



British-Irish Council Collaborative Spatial Planning Work Sector

**Spatial Connectivity between Administrations through
Economics, Infrastructure and Environment**



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Introduction

The British-Irish Council Administrations share common land and sea boundaries and experience similar planning challenges in supporting economic development whilst protecting the environment.

The various economies of each Administration are driven forward by regional, urban and rural areas that act as key zones of economic activity and influence. The optimal performance of the areas and regions within the Administrations is influenced by how cohesive they are in terms of connectivity and strategic development.

Strategic Infrastructure, including air, sea, road and rail networks, electricity and gas interconnections and digital communications, link Administrations, providing vital economic lifelines and the potential to better link developed and more peripheral areas and realise economic opportunities. For example, a co-ordinated approach to development of renewable energy sources like offshore wind is essential to maximise the potential of the resource and avoid potential conflict with other activities.

On the other hand, environmental protection designations relating to sensitive nature conservation interests or areas of high landscape value also need to be taken into account in advancing potential economic development and infrastructure investment opportunities. However, high quality environments also offer positive opportunities for promoting economic growth, such as tourism, helping attract inward investment. Long distance walking and cycling routes connect British-Irish Council Administrations and ecological corridors cross administrative boundaries.

Background

At the British-Irish Council Summit in Guernsey on 13 June 2014, the Council considered a spatial perspectives paper produced by the Collaborative Spatial Planning Work Sector focussing on three main themes; the economy, the environment and infrastructure. This paper explored how practical cooperation and information sharing between the Administrations in respect of these themes could turn shared challenges into shared opportunities.

Officials within the Spatial Planning Work Sector have continued to work collaboratively and have produced a series of three high level strategic maps relating to these themes. These maps spatially represent key features of interconnected significance to the economy, infrastructure and environment of the Administrations. The maps illustrate spatial connectivity between the Administrations including current air, sea, road, rail and digital communications links, and identify 'connectivity zones' where particular challenges, opportunities and requirements to cooperate exist.

By viewing key aspects of economic, infrastructure and environmental importance at the strategic level across all of the Administrations, opportunities and gaps in provision can be identified which can help decision-makers at national and regional level to focus their efforts where they will achieve greatest benefit for all. These can lead to better informed investment decisions helping to identify where the Administrations can work together to enhance cohesion and overall economic impact.

This narrative highlights particular areas of spatial challenge and opportunity for British-Irish Council Administrations having regard to the information shown on the three strategic maps, and identifies a number of key benefits arising from their preparation and use.

Economy

In Scotland, the Central belt (Edinburgh and Glasgow) is the key focus for investment but significant weight is also given to the other cities including Stirling, Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness. In Northern Ireland, the key centre of economic influence is the Belfast Metropolitan Area (including City Airport and Belfast Port). Derry/Londonderry is the principal city of the North West, and the gateways of Larne, Warrenpoint, Newry and Enniskillen and Belfast International Airport are also of prime significance. In Ireland, key centres of economic influence and activity include the Greater Dublin Area including Dublin Airport and Dublin Port, Cork City and its Airport and Port, Waterford City and Belview port, Limerick and Shannon International Airport.

In Wales, two key economic zones extend along the M4/A40 in South Wales through Newport, Cardiff, Swansea towards Fishguard, mirrored by the A55/A5 corridor linking Deeside across North Wales to Holyhead.

The three British Crown Dependencies, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, are all vibrant international business centres with strong global links, encompassing sectors that include banking and finance, agriculture, tourism (including notably in the Isle of Man the TT and motorsport) and high-tech manufacturing.

As well as sustaining investment and growth in these areas, there are planning challenges around economic development priorities for the Administrations. For example, in relation to renewable energy projects, it is presently unclear exactly what is proposed in the Solway Firth in Scotland, but this is an area with offshore wind and tidal potential which could in turn impact on plans around Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man.

In Northern Ireland, the Executive's Economic Strategy seeks to rebalance the economy by tackling long-standing structural weaknesses which have hampered growth. Regional Planning Policy (RDS 2035) focuses on ensuring an adequate supply of land to facilitate sustainable economic growth; delivering a balanced and sustainable approach to transport, telecommunications and tourism infrastructure and a sustainable and secure energy supply. There is potential to develop the Londonderry/Letterkenny gateway in the wider North West area and further potential to develop the Newry/Dundalk gateway/corridor area. Already much work has been done – and is ongoing - in cooperation zones, for example: ICBAN; North West Region Cross Border Group; North East Partnership (with Scotland); and the East Border Region.

In Ireland, The Government's Medium Term Economic Strategy 2014-2020 maps out key economic priorities. A new National Planning framework is currently being prepared. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies are to be prepared, replacing the existing regional planning guidelines. These will establish a framework to harness the economic potential of each region including connections with

Northern Ireland and other parts of the European Union and British-Irish Council Administrations.

In Wales, the key economic centres include the commercial and financial activities in Newport, Cardiff and Swansea, manufacturing in Broughton in North Wales and the steel works at Port Talbot. The importance to the Welsh economy of the international sea gateways to Wales at Holyhead, Milford Haven, Fishguard and Cardiff, Cardiff International Airport and road links in the north and south of the country are important to the future prosperity of both Wales and other UK administrations. The seven Enterprise Zones across Wales are an important focus point for growth, helping to diversify the Welsh economy and providing a context for future infrastructure investment. The focus of economic renewal and regeneration will be in the Heads of the Valleys area in South Wales and along the North Wales coast.

In the Irish Sea around the Isle of Man the quality and sustainable management of the commercial fisheries for Scallop, Queen Scallop, Crab, Lobster and Whelk is internationally recognised. These are being managed alongside the emerging opportunities for offshore renewable energy generation in Manx Waters plus the possibility of the island acting as a hub for the interconnected offshore electricity Grid network in the waters between Scotland, Northern Ireland, Ireland and the wider UK which is being promoted through the Isles project.

Infrastructure connectivity

In Scotland, the most critical Transport connection is from Ireland / Northern Ireland to Scotland via Cairnryan and on to the north of England and Europe beyond. The A1 and M74/ M6 and high speed rail are the key north-south connections. For Grid connectivity the crucial links include the Grid link from Hunterston to North Wales, the interconnector to Northern Ireland, the Isles project (which is still at an early stage) connecting West of Scotland to Northern Ireland and Ireland, and the connection from Peterhead to the north of England.

For Northern Ireland and Ireland, the Belfast to Dublin road corridor continues to be of vital importance in terms of transport infrastructure as does the Enterprise Rail Service between Belfast and Dublin (upgrade of the train is scheduled to be completed by end of 2015). There is potential for this corridor to become a significant axis of development within the wider European context. Plans to improve the A5 are still on-going; the A5 Western Transport Corridor is one of five Key Transport Corridors in Northern Ireland. Its planned improvement represents a significant link in longer term plans to improve connections between Dublin and the North West.

The Belfast Hub is a planned public transport hub on the site of the existing Great Victoria Street Station in Belfast (with no start date as yet). This will increase access to the city centre and connections across the region and beyond (the Enterprise Rail service between Belfast and Dublin will terminate here rather than at the more peripheral existing stop at Belfast Central Station). Belfast Harbour continues to play an important role (20% of the entire island's seaborne trade and 112,000 cruise passengers in 2014). The ongoing A8 road upgrade near Larne and the planned York Street Interchange in Belfast (a large road junction improvement scheme) will improve the movement of freight from the North (Larne/Belfast) to the South when implemented.

Dublin and Shannon International Airports both play a significant role in providing necessary connections both east and west. Dublin, Cork and Waterford ports are also critical in terms of trading capabilities.

The Isles II Project continues to be important for the electricity Grid for Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland. The Moyle electricity interconnector between Northern Ireland and Scotland should be back to full capacity by 2016 following a series of faults dating back to 2010 which left the interconnector running at half of its usual 500mw capacity. The company 'First Flight Wind' decided in late 2014 not to develop an offshore wind farm off the County Down coast. The firm was unlikely to complete the project within the timescale of new renewable energy rules.

The new North-South 400 kV Interconnection Development (also known as the Meath-Tyrone 400 kV Interconnection Development) is a jointly proposed new high capacity electricity interconnector between the electricity networks of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The new interconnector will increase the capacity, and the reliability, of interconnection between the two networks. This will allow the two independent networks to operate together as if they were one system for the mutual benefit of residents and businesses in both jurisdictions.

The increase in interconnection capacity will effectively eliminate current restrictions in cross border support in the event of a shortage of electricity in one jurisdiction, thus enhancing the security of electricity supply throughout the island of Ireland. Operating the two networks as if they were one system will bring cost savings for all electricity consumers as larger electricity systems can be operated more efficiently than smaller ones. The increase in interconnection capacity will also facilitate further and greater connection of wind generation in both parts of the island which will help achieve Ireland's renewable energy targets.

The Grid West project is an important project for the development of Ireland, as a whole. This project will deliver 21st century energy infrastructure to the west of Ireland contributing to national recovery and growth while at the same time allowing the region to attract inward investment that requires a strong reliable source of power.

In Wales, ensuring connectivity nationally and internationally is a key spatial planning priority. Sea routes with Ireland and road and rail connections through England to other administrations and Europe are vital to Welsh prosperity. This includes trans-European routes, improvements to the M4 at Newport and electrification of both the mainline and valleys lines. Cardiff International Airport is now owned by the Welsh Government and opportunities for growth and expansion will be taken forward, making connections to adjacent Enterprise Zones and the British Airways maintenance centre. The development of connection corridors, to ensure quick and easy movement of both people and freight into and across Wales, will be a major issue for the emerging National Development Plan. Ensuring that Wales maximises the benefits from growth in neighbouring administrations and in turn, supports growth in other areas will be an important priority for the planning system in coming years. The facilitation of renewable energy developments remains a priority for Wales. Opportunities for tidal (lagoons) energy generation are being explored and proposals are advancing at Swansea Bay. Wales's role in both energy generation and transmission, helping neighbouring administrations meet their energy needs will continue to inform the delivery of new infrastructure.

The economy and quality of life of the island communities within the Crown Dependencies of Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey is dependent on year round access to good air and sea links to London, North West England, the South Coast of England, Glasgow, Belfast and Dublin for both freight and passenger services. Links may vary in frequency from a few times a week to several times a day; however all form essential lifeline services for businesses, residents and tourists alike including providing access to specialist medical services not available in the islands. Similarly, the islands are heavily dependent upon imported energy supplies, via subsea cables and shipping. There is a requirement to ensure that the requisite communications and energy infrastructure links to other British-Irish Council Administrations and, in the case of electricity supplies to the Channel Islands, to France, are maintained and enhanced.

Environment

In Scotland, cross-boundary protected sites tend to be offshore and are around the Solway Firth and River Tweed. There are important long-distance walking routes across the south of Scotland.

Protection of Northern Ireland's 'Strategic Natural Resources' is important, these being; the Causeway Coast (incorporating UNESCO World Heritage Site at Giant's Causeway), Antrim Coast & Glens, Strangford Lough & Coast, Mourne, Ring of Gullion, Fermanagh Lakeland, Sperrins and Foyle Estuary. There is a need to promote a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism infrastructure in these areas. For the shared sea loughs between Northern Ireland and Ireland (Carlingford and Foyle) there is already a joined-up approach via the Loughs Agency and scope for further interaction as the Draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland (DOE) is due to be published in 2015.

There are no dedicated long distance cycling/walking routes which link Northern Ireland and Ireland. There is the potential for existing way marked trails within Ireland, such as the Monaghan Way, Cavan Way and Carlingford route to be extended to link into existing established trails within Northern Ireland. There are many cycling routes which cross the border but the vast majority of these are on country roads rather than cycle ways. Euro Velo Route 1 (which is not yet fully implemented) stretches from Norway to Portugal. It is particularly relevant for the British-Irish Council Administrations as part of the route runs from Scotland into Northern Ireland, Ireland, Wales and England.

In 2012/13, 1,110,000 MWh of electricity in Northern Ireland was produced from indigenous renewable sources. This was equivalent to 13.6% of total electricity consumption in that period. There has been a sizable increase in the amount of electricity produced from indigenous renewable sources since 2001/02, when only 128,000 MWh (1.5% of total electricity consumed) was from renewable sources. Since the first wind farm project was realised in 1992 at Bellacorrick, Co. Mayo, 2,281 MW of wind capacity has been installed in Ireland. The Governments of Ireland and Northern Ireland are jointly working on an all-island '2020 Vision' for renewable energy. A joint strategy is emerging for the provision of renewable energy sourced electricity within the All-island Energy Market leading up to 2020 and beyond, so that consumers, North and South, continue to benefit from access to sustainable energy supplies provided at a competitive cost.

In Wales, ensuring the protection of our high quality landscape and ecological areas remains one of the key priorities for the planning system. The National Development Framework, the preparation of which

will commence following Royal Assent of the Planning (Wales) Bill in the summer, will seek to ensure that growth and prosperity compliment the protection of our environment and indeed, that tourism and investment can grow because of the breadth and quality of Wales's natural resources. The national parks at Snowdonia, Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast have played, and will continue to play, an important role in protecting the quality of Wales's environment and promoting Wales to the world. The National Coast Path, international and European designations as well as World Heritage Sites add to the scale and significance of Wales's environmental assets.

The Crown Dependencies of Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey contain a spectacular variety of protected land and seascapes, on- and off-shore. There are plans to seek designation of the whole of the Isle of Man as a UNESCO Biosphere. The Islands offer the opportunity to provide important habitats for certain species which are under threat elsewhere in the British Isles. For example the formal disease-free status for bees in the Isle of Man was recognised by the European Union which has in 2015 declared the Isle of Man officially free of the bee pest Varroa; an announcement that provides an important economic and environmental boost.

Key Benefits of Strategic Mapping

The production of the three strategic maps along with this accompanying narrative represents an important step towards the creation of an effective framework for identifying and highlighting particular spatial planning issues, challenges and opportunities at a strategic level which affect all of the British-Irish Council Administrations. There are a number of clear and substantial benefits arising from this approach.

1. Strategic level viewpoint

The strategic maps enable spatial planning issues that affect all the Administrations, and particular regions or areas within them to be considered at a strategic level, helping decision-makers to identify and work to resolve such issues in a holistic, coordinated way at the higher regional or inter-regional strategic level and not be 'caught up' in more detailed localised issues which can sometimes distract or obscure the 'bigger picture'.

The maps show graphically how issues of strategic importance concerning the economy, infrastructure and environment relate to each other and the physical relationships between regions and Administrations. This information can help to identify strategic opportunities and gaps in provision, and can help decision-makers to focus on areas of potential conflict so that scarce resources can be used effectively and collaboratively with others to help resolve such challenges.

2. Identifying shared opportunities

By taking a holistic and strategic level approach to spatial planning issues, the maps enable a shared view to be developed of potential opportunities in relation to key issues for all Administrations relating to the economy, infrastructure and the environment.

This will enable opportunities for linking major infrastructure/investment projects to be identified and ensure that a suitable coordinated approach is achieved. It will assist the strategic planning of transport infrastructure relating to critical road, rail, sea and air links which should be located and developed in such a way that provides the best opportunities for connectivity between regions and Administrations. Similarly, it will assist with the strategic spatial consideration of power and digital communications investment and connectivity. Linking of long distance walking and cycling routes will also help increase connectivity between and enhance tourism opportunities within Administrations.

This strategic approach to cross-Administration spatial planning will also help to ensure that critical inter-regional connections between Administrations are recognised and safeguarded; ensuring through coordination and collaboration that transport and other links on which Administrations are economically dependent are safeguarded and where possible strengthened.

In relation to nature conservation and habitats, a strategic level perspective based on the maps could underpin a collaborative approach to using the Island Administrations where appropriate to protect/rebuild bird and animal populations and help protect biodiversity.

Having enabled the identification of potential opportunities or gaps in provision at regional and inter-regional level, the strategic approach to spatial planning then helps to facilitate the coordination of funding and investment bids across administrative boundaries. For example, a coordinated approach made collectively and in unity by a number of Administrations based on spatial arguments evidenced by the strategic maps would be much more likely to be effective in leveraging European Union funding than individual approaches made without the benefit of such clear geographical evidence.

3. Managing conflicts and challenges

As well as focussing attention on areas of potential opportunity to target investment, enhance connectivity and help leverage funding, the strategic maps also identify areas where it would be beneficial to focus resources in order to manage conflicts and challenges to the shared benefit of British-Irish Council Administrations.

For example, the Solway Firth and Irish Sea are areas where the complex planning issues surrounding offshore energy production and the relationships and potential conflicts between this and other activities of key economic importance such as sea and air transportation and fishing require particularly careful consideration and a coordinated approach to strategic planning involving all of the affected Administrations.

The further development of a coordinated approach between Administrations based on the framework created by the strategic maps will help to ensure that future investment in renewable energy projects is coordinated spatially to avoid potential conflicts arising as a result of uncoordinated development or activities. Similarly, the strategic approach will help Administrations to work collectively to identify and recognise key environmental assets which could be damaged by inappropriate development, and to work together to ensure that a shared sustainable approach is taken to common assets. It will also help Administrations to identify priorities for more detailed planning in specific areas where appropriate.

The key importance of year round access to good air and sea links, as well as robust energy and communications infrastructure, to the economies and quality of life of the island communities within the three Crown Dependencies is also highlighted and emphasises the need for a number of Administrations to work collaboratively to ensure that these vital links are safeguarded and strengthened where possible.

Conclusion

The benefits of taking a shared, collaborative and coordinated approach to the strategic planning issues surrounding the economy, infrastructure and environment of all British-Irish Council Administrations are clear and substantial. The strategic maps that have been produced by the Collaborative Spatial Planning Work Sector represent an important and valuable step in creating a robust and effective framework within which this process can operate and develop to the benefit of all British-Irish Council Administrations.

British-Irish Council
Collaborative Spatial Planning Work Sector
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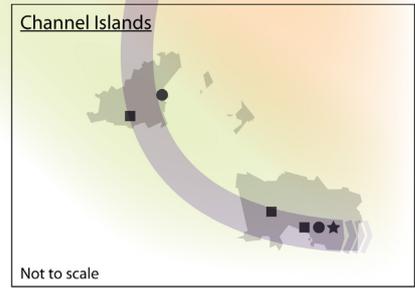
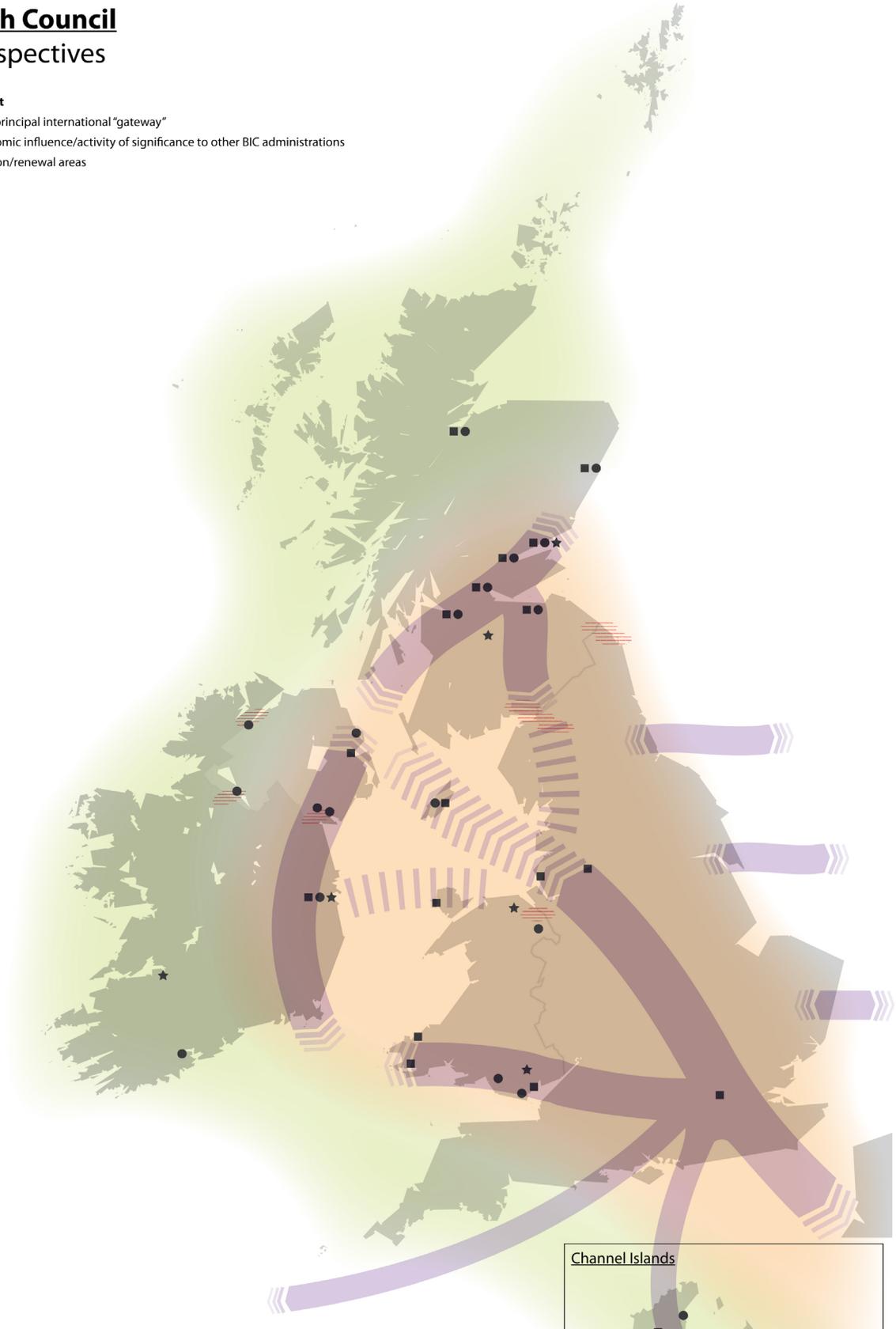
Spatial Perspectives

Economic Development

- BIC Administration principal international "gateway"
- Key centres of economic influence/activity of significance to other BIC administrations
- ★ Principal regeneration/renewal areas
- ▬ Co-operation zones

Connectivity Zones

- Pure zone
- Central zone
- ▬ Economic flows



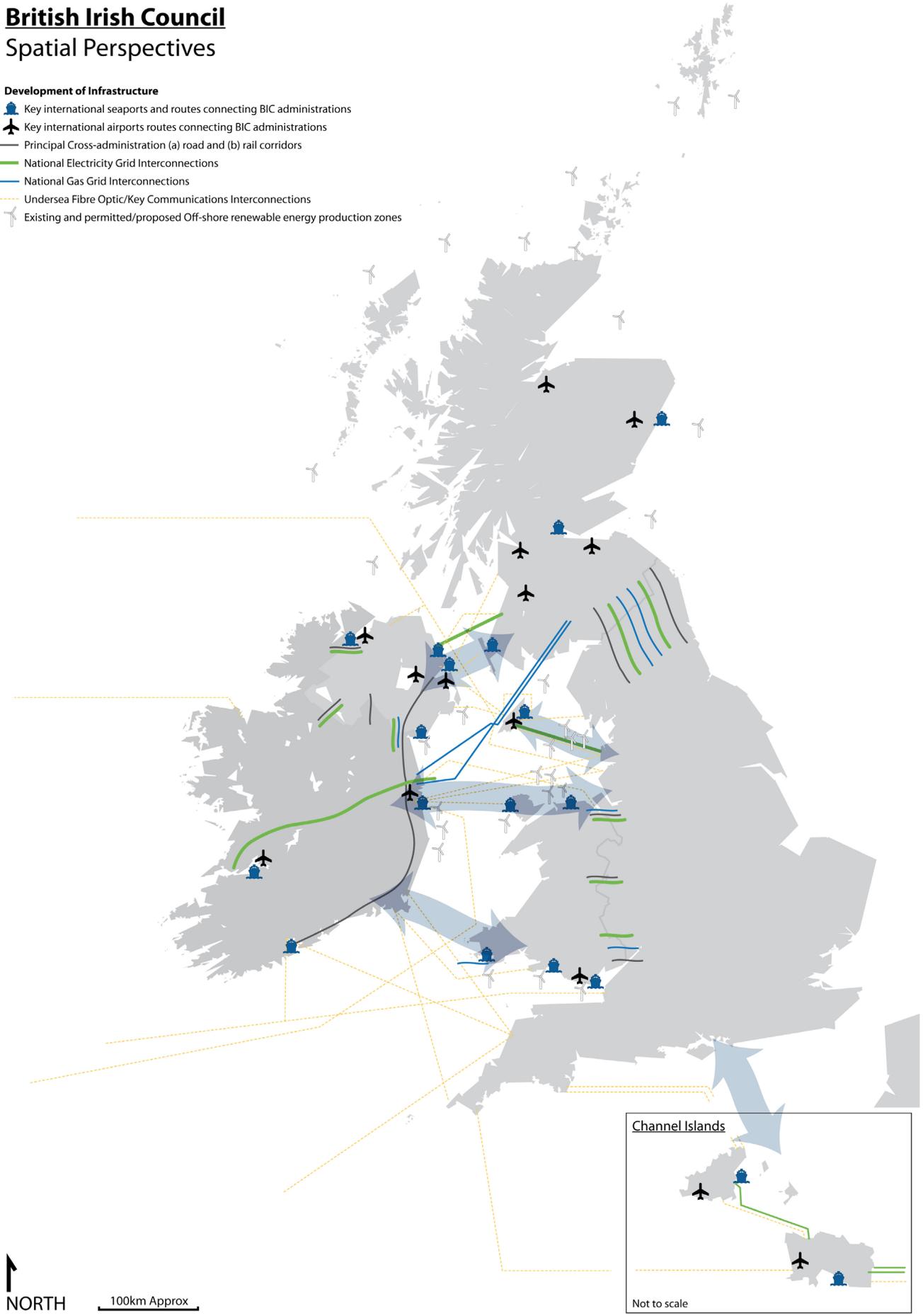
↑
NORTH

100km Approx

British Irish Council Spatial Perspectives

Development of Infrastructure

-  Key international seaports and routes connecting BIC administrations
-  Key international airports routes connecting BIC administrations
-  Principal Cross-administration (a) road and (b) rail corridors
-  National Electricity Grid Interconnections
-  National Gas Grid Interconnections
-  Undersea Fibre Optic/Key Communications Interconnections
-  Existing and permitted/proposed Off-shore renewable energy production zones

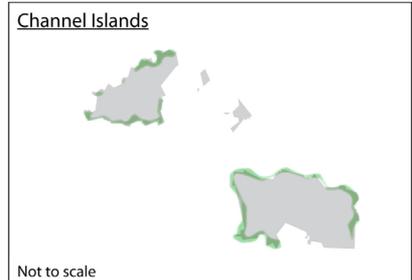


British Irish Council

Spatial Perspectives

Conservation of Environmental Qualities

-  NATURA sites adjoining/straddling BIC administrations
-  Long-distance walking and cycling routes connecting BIC administrations
-  Green Infrastructure – Ecological Corridors
-  Areas of high landscape value
-  International River Basin Districts




NORTH


100km Approx

