Local Development Plan 2030

PLAN STRATEGY REVISION

PREFERRED OPTIONS PAPER







Antrim and Newtownabbey BOROUGH COUNCIL

This page is intentionally left blank

Contents

Have Your Say 2
1 Introduction 4
2 The Section 14 Direction 5
3 Policy Options for Abbey Centre Retail Area 7
4 Assessments Scoping Report Summary 13
5 Summary 13

Appendix 1: List of Supporting Documents 15

Have Your Say

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council is consulting on this Preferred Options Paper (POP) for the forthcoming Local Development Plan 2030: Plan Strategy Revision.

The POP represents the first public consultation stage, before the publication of a Plan Strategy Draft Revision, concerning matters relating to the Abbey Centre retail area. This has occurred as a consequence of the issuing of a Direction under Section 14(2)(b) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, by the Department of Infrastructure, to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council on 28 October 2025. The content of the Direction related to matters concerning the Abbey Centre retail area only and the proposed revision to the Plan Strategy is accordingly limited to these matters.

The comments received in relation to the POP will assist in informing the Council's Plan Strategy Draft Revision, which will be subject to public consultation and Independent Examination.

Public Consultation on the Plan Strategy Revision POP

The POP is published for public consultation for a period of 8 weeks, beginning on 20 October 2026 and closing at 5pm on 15 December 2026.

Please note that representations received after the closing date will not be considered by the Council**.**

The POP is supported by a series of assessments, as well as an evidence base in the form of an updated Retail Centres Report (June 2026), that have considered the content of the Section 14 Direction and have informed the preparation of various options relating to planning policy for the Abbey Centre retail area.

Copies of the POP and supporting documents are available to view on the Council's website at Preferred Options Paper or alternatively for public inspection at the Council Offices in Mossley Mill, Carnmoney Road North, Newtownabbey from Monday to Friday, between the hours of 08:30am and 5:00pm and Antrim Civic Centre, 50 Stiles Way, Antrim from Monday to Friday, between the hours of 9:00am and 5:00pm.

Should you require a copy of the documents in an alternative format, it can be made available on request in large print, audio format, DAISY or Braille. It may also be made available in minority languages to meet the needs of people for whom English is not their first language.

How to respond

The public consultation relates to the content of this POP only and any other issues raised outside of this will not be considered by the Council. The proposed review of the Plan Strategy is limited to those matters specified in the Section 14 Direction. Please state if you support each of the Preferred Options and why; alternatively, if you disagree or wish to propose an alternative option, please explain your reasons and submit supporting evidence.

Representations should be made in writing and we would encourage you to email them to forwardplanningteam@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk; or alternatively to the address below.

Forward Planning Team
Planning Section
Mossley Mill
Carnmoney Road North
Newtownabbey, BT36 5QA

Keeping the Community Involved

The Council wishes to encourage the ongoing involvement of the local community in the plan process. You can sign up to receive our Local Development Plan emails to keep up to date on the progress of the Plan and upcoming events.

If you would like to receive our Local Development Plan emails, please contact the Forward Planning Team using the contact details above.

General Data Protection Regulation

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by producing a specific Local Development Plan Privacy Notice, which lets you know how we manage any personal information we receive from you. It contains the standards you can expect when we ask for, or hold, your personal information and an explanation of our information management security policy. A copy of our Local Development Plan Privacy Notice is available on our website. All representations received will be published on our website and forwarded to the Department of Infrastructure in advance of the Independent Examination into the Plan Strategy Draft Revision. The Council will also prepare a POP Consultation Summary Report for the Independent Examination.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Development Plan 2030 (LDP) Plan Strategy (PS) was adopted by the Council on 03 July 2025.

1.2 The adoption followed a period of public consultation on the Draft PS, which was published in June 2019 and subsequently subject to Independent Examination by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) in May and June 2022.

1.3 The PAC advisory report into the Independent Examination (IE), concluded that the Draft PS, subject to a number of 'Recommended Amendments', satisfied all of the tests of 'soundness', as set out in Development Plan Practice Note 6 published by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). Having considered the content of the PAC Report, in September 2024 DfI issued the Council with a Direction under Section 12(1)(b) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, to adopt the Draft PS, subject to 93 modifications.

1.4 The vast majority of these modifications were minor in nature, however a number concerned the excising of the Abbey Centre from the PS, where it was proposed as a 'Large Town Centre' within the Hierarchy of Centres. The Direction also stated that following adoption of the PS, DfI would subsequently issue a Direction under Section 14(2)(b) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which would require the Council to prepare a revision to the adopted PS, to provide new planning policy for the Abbey Centre.

1.5 Following the adoption of the PS, on 28 October 2025 DfI issued the Council with the Section 14 Direction, which has been published on the Council's website. This POP represents the first stage of the Council's response to that Direction, and it is now being published for a period of public consultation.

What is a POP and Why Is It Required?

1.6 A POP is a consultation document that considers key strategic planning issues arising within the plan area. It is used to promote public engagement and debate and sets out the Council's initial thinking on the direction of policy, before this is incorporated into the Local Development Plan. A POP sets out a range of possible options, as well as the Council's preferred option or approach and the reasoning for this. The Council first published a POP in January 2017, which covered a wide range of issues across the Borough and informed the publication of the Draft PS in June 2019.

1.7 This POP takes the form of a more targeted document and is a direct, proportionate response to matters raised within the Section 14 Direction. This POP is required in order to satisfy legislation. Regulation 3 of the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 states that the regulations *"apply to the revision of a local development plan as they apply to its preparation",* and consequently, it is necessary to prepare a POP in accordance with regulations 9 to 11 of the same regulations.

1.8 Following this public consultation period, any responses received will be considered, before preparation of our Plan Strategy Draft Revision to introduce planning policy for the Abbey Centre retail area. The Revision itself will then be subject to a further period of public consultation and subsequent Independent Examination, before its adoption. An indicative timeframe for this process, is set out in the Updated Local Development Plan Timetable (October 2026)

Evidence Base and Assessments

1.9 The POP is supported by an updated Retail Centres Report (June 2026) evidence base, which has been prepared to address the issues raised in the Section 14 Direction and make subsequent recommendations. The updated evidence, as well as engagement with consultation bodies[1], has been the primary source of baseline information, when identifying the various options within this POP.

1.10 The Council has also prepared a number of assessments in support of the POP, which are a proportionate response to the extent of the limited changes being proposed to the Plan Strategy. These are required in accordance with Section 8(6) of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 and the other respective legislation and are comprised of a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA, incorporated with the SA); a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA); an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA); and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA).

1.11 These assessments are a key part of the process and have helped to inform the selection of the options and the Council's preferred option. They are included within an 'Assessments Scoping Report' which is published for comment alongside the POP. A summary of the findings is set out in Section 4 of this document.

1.12 The supporting evidence base and assessments are available to view (alongside the POP) at Preferred Options Paper . A list of the relevant documentation is set out in Appendix 1 of this document.

2 The Section 14 Direction

2.1 The section below provides the key context for the publication of this POP document, following the issue of a Direction under Section 14(2)(b) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 by DfI to the Council on 28 October 2025. The Direction is legally binding and sets out a number of things that the Council must do in preparing new strategic and operational planning policy in respect of the Abbey Centre retail area. As a consequence, many of the POP options available to the Council in relation to these matters are necessarily limited.

[1] as defined in Regulation 2 of the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

2.2 The Direction requires the revised PS policy to take account of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 and in particular the spatial framework guidance contained within SFG 3 to "Enhance the role of Belfast City Centre as the regional capital and focus of administration, commerce, specialist services and cultural amenities".

2.3 In addition, the Council should also take account of the provisions of the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS), which reinforces that a precautionary approach should be applied in relation to future major retail development proposals. The aim of the SPPS is to support and sustain vibrant town centres through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions, consistent with the RDS.

2.4 The Direction states the Council therefore should take account of the Regional Strategic Objectives for Town Centres and Retailing, which include and are not limited to: a town centres first approach for the location of future retailing and other main town centre uses; adopting a sequential approach to the identification of retail and main town centre uses in the PS revision; and ensuring the PS revision is informed by a robust and up to date evidence base.

2.5 The Direction contains a number of specific measures, however, most fundamentally para. 3.3 states that, "Abbey Centre will be designated as a 'District Centre' in line with the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) (para. 6.276)….". It states the Council should:

- Review and update the retail evidence base. This will require an update to Evidence Paper 4: Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (January 2019). Of particular relevance 'Market Share & Capacity Assessment' and 'Policy and Proposals' sections in respect of the Abbey Centre. This will include review of but not limited to Para 6.16, 6.30 Figure 6.2, 6.59, 6.61 & 6.68, Appendix F.
- Review and update the hierarchy of centres to include Abbey Centre as a district centre in the Figure 5: 'Hierarchy of Centres in our Borough" and Table 4 as a district centre.
- To safeguard existing/established town centres and minimise adverse impact, the Council should define the spatial extent of the Abbey Centre district centre boundary, as supported by the updated evidence base.

2.6 The Direction also states that as a result of the district centre designation, the Council should also review and update the Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) between neighbouring councils, to ensure that cross boundary working is appropriately documented and managed.

2.7 Following issue of the Direction, the Council entered into further correspondence with the Department in order to clarify several points raised in

the Direction and has prepared an evidence base which addresses each of the issues raised.

2.8 The Council has considered the content of the Direction, the updated retail evidence base and through engagement with the consultation bodies[2] in accordance with Regulation 9 of the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, for the purposes of generating alternative strategies and options. Section 3 of this document sets out what the Council considers to be the preferred options for new strategic and operational planning policy at the Abbey Centre retail area.

3 Policy Options for Abbey Centre Retail Area

3.1 Having considered the content of the legally binding Section 14 Direction in relation to the Abbey Centre and through engagement with consultation bodies, the Council considers that there are 4 main areas of revision required to the Local Development Plan 2030: Plan Strategy, as adopted on 3 July 2025.

3.2 A series of options are set out below for each of these areas, although given the constraints imposed by the Section 14 Direction, the available options are necessarily limited. Nevertheless, the Council has set these out below and identified which is our preferred option in each case.

The Retail Hierarchy

3.3 The first provision of the Local Development Plan 2030: Plan Strategy which requires revision, concerns the retail hierarchy for the Borough. The legally binding Section 14 Direction states that Abbey Centre will be designated as a District Centre.

3.4 The designation of a retail hierarchy is the process of classifying our centres according to their role and function. This will inform decisions about where new commercial growth and development should take place.

Option 1: Do Nothing

3.5 Option 1 maintains the Retail Hierarchy as set out on page 79 of the adopted Plan Strategy, which does not include the Abbey Centre retail area.

Option 2: Include Abbey Centre within the Retail Hierarchy as a District Centre

3.6 Option 2 brings the Abbey Centre retail area into an amended Retail Hierarchy, as set out in the table overleaf.

[2] as defined in Regulation 2 of the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Tier	Title	Role and Function	Centres
1.	**Large Town Centres**	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a range of shops, services, businesses and community facilities to a significant hinterland which includes smaller neighbouring towns or a number of suburbs.	Antrim
2.	**Town Centres**	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a range of shops, services, businesses and community facilities to a hinterland which includes neighbouring villages or a few surrounding suburbs.	Ballyclare, Crumlin, Glengormley and Randalstown
3.	**District Centres**	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a range of shops, services, businesses and community facilities to a suburban community.	Abbey Centre, Northcott and Whiteabbey Village
4.	**Local Centres**	Provides (or has the potential to provide) a range of shops and services to a surrounding community.	**Urban** Metropolitan Newtownabbey Abbot's Cross, Ballyduff, Beverley Road, Carnmoney, Cloughfern, The Diamond (Rathcoole), Jennings Park, Kingspark/Kings Crescent, Mallusk, Mayfield, Merville Garden Village, Monkstown, Mossley West and Richmond. Antrim Greystone and Parkhall **Rural** Ballynure, Doagh, Parkgate, Templepatrick and Toome

Option 2 is our Preferred Option

3.7 Given that the Section 14 Direction is legally binding, the inclusion of the Abbey Centre retail area into a revised Retail Hierarchy, is considered to be the only viable option.

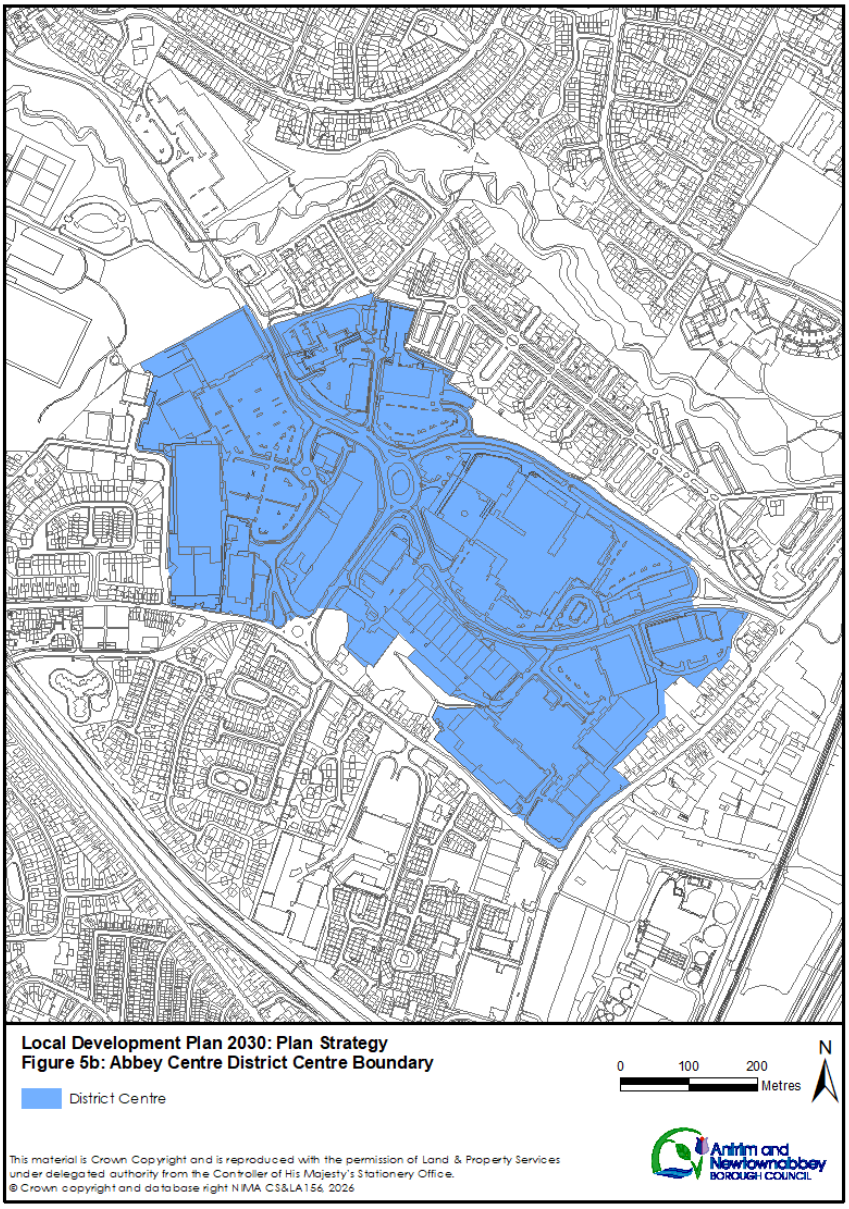
Abbey Centre Boundary

3.8 The second main area to be addressed, concerns the inclusion of a boundary map into an amended Plan Strategy, to define the spatial extent of the Abbey Centre District Centre boundary. The Section 14 Direction indicates that this should be defined to safeguard existing/established town centres and minimise adverse impact.

Option 1: Define Boundary based on BMAP 2015 District Centre Boundary

3.9 Option 1 proposes a boundary which encompasses the main Lesley Abbey Centre itself and the surrounding Abbey Retail Park and Longwood Road Retail Park. This boundary reflects that indicated in the original Preferred Options Paper (2017), albeit at that time proposed Abbey Centre as a Large Town Centre. Option 1 also closely reflects the boundary that was purportedly adopted through the BMAP 2015 (2014 version) and was also identified as a proposed boundary in the Plan Strategy Retail Study and updated Retail Study 2026 which is published alongside this POP paper. The inclusion of a boundary for Abbey Centre District Centre was also required in the legally binding Section 14 Direction.

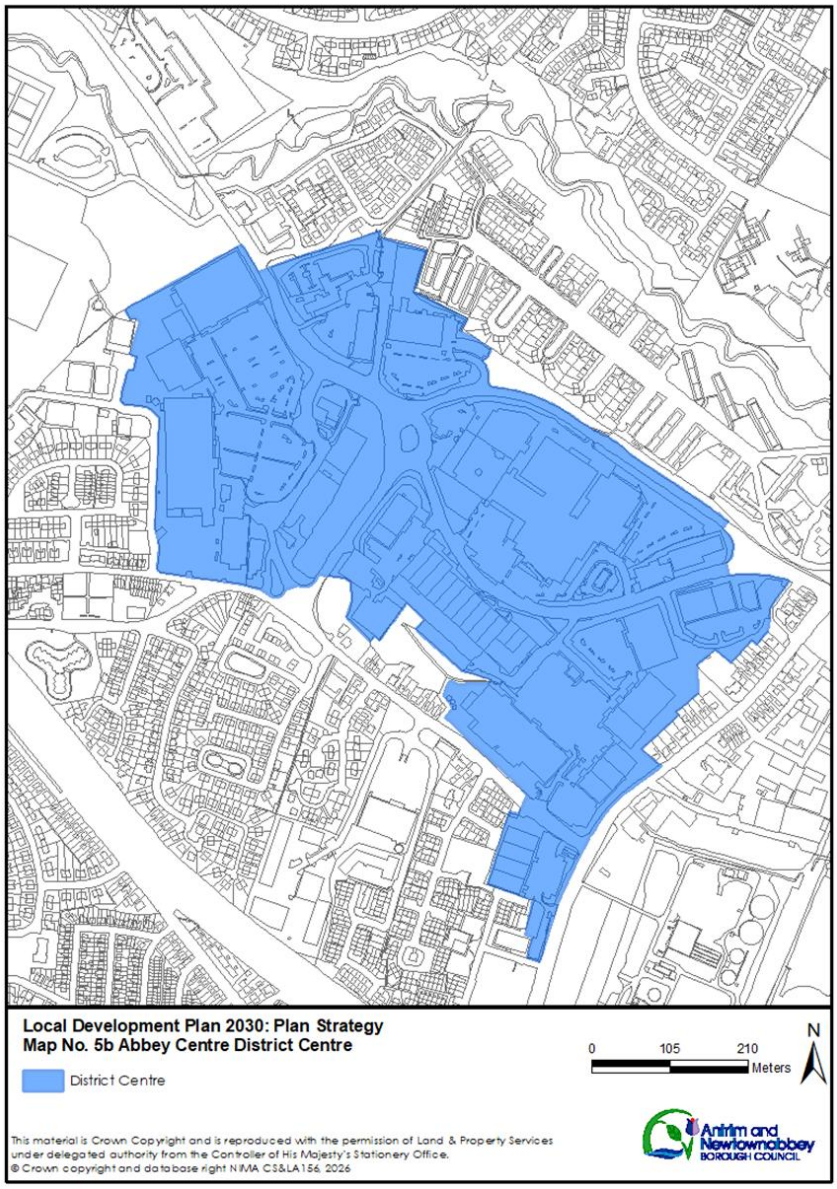
Option 1 Abbey Centre District Centre Boundary



Option 2: Define extended boundary to southwest.

3.10 Option 2 proposes the same boundary as Option 1, but with a small extension to take in existing retail development to the southwest, which fronts onto Shore Road, encompassing the Shore Retail Park.

Option 2 Abbey Centre District Centre Boundary



Option 1 is our Preferred Option

3.11 Option 1 is our preferred option, as we are cognisant of the subservience of the District Centre designation to existing town centres in the overall retail hierarchy, as well as Belfast City Centre. Regional planning policy also indicates that district centres should be consolidated and supported, rather than potentially adversely impacting upon other centres. Consequently, the preferred option for the Abbey Centre boundary is drawn to delineate the

Abbey Retail Park, Longwood Road Retail Park and the Lesley Abbey Centre itself. The Council considers that potential extension beyond Option 1 would not form a natural extension to the boundary. Such areas are bounded by suburban housing and a potential expansion would blur the focus of creating a core area, where appropriate investment should be focused.

3.12 In addition, at the Draft Plan Strategy consultation stage, both Belfast City Council and the Department for Infrastructure raised concerns regarding the elevation of Abbey Centre to a large town centre designation, due to the potential impact on Belfast City Centre, as well as the fact that the Abbey Centre area lacked the range of uses normally found within traditional town centres. These representations are available to view on our website under references LA03/DPS/0051 and LA03/DPS/0107 respectively.

Retail Policy

3.13 The third main area to be addressed, concerns the inclusion of additional policy wording within Policy DM 6: Development within Centres, to address matters raised within the legally binding Section 14 Direction. This concerns the protection of existing town centres, and particularly the role of Belfast City Centre, as the primary retail location in Northern Ireland.

Option 1: Do Nothing

3.14 Option 1 does not include additional policy wording within DM 6, instead relying on the existing policy provisions of policy DM 6.5, to protect existing centres from any potential harmful development that may occur within District and Local Centres.

Option 2: Amend DM 6: Development within Centres policy wording

3.15 Option 2 amends policy DM 6 by the inclusion of additional policy wording which expands on what a Retail Assessment must demonstrate, namely that the role and function of the centre should not be unacceptably altered and that there will be no unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability.

3.16 Under this option, policy DM 6.5, would read:

'DM 6.5 A Retail Assessment will be required for any development proposal that involves an increase of more than 1,000m2 (gross) of retail floor space in District and Local Centres. The Retail Assessment should provide a proportionate response to the proposal being sought and incorporate an assessment of need, impact and the sequential test. This includes applications for an extension(s) which would result in the overall development exceeding 1,000m2 (gross) external area. The Retail Assessment should demonstrate that the proposal would not unacceptably alter the role and function of the centre itself, and that there would be no unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of any existing centre within the catchment.'

Option 2 is our Preferred Option

Option 2 is our preferred option, to introduce additional policy wording. The Council recognises that whilst the intention of the original policy DM 6.5 is clearly the protection of other centres through the use of a Retail Assessment approach, there is some benefit in further clarificatory text, which sets out what the Retail Assessment must demonstrate. This will assist in applying the policy at the development management stage.

Monitoring Framework

3.17 The fourth main area to be addressed, concerns the inclusion of a new indicator within the Indicative Monitoring Framework within the Local Development Plan 2030 – Plan Strategy. The intention is to monitor the level of retail development within lower tier centres, thus helping to ensure that established town centres are protected from unacceptable adverse impact.

Option 1: Do Nothing

3.18 Option 1 does not include an additional monitoring indicator and retains the Indicative Monitoring Framework as adopted within the Local Development Plan 2030 – Plan Strategy.

Option 2: Include additional indicator to monitor retail development within the Abbey Centre District Centre.

3.19 Option 2 concerns the inclusion of an additional measure within the Indicative Monitoring Framework, which reads:

'The number of planning applications permitted for retail development and complementary uses and the area of new floor space (m^2) created, within the Abbey Centre District centre.'

Option 3: Include additional indictor to monitor retail development within all District and Local Centres

3.20 Option 3 concerns the inclusion of an additional measure within the Indicative Monitoring Framework, which reads:

'The number of planning applications permitted for retail development and complementary uses and the area of new floorspace (m^2) created, within District and Local Centres.

Option 3 is our Preferred Option

3.21 Option 3 is our preferred option, as the Council considers it more appropriate to apply the measure to ALL district and local centres, rather than focussing specifically on the Abbey Centre District Centre designation.

3.22 **Having considered the above Options and should you wish to make a representation, please state if you support each of the Preferred Options and**

why; alternatively, if you disagree or wish to propose an alternative option, please explain your reasons and submit supporting evidence.

4 Assessments Scoping Report Summary

4.1 The process of amending the LDP Plan Strategy is subject to the same statutory processes as were required for the preparation of the PS.

4.2 The Assessment Scoping Report carries out the initial scoping associated with statutory strategic environmental assessment.

4.3 Section 3 of the report found there will be no likely significant effects on the environment from the implementation of these options and that the conclusions of the 2019 SA are not impacted. Further sustainability appraisal work will be undertaken as required in later stages of the revision process.

4.4 Section 4 of the report found that in reassessing the outcomes of the original 'Equality (Sec 75) Screening' and 'Rural Needs' Report issued alongside the DPS in June 2019, with regard to the POP options, it is considered that the proposed options do not alter the likely impact of the PS policies and strategies on the Section 75 groups or the rural community, nor do they alter how much regard the PS has had to equality or rural needs.

4.5 Section 5 of the report concludes that the proposed options would not substantially alter the assessment and conclusions of the adopted LDP PS HRA Report 2025.

4.6 These assessments have been carried out in relation to the scale of the PS Revision POP, taking into account the limited nature of the options available and assessing the likely impact these would have on the findings of the original assessments prepared for the adopted PS. Further assessment work will be undertaken as proportionate and required in later stages of the revision process. Any comments on the scope and level of detail of the information that should be included in these reports can be provided during this consultation.

5 Summary

5.1 On 28 October 2025, the Council received a legislatively binding Direction from DfI, under Section 14 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, instructing it to revise the Local Development Plan 2030: Plan Strategy, to deal with matters relating to the Abbey Centre.

5.2 This involved revision of the retail hierarchy, as adopted in the Local Development Plan 2030: Plan Strategy, to include Abbey Centre as a District Centre and inclusion of a map to define the spatial extent of the designation. It was also directed that revisions to planning policy should take place.

5.3 In order to comply with the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, the Council has now published this POP, which sets out a series of options to address the matters raised in the Direction.

5.4 The Council welcomes any representations which you may have in respect of the various policy options, which are set out in section 3 of this document.

Appendix 1: List of Supporting Documents

The following documents are published in support of the POP:

- Assessments Scoping Report (October 2026) and
- Retail Centres Report (June 2026).

Antrim and Newtownabbey BOROUGH COUNCIL

Mossley Mill
Carnmoney Road North,
Newtownabbey
BT36 5QA

Antrim Civic Centre
50 Stiles Way,
Antrim,
BT41 2UB

antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk