

Local Development Plan 2032
Technical Supplement 13

Outdoor Advertisements



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This technical supplement is one of a suite of topic-based documents detailing the evidence base used to inform the preparation of the Ards and North Down (AND) Local Development Plan (LDP) draft Plan Strategy (DPS) 2032. This suite of documents should be read alongside the policies contained within the DPS in order to understand the rationale and justification for each policy.
- 1.2 In May 2019, the Council launched the Preferred Options Paper (POP), the first of three public consultation documents which will be issued through the LDP process. The POP outlined the vision and strategic objectives of the plan based upon the baseline information detailed in a suite of position papers. The technical supplements which complement the DPS will build upon the baseline information gathered in the position papers and show how this has been progressed through the LDP process to formulate the DPS.
- 1.3 Advertising is a familiar feature of our environment that can contribute to a vibrant and competitive economy. All advertisements affect the character and appearance of the building or place where they are displayed. Given the potential impact of outdoor advertising on amenity, both positive and negative, there is a need to balance the requirements of the industry with the protection and, where possible, enhancement of the character and appearance of our cities, towns and villages. There is a corresponding need to ensure that advertisements will not prejudice public safety.
- 1.4 Planning legislation enables planning authorities to restrict or regulate the display of advertisements in the interests of amenity or public safety, including road safety. Furthermore, roads legislation provides additional controls on advertisements in, or on, a public road.
- 1.5 The consent of the planning authority is required for the display of advertisements, however, certain types of advertisement benefit from 'Deemed Consent' provided certain conditions are met.
- 1.6 The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011¹ defines an advertisement as: 'Any word, letter, model, sign, placard, board, notice, awning, blind, device, or representation, whether illuminated or not, in the nature of, and employed wholly or partly for the purposes of, advertisement, announcement or direction, and (without prejudice to the preceding provisions of this definition) includes any hoarding or similar structure used, or designed or adapted for use, and anything else principally used, or designed or adapted principally for

¹ [Planning Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#)

use, for the display of advertisements, and references to the display of advertisements shall be constructed accordingly.'

2.0 REGIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.1 The regional policy context is provided by the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS), the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) for Northern Ireland, and extant regional planning policy.

[Programme for Government \(PfG\) 2024-2027](#)

- 2.2 The Programme for Government (PfG) Framework 2024-2027 was officially agreed on the 27 February 2025. It sets out nine core priorities aimed at addressing immediate needs and laying the groundwork for transformative progress. To grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy is one of the core priorities. The Planning (NI) Act 2011 specifically requires the Local Development Plan (LDP) to take account of the PfG, and LDPs are a key delivery tool for the achievement of a number of outcomes of the programme.

[Everyone's Involved — NI Executive Sustainable Development Strategy \(2021\)](#)

- 2.3 The Northern Ireland (NI) Executive launched the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) 'Everyone's Involved', on 27 May 2010, reissued on 20 July 2021.
- 2.4 This document is the current regional strategic framework guiding sustainable development. It encourages integration of economic, social, and environmental goals into policy across all Northern Ireland Government Departments and District Councils, primarily through the Programme for Government.
- 2.5 The Strategy has been designed to provide a framework that can support and inform the decisions and actions taken by individuals, groups and organisations in progressing the sustainability agenda.

[Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland \(SPPS\)](#)

- 2.6 The SPPS sets out the strategic subject planning policy for a wide range of planning matters. It also provides the core planning principles to underpin the delivery of the two-tier planning system with the aim of furthering sustainable development. It sets out the strategic direction for councils to bring forward detailed operational policies within future local development plans:
- Ensure that outdoor advertisements respect amenity and do not prejudice public safety, including road safety;

- Help everyone involved in the display of outdoor advertisements contribute positively to the appearance of a well-cared for, attractive environment in our cities, towns, villages and the countryside.
- 2.7 The regional strategic objectives for the control of advertisements within the SPPS are to ensure that proposals do not prejudice Section 130 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011, Article 87 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, the Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (2015 No.66), made under section 130 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011, amenity or public safety, having regard to the specific circumstances of each proposal.
- 2.8 Well-designed advertising which respects the building or location where it is displayed, and which contributes to a quality environment should be encouraged. Consent should be given for the display of an advertisement where it respects amenity, when assessed in the context of the general characteristics of the locality and to ensure proposals do not prejudice public safety, including road safety. (SPPS Para 6.57)
- [Regional Development Strategy 2035 \(RDS\)](#)
- 2.9 The RDS provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors. Preparation of Local Development Plans by Councils must 'take account' of the RDS.
- 2.10 The control of outdoor advertisements is relevant to RG11: Conserve, protect and, where possible, enhance our built heritage and our natural environment.

3.0 LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

[The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017-2032](#)

- 3.1 The Big Plan is the Council's Community Plan which provides an overarching framework, setting out a shared vision and ambition that Ards and North Down's Strategic Community Planning Partnership has agreed to work towards over the next fifteen years. The vision of the plan is that Ards and North Down is a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous place to be.
- 3.2 The Big Plan contains five outcomes that the Plan hopes will reflect the position of the Borough by 2032. The following are of relevance to this technical supplement, that all people in Ards and North Down benefit from:
 Outcome 4 - A prosperous and inclusive economy.
 Outcome 5 - An environment that is valued, well-managed and accessible.

- 3.3 The Local Government Act 2014 through an amendment to Section 8 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, introduced a statutory requirement that the preparation of the Local Development Plan (LDP) must take account of the Community Plan. The Big Plan will work in tandem with the LDP providing the spatial framework to achieve the shared vision for the Borough.

[Ards and North Down Corporate Plan 2024-2028 A Sustainable Borough](#)

- 3.4 The priorities of the Corporate Plan are closely aligned to those within the Big Plan, and set out a long-term vision for Council, local organisations and communities to work towards. The delivery of the Corporate Plan seeks to achieve better outcomes for all the people of our Borough, towards the longer-term vision outlined in the Big Plan.
- 3.5 The core of the Corporate Plan is the vision of a sustainable Borough where environmental, social and economic wellbeing are interdependent. The three priorities of the plan are increased economic growth, attracting more businesses and jobs, reduced carbon emissions as we transition to net zero and improved wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality.

[Extant Local Development Plan Context](#)

- 3.6 In Ards and North Down Borough Council the relevant plans are the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 and the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (dBMAP), which includes policies for the legacy North Down Borough.

[Ards And Down Area Plan 2015](#)

- 3.7 The Plan objectives include promotion of Newtownards as a 'main town within Northern Ireland' and strengthening the role as the principal administrative, trade, employment and residential centre within the Plan area, and facilitation of the creation of employment, taking into account the Governments' Strategy on Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland.
- 3.8 The principal purpose of the Plan was to establish physical development policies for Ards and its surroundings up to 2015.

[Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015](#)

- 3.9 It should be noted that BMAP was adopted in September 2014 but was subsequently quashed as a result of a judgment in the Court of Appeal delivered on 18 May 2017. As a consequence of this, the North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984-1995, the Belfast Urban Area Plan, and Bangor Town Centre Plan 1995 are now the statutory Development Plans for the North Down area with draft BMAP remaining a material consideration.

- 3.10 These plans remain extant until replaced by the new Local Development Plan (LDP) for the Borough. The existing plans are an important consideration in the LDP process, as they provide a starting point for the review of our spatial planning options.

4.0 PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT 17 - CONTROL OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISEMENTS²

- 4.1 Planning Policy Statement 17 (PPS 17) contains sets out the main considerations taken into account in assessing proposals for the display of outdoor advertisements that require planning consent. It contains Policy AD 1 Amenity and Public Safety and Annex A: Guidance for Outdoor Advertisements.
- 4.2 Policy AD 1 states that, 'Amenity and Public Safety Consent will be given for the display of an advertisement where:
- (i) it respects amenity, when assessed in the context of the general characteristics of the locality; and
 - (ii) it does not prejudice public safety.
- The guidance set out in Annex A for different categories of outdoor advertisement will be taken into account in assessing proposals.'
- 4.3 This policy approach is continued and updated by advertisement policy within the LDP.

5.0 PREFERRED OPTIONS PAPER (POP)

- 5.1 The Council's Preferred Options Paper, (POP) published in 2019 was the first formal stage in the preparation of the LDP for the Borough. It was designed to promote debate in relation to key strategic planning issues arising in the area. The POP identified 42 key planning issues and examined options for addressing these issues. In each case, a preferred option was highlighted and the rationale for selection of this option was given.
- 5.2 The POP also includes a review of the existing operational planning policies, largely contained within the suite of Planning Policy Statements. This review stimulated public debate on whether the existing policies are still suitable or whether a different approach would be more appropriate to meet local circumstances.

² [PPS17: Control of Outdoor Advertisements](#)

- 5.3 Following a minor revision to the online version of the POP, the 12-week consultation period was relaunched and therefore the total consultation period from the official launch was 19 weeks.

POP Representations

- 5.4 Outdoor Advertisements were not identified as a key issue within the POP and specific representations were not received for advertisements.

6.0 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

- 6.1. The policy for advertisements was discussed with members of the Development Management planning team who were supportive of the suggested policy approach, with particular discussion on the need for modern illuminated styles to be considered.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL (SA)

- 7.1 The formal Sustainability Appraisal process was undertaken by the LDP team and Shared Environmental Services (SES) in March and April 2024. The Councils preferred policies and proposals were appraised against reasonable alternatives. The process proved useful in further refining policies in relation to sustainability objectives. The SA scrutiny suggested that there would be a benefit in adding additional detail for the consideration of light from illuminated signage on light sensitive species.
- 7.2 Post Sustainability Appraisal (SA), a number of amendments to policy were made and brought before Planning Committee for agreement in 2024, with final approval secured at a Special Planning Committee meeting held on 20 January 2025 and ratified at the full Council meeting on 29 January 2025.

8.0 CROSS BOUNDARY POLICY CONTEXT

- 8.1 The Council has engaged with each neighbouring council's POP consultation, as well as the dPS consultations of Belfast City Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.

- 8.2 Professional officers from the LDP team also took part in a number of cross council forums including the Metropolitan Spatial Working Group and the Development Plan Working Group.
- 8.3 Most recently, online engagement on the Council's draft Plan Strategy was held with the three neighbouring councils in March 2025. This included discussion around the proposed growth strategy, strategic housing and employment land allocation, settlement hierarchy, strategic approach to climate change and mitigation, alongside operational policies. This included the identification of specific cross-boundary issues.
- 8.4 Throughout the LDP process, it has been important to take the position of other councils, and particularly our neighbouring councils, into account. Ards and North Down Borough is bounded by Belfast City, Lisburn and Castlereagh City and Newry, Mourne and Down Council areas, each of which is at different stages in the formulation of their own LDP (Table 4).

Council	Document
Belfast City Council (BCC)	<p>The BCC draft Plan Strategy was formally adopted on 2 May 2023.</p> <p>'Adverting and Signage' SPG was produced in May 2023 to supplement Policy DES4 Advertising and signage contained within the Plan Strategy.</p>
Lisburn Castlereagh City Council (LCCC)	<p>Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council adopted its Local Development Plan 2032 Plan Strategy on 26th September 2023.</p> <p>Part 1 of the Plan Strategy relates to Strategic Policies. Part 2 contains Operational Policies including AD1 Amenity and Public Safety, and HE 7 and 11 for advertisements related to Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape/Village Character. Supplementary Planning Guidance, Part F: Guidance for Outdoor Advertisements was also published with the Plan Strategy.</p>
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NM&D)	<p>Newry, Mourne and Down District Council launched their Draft Plan Strategy on the 27 June 2025.</p>

	<p>Policy AD1 Outdoor advertisements states that:</p> <p>(a) It respects amenity, when assessed in the context of the general characteristics of the locality; and</p> <p>(b) It does not prejudice public safety, including road safety.</p>
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Table 4: Neighbouring Councils' position in relation to Advertisements

- 8.5 The Advertisement policy should not have any impact on the neighbouring councils.

9.0 DRAFT PLAN STRATEGY APPROACH

- 9.1 The fundamental approach of the draft Plan Strategy is to support the aims and objectives of the RDS and the SPPS. The draft Plan Strategy has been informed by the POP responses and all of the other methods of engagement that are described above.
- 9.2 The aim of the approach is to ensure that advertisements do not detract from the character and amenity of where it is to be displayed, to prevent advertising clutter, to ensure that advertisements do not prejudice public safety, including road safety and to adequately control illuminated signage and digital advertising screens.
- 9.3 The draft Plan Strategy provides a policy approach for advertisements that has evolved from a consideration of a range of other factors including:
- The Council's Community Plan and other relevant strategies;
 - Regional strategic policy contained within the RDS and SPPS;
 - Consultation through informal consultation with statutory consultees;
 - Consultation with neighbouring councils;
 - Engagement with Elected Members;
 - Engagement with internal planning colleagues and cross-council colleagues; and
 - Sustainability Appraisal.

10.0 POLICY APPROACH FOR ADVERTISEMENTS

- 10.1 Strategy for Outdoor Advertisements and Policy AD 1 Outdoor Advertisements. The policy approach contained within Planning Policy Statement 17- Control of Outdoor Advertisements has been continued within the DPS, with an update on the consideration of the effect of illumination within advertisements on light pollution so that it is not detrimental to biodiversity, (including ecological sensitive receptors). The guidance set out in Annex H- Advertisements will be taken into account in assessing proposals. The design guidance within Annex A has been updated and is included in the dPS as Annex L.

11.0 SOUNDNESS

- 11.1 The LDP has been prepared to meet the tests of soundness as set out in the DfI Development Plan Practice Note 6: Soundness (Version 2, May 2017). The draft Plan Strategy, insofar as, it relates to natural heritage policies and other relevant policies in the document, is regarded as sound, as it is considered to have met the various tests of soundness as summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Consideration of Soundness

Procedural Tests	
P2	The outdoor advertisement policy has been developed through engagement as detailed earlier in this report.
P3	The outdoor advertisement policy approach has been subject to Sustainability Appraisal. Further details are included in the Sustainability Appraisal Report.
Consistency Tests	
C1	The outdoor advertising policy approach has taken account of the RDS and SPPS. Refer to paragraphs 2.6-2.10 of this document.
C2	The outdoor advertisement policy has taken account of our Community Plan. Refer to paragraphs 3.1-3.3 of this document.

C3	The outdoor advertisement approach has taken account of regional strategic objectives as contained within the SPPS paragraphs 6.57-6.60 - relating to the control of outdoor advertisements. Refer to Paras 2.6-2.8 of this document.
C4	The outdoor advertisement policy has taken account of the existing development plans within Ards and North Down, ongoing Council initiatives and the neighbouring council context.
Coherence and Effectiveness Tests	
CE1	The outdoor advertisement policy has taken account of the emerging LDP's of our three neighbouring Councils, and it is not considered to be in conflict with them.
CE2	The advertisement policy approach within the DPS continues and updates the approach contained within Planning Policy Statement 17 Outdoor advertisements (PPS 17).
CE3	The monitoring framework within Chapter 26.
CE4	The Advertisement policy will be reviewed at Plan Review stage.