

5.13 Policies and Plans

5.13.1 Introduction

The planning policy context is material to the eventual decision on any planning application for proposed development. This section summarises a review of all relevant planning policies and guidance at varying levels, which are likely to have a bearing on the proposed new dual carriageway between Randalstown and Toome, cascading down from the strategic national framework to more detailed local plans. These include:

- Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025;
- Regional Transportation Strategy 2002 – 2012;
- Planning Policy Statements; and
- Development Plans.

5.13.2 Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 – Shaping Our Future

In September 2001 the Department for Regional Development published the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) document for Northern Ireland, ‘Shaping our Future’, which seeks to evolve a regional strategic framework for guiding development in the region over the next 25 years. Regarding transportation, the Strategy seeks to strengthen economic and social cohesion by enhancing linkages, such as the A6 Key Transport Corridor. It also recognises the need to continue to improve the ‘hard’ physical infrastructure incorporating the roads, rail, water (supply, sewerage and drainage systems), energy and telecommunications.

A substantial part of the Strategy is devoted to Strategic Planning Guidelines (SPG’s), and a spatial development strategy that recognises “the need to take a sustainable approach to future development of the Region.”

The following SPG’s are relevant to the proposal:

SPG-LNW 1: To develop a strong North West based on Londonderry

The Strategy recognises Londonderry as the dominant centre in the North West. Through upgrading its strategic transport links to the rest of the Region (of which the A6 is one) and across the border, the city will be able to fulfil this role.

SPG-TRAN 1: To develop a Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN), based on key transport corridors, to enhance accessibility to regional facilities and services.

The RSTN comprises the 5 Key Transport Corridors, which form the upper tier of the Region’s long distance routes connecting a number of towns to the major regional gateways and the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA). The A6 forms part of the BMA to Londonderry Key Transport Corridor, connecting the Region’s two largest cities and improving links to the International Airport.

SPG-TRAN 1.2: Develop and maintain the identified RSTN to enhance accessibility on an integrated basis for all users, including freight.

When upgrading the road network, improvements should be targeted at the Key, Link and Metropolitan Transport Corridors and on a local scale, introduced at significant bottlenecks thereby relieving congestion and facilitate efficiency for all road users.

5.13.3 Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002 - 2012

The Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) is a supporting document for the RDS, and identifies strategic transportation investment priorities within the Province, over the next 10 years, moving towards achieving the longer term vision for transportation contained within the RDS.

The Strategy outlines strategic highway improvement measures to upgrade the Key Transport Corridors and other routes on the Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN). The Strategy identifies that a new dual carriageway between Randalstown and Toome would be amongst the initiatives to improve the RSTN, offering significant economic benefits resulting from journey time reduction.

5.13.4 Planning Policy Statements

Further advice on Government policy priorities is given in Planning Policy Statements (PPS), which are statements of Departmental policy on aspects of land use planning. Relevant to the current scheme are:

PPS2 – Nature Conservation

Strongly guided by Government policy, PPS 2 states the Department's planning policy for nature conservation for the whole of Northern Ireland. It helps to protect designated areas and advises on the treatment of nature conservation issues in development plans. In addition, it outlines the criteria Planning Service employs when processing planning applications which might affect nature conservation interests and to which developers should have regard when preparing proposals.

There are no designated areas of nature conservation within the study area, however it is in relatively close proximity to Lough Neagh Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Ramsar site. Where a route option is likely to have a significant effect on these designations, it will be assessed to decide whether the nature conservation interest will be damaged. If so, the route shall only proceed where there is no alternative solution and where it must be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

PPS 3 (revised) - Access, Movement and Parking

This draft PPS is due to replace the current PPS 3 on Development Control and Roads Issues. In line with the Programme for Government’s (PfG) aim to ensure the provision of a modern, safe, sustainable transport system, and promote healthy living and improved road safety, this PPS sets out the Department’s planning policies for vehicular and pedestrian access, the protection of transport routes, transport assessment and parking.

It states that Development Plans will include details of strategic transport proposals. Land required for proposed dedicated public transport routes or proposed road schemes will be identified and protected from development, which would prejudice their implementation.

PPS 6 - Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage

PPS 6 describes the policy that helps to enforce the protection and conservation of archaeological remains and features of the built heritage and advises on the treatment of these issues in development plans. In addition, it outlines the criteria which the Planning Service will employ when processing planning applications that might affect the built heritage and to which developers should have regard when preparing proposals.

Within the study area there are approximately 32 known features of archaeological and built heritage interest. Where these may be affected by the proposed road scheme, it is important to consider the mitigating procedure to be put in place or if other such sites were uncovered during construction.

PPS 13 (Draft) – Transportation and Land Use (December 2002)

The main purpose of this statement is to define the processes and policies flowing from the RDS strategic policy guidance relating to the integration of transport and land use planning. The need for dualling the road will be reinforced by considering that the route serves a large and expanding population and many other land uses.

5.13.5 Area Plans

The route corridors fall within the Antrim Borough Council area. The applicable Development Plan is therefore the Antrim, Ballymena and Larne Area Plan 2016, currently in draft, which follows on from the Antrim Area Plan 1984-2001.

Antrim Area Plan, 1984 – 2001

The Plan has identified the A6 as part of the Boroughs “main roads for protection”. Access to, and development along these roads, is strictly controlled to preserve the safety and convenience of traffic, and for amenity reasons.

Antrim, Ballymena & Larne Area Plan, 2016 (Draft)

In line with the RDS and RTS, the plan wishes to create a “modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone’s quality of life”.

The plan contains key road and rail corridors evolving from the Regional Strategic Transportation Network (RSTN). Antrim Borough is located at the junction of the North Corridor, which links the Belfast Metropolitan Area to Londonderry by road and rail and the North Western Corridor Belfast Metropolitan Area – Londonderry. These corridors connect the two largest cities of Northern Ireland and strengthen access across the province.