



Donaghadee Community Development Association

Memo

From: John Caldwell, Honorary Secretary

To: LDP Planning Team Ards & North Down Borough Council

CC: Brian Dorrian, Mayor and Bangor East and Donaghadee Councillors

Date: 14th March 2026

Subject: **Submission on the Ards and North Down Local Development Plan – Draft Plan Strategy**

1. We would again like to thank Council officers for attending the recent meeting of the Donaghadee Town Advisory Group (TAG) and for the constructive discussion which took place. In particular, we welcome the assurance that the Draft Plan Strategy should still provide sufficient “hooks” within the Local Development Plan framework to allow the Donaghadee Community Development Association to promote and pursue a number of the initiatives outlined in our earlier submission and which was subsequently withdrawn in the light of the TAG meeting. We consider this particularly important in the context of land being available for industrial/commercial development and in relation to coastal protection and resilience, One issue which we believe still requires closer attention is the question of traffic flows and car-parking provision within Donaghadee.
2. This matter is not new. During the examination of the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015, the Planning Appeals Commission specifically highlighted the need to examine traffic flows in Donaghadee (see pages 127–128 of the Commission’s report). While this recommendation was not ultimately adopted by the Department at the time, the underlying concern has not disappeared and, if anything, has intensified. Indeed, the Department for Infrastructure has itself previously acknowledged pressure on parking provision in the town. For example:
 - In the 1980s the Department sought to vest lands behind the Manor House and Market House in order to create a town-centre car park, withdrawing only in the face of objections from affected residents.

- At a meeting with the then Regional Development Minister, Danny Kennedy in 2011, a senior Roads Service official confirmed that there was a shortage of car-parking provision in Donaghadee.

It is therefore difficult to reconcile this earlier recognition of parking pressures with the very limited treatment of the issue in more recent transport assessments, particularly as a number of factors suggest that the situation has since become more acute.

3. In this context, the Local Transport Study of the borough published by the Department for Infrastructure in 2021 raises questions regarding the robustness and completeness of the evidence base on which current assumptions about traffic flows and parking provision appear to rest. In particular:
 - The study does not appear to take full account of the implications of the 2021 Census, which shows that Donaghadee's population increased by 6.6%, significantly above the Borough figure of 4.5% and the Northern Ireland average of 5.1%. Subsequent housing developments at Hightrees and Hadlow will increase the population further and it is now likely to be approaching 8,000 residents.
 - More than 25% of Donaghadee's population is aged 65 or over, compared with approximately 17% across Northern Ireland.
 - While the Study places considerable emphasis on active travel (walking and cycling), these options may not be realistic for a substantial proportion of residents given the town's higher-than-average age profile and associated mobility considerations.
 - This demographic profile, combined with the limited availability of certain employment opportunities locally, contributes to higher levels of car ownership and outward commuting.
 - The Study also appears to take limited account of Donaghadee's growing reputation as a major visitor and tourism destination within the Borough, outside of Bangor, and the consequential impact this has on traffic flows and parking demand.
 - A further consideration is the seasonal nature of traffic and parking demand in coastal towns. Donaghadee experiences significant peaks in visitor numbers during weekends, holiday periods and summer months. Assessments based primarily on average daily traffic flows may not fully capture these peak pressures. A more detailed analysis of seasonal demand would provide a clearer understanding of the town's infrastructure requirements, particularly in relation to parking capacity and town-centre circulation.
4. It is also important to recognise the relationship between parking provision and town-centre vitality. Donaghadee's independent retail, hospitality and tourism sectors rely heavily on visitor access. Adequate and well-located parking therefore plays an important role in supporting the local economy and ensuring

that the town centre remains accessible to residents, visitors and older members of the community.

5. Taken together, these factors suggest that the current level of parking provision — estimated at approximately 205 spaces within the town centre — may be significantly below that available in comparable coastal tourist towns such as Portstewart, Ballycastle and Newcastle, all of which provide substantially larger public parking capacity to accommodate visitor demand.
6. Turning to the question of traffic flows the town centre is frequently at a standstill – especially during the bin collection round and when there are buses at the Market House at the same time as vehicles are unloading in the loading bay. Aside from that there are frequent bottlenecks at the Killaughey Road/High Street junction and at the Hightrees intersection. Perhaps even more concerning is the expectation that the proposed Cannyreagh link road will lead to more, not less, traffic on Northfield with the consequential risk to pupils walking to school.
7. In light of these considerations, we believe the Local Development Plan would benefit from a fresh and comprehensive examination of traffic flows, seasonal visitor demand and parking provision in Donaghadee. Such an assessment would ensure that future planning decisions are based on a realistic understanding of the town's growth, demographic profile and evolving role within the Borough's tourism economy and would help ensure that infrastructure provision keeps pace with the town's continued development.

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Honorary Secretary
Donaghadee Community Development Association