



MID AND EAST ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Position Paper 10

Development Pressure Analysis

December 2015

Development Pressure Analysis of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Purpose: To provide members with a Development Pressure Analysis for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, particularly to identify those areas where significant development pressure has occurred and/or where local rural character is under threat.

Content: The paper provides information on:-

- (i) The Development Pressure Analysis for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and its key findings;**
- (ii) Identifies areas within the Borough which have experienced significant development pressure from individual 'single dwelling' planning applications as well as wind energy applications;**
- (iii) Analysis of development pressures in the context of the environmental designations and landscape character of the District.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** This Development Pressure Analysis is one of the 4 strands of the Countryside Assessment. Following on from the identification of environmental assets, landscape assessment, and the ongoing settlement evaluation study, it seeks to identify those areas where significant development pressure has occurred and where landscape, environmental integrity and local rural character may be under threat of significant change. Development pressure analysis typically involves an assessment of the spatial distribution of single dwellings in the countryside, taking account of applications within the past decade or so, as well as the cumulative impacts of pre-existing development. Given the high number of wind energy applications in recent years and their potential visual impacts, it is considered appropriate to widen the remit to also include an assessment of wind energy development.
- 1.2** It is acknowledged that other types of development, such as mineral excavation, agricultural or industrial buildings, can also have potential adverse visual impacts on the visual amenity and character of the countryside. However in regard to such forms of development it is widely considered that sufficient control is already provided by prevailing regional policy. Additionally, it will be possible to bring forward bespoke policies in the Local Development Plan (LDP), to manage such development in the countryside, should this be considered appropriate.

- 1.3 The development pressure analysis will serve primarily to identify areas of exceptional landscape (for example parts of the AONB or areas of high scenic value) which are particularly vulnerable to development and where such pressures, relating to single dwellings and wind energy, are becoming evident. The analysis will therefore be useful in contributing to the evidence base informing any decisions to provide additional protection to such areas, through the LDP.
- 1.4 The 'countryside' as referred to in this paper, is defined as lands outside of the designated settlements as defined in the existing Ballymena Area Plan 1986-2001, Larne Area Plan 2010 and Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (BMAP) Part 4 (Carrickfergus).

2.0 Regional Planning Policy

- 2.1 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) states that furthering sustainable development lies at the heart of the new planning system. Part of this, according to the SPPS, is the need to protect and enhance the built and natural environment; including safeguarding landscape character and halting the loss of biodiversity.
- 2.2 The SPPS directs that the policy approach to new development in the countryside should reflect differences in the region, be sensitive to local needs and take due account environmental sensitivity and the ability of landscapes to absorb development. This regional policy context therefore provides scope for developing policies in the LDP which are tailored to particular circumstances; for example through restricting development in areas that are particularly sensitive to change, or accommodating sustainable development in rural areas with lower sensitivity. All proposals for development in the countryside must be sited and designed to integrate sympathetically with the surroundings and to meet other planning policy and environmental considerations.

3.0 Overall Trends in Mid & East Antrim Countryside (Single Dwellings)

- 3.1 The data used to inform the development pressure analysis has been provided by Department of the Environment (DOE). This data includes records of planning decisions issued for all single and replacement rural dwelling applications (Outline, Full and Reserved Matters) in the Mid and East Antrim countryside between June 2004 and March 2015 (Table 1 and Figure 1 refers). During this 10 to 11 year period, proposals for rural dwellings were determined within the successive policy contexts of 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' 1993 (PSRNI), draft PPS 14 published in March 2006, Draft PPS 21 published in November 2008 and the final version of PPS 21 published in June 2010.
- 3.2 Map 1 shows the location of single dwellings approved in the MEA countryside over the period from 1st April 2010 to 31 March 2015. This period largely corresponds with the first 5 years following the introduction of the existing rural planning policy PPS 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside'. In this 5 year period, it is considered that PPS 21 had become sufficiently 'bedded in' to

allow emerging trends to be highlighted and identified. The map also shows the location of pre-existing single dwelling development in order to allow some appreciation of cumulative impacts.

- 3.3 Considering the Borough as a whole, it can be seen from both Figure 1 and Table 1 that there has been a general downward trend in the volume of single rural dwelling decisions since 2006-2007. Prior to this single dwelling applications were being processed at an average rate of approximately 272 per year across the Borough. To put this in context, this figure is almost double the number of applications decided for each of the 5 years (or part thereof) following the introduction of PPS 21. Figure 1 also illustrates how the number of decisions has steadily declined since 2008. It is important to note that the general trends for the Borough, mirror the trends for the former Ballymena Council area, which year on year accounted for the vast majority of applications (77% on average). Trends within the former Larne and Carrickfergus Boroughs where application numbers have always been much lower, show a more static picture, with comparatively little variation in the number of applications processed annually.
- 3.4 Between 2012 and 2014, when it might be said that PPS 21 was 'bedded in', the average number of applications decided per year for the Borough was 130. Again, to put this in context, this amounts to almost one third of the total number of rural single dwelling applications decided in the peak 2006-7 year.
- 3.5 The peaks of 2006-2008 may be reflective of the high volume of speculative proposals submitted in anticipation of a revised and more restrictive rural policy i.e. Draft PPS 14 in March 2006. It is also likely to be indicative of the robust economic conditions that prevailed at that time. The very different trends for the former Larne and Carrickfergus Boroughs (paragraph 3.3 refers) no doubt reflects the stricter planning regime associated with these areas over the study period. The Larne Area Plan 2010 designated all of the rural area beyond Greenbelts as a Countryside Policy Area. The Carrickfergus Area Plan 2001 designated the remainder of the rural area (beyond the Belfast Urban Area Greenbelt) as Countryside Policy Area.

TABLE 1: Planning Approvals for Rural New and Replacement Single Dwellings (Full, Outline, RM) in Mid and East Antrim 2004-2015

Year	Ballymena			Larne			Carrickfergus			Mid & East Antrim		
	Total No. of Decisions	Total Approved	Approval Rate	Total No. of Decisions	Total Approved	Approval Rate	Total No. of Decisions	Total Approved	Approval Rate	Total No. of Decisions	Total Approved	Approval Rate
2004-05	254	250	98%	34	32	94%	10	10	100%	298	292	98%
2005-06	221	213	96%	16	16	100%	8	7	88%	245	236	96%
2006-07	353	332	94%	31	27	87%	8	7	88%	392	366	93%
2007-08	327	317	97%	29	29	100%	10	10	100%	366	356	97%
2008-09	252	251	100%	38	38	100%	8	8	100%	298	297	100%
2009-10	188	187	99%	45	45	100%	18	17	94%	251	249	99%
2010-11	108	106	98%	38	34	89%	15	13	87%	161	153	95%
2011-12	120	118	98%	34	31	91%	12	11	92%	166	160	96%
2012-13	76	75	99%	40	38	95%	10	9	90%	126	122	97%
2013-14	86	86	100%	35	34	97%	14	14	100%	135	134	99%
2014-15	80	79	99%	28	27	99%	4	2	50%	112	108	96%
Total	2,065	2,014	98%	368	351	95%	117	108	92%	2,550	2,473	97%

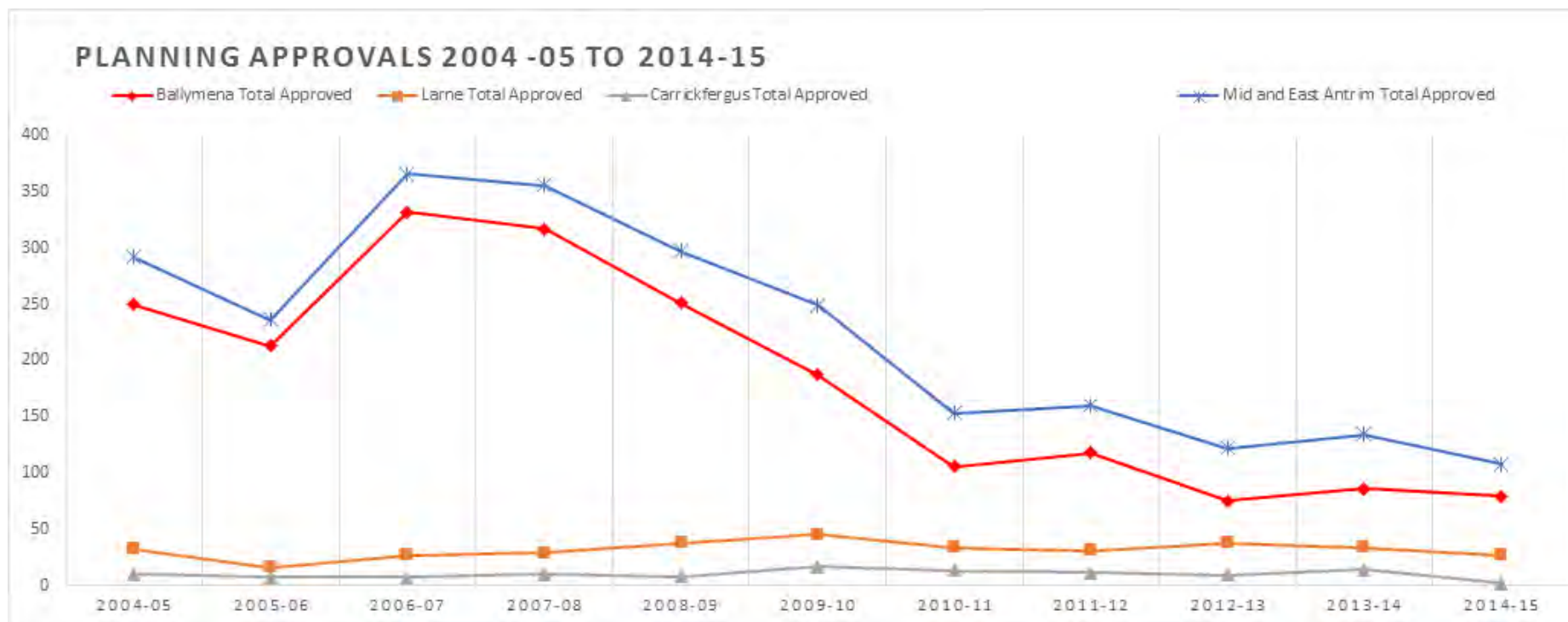


Figure 1

- 3.6 Table 1 shows that a total of 700 Outline, Full and RM planning applications for single rural houses (including replacements) were decided by DOE in the 2010-2015 period in Mid and East Antrim Borough. Of these, 470 were within Ballymena, 175 were within Larne and 55 were within Carrickfergus. Since almost 97% (677) of these applications were approved, it is not considered essential to include specific information for applications that were refused or withdrawn, even though this can also be an indication of development pressure.
- 3.7 In order to assess the spatial distribution of development pressure over the 5 year study period, all rural new and replacement single dwelling approvals have been plotted as red triangles on a 'dot map' (See Map No. 1). Applications which fall on the same site are only shown as one dot at the scale displayed. All other pre-existing residential properties with a postal address are shown as blue dots in order to provide some insight into the overall cumulative impact of single dwellings in the countryside.
- 3.7 It can be seen from the geographical distribution of single dwelling approvals shown on Map 1, that development pressure throughout the countryside is not uniform, and that certain areas are subject to relatively more intensive pressure than others. It is considered that the spatial pattern of development pressure can be categorised into 3 broad categories, depicted on Maps 2 and 3, as follows:
- Higher pressure areas – Red
 - Medium Pressure areas – Yellow
 - Low Pressure areas - Green

Higher Pressure Areas

- 3.8 Generally, areas of higher development pressure are mostly associated with much of the rural area within the former Ballymena Council Area. Specific areas of high pressure within and outside of this area include:
- Wide swathe of land running north/south between the River Bann and Ballymena extending north to Glarryford and south to Grange Corner
 - Lands between the A26 Lisnevenagh Road and the A36 Moorfields Road from south of Pennybridge Industrial Estate to the Council Boundary, south of Kells/Connor and Woodgreen
 - Lands on the eastern side of the A26 Crankill Road at Fenagh Road to the A36 Cushendall Road extending south to the Dervnaveagh Road and north to the Clough River
 - Lands along the A36 Cushendall Road from McGregor's Corner to Cargan
 - Lands from Woodside Industrial Estate along the A42 Raceview Road to Broughshane and from Broughshane along the A42 Carnlough Road to the Sheddings
 - Lands south of the Braid River around the Buckna area

- Lands in the vicinity of Ballystrudder and to the south towards Whitehead as well as the southern half of Islandmagee from Low Road across to Gobbins Road

Medium Pressure Areas

- Lands around Clough and westward to Glarryford extending to the extreme north-west corner of the Council boundary
- A swathe of land from the south-east side of Broughshane to the Whappstown Road just south of the Battery Inn
- A small pocket of land running south-west to north-east from the most northerly tip of the Ballymena Development limit where the Doury Road meets the Ballymena bypass to the Knockan Road north of Broughshane
- Lands around the hamlets of Drumcrow, Carnalbanagh, Feystown, Deerpark and Carnageer continuing north-east along both Glencloy and Glenarm to the villages of Carnlough and Glenarm and along the Coast Road to Garron Point in the north and Larne and across to Kilwaughter in the south.
- Lands on either side of the A8 Larne Line at Lower and Upper Ballyoley Road towards the north-west, to Ballygowan and Moss Road in the south-east
- Lands to the west of Redbrae Road from Liberty Road to Cairn Road.
- A swathe of land from the A8 Belfast Road in a south-east direction to the development limits of Carrickfergus and Whitehead with an arm extending westward to the Watchill Road

Lower Pressure Areas include:

- Much of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB (largely coinciding with areas designated for their Natural Heritage importance)
- Area around Shanes Hill
- The fringes of the River Bann and Lough Beg
- Area around Elliott's Hill
- Carrickfergus Escarpment

4.0 Analysis of Development Pressure in the Context of Areas Designated for their Natural Heritage or Landscape Importance

Natural Heritage

- 4.1 Map 2 illustrates the above 3 broad categories of development pressure levels for single dwelling approvals in the context of areas within the Borough that are designated for their natural heritage importance such as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) RAMSAR sites and Areas Of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI).
- 4.2 From this map it is readily apparent that areas designated for their natural heritage importance have experienced much less pressure for single housing

development that other rural areas of the Borough. It is acknowledged that in some upland / peatland and wetland areas, this may be more a reflection of the adverse conditions for human settlement, as opposed to the influence of planning policy. Nevertheless, it seems safe to assume that most of these areas are not under threat of significant change if the current policy provisions of PPS21 were to be retained. One possible exception to this, the Lower Bann Valley, is discussed further in paragraph 4.8.

Landscape

- 4.3 Map No.3 illustrates the varying levels of development pressure for single dwelling approvals in the context of areas within the Borough that are designated for their landscape importance, namely the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Map 3 also shows 'Areas of Scenic Quality' and 'Distinctive Landscape Settings', as identified by NI Environment Agency in the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000 (NILCA). These areas are regarded as vulnerable to landscape change. While they have no statutory status, they are nevertheless significant landscape assets. Where known development pressures are coupled with limited capacity to absorb development (for example through topography or vegetation), it may be prudent to offer protection to such areas through the Plan. A draft Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment has recently completed a consultation period.
- 4.4 From Map 3 it appears that development pressure is relatively low throughout most of the AONB. A notable exception is the area to the north-west and south-east of the A42 Ballymena to Carnlough road, extending well beyond Buckna, into the heart of the AONB. Higher development pressure is also evident within the AONB at its north-west extremity, in the vicinity of Cargan and Newtowncrommelin.
- 4.5 Areas of higher development pressure areas which encompass vulnerable landscapes as identified by NILCA include:
- lands to the east of the Lower Bann Valley
 - lands to the west of Cullybackey
 - lands to the south-east of Gracehill
 - lands in proximity to the A42 between Ballymena and Broughshane and to the north of Broughshane
 - lands around Ballystrudder and the southern half of Islandmagee
 - lands to the west of Whitehead
- 4.6 From this analysis it would seem that most of the land contained within the AONB is not under significant threat of change and it may be appropriate to maintain the current policy provisions of PPS 21. However, it also seems prudent to focus further survey work in the two areas of 'higher pressure' noted in paragraph 4.4 and perhaps also in areas within or on the margins of the AONB, where medium levels of development pressure have been identified. Likewise, the 6 areas of 'vulnerable landscape' identified through the NILCA study and referred to above, as being subject to higher development pressure,

should be reassessed, in order to inform the nature and level of protection that might be appropriate through the Plan.

- 4.7 NILCA acknowledges that some types of landscape have a greater ability to absorb development than others, for example where drumlin type topography or heavily wooded areas are predominant. Thus, in regard to the area of higher development pressure identified to the west of Cullybackey, NILCA notes that where there is undulating landform particularly in areas with a robust network of hedgerows, there will be greater capacity to absorb further development without causing demonstrable harm. Further surveys will be necessary to assess whether this remains the case in this area, and in others such as Islandmagee, where NILCA has suggested that further development of single dwellings is possible provided it is carefully managed.
- 4.8 NILCA generally promotes growth within existing settlements as a means of reducing scattered rural dwellings and ribbon development along roads, which may lead to a degradation of the rural landscape. Accordingly, it is recommended that this option is also explored through the Plan; particularly around Buckna and Newtowncrommelin which are built up areas within the AONB not currently designated as settlements by the existing Ballymena Area Plan.
- 4.8 The flat floodplain landscape of the Lower Bann Valley is contained in LCA 52 of the NILCA study. The document notes that this landscape is particularly sensitive where it is overlooked by the ridges to the east of Portglenone, and in areas where there is extensive wetland habitat. Further as shown on Map 2, this area includes a designated RAMSAR site and SPA and is therefore of a sensitive area in the environmental context. Given that there is high development pressure immediately to the east of the river corridor, and along its entire length, it may be an appropriate measure to introduce a protection area along the eastern fringe of the River Bann extending from south of Portglenone to the Council Boundary just south of Ballyscullion. This would serve to protect this 'Area of Scenic Quality' and environmentally sensitive area from inappropriate development.
- 4.9 The recommendations highlighted above are largely based on a desktop assessment only. It is suggested that a more detailed assessment, including complementary field survey work would be required in order to justify the introduction of a stricter policy regime in certain areas, or relaxation in others as the case may be.

5.0 Conclusion –Single Housing

- 5.1 It is clear from the above analysis that the rate of rural housing approvals under PPS 21 is significantly less than that under previous rural planning policies, particularly under PSRNI. Furthermore, since its final adoption in June 2010, and having had a chance to 'bed in', the rate of rural approvals has more than halved.

- 5.2 Generally, the development pressure analysis shows little evidence of significant pressure across the Borough thus suggesting that PPS 21 has been generally effective, with some exceptions, in meeting rural housing needs while maintaining rural character. If these policies or similar provisions are retained over the Plan period then it is anticipated that they will maintain this balance.
- 5.3 Broadly speaking, the analysis suggests that areas within the Borough that are valued for their high scenic value or natural heritage importance have experienced less pressure for single house developments than other parts of the countryside. As such, it may be safe to assume that these areas are, for the most part, not under threat of significant change if the current policy provisions of PPS21 policy were to be retained. Accordingly, a bespoke policy response may not be necessary in this context.
- 5.4 Notwithstanding these general conclusions, there are a few localised areas (referred to in paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5) that have been identified as warranting further detailed consideration, as to whether a more restrictive approach might be appropriate.

6.0 Wind Energy Development – Overall Trends in Mid & East Antrim

- 6.1 DOE has provided records of planning decisions issued for all single wind turbines and wind farm applications within the Borough over the period between August 2002 and March 2015. This period includes the first 6 years following the introduction of Planning Policy Statement 18 ‘Renewable Energy’, which sets out the Department’s planning policy for all development that generates energy from renewable sources. All decisions identified through the DOE statistics are plotted as a ‘dot map’ (See Map No.1). Applications which fall on the same site will show as one dot only at the scale displayed.
- 6.2 Information on the numbers of applications determined and approved is set out in Table 2 and Figure 2. The most significant trend is the sharp increase in the number of determinations and approvals post 2011. Prior to the publication of PPS 18 Renewable Energy, in August 2009, applications for wind energy development were determined with the policy context of Policy PSU 12 ‘Renewable Energy’ of ‘A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland’. Stringent renewable energy targets set by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) which stipulates that 40% of energy production will be generated through renewables by 2020¹, formed the backdrop to a more permissive renewable energy policy being introduced through PPS18 in August 2009. This coupled with government subsidy explains the sharp increase in applications and approvals for wind energy development since 2011-12. There

¹ DETI-Statistics on Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation in Northern Ireland- September 2014. The Executive’s Programme for Government target to “Encourage achievement of 20% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2015” and the Executive’s Strategic Energy Framework which includes a target to achieve 40% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020.

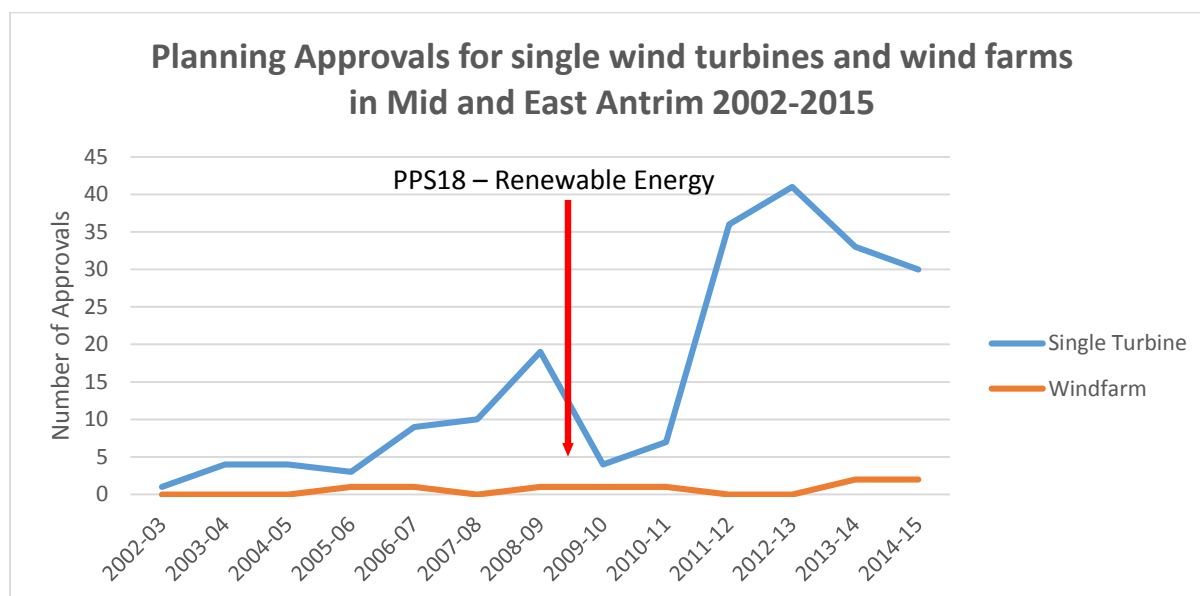
has been a recent downward trend in the number of approvals for single turbines.

Table 2: Planning Approvals for single wind turbines and wind farms in Mid and East Antrim 2002-2015

	Single Turbines			Wind Farms		
YEAR	Decided	Approvals	% Approved	Decided	Approvals	% Approved
2002-03	1	1	100%	0	0	0
2003-04	4	4	100%	0	0	0
2004-05	5	4	80%	0	0	0
2005-06	3	3	100%	1	1	100%
2006-07	9	9	82%	1	0	0
2007-08	11	10	91%	0	0	0
2008-09	19	19	100%	1	0	0
2009-10 ²	4	4	100%	1	1	100%
2010-11	8	7	88%	1	1	100%
2011-12	43	36	84%	0	0	0
2012-13	44	41	93%	0	0	0
2013-14	36	33	92%	2	2	100%
2014-15	44	30	68%	5	2	40%
TOTAL	231	201	87%	12	7	66%

Source: DOE Statistics

Figure 2



6.3 As of December 2015 Mid and East Antrim has 7 windfarms³ which have received planning permission, and a further 1 application currently under consideration. This compares to a total of 108 planning windfarm approvals for Northern Ireland as a whole. In relation to single wind turbines, there are 231 approvals for such proposals in Mid and East Antrim, with 2337 approvals in

² Introduction of PPS18.

³ Defined as development comprising more than 2 turbines.

the whole of Northern Ireland⁴. As of March 2015 there were 51 pending decisions on singles wind turbines within the Borough compared to 521 for Northern Ireland as a whole.

- 6.4 Whilst there are significant numbers of approvals for wind energy in the Borough, there is a lack of information regarding how many have been implemented. It should be noted that a number of historic planning permissions may have lapsed, and will no longer be eligible to be enacted unless previously commenced.

Spatial Analysis of Wind Energy Decisions

- 6.5 Map No.4 illustrates the geographical spread of single turbine and wind farm decisions across Mid and East Antrim from 2002/03 to 2014/15 in the form of a dot map. Map No.5 shows the geographical distribution of wind energy development in the context of natural heritage / environmental designations. Map No.6 illustrates the spread of decisions in the context of sensitive landscapes identified within the Assessment for Wind Energy Development, Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)⁵ and other relevant environmental designations. Map No.7 highlights wind energy development in the context of NILCA 2000 Character Areas.

Identification of Spatial Patterns of Development Pressure (Wind Energy)

- 6.6 Throughout the council area there are significant variations in the spatial distribution of wind energy developments (Map No.4). There is a visibly higher concentration of wind energy development in the western, northern and north-east sectors of the legacy Ballymena Council area. Other clusters are apparent around to the west of Larne; north of Carrickfergus; and to a slightly lesser extent in the area between Ballymena and Kells. In contrast, the remainder of the Borough has a medium to low concentration of wind energy development, with pockets of no pressure, some of which generally correspond with environmental designations.
- 6.7 The AONB designation has not prevented wind energy development. Map 6 reveals that there are significant clusters around the hamlets of Carnalbanagh, Drumcrow, Deerpark and Feystown. Pressure within the AONB is also evident in the area around Kilwaughter. As previously noted, and indicated by Map 5, there is little pressure within those parts of the AONB designated for their international importance as natural heritage sites (Antrim Hills SPA and Garron Plateau & Main Valley Bogs SACs).
- 6.8 The geographical spread of wind energy development across the Borough in the context of the LCAs defined by NILCA is illustrated in Map No.7. The following trends have been identified:

⁴ DOE Statistics.

⁵ Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes, Supplementary Planning Guidance to Accompany Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy', August 2010, Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Higher Development Pressure Areas:

- Lands to the north of Clough – between Ballycreahagh Road and Glenleslie Road.
- North-west of Cullybackey - lands located at Tullygrawley Road, Shellinghill Road, Loughmagarry Road and the A26.
- Lands west of Larne and north of Kilwaughter centred on the Ballymullock Road, Mullaghsandall Road and Deer Park Road.
- North of Ballystrudder – lands adjacent to Low Road and Middle Road.
- Lands extending northwards from Carrickfergus, easterly towards the coastline at Larne Lough and westerly towards New Line.
- To the north and west of the village of Raloo between the Ballyrickard Road and Crosshill Road.
- Pocket of concentrated wind energy development located to the north-west of Tilledarg.

Medium Development Pressure Areas:

- A swathe of land extending from the south to the north of the Borough between Portglenone and Cullybackey and as far south as the settlement of Grange Corner.
- A linear section of land which extends between Ballygally westwards towards Drumcrow.
- A crescent of elevated land which runs in an easterly direction from Martinstown to Straidkilly which abuts the Antrim Hills Special Protection Area to the north.

Low Development Pressure Areas:

- Some areas that have experienced minimal pressure from wind energy development are located within LCA 124 Larne Basalt Moorland, LCA 122 Garron Plateau, and LCA 52 Lower Bann Valley.
- Areas with no pressure include:
- Garron Plateau SAC and ASSI, Antrim Hills SPA and sections of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB located between Martinstown and Straidkilly, and between Crosshill running eastwards towards Millbrook.
- Area located to the north and south of Dunminning Road extending northwards to the Borough boundary.
- Large section of elevated moorland located to the south-east of Newtowncrommelin, including Longmore Wood extending onwards in a north-east direction to Carnlough and Glenarm.
- Swathe of land extending in a northerly and southerly direction from the Shane Hill Road on the Mid Antrim Plateau, including Capanagh Forest to the north and Ballyboley Forest to the south.
- Small pocket of farmland located directly to the south of Ballymena between the Straid Road and the A26.
- Linear section of shoreline located to the east of Lough Beg extending 4kms inland in an easterly direction.

- Small area extending in a north-west direction from Galgorm to Cullybackey straddling the Ballymena Road.
- Area which extends northwards from Kells and Conor to Broughshane.

7.0 Assessment of Sensitivity of Landscape Character Areas to Wind Energy Development.

7.1 Detailed assessment of the sensitivity of rural areas to wind energy development has been produced by NIEA for all rural areas in Northern Ireland. This guidance seeks to support the policy context of PPS18 in facilitating the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment in order to achieve Northern Ireland's renewable energy targets and to realise the benefits of renewable energy. The guidance is based on the sensitivity of Northern Ireland's landscapes to wind energy development and contains an assessment of each of the 130 Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) in Northern Ireland by referencing the characteristics and values associated with each LCA.

7.2 Higher pressure areas which are sensitive to landscape change.

- **LCA 59 Cullybackey and Clogh Mills Drumlins** – Area of high pressure is located NW of Cullybackey - lands located at Tulleygrawley Road, Shellinghill Road, Loughmagarry Road and the A26. This LCA has a total of 17 single turbines with an area of high concentration located north of Cullybackey with 6 of these turbines being located within close proximity to each other. The remaining turbines are distributed quite evenly across the remaining area of the LCA.

For much of this landscape views are inward-looking and short, interrupted by topography and vegetation. This reduces the sensitivity of this landscape to wind energy development. However the variation in topography over short distances and the small scale of the drumlins (which are often just 20m height) and the complex landform mean that this landscape could easily be overwhelmed by poorly sited or inappropriately scaled wind energy development, especially since there is already wind energy development in adjoining LCAs to the east and west. Local landscape sensitivity is high due to the quality of the landscape along the river valleys and the value of local landscape features such as wetland sites and cultural heritage features.

Towards the northern part of LCA 59, on the more elevated ridges, the scale of the landscape is larger and there are fewer sensitive cultural and natural heritage sites. In addition the influence of development and the A26 corridor in the area north of Ballymena makes this area somewhat less sensitive. **Overall Sensitivity - High to medium.**

- **LCA 98 Carrickfergus Upland Pastures, LCA 127 Larne Ridgeland & LCA 130 Carrickfergus Farmed Escarpment** - Lands extending

northwards from Carrickfergus until the A8 Belfast Road, easterly towards the coastline at Larne Lough and in a westerly direction towards New Line. This area of high pressure covers 3 LCA's, the whole of LCA's 98 & 130 and a large section of LCA 127, located to the south of Larne and north of Carrickfergus. These 3 LCA's have a total of 48 approvals for wind energy development, one of which is for a windfarm comprising of 2 turbines. The area of high pressure which contains 16 wind turbine approvals is centred on lands located south of Raloo, north of Carrickfergus and extends in an easterly direction towards Ballycarry. A portion LCA 130 directly north of Carrickfergus is also identified as an area of distinctive landscape quality, 3 single turbines have been approved within this area

- **LCA 98 Carrickfergus Upland Pastures** - This landscape has characteristics that suggest suitability, in parts, for wind energy development, while other parts of the LCA would be highly sensitive and much less suitable. The north-western and northern parts of the area are least sensitive as they lie away from the escarpment edge and Belfast Lough, are partly enclosed by forestry, and are already affected by intrusive influences.

The southern and eastern parts of the LCA are much more sensitive, due primarily to their extreme visual prominence. The monument at Knockagh is a particular landmark whose setting is highly sensitive. **Overall Sensitivity - High to medium.**

- **LCA 125 Tardree Upland Pastures** – a small pocket of clustering occurs NE of Tildarg where approval has been granted for 4 windfarms and 4 single turbines. The visually exposed character of this LCA suggests some sensitivity to wind energy development. The southern slopes form a setting to Antrim and are particularly visible from the M2; while the northern slopes and ridges protrude into the lower-lying landscape of the Ballymena Farmland (LCA 116) and form part of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. Scenic quality in these areas is also relatively good.

However there are some locations in the central and southern parts of the LCA where the ridges have a smooth profile, visibility is reduced by dips in the landform or by forestry, and the landscape has already been affected by man-made influences. In these areas landscape sensitivity might be less. **Overall Sensitivity – Medium.**

- **LCA 127 Larne Ridgeland** - This landscape is contained visually by higher land to the north and south; and parts of the LCA are affected by development such as the power station, quarrying, pylons and transport corridors. These factors tend to reduce the landscape's sensitivity to wind energy development. However, the northern slopes of this LCA are valued for their scenic quality and the ridges in the south-east are highly visible

from Larne Lough and the coast to the north. These factors tend to increase sensitivity.

The low ridges behind Black Hill and Cross Hill are potentially most suited to wind energy development, but they are relatively narrow and the landscape could easily be overwhelmed by inappropriate wind energy development. They would be less sensitive to turbine groupings that are set well back from the edge of Larne Lough, thus avoiding both significant visual impacts and also impacts on important bird habitats and species.

Overall Sensitivity - High to medium.

- **LCA 130 Carrickfergus Farmed Escarpment** - Notwithstanding some intrusive influences, this LCA is intrinsically highly sensitive to wind energy development in landscape and visual terms, sharing many of its characteristics and sensitivities with other escarpment landscapes around Belfast, notably the Belfast Basalt Escarpment, of which it is the geological continuation. It has distinctive small scale field patterns, notable skylines and settings and is visually very exposed, with a relatively wild character.

Wind energy development could easily dominate landscape character, and be visually very prominent, intrusive and be difficult to access. **Overall Sensitivity – High.**

- **LCA 117 Central Ballymena Glens** – Area of high development pressure is centred on lands to the North of Clough – between Ballycreahagh Road and Glenleslie Road. This large LCA which sweeps around the southernmost portion of the Antrim Hills SPA and has a total of 48 approvals for single turbines and 2 wind farms (total of 19 turbines). The area identified through the dot map analysis as having a degree of high pressure has approval for 18 single turbines within a relatively small geographical area.

These glens are extremely sensitive to wind energy development due to their distinctive character, relative wildness and tranquillity, high scenic quality and key role in providing views from surrounding ridges and major tourist routes.

The south-eastern half of this LCA (Braid valley) also forms part of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and is an important setting for Slemish. Elsewhere the distinctive knolls and outliers on the valley sides are sensitive in both character and visual terms and are valued for their scenic and perceptual qualities. In the lower-lying valley landscapes there are many small scale features. Development here could be out of scale with the landscape and might appear to ‘flatten’ the landform and reduce the sense of contrast with surrounding upland areas.

The prominent upper slopes on the western edges of the LCA are most sensitive because of their very open visibility. There might be some

localised areas of lower sensitivity on the less prominent middle slopes.
Overall Sensitivity – High.

- **LCA 124 Larne Basalt Moorland & LCA 127 Larne Ridgeland** – Development pressure is located at lands west of Larne and north of Kilwaughter centred on the Ballymullock Road, Mullaghsandall Road and Deerpark Road, where a total of 9 single turbines are clustered within a relatively small geographical area.
- **LCA 124 Larne Basalt Moorland** - This LCA has a large scale, simple landform and land cover that suggest some suitability for wind energy development. However, the outer hills often have a distinctive form and wide visibility; hence they are especially sensitive to wind energy development, whether they lie within the AONB or not. This also applies to the narrow finger of land in the northern part of this LCA which forms an important setting to Glenarm and the coastal landscapes. As in other parts of the Antrim Plateau, areas that can be seen from the coast and coastal glens are of the utmost sensitivity.
The central parts of the LCA have an open plateau landform with simple, uniform land cover and these areas might be less sensitive, particularly where there is some topographic screening and where forestry plantations have already affected the area's landscapes and moorland habitats.
Overall Sensitivity – High to medium.
- **LCA 128 Islandmagee** – Wind turbine development pressure is centred primarily on lands located north of Ballystrudder, adjacent to Low Road and Middle Road. This relatively small LCA which covers Islandmagee and a small portion of landscape on the western edge of Larne Lough contains a total of 16 approved single turbine developments. A small high density cluster of 8 single turbines is located north of Ballystrudder. Islandmagee is also defined within NIICA 2000 as being an area of distinctive landscape setting.

The general openness of the landscape and the remote and wild qualities of Islandmagee itself make this LCA very sensitive to wind energy development. Similarly the hills and ridges which flank the settlement of Whitehead are important in defining a setting to the town and are also visually sensitive to wind energy development. In addition, Islandmagee is valued for its high scenic quality; and Larne Lough and its shores for their nature conservation and bird habitats.

It may therefore be difficult to accommodate wind energy developments in this LCA. A possible exception is land associated with the power station at Ballylumford, which might have lower sensitivity to appropriately scaled wind energy development. **Overall Sensitivity – High.**

7.3 **Medium development pressure areas which are sensitive to landscape change.**

- **LCA 58 Long Mountain Ridge** - A swathe of land extending from the south to the north of the Borough between Portglenone and Cullybackey and as far south as the settlement of Grange Corner. There are a total of 21 single wind turbines approved within this LCA, evenly distributed across this particular landscape.

The gentle convex shape of the ridge and its relative simplicity of character tend to reduce this landscape's sensitivity to wind energy development; and although the area is visible over a wide area, close range views are generally filtered by existing vegetation. In addition, this LCA is not of exceptional landscape or scenic quality. This means that, overall, landscape sensitivity is medium.

However, the side slopes and southern sections of the ridge are of a lower elevation and have a more complex topography as well as smaller scale field patterns which increase sensitivity. The southern sections of the ridge also form a setting to Lough Neagh. In addition landscape features such as craggy outcrops at the heads of streams, archaeological sites, estate landscapes and dispersed pattern of settlement are key constraints in some areas. **Overall Sensitivity – Medium.**

- **LCA 117 Central Ballymena Glens** - This large LCA sweeps around the southern edge of the Antrim Hills SPA from Martinstown to Straidkilly. A portion of this LCA extending in a south easterly direction from the Cushendall Road towards the Carnlough Road and onwards to the Sheddings is considered to have medium to high pressure with a total of 29 single turbines evenly distributed across the landscape.
- **LCA's 123 Larne Glens, 124 Larne Basalt Moor and 126 Larne Coast** – A linear section of land which extends between Ballygally westwards towards Drumcrow and onwards to Carnalbanagh and incorporates a section from each of these LCA's. This particular area of medium density pressure has approval for 11 single turbines. **Overall Sensitivity – High to Medium.**

7.4 Low pressure areas which are sensitive to landscape change.

- **LCA 52 Lower Bann Valley** – only a long linear section of LCA 52 is contained within the Borough, with 2 single turbines approved in the northern most point. While the relatively simple and flat topography found in this area in theory makes it suited to wind energy development, this LCA has a wealth of nature conservation interest and designed parkland landscapes as well as areas of high scenic quality associated with Lough Beg and Lough Neagh. These qualities act as key constraints to wind energy development. The river valley floodplain of the Lower Bann and tributary river valleys are also particularly sensitive to wind energy

development because of their openness and small scale drumlin landscape features.

The landscape is somewhat less sensitive where the topography is relatively simple; vegetation provides localised enclosure and potential screening; and there are fewer sensitive cultural or natural heritage sites.

Overall Sensitivity – High.

- **LCA 116 Ballymena Farmland** – expansive area which extends northwards from Kells and Conor to Broughshane. Planning permission has been granted for 12 single turbines developments. The moderately enclosed character of this landscape with its hedgerow trees and shelterbelts helps to reduce its sensitivity to wind energy development. However the upper slopes of this LCA are visually prominent from lower-lying areas in this LCA and land further west. These slopes are also important in forming a setting to the settlements, and any development here could affect much of the LCA. To the south, the river valley of the Kells Water is especially sensitive due to its small intimate character and landscape features.

Areas away from settlements, key ridgelines and existing pylons might be less sensitive, as might the principal transport corridors and industrial areas on the edge of Ballymena. **Overall Sensitivity - High to medium.**

- **LCA 122 Garron Plateau** – large expanse of upland plateau located to the north of the Borough. This area is also part of the Garron Plateau SAC and ASSI, Antrim Hills SPA and a section of the Causeway Coast and Glens AONB located between Martinstown and Straidkilly. 3 single turbine developments have been granted permission within this LCA, 2 are located to the east of Cargan with the remaining turbine being located on the eastern edge to the north east of Carnageer.

This LCA has a large scale, simple expansive landform and land cover that in theory make at least parts of the area suitable for wind energy development. However, the stepped landforms and rounded knolls around the plateau edges form prominent open skylines that are highly visually sensitive and are the setting for the coastal glens of Glenariff and Glencloy to the east. Parts of the LCA are overlooked from slopes and summits to the north around Glenariff Forest Park, and this too heightens sensitivity. The area around Glenariff Forest Park is highly valued for recreation, while the northern reaches of the LCA, as it extends towards the coast, becomes increasingly complex with distinctive upland loughs and rocky outcrops. These factors, together with the area's scenic quality and outstanding intact peatland habitats result in high sensitivity over most of the LCA.

Areas of lesser sensitivity occur in the south-west, for example in areas of simple terrain within or close to the extensive coniferous plantation of Cleggan Forest, where recreational access is limited. Here the forestry might help contain visibility and use of existing forestry access tracks could reduce infrastructure impacts on fragile moorland landscapes and habitats. **Overall Sensitivity - High to medium.**

- **LCA 123 Larne Glens** - A long narrow linear swathe of land which extends southwards from Glenarm to Drumcrow. This LCA has approval for 2 wind turbine developments which are located directly east of Drumcrow.

This landscape is highly sensitive overall. The more open areas nearer the coast offer long coastal views, and although the lower lying areas are relatively well treed they are also overlooked from surrounding higher ground and form a central visual focus within the LCA. Similarly the upper slopes of the glens are of high visual sensitivity, providing an outstanding backdrop and skyline to the valleys. Both these areas are inherently sensitive to wind energy development. The outstanding scenic quality of this landscape and its popularity for visitors and for outdoor recreation increase its sensitivity still further.

The very high sensitivity across the whole area indicates that there is limited scope for wind energy development in this LCA. **Overall Sensitivity – High.**

- **LCA 124 Larne Basalt Moorland** – Whilst there is some concentration of wind development on the northern and eastern boundaries, the remainder of this LCA has remained untouched and currently has no wind development pressure. This LCA has a large scale, simple landform and land cover that suggest some suitability for wind energy development. However, the outer hills often have a distinctive form and wide visibility; hence they are especially sensitive to wind energy development, whether they lie within the AONB or not. This also applies to the narrow finger of land in the northern part of this LCA which forms an important setting to Glenarm and the coastal landscapes. As in other parts of the Antrim Plateau, areas that can be seen from the coast and coastal glens are of the utmost sensitivity.

The central parts of the LCA have an open plateau landform with simple, uniform land cover and these areas might be less sensitive, particularly where there is some topographic screening and where forestry plantations have already affected the area's landscapes and moorland habitats. Overall Sensitivity – High to medium.

- LCA 126 Larne Coast** - This LCA is highly sensitive to wind energy development because it is highly visible from the A2 tourist route and from elevated land above – particularly from key viewpoints such as Sallagh Braes. There are 4 wind turbine approvals located within this LCA, one of which is located within Cairncastle. Towards Larne urban influences make the area somewhat less sensitive but nevertheless it is still highly visible. This high visibility, together with high scenic quality, dramatic and memorable coastal views, strong natural and cultural heritage interests, and value in terms of tourism and recreation, means that there are limited areas within this LCA of lower sensitivity to wind energy development.
- The possible exception is land associated with the port of Larne, where brownfield and industrial sites might have a lower sensitivity to appropriately scaled wind energy development. **Overall Sensitivity – High.**

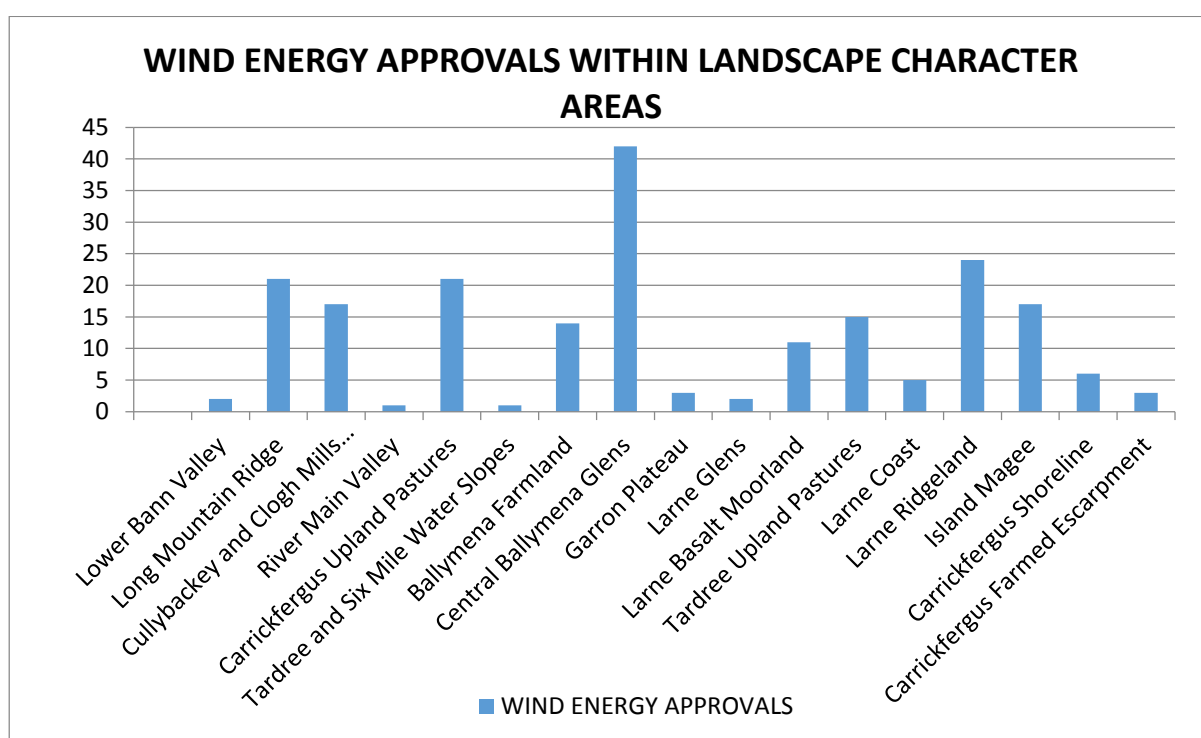


Figure 3

8.0 Conclusion – Wind Energy

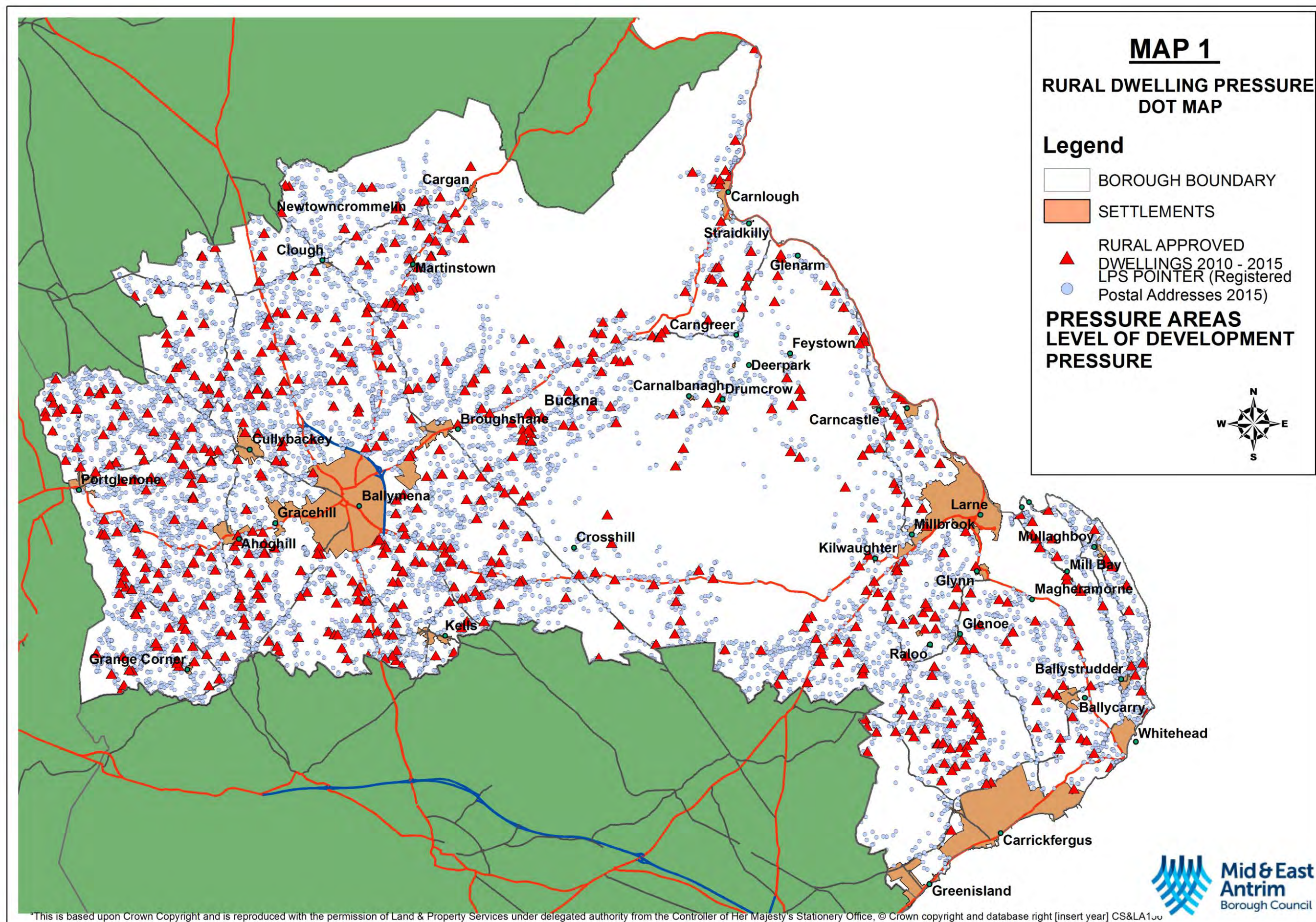
- 8.1 While the number of decisions in relation to wind energy development has increased since 2009, very recent trends do not indicate a continued rise. This may be linked to uncertainties over network infrastructure, operating incentives or the costs of installing this technology, all of which are beyond the control of planning policy.

- 8.2 A broad overview of the development pressure indicates, in general, that areas valued for their landscape quality or natural heritage importance have experienced relatively less pressure for development. That said, there has been significant pressure in other sensitive areas such as the Carrickfergus Escarpment and Islandmagee, which given the proximity to the coast, wide visibility and potential impacts on tourism as well as landscape, may need to be carefully managed in the future.
- 8.3 The focus of the LDP in bringing forward strategic policy, should be on setting a vision for wind energy development, determining the thresholds of acceptable change, identifying where the most suitable locations are, and providing guidance on appropriate scale and design. In so doing it will be important to take account of the patterns of development pressure uncovered by this study including the cumulative impacts of wind energy development as well as the differential capacity of landscapes to absorb further development. Other forms of development such as telecommunications masts and other high structures, which have the potential to cause adverse impacts in vulnerable landscapes, also need to be taken into account.
- 8.4 The trends highlighted above are largely based on a desktop assessment only. It is suggested that a more detailed assessment, including complementary field survey work would be required in order to justify the introduction of any form of a more stringent policy regime in certain areas, or relaxation in others as the case may be.

9.0 General Conclusion & Recommendation









- 9.1 This paper provides a broad overview of patterns of development pressure associated with single dwellings and wind energy development in the countryside of Mid and East Antrim. It will provide an evidence base that will need to be supplemented by further survey work, to inform policy formulation through the LDP.
- 9.2 Policy formulation should reflect differences in the area including the varying ability of landscapes to absorb development. Policy should also strive to strike an appropriate balance between protection of the environment from inappropriate development, while supporting and sustaining rural communities in order to take due account of the RRD and SPPS.
- 9.3 It is recommended that:
- i. This paper is taken into account when formulating countryside planning policies in the LDP relating to single dwellings and to renewable energy;
 - ii. The paper be sent to NIEA for consideration as it forms part of the Countryside Assessment;
 - iii. The development pressure analysis paper is part of the Countryside Assessment and as such is part of the Sustainability Appraisal

(incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment), which in turn must inform the emerging LDP.






MAP 2 **RURAL DWELLING PRESSURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNATIONS**

Legend

-  BOROUGH BOUNDARY
-  SETTLEMENTS
-  This area includes a number of overlapping designations
-  SPA
-  SAC
-  RAMSAR
-  NATURE RESERVE
-  ASSI

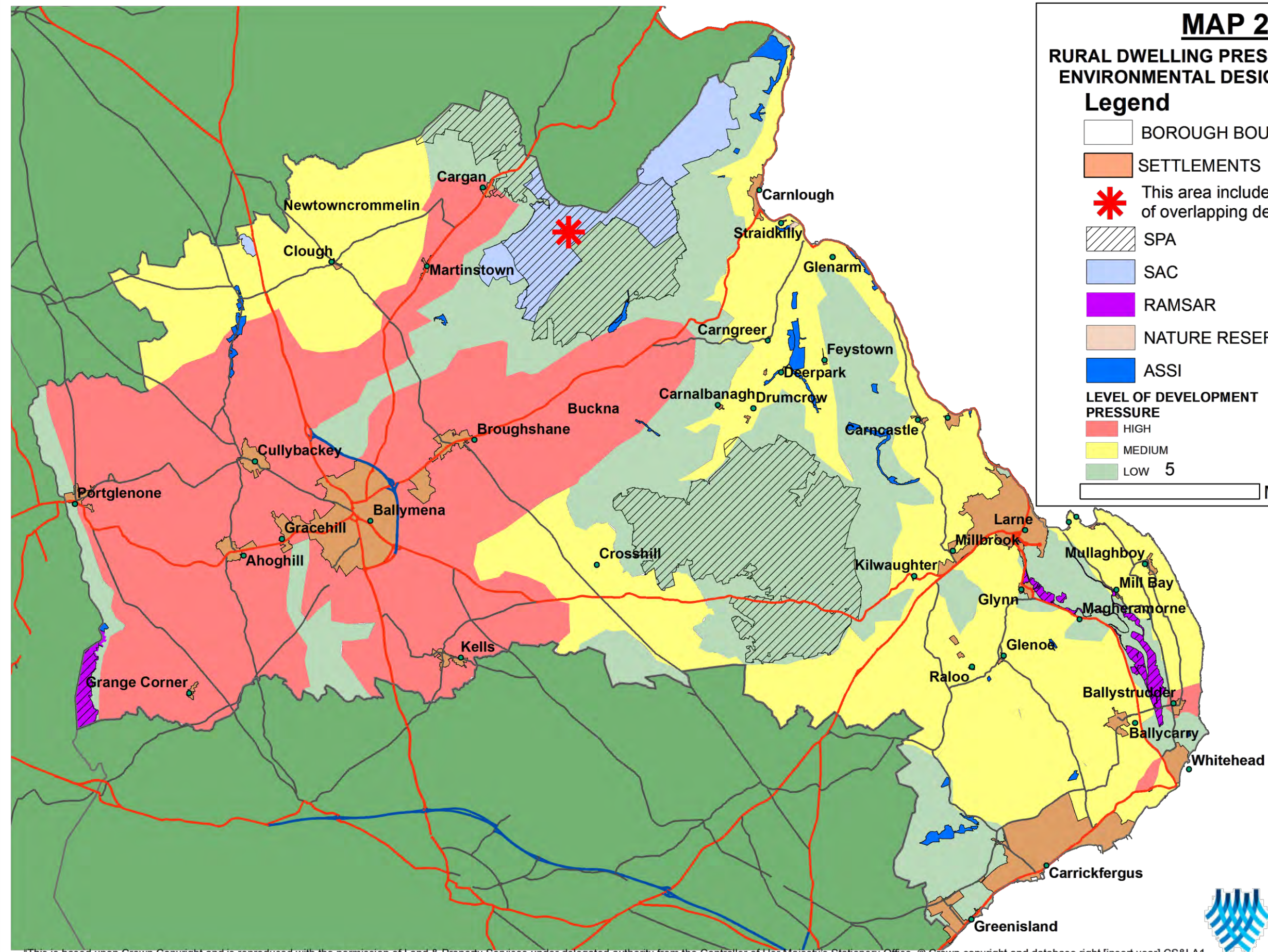
LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE

-  HIGH
-  MEDIUM
-  LOW

5




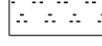
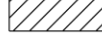


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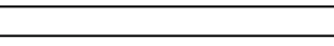

MAP 3 **RURAL DWELLING PRESSURE** **AONB AND NILCA 2000 -** **LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS AND** **SETTLEMENT SETTINGS**

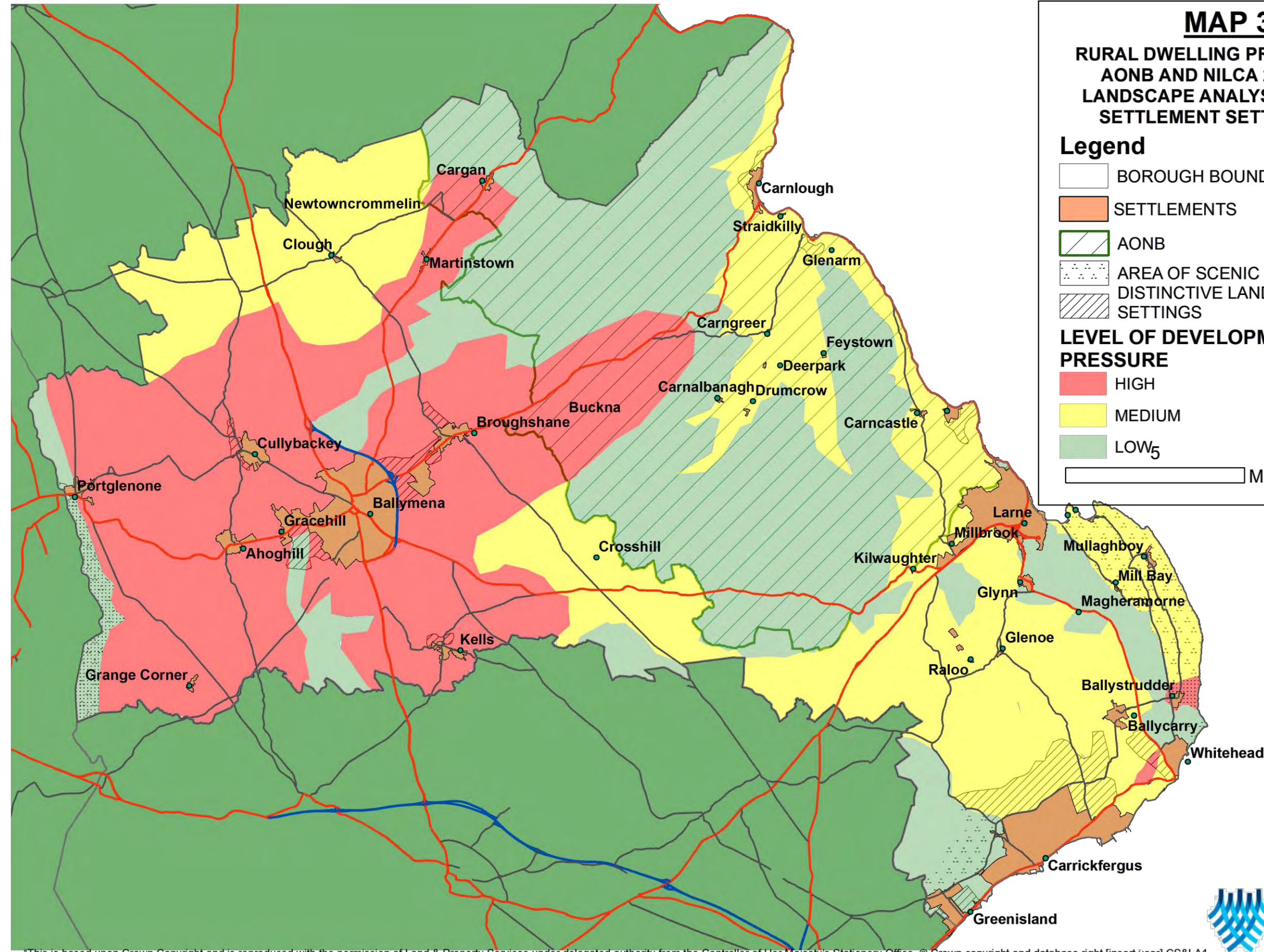
Legend

-  BOROUGH BOUNDARY
-  SETTLEMENTS
-  AONB
-  AREA OF SCENIC QUALITY
-  DISTINCTIVE LANDSCAPE SETTINGS

LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE

-  HIGH
-  MEDIUM
-  LOW

 Miles 



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