.

### **Central Government**

5.8 Whilst all government departments must take account of the RDS there are three which have the potential to make the biggest impact on the region. DRD propose to set up a Ministerial sub-group, chaired by the Minister for Regional Development, with the Ministers for the Environment and Social Development.

5.9 The inter-departmental group of senior officials which assisted in the preparation of the strategy will continue to meet under the chairmanship of DRD.

5.10 The Minister for Regional Development will, after consulting other departments, provide the Assembly Committee with a progress report triennially.

### **Local Government**

5.11 Given the proposal in the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to transfer planning powers to local councils it is important that Local Government is fully and formally engaged in the delivery process.

### **Working with Neighbours**

5.12 The region can benefit from collaboration with its neighbours on both a North/South and East/West basis.

### **Monitoring and Review**

5.13 DRD will set up a monitoring group to develop appropriate monitoring procedures. Indicators will be agreed to enable progress to be measured in implementing the strategy. The monitoring and evaluation reports will be presented to the Executive on an annual basis.

