Research and Library Services

Northern Ireland Assembly

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TOWNLAND NAMES

Paper providing background information on the use of Townland Names on street signage and Government correspondence with the public

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The following paper examines:

- The preservation of townland names through their inclusion on all new street and road signs and the gradual replacement of all existing road signs; and

- The use of townland names on all public correspondence emanating from government offices.

TOWNLAND AND PLACE NAMES IN OTHER AREAS

In Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland the following work is being done to promote townland/place names:

- Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba (Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland) promotes the use of Gaelic place-names on street and road signs in the Scottish Highlands;

- The Welsh Language Board has initiated a project which aims to standardise place names;

- In the Republic of Ireland Townland Names are legal titles and only an Act of the Oireachtas may alter them;

- The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has a place-names branch which researches the place-names of the Republic of Ireland and provides authoritative Irish language forms of those place-names;

- A number of Place-Name Orders have also been passed in the Republic of Ireland which have entered the place-names (as determined by place-name branch research), of provinces, specific counties and townlands within those counties, into law.

In addition, all regions in Great Britain as well as Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, operate academic place-name projects. These projects research and maintain a database of place-names. These projects are interlinked.

The Ordnance Survey has recently published a series of guides, both online and in hard copy, which provides information on the influence of Gaelic, Scandinavian, Scots and Welsh on place names in Great Britain.

TOWNLAND NAMES ON STREET AND ROAD SIGNS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 enables Local Councils to erect street road, square court, alley, passage and lane nameplates. The Article places a duty on the council to express the name of any 'street' in English, Councils have discretionary power to erect signs which also contain the name in *'any other language'*. The Order does not make reference to Townland Names.

Indicative cost - 2006, Belfast City Council erected seven dual language street signs at an approximate cost of £1,500, equating to a cost per sign of approximately £215.

THE USE OF TOWNLAND NAMES ON CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PUBLIC

In October 2001 a motion was debated and passed in the Assembly, which stated:

> *That this Assembly calls on each Government Department to adopt a policy of using and promoting townland names in all Government correspondence and official documents*

In 2002 the Committee for Culture, Art and Leisure report on its inquiry into Cultural Tourism and the Arts recommended that:

> *Government departments and other public bodies, as well as the public utilities, should include townland names on all public correspondence.*

In light of the above, Land and Property Services' Pointer system includes townland names within its specification. Pointer, an address database for Northern Ireland, is accessible by both Government Departments and Local Councils.

Every address held within its database is *'integrally linked to both a townland name and a geographic location'.* Including townland names in its specification ensures Pointer is a *'central and cost effective'* means of including he townland name within the standard address held by the public sector.

THE PROMOTION OF TOWNLAND NAMES BY DISTRICT COUNCILS

July 2009, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) provided the Committee with information pertaining to a *'scoping exercise'* it had carried out which aimed to evaluate local government views on the preservation and promotion of townland names. They state:

> *Our findings have demonstrated that the preservation of townland names appears to [be] much more of a prevalent issue in rural councils; nonetheless predominately urban councils have recognised the value of preserving townland names also.*

All Councils have at least voiced support for the preservation of townland names, with some taking direct action to ensure townlands names are persevered – particularly Omagh District Council who have erected 2,300 signs containing townland names.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The following paper is intended to provide background information on the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure's potential Townland Names Bill.

It does so by examining two possible clauses, which might be central to any future bill:

- The preservation of townland names through their inclusion on all new street and road signs and the gradual replacement of all existing road signs; and

- The use of townland names on all public correspondence emanating from government offices.

Before examining these issues, the paper first outlines the work being done in other legislatures to preserve traditional place-names.

2. TOWNLAND NAMES AND PLACE-NAMES IN OTHER LEGISLATURES

The following provides a summary of place-name promotion in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

SCOTLAND
Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba (Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland) has promoted the use of Gaelic place-names on street and road signs in the Highlands since 2003. The body is also in the process of developing a national gazetteer of Gaelic place-names in Scotland, which is expected to launch in 2010.[1]

WALES
The Welsh Language Board, in conjunction with the Ordnance Survey and The Place-Names Research Centre in the University of Bangor, North Wales, has initiated a project which aims to standardise place names.[2]

THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
In the Republic of Ireland townland names form the basis of the postal address system in rural areas. The E. Estyn Evans' book *Irish Folk Ways*, which contains a wealth of information on the history of townland names notes;

> *The townland names, involving so many land holdings, are legal titles, and their Gaelic names, however erroneously spelt on the Ordnance Survey maps, are fossilized in their forms. Only an [Act of the Oireachtas] can alter them…* [3]

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has a place-names branch which researches the place-names of the Republic of Ireland and provides authoritative Irish language forms of those place-names. The research is carried out on a county by county base and to date nine counties have been completed, with Cork, Wexford and Laois next in line for investigation.[4]

The Irish forms of place-names are published in the Liostaí Logainmneacha series. The Branch also provides Irish place-name forms to public bodies on request. Research was recently concluded on the administrative names of Gaeltacht areas and authoritative Irish forms were provided. The Branch has completed research on

the names of the district electoral divisions in order to provide Irish language forms of these to the Central Statistics Office.[5] A number of Place-Name Orders have also been passed which have entered the place-names (as determined by the place names branch research), of provinces, specific counties and townlands within those counties, into law.[6]

PLACE- NAME PROJECTS
All three legislatures above operate place-name projects, which promote, research and maintain a database of place-names. Similar projects exist in Northern Ireland and England. Each place-name project has established links with its counterparts in the other regions. A list of these projects is as follows:

- The Scottish Place-name society[7];
- The Locus Project, University of Cork;[8]
- The Place-Names Research Centre in the University of Bangor, North Wales;[9]
- Institute for Name-Studies in the University of Nottingham;[10]
- Queen's University of Belfast Place-Names project.[11]

ORDNANCE SURVEY
The Ordnance Survey has historically catalogued place names in Wales and Scotland. Most recently they have published a series of guides, both online and in hard copy, which provide information on the influence of Gaelic, Scandinavian, Scots and Welsh on place names in Great Britain.

3.   TOWNLAND NAMES ON STREET AND ROAD SIGNS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

POWERS OF COUNCILS
Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, states that a council *'may erect at or near each end, corner or entrance in its district a nameplate showing the name of the street'.* In this context street is used to describe *'any road, square court, alley, passage or lane'.* The Article places a duty on the council to express the name of any 'street' in English. It also gives them a discretionary power to express that name *'in any other language'.*[12] The Order does not make reference to Townland Names.

Such power may only be exercised when the views of residents are taken in consideration. It is noteworthy that the Article does not place any statutory duty on a council to display 'street' names in any other language than English.[13]

INDICATIVE COST PER-SIGN
Assuming, for the purposes of this paper, the design and cost of erecting dual language signs is broadly comparable to that of signs displaying townland names, it is possible to establish an indicative cost per-sign.

In 2006, Belfast City Council erected seven dual language street signs at an approximate cost of £1,500. This equates to a per sign cost of approximately £215.[14]

4.   THE USE OF TOWNLAND NAMES ON CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PUBLIC

In October 2001 a motion was debated and passed in the Assembly, which stated:

> *That this Assembly calls on each Government Department to adopt a policy of using and promoting townland names in all Government correspondence and official documents.*[15]

In May 2002 the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure published its 'Inquiry into Cultural Tourism and the Arts'. The report noted that the:

> *… gradual erosion of familiarity with townlands and their boundaries will, if not halted, eventually result in stalling development of potentially dynamic roots tourism product..*

Amongst the report's 56 recommendations is the following:

- **Recommendation 21: Townland names –** Government departments and other public bodies, as well as the public utilities, should include townland names on all public correspondence.

As a result of the above, Pointer, the Land & Property Services (LPS) maintained address database for Northern Ireland, includes townland names within its specification. Pointer, which contains a *'common standard address for every property in Northern Ireland',* was compiled using datasets held by Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, the Valuation and Land Agency and the Royal Mail.

Pointer is accessible by both Government Departments and Local Councils. Every address held within its database is *'integrally linked to both a townland name and a geographic location'.* Including townland names in its specification ensures Pointer is a *'central and cost effective'* means of including the townland name within the standard address held by the public sector. On the use of Pointer by Government Departments and Local councils LPS have stated that although some of them may not be using it currently, therefore the cost would be minimal as the data is freely available, it may be the case that staff need a user guide for help.

5.   THE PROMOTION OF TOWNLAND NAMES BY DISTRICT COUNCILS

In July 2009, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) provided the Committee with information pertaining to a *'scoping exercise'* it had carried out which aimed to evaluate local government views on the preservation and promotion of townland names. The information provided demonstrates that all councils are supportive of the retention of townland names. NILGA note, however:

> *Our findings have demonstrated that the preservation of townland names appears to [be] much more of a prevalent issue in rural councils; nonetheless predominately urban councils have recognised the value of preserving townland names also.*[16]

The research carried out by NILGA provides some detail on each Councils views on townland name promotion:

ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL – does not use townland but are supportive of being able to use them though the 'Pointer' service.

ARDS BOROUGH COUNCIL – fully supports the retention of townland names and encourages their use when approving names to new streets, where appropriate.

ARMAGH CITY AND DISTRICT COUNCIL – have express their *'content with the recent progress in the development of the Pointer system',* and it's inclusion of townland names within its database.

BALLYMENA BOROUGH COUNCIL – advocate the use of townland names. The council issued a 'longstanding instruction' to use townland names in addresses and operates a 'system of identifying the townland as an integral part of all new addresses'.

BALLYMONEY BOROUGH COUNCIL – is supportive of 'any measure which ensures that townland names are both retained and utilised'.

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL – does not currently have any 'explicate initiatives' in place to promote the use of townland names. The council is aware of the significance of townland names, but feels their application to be more difficult in Belfast's urban context than in a rural one. They cite the expansion of the city during the industrial revolution and the shift of traditional townland names from one part of the city to another as reason contributing to the decline in the use of townland names.

The council suggests the adoption of popular (relatively) modern place names by residents, names such as the Village, Short Strand and Andersontown, has also contributed to the decline in townland names. This, it is advised, may the most significant reason, since such names *'give such a sense of pride and identity to the communities within those areas'.*

The council add however, that they are 'very enthusiastic' to ensure the city's heritage is reflected in its street names and agree that townland names should form part of this process.

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH COUNCIL – fully supports the retention of townland names.

COLERAINE BOROUGH COUNCIL – fully supports the retention of townland names.

COOKSTOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL – 'strongly favours' the retention of townland names and their inclusion on addresses. The council ensure that each time a new address is confirmed the relevant townland is included.

DERRY CITY COUNCIL – promote the use of townland names when new developments are named as part of its Street naming and Postal Numbering policy. They have also replaced all rural signage with signs that include road names and townland names.

DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL – are supportive of townland names and use them on any new signage.

DUNGANNON AND SOUTH TYRONE BOROUGH COUNCIL – is 'very supportive' of the use of townland names and has erected road name plates upon which they were included.

FERMANAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL – has historically campaigned for the retention of townland names and has expressed its concern that the system of introducing road names and numbers is detrimental to their promotion. The council has sought to introduce a policy that would allow houses in rural areas would be identified by a townland name and number. They council found themselves retrained by the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, and therefore unable to implement such a policy. As a result, they have written to the Department of the Environment in an attempt to get the legislation altered to allow for such a change in policy.

LIMAVADY BOROUGH COUNCIL – is supportive of the retention and use of townland names. They are also 'keen that their origins and meanings are researched and understood'.

LISBURN CITY COUNCIL – are 'keen to preserve and promote townland names and used townland names on all signage outside the 30mph zone since 2001.

MOYLE DISTRICT COUNCIL – supports the retention of townland names.

NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL – do not have a policy on the use of townland names in correspondence but do promote their use in street naming – the 'naming of any new developments within the council favours application that reflect either the name, or the heritage of the townland that the development falls in'. Of the 40 townlands falling in within council boundaries, 27 contain or accessed by at least one street, the name of which reflects that townland. A further three townlands share their name with a town or locality that falls within them. These processes are contained with in the council's Street Naming Policy.

OMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL – while recognising the role played by road and names in identifying in commercial locations, the council has attempted to retain the 'more meaningful cultural link that townlands provide'. The council has used the powers allotted to it through the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, to develop a policy ensuring that the names allocated to new roads and streets reflect the name of the townland that they are located within.

When a new building is erected the council issues a Postal Certificate confirming the buildings official address. The certificate contains the townland name in the address.

The council road naming policy stipulates that road name signage should include the name of the townland. To date the council has erected 2,300 signs over, with a further 280 required to complete the programme.

The council have also instigated a programme of 'lectures, symposia and events' to celebrate townland names. This programme has been introduced from primary school level upwards.

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[1] Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba (AÀA) ~ Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland http://www.gaelicplacenames.org/index.asp (accessed 04/12/09)
[2] Welsh Language Board, Place-names http://www.byig-wlb.org.uk/english/services/pages/place-names.aspx (accessed 04/12/09)
[3] Evans, E. *Irish Folk Ways*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957; reprinted by Routledge, 1989)
[4] The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Place-names Branch http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/ThePlacenamesBranch/ (accessed 04/12/09)
[5] Ibid

[6] The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Place-names Branch, Place-Name Orders http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/ThePlacenamesBranch/PlacenamesOrders/

[7] The Scottish Place-Name Society, Constitution http://www.spns.org.uk/constitution09.html (accessed 04/12/09)

[8] University of Cork, Locus Project, http://www.ucc.ie/locus/ (accessed 04/12/09)

[9] Univeristy of Wales Bangor, Place-Names Database http://www.e-gymraeg.co.uk/enwaulleoedd/amr/ (accessed 04/12/09)

[10] Institute for Name-Studies in the University of Nottingham in England http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezins//kepn.php (accessed 04/12/09)

[11] Queen's University of Belfast, Northern Ireland Place-Name Project http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofLanguagesLiteraturesandPerformingArts/SubjectAreas/Irishand CelticStudies/Research/NorthernIrelandPlace-NameProject/

[12] Statutory Instrument 1995, No.759 (N.I. 5) The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, Article 11

[13] *Ibid*

[14] Belfast City Council, Minutes of the Health and Environmental Service Committee, Monday 11 June 2007 *Consideration of Application Procedures for the Erection of Dual-language street signs* http://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/(S(bmeqqreejjig5c45qn0123yt))/Published/C00000317/M00006509/A I00003805/Appendix1MinutesofCommitteeMeetingof11thJune2007.pdf (accessed 20/11/09)

[15] Official Report, Northern Ireland Assembly, Monday 1 October 2001, Townland Names, http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports/011001f.htm (accessed 20/11/09)

[16] Letter from Northern Ireland Local Government Association to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Re: Townland Names 3 July 2009