

# Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Estate Framework



Department of  
**Agriculture and  
Rural Development**

[www.dardni.gov.uk](http://www.dardni.gov.uk)

AN ROINN

**Talmhaíochta agus  
Forbartha Tuaithe**

MÄNNYSTRIE O

**Fairms an  
Kintra Fordèrin**



**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**

**July 2013**

## Approach

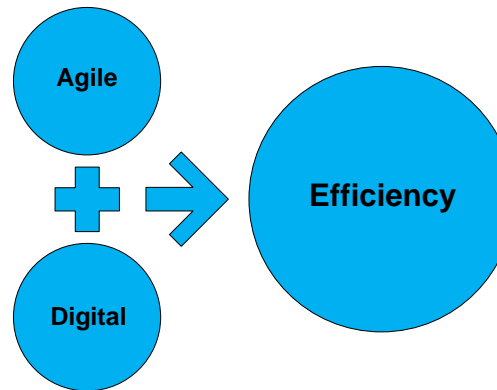
1. In these increasingly challenging economic times the Department recognises that we have a responsibility to operate our business as efficiently and effectively as possible. We have developed this **Estate Framework** as one of a number of strategic documents to help guide us through the change process that lies ahead. Figure 1 below shows how the framework relates to these documents.

**Figure 1 – Strategy Documents**



2. This document seeks to provide a suitable framework for strategic investment in our specialised estate to allow DARD to operate more effectively and efficiently in the future. By following the template established in the Regional Development Strategy we can lower the cost of running and maintaining our specialised estate and release some of the value locked into our property assets. We can improve our service delivery to the rural community and provide improved education, scientific and advisory services as well as greater opportunities for leisure. We can position DARD as a progressive, forward-thinking department and embrace technological change to help to modernise the rural community.

3. The **key drivers** in developing these strategies are **Service Delivery** and **Efficiency**. Efficiency has many drivers but in this strategy we have focused on the variables which we see as having the biggest impact on the delivery of an efficient estate. To maintain DARD's high standards of service delivery and achieve efficiencies in difficult economic circumstances the Department's future working practices must be **Agile** and **Digital**.



**Figure 2 – Efficiency model**

**Agile:**

**Agile Working** is about 'utilising the benefits gained from changing work practices, deploying new technologies and creating new working environments'<sup>1</sup>. DARD provides a number of important services to the rural community. As resources become constrained we need to streamline our operations and adapt to modern working methods in order to maintain and enhance our current high standards of service delivery.

**Digital:**

DARD has a '**Digital Vision**' to ensure that our services are IT enabled and accessible to customers. **The Customer Channel Strategy** highlights the changes DARD is making to the way we deliver some of our key services and schemes. The Strategy explains what the changes are, why they are needed and what they will mean for customers.

**Efficiency:**

DARD must deliver its services efficiently. To achieve this we need to utilise our assets in a way that best meets our business objectives and helps to reduce running costs. Delivering an efficient and effective operating model requires a change to how we deliver our services. The estate must be fit for purpose to deliver this change.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Allsopp, The Agile Organisation

## Vision

4. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has a strategic vision to support:

**‘...a thriving and sustainable rural economy, community and environment’**

The DARD Business Planning Model illustrates how our Estate Framework fits with DARD’s overall business planning.



**Figure 3 – The DARD Business Planning Model**

\* This consolidated figure of £824 million includes £528 million of networked assets such as flood defences and culverts.

5. The DARD Specialised Estate covers an area of approximately 78,000 hectares and is comprised of over a thousand buildings at 189<sup>2</sup> different locations. In 2010/11 DARD spent a total of £18.9m in resource consumption and maintenance on its Specialised Estate. The

<sup>2</sup> Figure includes 124 Forest Management Units

estate has a critical supporting role to play in **service delivery** by the Department and its agencies. It is therefore imperative that the estate is managed and developed in a way that fully supports and delivers against the Department's overarching vision.

6. The purpose of this Estate Framework is to consider how DARD's estate can more efficiently and effectively support delivery of the Department's strategic objectives in future and how it can support regional development, specifically in rural areas. It will also examine how we can maximise value for money as we develop the elements of our estate to deliver against our aims - through targeted local investment that aligns with the principles laid out in the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS).
7. The **decentralisation** of DARD will be a key factor in shaping the future of our estate. The Department has made a commitment under the Programme for Government to move jobs to rural areas. In September 2012 the Minister for Agriculture announced that DARD Headquarters will move to Ballykelly. The plan to relocate other key business areas (Forest Service HQ; Rivers Agency HQ; and Fisheries Division) from Belfast to rural locations has also been made public.
8. The Department's success will be measured against its annual business planning targets. This Estate Framework will act as a guide for future investment in the DARD estate.

## Strategic Context

9. This strategy has been developed taking into consideration a number of existing Executive/Departmental policies, strategies and plans, such as:
  - [The NI Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015](#)
  - [The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018 \(ISNI\)](#)
  - [The Regional Development Strategy – 2035](#)
  - [The Regional Transport Strategy](#)
  - [Review of the Location of Public Sector Jobs \(Bain Report\)](#)
  - [The DARD Budget to 2015](#)

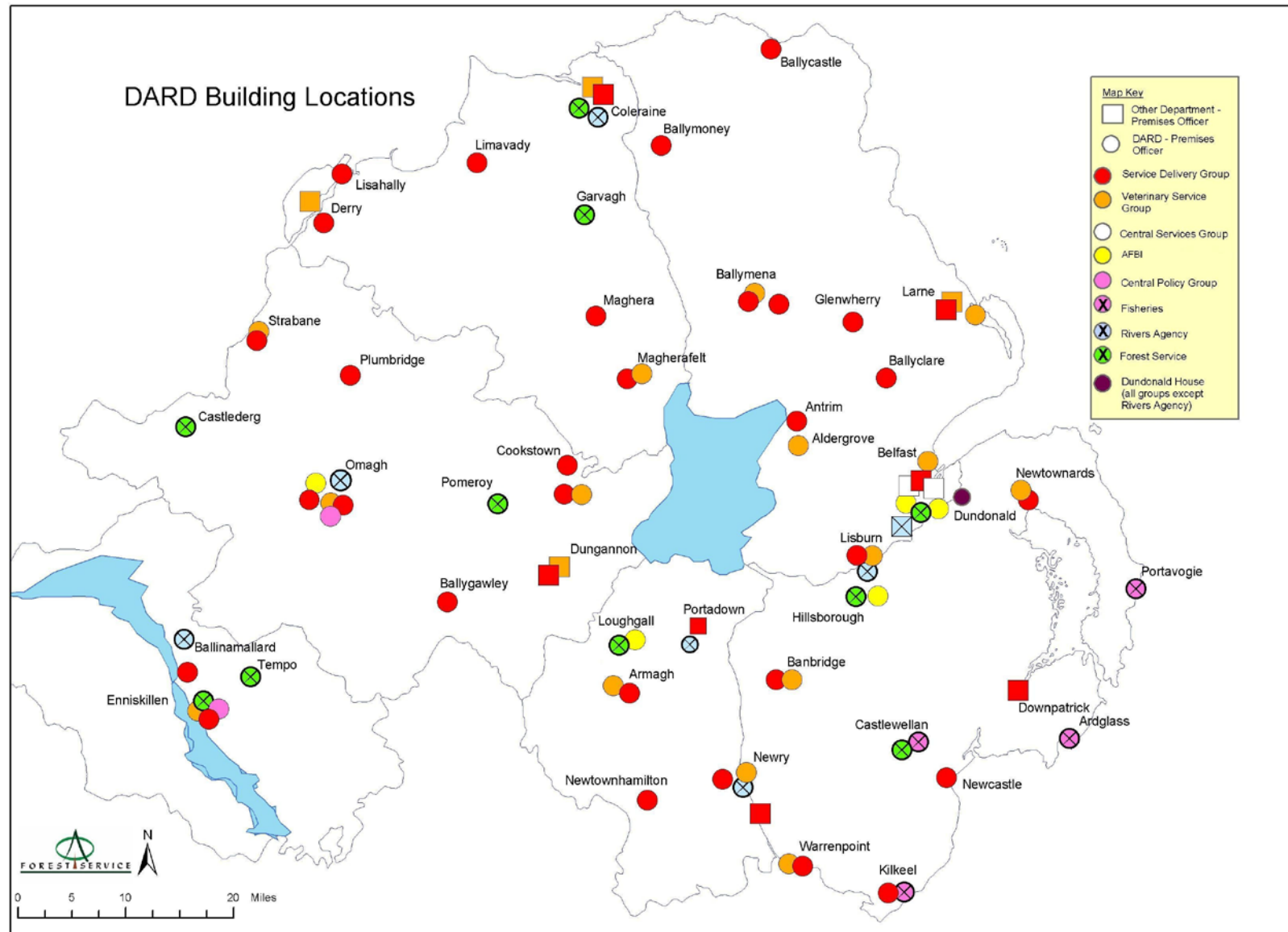
- The draft DARD Strategic Plan 2012-2020
- The new Economic Strategy
- The DARD Estate Management Strategy
- The DARD Customer Channel Strategy
- Lifetime Opportunities/Rural Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework
- The Review of Public Administration
- The Draft Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland
- The objectives set for the Asset Management Unit by the NI Executive
- The DARD Asset Management Plan 2012

10. The [Regional Development Strategy – 2035 \(RDS\)](#) is particularly relevant as ‘The Strategic Planning Order (Northern Ireland) 1999’ requires Departments to **‘have regard to the regional development strategy in exercising any functions in relation to development in Northern Ireland’**. The RDS identifies sustainable development as being at the heart of regional development and notes that it should be encouraged in rural development. It also recognises the importance of the role that the environment plays in economic development.

### **The DARD Estate**

11. **Figure 1** on the next page shows the extent of the DARD estate in 2008 before the DARD Direct project was launched to co-locate a number of DARD functions. The results of that project are clear when you compare this map with **Map 2** on the following page which shows the current extent of DARD’s estate.

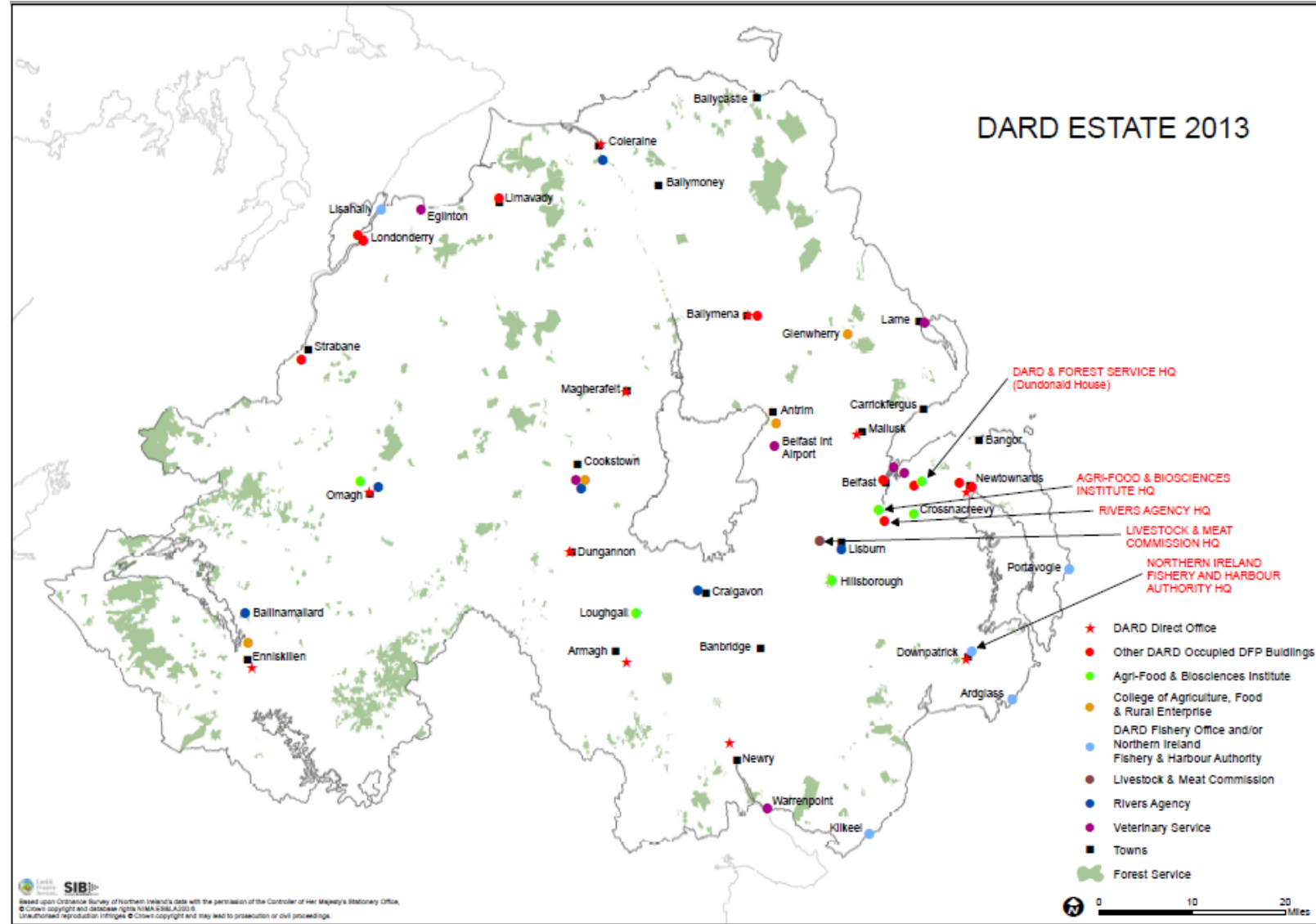
**Map 1 – The DARD Estate (circa 2008)**





## Map 2 – The Current DARD Estate (circa March 2013)

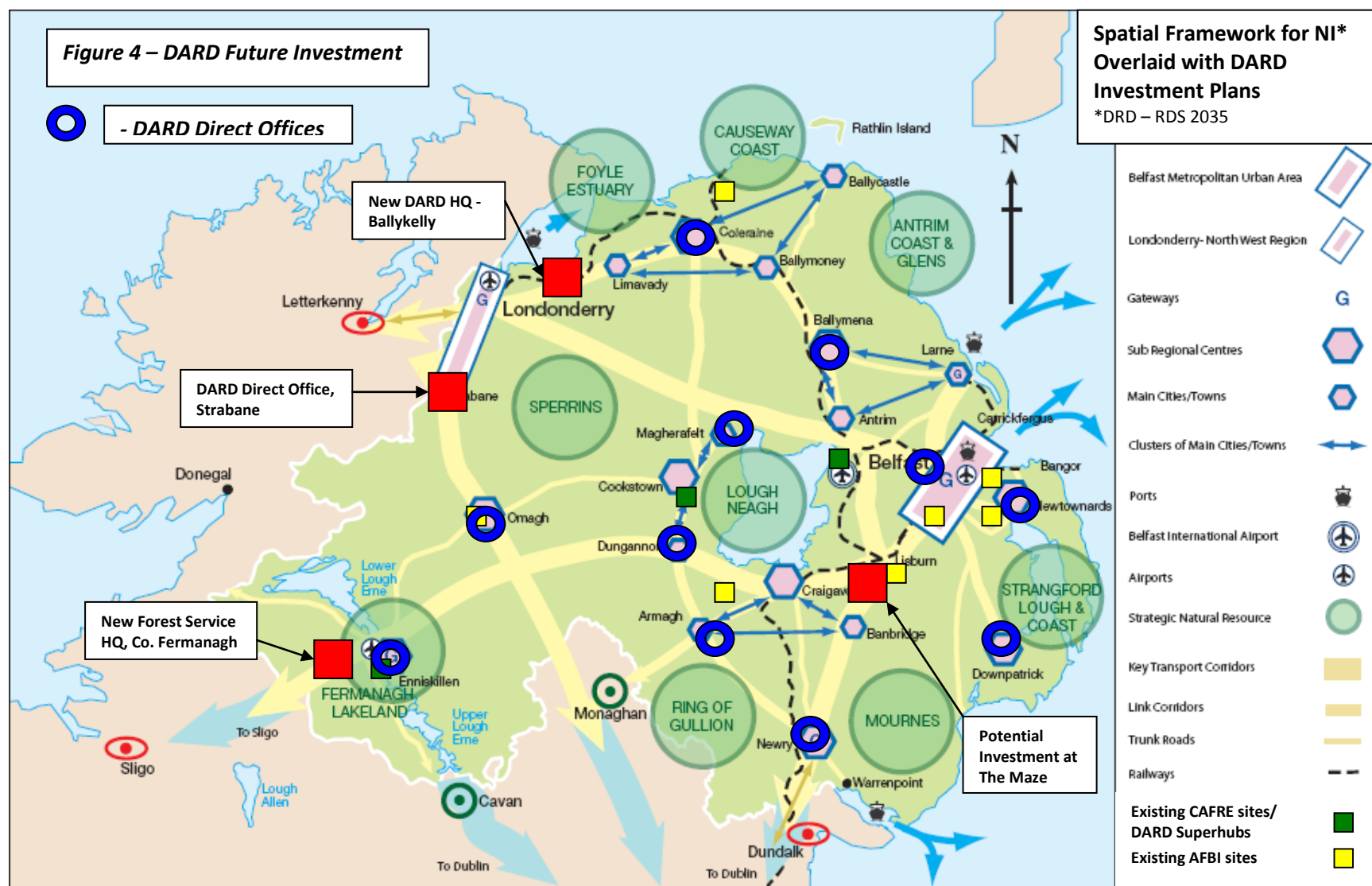
Please note: some of the smaller elements of the estate have been excluded for clarity.





## The DARD Estate Framework

- 12.** A **key driver** behind this framework is an acknowledgement that we must enhance service delivery to the rural community with increasingly limited resources. Our aim is to provide a high-quality, cost-effective service to the rural community and we can only achieve this by increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of our property assets.
- 13.** The **Regional Development Strategy** identifies sixteen **Main Hubs** (shown on *Figure 4* below, along with the two main population centres of Belfast and Londonderry) as the areas that will provide the best return on any investment. These Main Hubs were identified based on the degree of settlement and the availability of services in the following areas:
- transport and communication networks
  - education
  - health
  - social
  - environment
  - commercial
  - justice
- 14.** Investing in our estate at one of these Main Hubs is more likely to help us achieve our vision, by reaching the maximum number of customers and optimising service delivery. **Figure 4** illustrates the Main Hubs identified in the RDS, along with the current CAFRE locations which may form **DARD Superhubs** in the future. It also identifies a number of DARD Local Hubs which act as focal points for less well-populated areas. The RDS suggests ways to group these Main and Local Hubs into clusters when considering investment, so that less economically developed areas are considered as part of the decision on where to invest. DARD is currently developing its **Capital Investment Plan** which will provide specific detail of the expenditure on the Department's Estate.
- 15.** **Figure 4** illustrates DARD's proposed investment strategy for the future. This has been recreated on a separate handout, with the information separated into layers for clarity. The first overlay shows the DARD Direct offices which will be in place by March 2013 and illustrates how these offices align with the Main Hubs identified in the RDS - ensuring that we optimise the benefits of investing in these areas. The top overlay illustrates DARD's planned investments, including the new DARD Headquarters building in Ballykelly, the Forest Service HQ building in Fermanagh (location TBC), a potential DARD Direct Office in Strabane and potential investment at the Maze.



## Strategic Objectives

16. The Objectives of this Estate Framework and the relevant targets from the Spatial Framework Guidance of the RDS are highlighted in blue below along with the actions that the Department is taking to achieve them:

**A. To deliver services to our customers in a cost-effective way. (SFG14)**

**DARD Asset Management Plan** - DARD has developed an Asset Management Plan (AMP), in conjunction with the Asset Management Unit (AMU), which examines all opportunities within the specialised estate for **rationalisation, commercialisation** and **disposal**. The AMP also feeds into the Asset Management Strategy (AMS) which was agreed by the NI Executive's Budget Review Group (BRG) in December 2012.

**B. A need for greater investment in the North West and rural areas in general. (SFG6; SFG9)**

**HQ Relocation** - The DARD Minister announced her decision to relocate the DARD Headquarters to Ballykelly. This represents a significant investment in a rural area and will stimulate the economy through increased local spending and the provision of well paid public sector jobs.

**Decentralisation** – As well as the relocation of DARD HQ the Minister has also announced that the Forest Service HQ will move to Fermanagh, Rivers Agency HQ will relocate to CAFRE's Loughry Campus and Fisheries Division will relocate to South Down.

**C. Identification of opportunities to utilise current DARD assets for the betterment of Rural Development. (SFG14)**

**Food Business Incubation Centre (FBIC)** – CAFRE opened the FBIC in 1998 to help agri-food businesses to 'transform their product concepts and ideas into successful thriving businesses'. The Department plans to invest an additional £1.8m in an Economy and Jobs initiative, expanding the FBIC.

**Community Asset Transfer** - DARD is engaging with DSD on their Community Asset Transfer project to investigate any opportunities to assist rural community groups and projects.

**Community/Commercial Use of DARD Facilities** - DARD is also developing plans to allow community groups and commercial organisations to share in the use of some of its facilities and property assets. e.g. Forest Service is evaluating the potential for a 'Forest Fund' of £4 million, with a view to encouraging organisations to present business cases for drawing down funding to share the cost of developing Forest Service land for commercial use - caravan sites, play parks etc.

**D. Investigate the potential of Land Assets to assist in the delivery of sustainable energy.**

**Renewable Energy Projects** – AFBI Hillsborough has established an 'Environment and Renewable Energy Centre' to investigate the benefits of technologies such as biomass boilers, combined heat and power, and anaerobic digestion. CAFRE have introduced Biomass Boilers at all three campuses and are investigating the installation of an Anaerobic Digestion System at Loughry Campus.

**Forest Service Commercialisation Project** - Forest Service has developed a business case for commercial opportunities and is investigating the potential to install a number of 50 Megawatt Wind Farms throughout its forest estate.

**E. Develop Heritage Assets to ensure they achieve their full potential.**

**Protocol for the Care of the Government Estate** – The Department has developed an action plan for the implementation of this protocol. We have identified our Heritage Assets and are developing a programme aimed at commissioning condition surveys to establish where remedial works are needed. The Department is committed to implementing this protocol and optimising its Heritage Assets for the benefit of the community.

**F. A partnership model that ensures that Rural Development is managed and physically structured by 'Cluster' areas. (SFG10; SFG11; SFG12; SFG13).**

**Restructuring of the DARD Estate** –The DARD Estate is well-established. Some of the properties that we own have already survived beyond their predicted life. There are numerous examples across the whole estate of buildings that are no longer fit

for purpose. The AFBI estate in particular needs to be modernised and reorganised to allow it to make use of property assets more effectively and efficiently. DARD aims to focus future investment at the Main and Local Hubs identified in the RDS. A Strategic Outline Case will be prepared for the whole of the DARD Estate based on the strategic direction outlined in this document.

**Clusters** – Clusters are networks of smaller towns in less densely settled and economically weaker regions. Identifying clusters is a way of capturing smaller, less well-positioned communities and ensuring that service provision extends to them no matter how far they are from a DARD superhub, such as Loughry College or the new headquarters at Ballykelly. The RDS identifies<sup>3</sup> hubs that have the most potential to cluster as:

- Limavady, Coleraine, Ballymoney and Ballycastle
- Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt
- Craigavon, Armagh and Banbridge
- Newry and Warrenpoint and cross border with Dundalk
- Downpatrick and Newcastle
- Ballymena, Antrim and Larne

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<sup>3</sup> Regional Development Strategy – Appendix A, Para 8

## Key Performance Indicators

1. **Greenhouse Gas emissions from the DARD specialised estate – 15% reduction over 5 years**  
The Department is committed to expanding its use of renewable energy sources and reducing overall energy usage. This will enable us to contribute to the overall government targets for GHG emissions.
2. **e-PIMS system fully populated by 2015**  
The 'Electronic Property Information Mapping Service' is an on-line database system chosen by the NI Executive to act as an asset register for the entire NICS estate. The Department is working with Business Areas to ensure that the e-PIMS database is fully populated with information on the Department's estate (e.g. property location, size, nature of ownership, usage, assorted costs etc.) and provides an accurate assessment of the Department's property assets.
3. **Space standard – 15m<sup>2</sup> per FTE by 2025 (for administrative office space within the DARD specialised estate)**  
Analysis of the data provided to AMU for the annual 'State of the Estate' Report shows that DARD-owned office space currently provides 25.63m<sup>2</sup> per Full-Time Equivalent (FTE). A space standard of 15m<sup>2</sup> per FTE would bring the DARD Estate closer to UK space standards and optimise the use of office space.
4. **Establish a baseline and target for a reduction in resource consumption and maintenance spend for the DARD specialised estate**  
The Department spends approximately £19 million per year on its specialised estate. Future investment and initiatives such as the Depots Project (a project aimed at collocating common 'depot' functions across NICS departments to reduce costs) will be geared towards rationalising the estate and reducing this figure.
5. **Maintain a 'Cost per FTE' at or below the NI Average for Freehold and Leasehold properties, as calculated by the Asset Management Unit**  
AMU has calculated that DARD spent an average of £2,360 per FTE on freehold property and £2,880 on leasehold property in 2011/12. The NI Averages were £2,390 and £4,340 respectively. DARD will maintain costs at or below the NI Average.

## What it will be like to work with DARD in the future?

17. DARD has a specific target under the Programme for Government 2011-15 '*To advance the relocation of the headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to a rural area by 2015*'. The Department intends to fulfill this commitment and to support its strategic vision of '**a thriving and sustainable rural economy, community and environment**' by pursuing a policy of **decentralisation**, in an effort to increase our investment in rural areas and stimulate the rural economy through the provision of well paid public sector jobs. In September 2012 the Minister for Agriculture announced DARD's plans to relocate its Headquarters to Ballykelly. The Minister has also recently announced plans to move: Forest Service HQ to a location (TBC) in Fermanagh; Rivers Agency HQ onto CAFRE's Loughry site; and Fisheries Division to a location (TBC) in South Down.
18. The DARD 'Customer Channel Strategy'<sup>4</sup> explains how the Department is going to change the way in which we deliver our key services and schemes to our customers. Over the next five years the Department will seek to increase the opportunity to utilise electronic service delivery; with customers being able to access many services on a 24/7 basis over the internet. We recognise that accessing services and schemes can be challenging for some sections of the community and we are determined that customers will experience a consistent quality of service, regardless of the channel available.
19. In the longer term the way we interact with our customers will have an effect on how our estate supports service delivery. An increase in the use of on-line services will reduce our requirement for a physical presence throughout the province. As the emphasis switches from face-to-face interactions, service delivery will be managed via DARD '**Superhubs**', providing opportunities for process efficiencies. The superhubs will be located at existing and future DARD sites (e.g. CAFRE's Greenmount Campus; the new HQ at Ballykelly etc.). Future development of the DARD estate will ensure that these superhubs are accessible to the public and that there will always be an opportunity for personal contact, where it is required. In the long-term DARD hopes to reduce its physical presence and to deliver services from these superhubs which are currently administered from DARD Direct sites and other regional offices.
20. As our customer's confidence in technology grows, their expectations for how our services are delivered will change. We aim to exceed these expectations and be a driver for technological change within the sector. The RuralNI portal already has over 4,500 pages of up-to-

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-dard-strategies-reports-and-accounts/dard-customer-channel-strategy.htm>



date technical information and some 29 interactive business support tools to aid farmers and growers in making key decisions. It is important that we encourage the rural community to embrace technology and we can achieve this by:



**Pursuing a 'Digital Vision' to ensure that our services are IT enabled and accessible to customers.**

**Providing 'touchdown centres' at DARD Offices to allow customers to access services**



**Ensuring that the Department embraces modern working methods and techniques**

**Transferring vital skills and knowledge to the rural community through our College**





**Maintaining and improving the high quality scientific services provided by the Agri-Food and Bio-Sciences Institute (AFBI)**

## **Conclusion**

- 21.** The DARD estate is entering a period of significant change. A number of key strategic decisions regarding the DARD Strategic Plan 2020, the Channel Management Strategy and how to proceed with the DARD HQ and other relocations, are currently under consideration and will greatly influence the future shape of the estate.
- 22.** This document seeks to provide a suitable framework for strategic investment in our specialised estate to allow DARD to operate more effectively and efficiently in the future. By following the template established in the Regional Development Strategy we can lower the cost of running and maintaining our specialised estate and release some of the value locked into our property assets. We can improve our service delivery to the rural community and provide improved education, scientific and advisory services as well as greater opportunities for leisure. We can position DARD as a progressive, forward-thinking department and embrace technological change to help to modernise the rural community.