

Outdoor Recreation Strategy and 10 Year Action Plan
for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

April 2019

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland
on behalf of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

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Acronyms

ABCBC	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
ASSI	Area of Special Scientific Interest
BOSS	Benefits of Outdoor Sports for Society
CANI	Canoe Association Northern Ireland
DEA	District Electoral Area
DAERA	Department of Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DfC	Department of Communities
DFI	Department of Infrastructure
FSNI	Forest Service NI
GIS	Geographic Information System
ILDRA	Irish Long Distance Riders Association
LCA	Landscape Character Area
LPS	Landscape Partnership Scheme
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MEABC	Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
MNDDC	Mourne, Newry and Down District Council
MUDC	Mid Ulster District Council
NCN	National Cycle Network
NGB	National Governing Body
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
NIMRA	Northern Ireland Mountain Runners Association
NIOA	Northern Ireland Orienteering Association
NNR	National Nature Reserve
ORAP	Outdoor Recreation Action Plan
ORNI	Outdoor Recreation NI
PROW	Public Right of Way
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
SUP	Stand Up Paddleboarding

TNI	Tourism NI
UAF	Ulster Angling Federation
UHGPC	Ulster Hang Gliding and Paragliding School
URRA	Ulster Rural Riders Association

Foreword

Please note that this report is not an exhaustive list of all current outdoor recreation within Mid and East Antrim. The results recorded are based on the information received through consultation with various organisations and local groups. Although every endeavour has been taken to ensure accuracy in mapping, some trails, sites, public land and activities may appear under-represented due to a lack of feedback or limited response. This Strategy and Action Plan, however, does provide a comprehensive picture of the status of current outdoor recreation and opportunities for future development in the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area.

Executive Summary

1 or 2-page brief overview of report, including succinct introduction and methodology, findings, and key recommendations

To be determined after feedback on first draft

PART 1 // CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

The landscape of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (hereafter referred to as MEABC) presents rich opportunities to explore and engage with the outdoors. However, at present, the natural assets of the Borough for the purposes of outdoor recreation are largely underutilised, including the coastline, hills, mountains (such as Slemish Mountain), lakes, rivers, reservoirs and forests.

It is recognised that outdoor recreation is a key asset to communities, economic growth (including activity tourism), improving the health and well-being of people, providing opportunities for social development, learning and volunteering that enable individuals to feel part of society. These benefits align with the 5 strategic themes of MEABC's 15-year Community Plan that the Council has committed to, namely:

- Good Health and Wellbeing;
- Sustainable Jobs and Tourism;
- Our Environment;
- Community Safety and Cohesion;
- Progress in Education.

Adopting a strategic approach to outdoor recreation moving forward is therefore essential – not only in playing a significant role in the future prosperity and well-being of the Borough and its citizens, but also in attracting visitors to the area who can avail of the diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities across the Borough.

1.2 Vision

In late 2018, MEABC commissioned Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (hereafter referred to as Outdoor Recreation NI) to develop an Outdoor Recreation Strategy and Action Plan to provide direction for the growth, development and management of outdoor recreation across the Borough in line with the Council's strategic objectives. The aim of the study as outlined in the project specification was to:

“Provide an overview of current outdoor recreation provision within the Borough... [and] to present a clear vision of how recreation will be in ten years.”

In line with developing this vision, the study was to recommend areas where notable investment should be focused that would yield the most benefit for locals as well as increase the tourism potential. To effectively generate such recommendations the objectives of the study were to:

1. Consider the strategic importance of outdoor recreation to policy contexts;
2. Analyse the existing outdoor recreation provision and providers;
3. Analyse the barriers to outdoor recreation participation and future development;
4. Recommend how existing provision can be further developed and enhanced, and;
5. Identify new sites and cost-effective outdoor recreation opportunities that the Borough can offer.

1.3 Scope

The scope of the study boundary extends to all District Electoral Areas (DEAs) within MEABC formed through the amalgamation in 2015 of the three former councils namely, Ballymena, Larne, and Carrickfergus. The newly formed local authority area now extends to 104,511 hectares (1,045 km²), from the Irish Sea/North Channel in the east to the River Bann in the west (see Figure 1).

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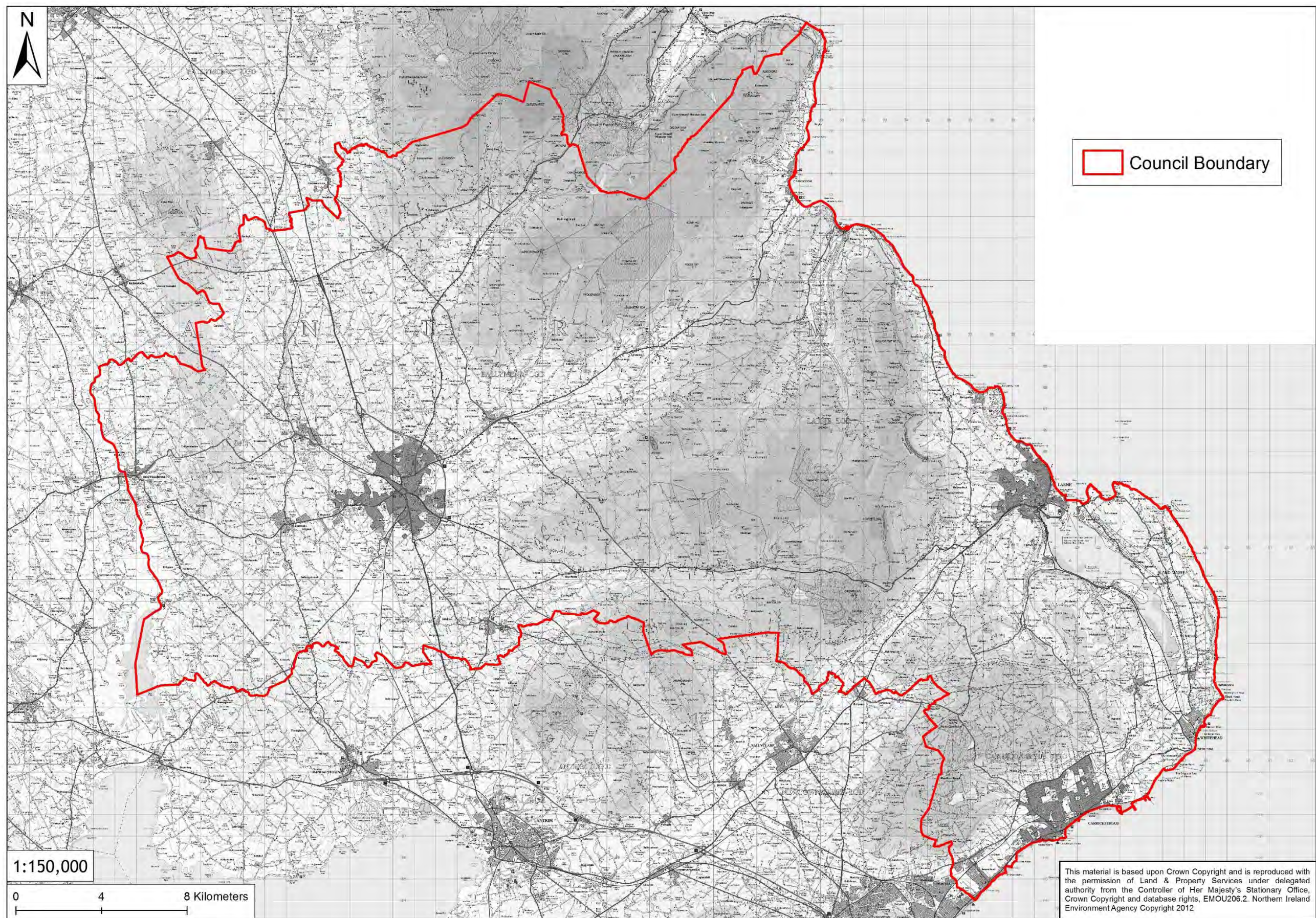


Figure 1: Council Boundary, Study Area

1.4 Defining Outdoor Recreation

A concise definition of “outdoor recreation” can be difficult to establish as it includes many activities that are undertaken in the natural environment. It is crucial, however, for the purposes of this Strategy and Action Plan that outdoor recreation is clearly defined. This is important for ascertaining an accurate picture of current provision and identifying future sites and opportunities for development.

Outdoor recreation has a broad scope. It can take place in a range of locations, from somewhere close to home (e.g. a local park or greenspace) to further afield (e.g. country park or the seaside). There are also various types of participation to be considered, from those that are intentional and represent a lifetime pursuit and skill development (e.g. hang gliding and paragliding), to more incidental engagement (e.g. walking or cycling for recreation or to work). Walking is also an important conduit to other activities, such as birdwatching, photography and picnicking.

Within this broader context the following activities (presented Table 1) are widely agreed to be forms of outdoor recreation. It is recognised, however, that the ongoing development and changing trends within outdoors recreation means that this definition is constantly evolving. This study reflects additional relevant activities as required.

Land	Water	Air
Adventure Racing	Angling	Gliding
Archery	Boat Cruising	Hand Gliding/Paragliding
Boot Camps	Canoeing	Micro-light Flying
Bouldering	Coasteering	Model Flying
Bush Craft	Diving	Sky Diving
Caving	Hover Crafting	
Clay Pigeon Shooting	Rowing	
Climbing	Sailing	
Cycling (on-and off-road)	Stand Up Paddleboarding	
Fell Running	Surfing	
High Ropes/Zip Lines	Water Ski-ng	
Horse Riding	Wakeboarding	
Kite and Land Buggyng	Jet Ski-ing	
Mountain Biking	Kite-surfing	
Mountain Boarding		
Orienteering		
Paintballing		
Segway		
Walking		
Zorbing		

Table 1: Outdoor Recreation Activities

1.5 Methodology

The methodology employed to produce this Strategy and Action Plan followed the research process outlined below (see Table 2). Both primary and secondary research and qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed.

A core component of the methodology was consultation with the local outdoor recreation community to scope the current provision and interests. Alongside online, telephone and email consultations, the main form of consultations were held through a series of workshops. These enabled views on outdoor recreation to be gathered from members of the public, groups representing people with a disability, relevant local business leaders, community representatives, elected members and key Council officials.

Desk Research	Consultation	Site Visits	Report & Action Plan
Strategic Context	Online Questionnaire Survey	Ballygally	Collation of data and formulation of detailed Strategy and Action Plan
Trends and benefits of outdoor recreation	Public Consultations in Carrickfergus, Larne and Ballymena	Balleyboley Forest	
GIS Mapping of current provision and key landownership	Elected Representatives' Consultation	Glenarm Castle	
Detailing current provision	Consultations with community groups and charities	Woodburn Forest	
Benchmarking	Consultations with clubs and NGBs	Portglenone	
Funding Opportunities	Consultations with Council departments and officials	Newferry East	
		Whitehead	
		Brown's Bay	

Table 2: Methodology Process

Information from desk research on local plans and policies (e.g. village plans), current provision and previous research projects on outdoor recreation within the Council area was collated with the data captured through the consultation process. The data was then analysed for emerging themes and evaluated against the strategic context, benchmarking and funding opportunities to generate key recommendations and actions. These are presented in Parts C and D of this Strategy and Action Plan.

1.6 Strategic Context

This Strategy and Action Plan ensures that the future development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across MEABC aligns with the broader policy context. Outdoor recreation is reflected in numerous policies and strategy documents of regional and local government departments, thus showing the relevance of it as a valuable tool (albeit under-utilised) in meeting their agendas. For this project, the following policies and strategies were identified as having most strategic relevance.

Theme	Policy / Strategy
Overarching Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 (NI Executive, 2016) – Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD 2010) – Putting People First: The Mid and East Antrim Community Plan 2017-2032
Health & Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Obesity 2012-2022 – Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)
Economy & Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tourism Strategy for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council 2017-2022 (Draft) – Integrated Economic Development Strategy for Mid & East Antrim 2018-2030
Culture, Sport & Outdoor Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Northern Ireland (2014) – Sport Matters: Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019 – Sport NI Corporate Plan 2015-2020 – Exercise, Explore, Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways (DfI, 2016) – Mountain Bike Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014 –2024 – The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (DfC, 2011)
Natural Environment & Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – NIEA “Our Passion, Our Place” Strategic Priorities 2012-2022 – Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2012) – DAERA Strategic Plan 2012-2020
Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland (2006)
Community Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Masterplans for Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Greenisland, Larne (Appendix 10) – Village Plans for Ahoghill, Ballycarry, Ballygally, Broughshane, Carnlough, Clough, Culleybackey, Glenarm, Glenoe, Glenravel, Glynn, Gracehill, Grange, Isalndmagee, Kells & Conor, Millbrook, Portglenone, Whitehead (Appendix 10)

Table 3: Relevant Strategies and Policies for this study

In relation to people’s enjoyment and engagement with the outdoors these documents widely agree that outdoor recreation:

- Effectively combines the positive outcomes of physical activity and being in nature;
- Significantly improves mental health and well-being;
- Is effective for intra and interpersonal development, active citizenship and crime reduction;
- Connects people with nature and improve environmental education and awareness;
- Provides a range of activities that engages people of all ages, ability, and social/economic status;
- Has few limitations to participation and is great for providing life-long physical activity.

The focused management, development and promotion of outdoor recreation in MEABC over the lifespan of this Strategy and Action Plan will help deliver on the strategy agendas identified above. Under the following themes the project has the potential to:

Theme	Contribution to Policy / Strategy
Health & Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Raise awareness and understanding of outdoor recreation opportunities; – Enable communities to engage with the outdoors by providing Iconic products, Signature products, Activity Hubs, Community Hubs and Community Trails; – Encourage families to be more physically active in the outdoors through enhanced provision of accessible activities and natural play facilities; – Encourage older people and people with limited mobility to be more active through the provision of all-ability trails; – Enable greater utilisation of greenspace by walking groups and social prescribers.
Economy & Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capitalise on popularity of Causeway Coastal Route¹ with the development of “Iconic” products that makes the Borough a tourist destination of choice; – Increase visitor numbers, bed nights, spend on first-class facilities/attractions; – Raise the profile of activity tourism opportunities through offsite interpretation to promote the variety of natural landscapes and recreation activities within it; – Improve partnership working between asset holders, private activity providers, private landowners, and clubs and individual users to maximise opportunities; – Develop tourism assets that capitalise on the Borough’s history through interpretative heritage trails (spiritual heritage, plantation heritage etc); – Harness opportunities within the natural environment to enable recreational clubs and activity providers to grow, flourish and increase participation.
Culture, Sport & Outdoor Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Give locals and visitors confidence to explore MEABC’s greenspace through improved access, effective interpretation and developing Activity Hubs; – Connect urban populations (Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne) with fantastic natural resources on their doorsteps through Community Hubs and Trails.
Natural Environment & Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Raise awareness, appreciation and responsible use of the natural environment; – Improve the offering to locals/visitors by improved access and interpretation; – Improve local partnership between public, private and voluntary sectors to provide, manage and enhance a range of outdoor recreation opportunities; – Protect and sustainably manage the unique natural environment of MEABC.
Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure all people can participate in outdoor recreation regardless of ability; – Connect deprived communities within local urban and rural populations to fantastic doorstep natural resources that would be free to access and enjoy; – Encourage people with limited mobility to be more physically active through all-ability trails and where appropriate via installation of disability equipment.
Community Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Connect deprived communities within local urban and rural populations to fantastic doorstep natural resources that would be free to access and enjoy; – Encourage inactive people, older people and people with limited mobility to be more physically active through more community trails and all-ability trails; – Increase opportunities for outdoor recreation participation and volunteering.

Table 4: Contribution of outdoor recreation within MEABC to the broader strategic context

The strategic context clearly demonstrates the contribution that outdoor recreation has to offer in the delivery of regional and sub-regional (Council) policies and strategies. Appendix 1 provides a brief discussion on each of these documents, identifying their specific relevance to outdoor recreation in the Council area.

1.7 Benefits and Trends of Outdoor Recreation

In 2018, 17,560 academic studies on the Benefits of Outdoor Sports for Society (BOSS project) were reviewed across Europe. This comprehensive, in-depth, and up-to-date review provided robust evidence on the positive outcomes for individuals and communities of participating in outdoor recreation, as summarised below.²







	Mental health & wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – General mental health status – Quality of life and overall wellbeing – Combating mental illnesses and disease – Positive affective states – Reducing negative affective states – Control and coping – Self-development – Positive experiences – Active and happy ageing
	Physical health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – General physical health and related factors – Combating diseases like stroke, heart attack and cancer – Low injury rates and extended life expectancy – Healthy ageing – Subjective health perception – Sun exposure effectiveness
	Active citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Community benefits – Integration and inclusion – Volunteering – Bonding Capital
	Education & life-long learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – (Intra) personal development – Interpersonal development – Educational motivation and achievements – Cognitive aspects to improve learning – Environmental awareness and behaviour
	Crime reduction & anti-social behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increase of prosocial behaviour – Prevention and reduction of crime
	Additional benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lifetime physical activity – Accessibility – Cognitive functioning – Other multiple effects

Table 5: Summary of Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

These well documented benefits have resulted in outdoor recreation becoming more prominent within government and local authority policy and strategies (as covered in Section 1.6). These relate to getting more people active and therefore generating cost savings to the health service; improving the educational attainment of children and young people; supporting people into education,

employment and training for example through volunteering and; increasing social capital and creating economic prosperity through tourism. These core themes are considered in more detail below.

1.7.1 Health and Wellbeing

The link between active outdoor recreation participation and improved physical and mental health is well documented through research³. It is known that it contributes to the reduction of illnesses such as Type 2 Diabetes, some types of cancer, osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease, can help tackle obesity and reduce the risk of depression, dementia and Alzheimer's.

In addition, contact with green spaces and natural environments is also known to improve psychological well-being, by improving self-perception and self-esteem, mood and sleep quality and by reducing levels of anxiety and fatigue.⁴ A report in 2016 indicated that outdoor exercise delivers an estimated £2.2bn of health benefits to adults in England each year and therefore natural environments should be protected and managed for health promotion.⁵

1.7.2 Environmental Awareness

Participation in outdoor recreation is also one of the main ways of developing environmental awareness and care for the natural world. Although most of the Northern Ireland population now live in towns and cities, enjoying and using the outdoors enables many people to become aware and develop an understanding of the natural environment and its landscapes, wildlife, history and culture.

For those who take up environmental volunteering, social return on investment research shows that £1 invested in environmental volunteering can lead to a return of up to £4.⁶ It has also been shown that people who volunteer in sport have a 10% greater self-esteem, emotional well-being and resilience and are 15% less likely to worry.⁷

1.7.3 Community Cohesion and Social Inclusion

The added value that outdoor recreation can bring to communities, particularly through increased social capital has become increasingly recognised over the past few years. Outdoor recreation promotes social inclusion, making communities become more cohesive and stronger. Research has shown that higher levels of social capital are associated with better health, higher educational achievement, better employment outcomes and lower crime rates.

1.7.4 Growing the Economy

In 2013, SportNI, NIEA and Tourism NI published a report on the economic contribution of outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland which found that outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland generated £102million gross added value and that the sector employs more than 3,537 Full Time Equivalent⁸.

In addition, the importance of outdoor recreation development on the local economy through tourism is significant. The outdoor adventure tourism sector was estimated by Mintel to be worth €146m⁹ in 2018, whilst in Wales, outdoor activity tourism contributes £481 million per annum to the economy¹⁰, in the Republic of Ireland overseas visitors engaging in activity tourism are worth €1.2 billion per annum¹¹ and in England 42.4 million adults visiting the natural environment generate a total visitor spend of £21 billion per annum¹².

Although more research is needed on the direct and indirect benefits of activity tourism to Northern Ireland's wider tourism offering, market research on Northern Ireland's Mountain Bike product by Tourism NI found that mountain biking generates up to 5,550 same day and 3,700 overnight mountain bike visits from outside NI each year. The average daily spend per person during a day visit is £14.53, whilst for overnight visits it is £57.03, with an average overnight trip lasting 2.3 days. The study estimated that the total economic impact of mountain biking trips in NI per annum is between £1.08 million and £1.59 million (inclusive of expenditure made by domestic and out-of-state visitors).¹³ Importantly, the study highlighted the importance of developing "activity hubs" to attract tourists who prefer to try a variety of outdoor recreation activities in a locality rather than participate in only one.

1.8 Land Access and Management Trends

This section outlines recent developments within Northern Ireland regarding land access and management. This is an important topic for Council to consider and will determine how access will be secured and land effectively managed over the course of delivering the Action Plan outlined in Part 4 of this report. As part of this, the role and relationships of Council's community partners and other key stakeholders such as Forest Service Northern Ireland (FSNI), Northern Ireland Water (NI Water), National Trust, private landowners (e.g. Glenarm Castle Estate) needs to be considered within the context of what is working well in other areas of Northern Ireland.

There are a range of organisations that own and/or manage land for outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland. These organisations include:

- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs;
- Department for Communities;
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency;
- Forest Service Northern Ireland;
- District Councils;
- Loughs Agency;
- Northern Ireland Water;
- Waterways Ireland;
- National Trust;
- Woodland Trust;
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds;
- Ulster Wildlife Trust.

In most circumstances these organisations develop and manage opportunities within the land they own and/or manage. However, a key trend has been the development of partnership arrangements between FSNI and Councils. This approach has been implemented as a key outcome of “A strategy to develop the recreational and social use of our forests” (FSNI, 2009).¹⁴

Several Councils have utilised this partnership agreement to plan, develop, manage and promote outdoor recreation opportunities within FSNI lands and have signed up to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with FSNI. The MOU typically applies to all the FSNI lands within the Council boundary and provides the framework for collaborative partnerships to create social recreational tourism and economic benefits.

As projects are progressed, a Council is required to provide an overview of proposed development(s) to obtain An Agreement for Licence (valid during development) and Licence (valid during management and maintenance). Terms of licences vary; however, they typically relate to the “development, operation, management and maintenance of trails and associated recreation facilities”. In simple terms, the Council takes full responsibility of the recreational management of the forest whilst FSNI retains ownership and manages felling operations etc.

The table below summarises the current relationship between FSNI and Councils:

Council	MOU Position	Key Forests Developed / In Development ¹⁵
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	In place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Darkley – Gosford Forest Park – Carnagh
Ards and North Down Borough Council	Unknown	
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	No	
Belfast City Council	Unknown	
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	In place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Garvagh Forest
Derry City and Strabane District Council	Unknown	
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	In place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All Forest Service lands within Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark – Gortin Glen Forest Park
Lisburn City and Castlereagh Borough Council	In place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hillsborough Forest Park
Mid Ulster District Council	In place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Davagh Forest – Drum Manor – Parkanaur – Pomeroy Forest – Knockmany Forest
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	In place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bunkers Hill – Corry Wood – Drumkeeragh Forest – Castlewellan Forest Park – Rostrevor Forest – Tievenadarragh Forest

Table 6: Current relationships between FSNI and Councils within Northern Ireland

PART 2 // CURRENT PROVISION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the current provision of all activities which take place across the Borough, gathered from desk result, consultations and site visits.

To accompany the summation of each activity, GIS has been used to map:

- 1) All land, air and water-based activities;
- 2) Land ownership of these activities, including PRow and access agreements;
- 3) Current land management bodies involved in outdoor recreation within MEABC (e.g. Forest Service NI, NI Water, National Trust etc) and;
- 4) All environmental designations across the Borough.

The audit of current provision shows that there is currently a wide range of opportunities for recreation in the outdoors, mainly due to the diversity and richness of the MEABC landscape. The table below lists the outdoor recreation activities that are known to take place within the Borough.

Several of these activities, namely walking, cycling (on-road, off-road, and mountain biking), canoeing, orienteering and fishing are provided for at numerous sites across MEABC.

Land	Water	Air
Archery	Angling	Gliding
Boot Camps	Boat Cruising	Hand Gliding/Paragliding
Bush Craft	Canoeing	Micro-light Flying
Caving	Coasteering	
Clay Pigeon Shooting	Diving	
Climbing	Rowing	
Cycling (on-and off-road)	Sailing	
Fell Running	Stand Up Paddleboarding	
Horse Riding	Surfing	
Kite and Land Buggy	Water Ski-ng	
Mountain Biking	Wakeboarding	
Orienteering	Jet Ski-ng	
Walking		

Table 7: Outdoor recreation activities currently provided for in the MEABC area

For some activities a differentiation is made between outdoor recreation activities that are provided for on a formal versus those that take place on an informal basis.

	Formal	Informal
Walking And Cycling	Route signage in place and / or Interpretation panels present	No route signage in place and / or No interpretation panels present
Canoeing	Part of a canoe trail and / or Formal access and egress and / or Land Manager encourages activity	Not part of a canoe trail and / or No formal access and egress and / or Land Manager discourages activity
All other land-based activities	Formal facilities in place and / or Land Manager encourages activity	No formal facilities in place and / or Land Manager discourages activity
All other water-based activities	Formal facilities in place and / or Land Manager encourages activity	No formal facilities in place and / or Land Manager discourages activity
All other air-based activities	Formal facilities in place and / or Land Manager encourages activity	No formal facilities in place and / or Land Manager discourages activity

Table 8: Definition of formal versus informal provisions.

2.2 Current Land Ownership and Management

There are several landowners who permit and/or facilitate land, air and water-based recreation activities to take place on their sites. Most of the outdoor recreation land in MEABC is owned and managed by Forest Service NI (FSNI). The remaining land is owned and managed by other public sector organisations including the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), NI Water, Waterways Ireland, the Council and environmental organisations such as the National Trust and the Woodland Trust.

Landowners were identified as follows:

- Forest Service Northern Ireland;
- Northern Ireland Water;
- National Trust;
- Woodland Trust;
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.

See Figure 2 for overview of sites.

There is also a major private estate in the area that facilitates controlled public access, namely Glenarm Castle.

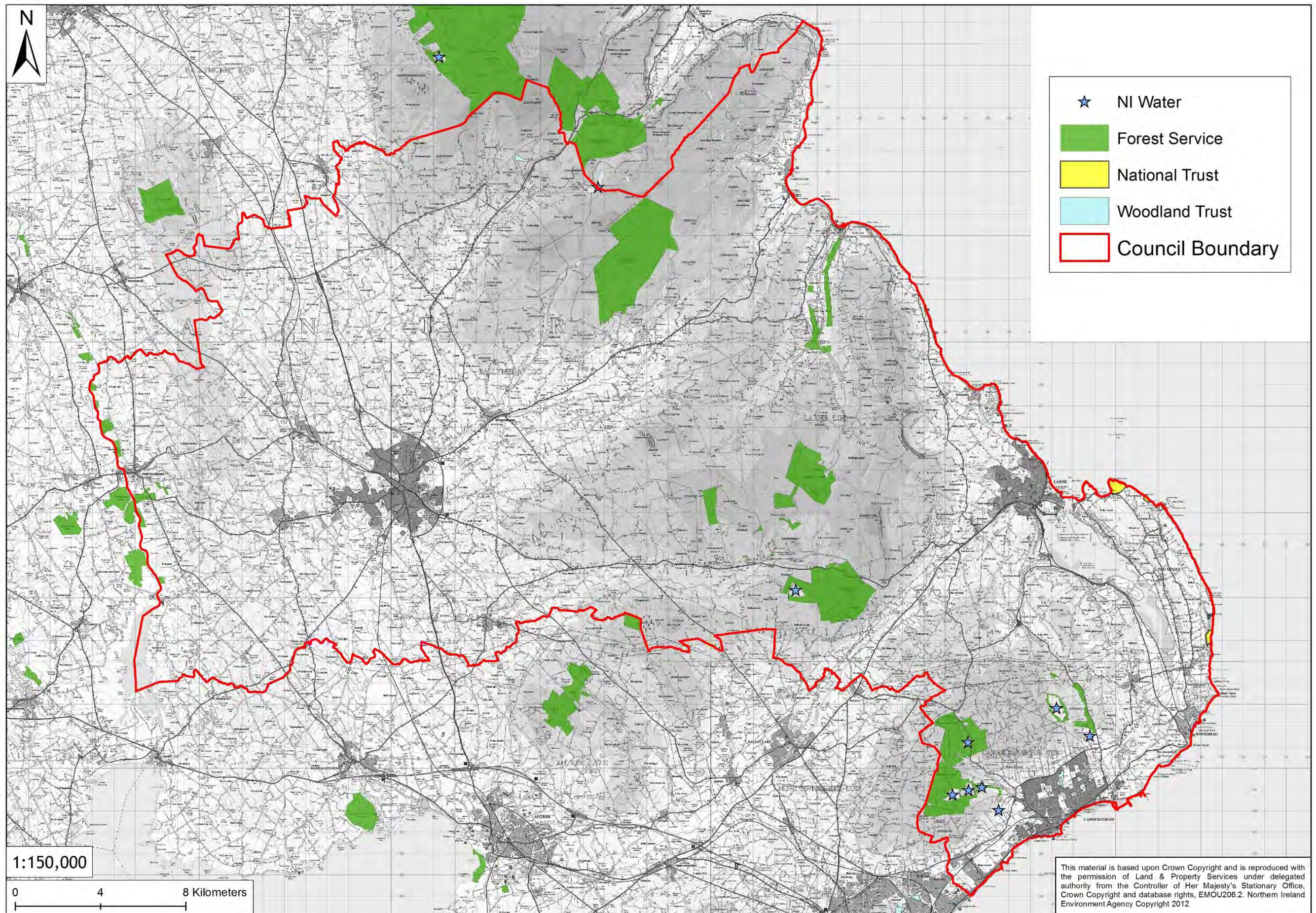


Figure 2: Overview of Landownership in the Study Area

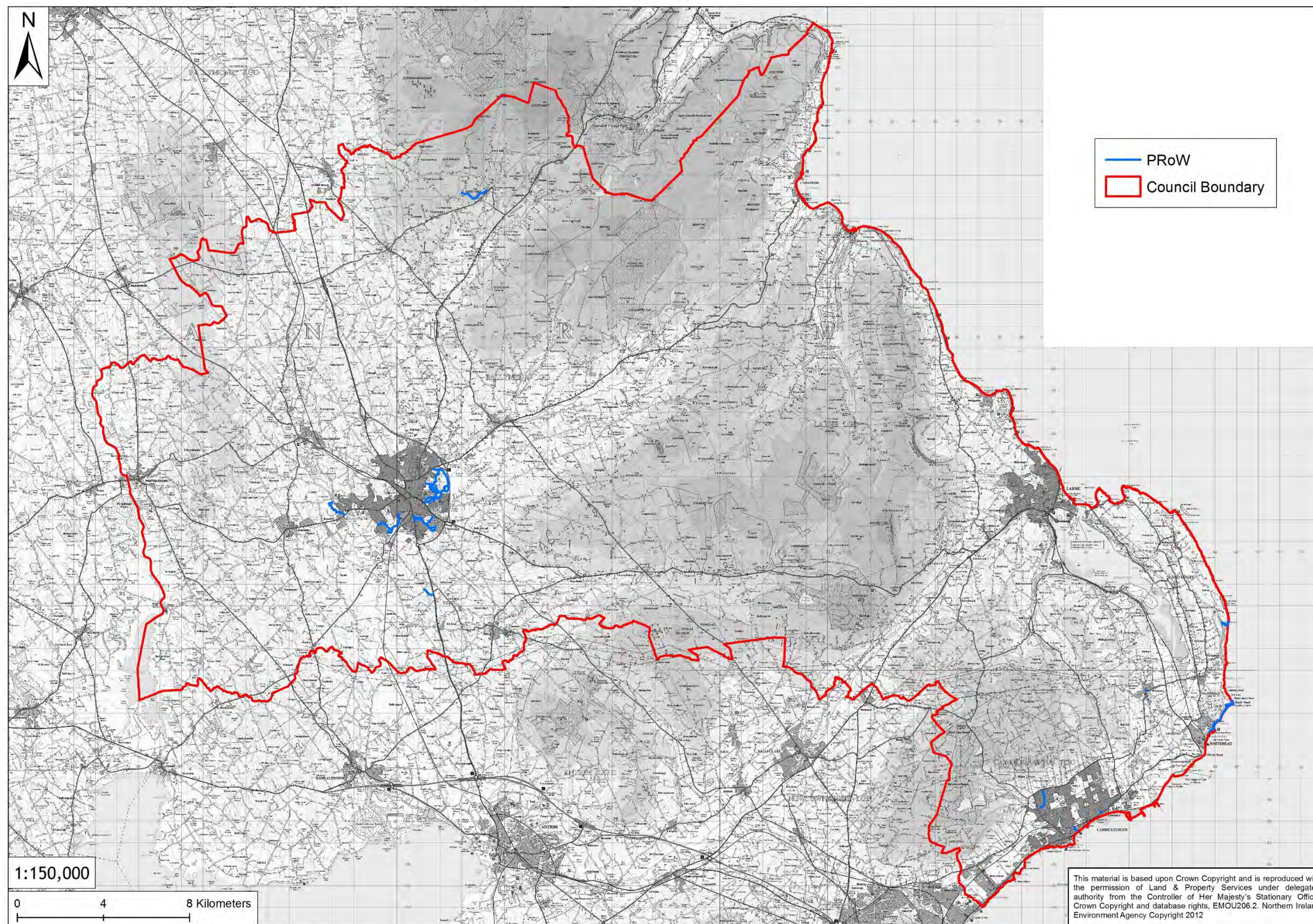


Figure 3: Public Rights of Way in the Study Area

2.3 Environmental Designations

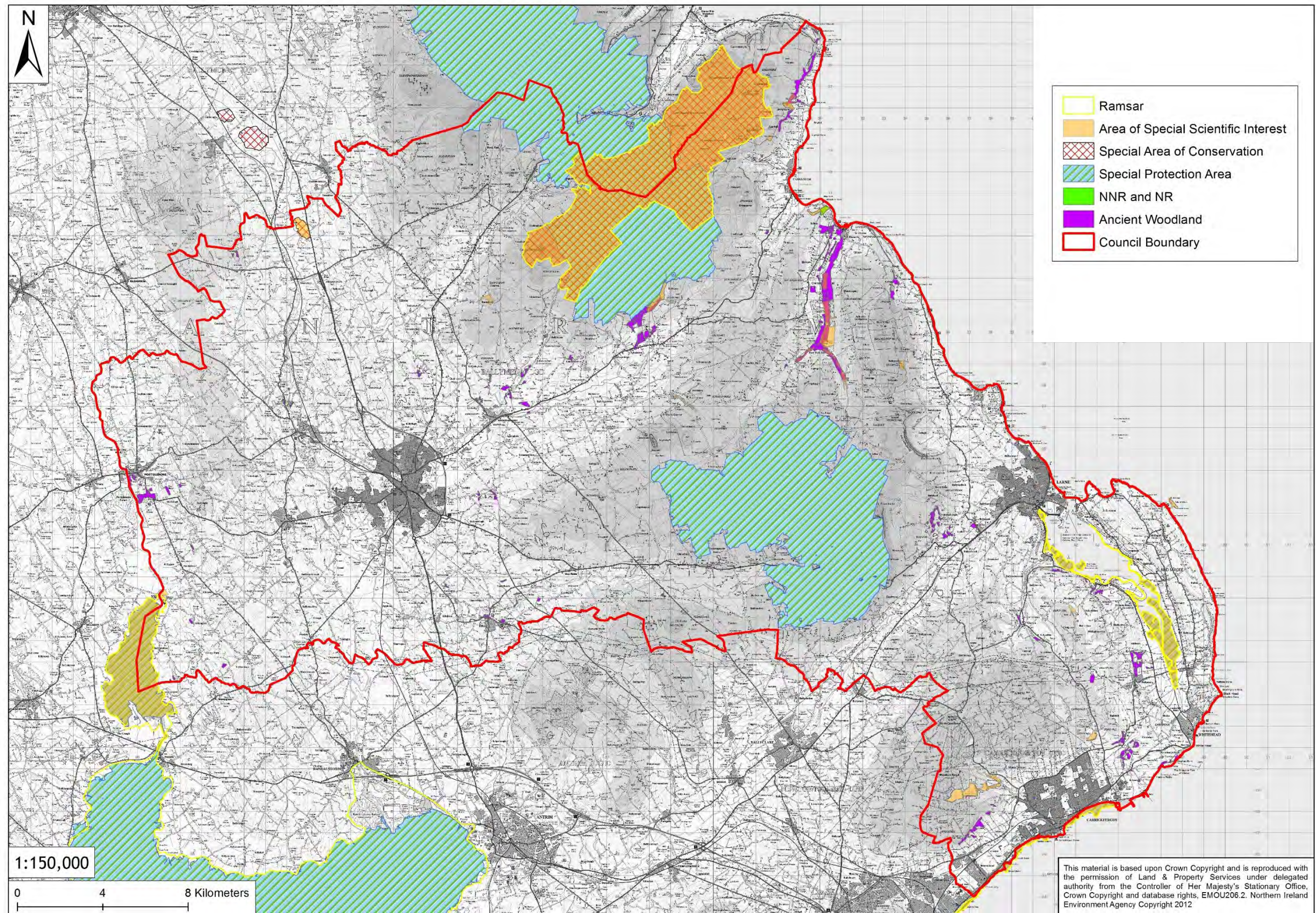


Figure 4: Environmental Designations in the Study Area

2.4 Land-Based Recreation

These activities within MEABC take place largely on publicly owned land, particularly for popular activities such as walking, fell running/running and cycling (road and mountain biking). More niche land-based recreation activities, such as clay pigeon shooting, are offered only on private land.

2.4.1 Walking

Walking is one of the most popular activities undertaken within the study area. It is often a conduit to other activities such as sightseeing, bird watching and photography etc., hence participation levels are high. Walking opportunities identified within the study area can be seen in Figure 6.

2.4.1.1 Quality Walks

21 Quality Walks¹⁶ are located within the study area split over 13 sites. The majority of these are short distance walks up to 8 kilometres long. For a full list of Quality Walks and formal walking sites see Appendix 6. Please note that the Quality Walk Scheme is currently under review.

The Antrim Hills Way is a long-distance walking route. At 22 miles in length, the route begins in Glenarm and ends at Slemish mountain. The route is in place through the permission of landowners. It is mostly off-road through fields which are usually grazed by sheep or cows. For safety reasons dogs are not allowed even if on a lead. Bulls can be present at certain times of the year. Hills are exposed and mostly covered in heather or tussocky grasses. Good footwear and advance preparation are strongly advised.

2.4.1.2 Formal Walking

In addition to the Quality Walks, there are several sites where formal walking takes place, often through public rights of way and the Highway to Health scheme. A formal walking route is defined as a route which is signed and/or has on-site information but is not a Quality Walk. Routes not classified as a Quality Walk either do not meet Quality Walk assessment criteria or may not yet have been assessed.

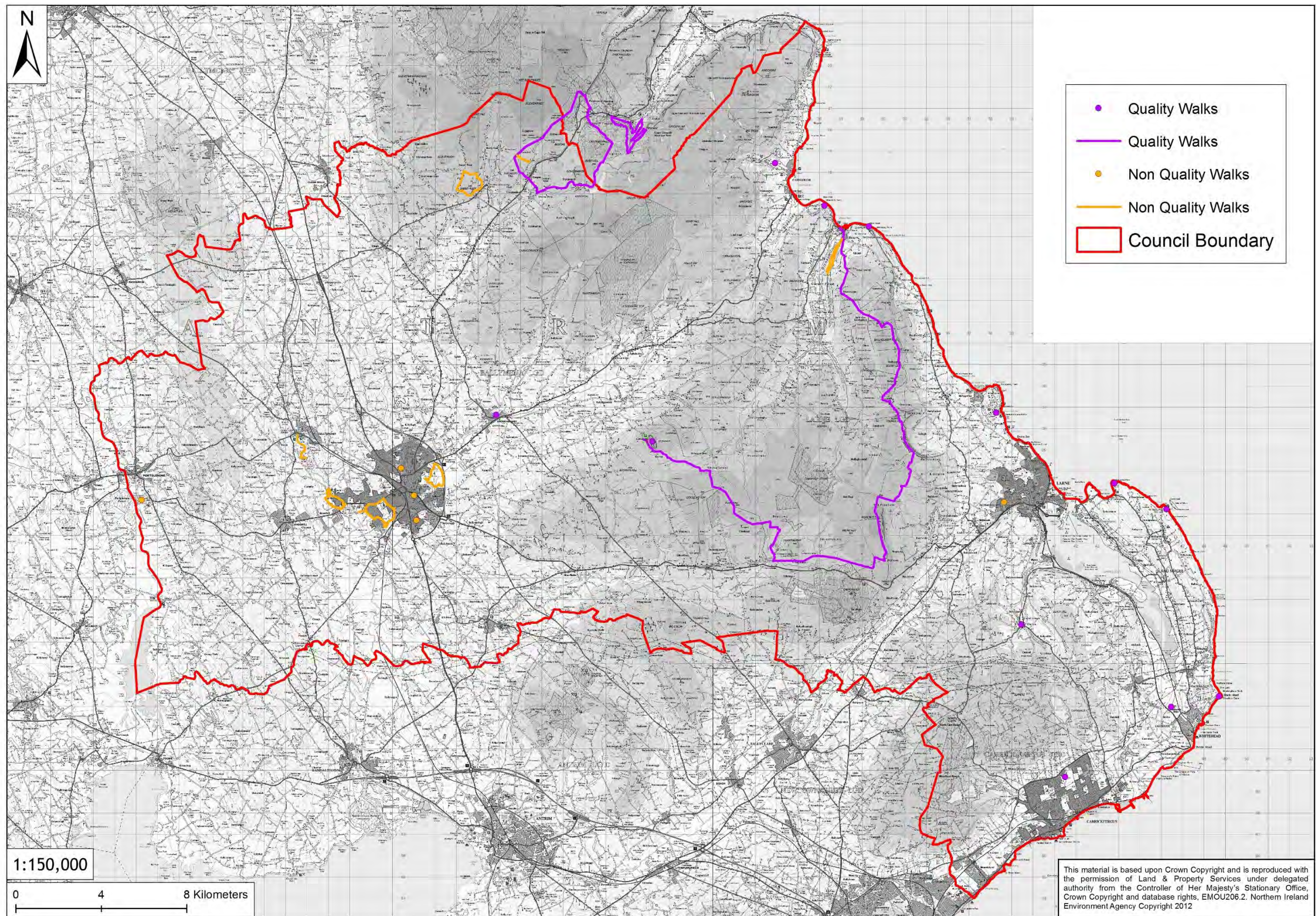


Figure 5: Current Walking Provisions

2.4.2 Fell Running/Running

Fell running, also known as mountain running, is governed by the Northern Ireland Mountain Runners Association (NIMRA). It is typically a competitive sport but also a popular leisure activity. The following fell running event takes place within the study area:

- Knockdhu Christmas Classic Fell Race (4 miles, 480ft ascent, Cairncastle).

Consultation identified a strong road running community in the area with the main running/athletics clubs identified as:

- Ballymena Runners;
- Larne AC;
- East Coast AC;
- Moneyglass and District Runners;
- Co Antrim Harriers;
- Seapark AC.

The following running events take place within the study area

- Larne Half Marathon (March);
- Ballymena Belles 5 Mile Road Race (April);
- Glenarm Castle Challenge 5K, 10K, Half Marathon (April);
- Larne AC Coastal Marathon (June);
- Fairhill 5 Mile (June);
- Broughshane 5K and 10K (July);
- Storming the Castle 5K and 10K, Carrickfergus (August).

The following Parkrun¹⁷ events take place within the Study Area every Saturday at 9:30am

- ECOS Parkrun, ECOS Centre Ballymena;
- Larne Parkrun, Carnfunnock Country Park;
- Carrickfergus Parkrun, Carrickfergus Amphitheatre Wellness Centre.

2.4.3 Cycling

For the purpose of this study, “cycling” is split in to three categories: road cycling, off-road cycling and mountain biking.

2.4.3.1 Road Cycling

The study area currently encompasses three National Cycling Network Routes.

- **NCN Route 93:** Derry to Bangor;
- **NCN Route 96:** The Lower Bann Cycleway is a 45-mile linear cycle route between Toome and Castlerock via Newferry and Portglenone;
- **NCN Route 97:** Glenarm to Randalstown via Ballymena and the ECOS Centre and Nature Park.

Consultation identified the most proactive cycling clubs in the area to be:

- Ballymena Road Club;
- Carrickfergus Cycling Club;

- East Antrim C.C;
- East Coast Raiders BMX Club;
- Glens C.C;
- Hunter Campbell Fat Boys Cycle Club;
- Team BibSport;
- Team Madigan C.C.

Cycling events identified in the study area include:

- **MAD Cycle Sportive organised by Making a Difference Worldwide** - this route follows the relatively flat coastal route along the Shore Road through Carrickfergus, Whitehead, and on to Larne before commencing the Glens of Antrim Coast Road to Cushendun and returning to Belfast via the same route.
- **Titanic Torr 200 organised by Audax Ireland** – this route begins at Stormont Estate and follows roads within the study area to Glenarm and Torr Head before returning to Belfast bypassing Larne.
- **Tour of the Glens organised by Castlereagh Cycling Club** – this 200km route starts and finishes at Loughside Recreation Centre in Belfast. The route passes through South Antrim to Ballygalley, where it then follows the coast road to Glenarm, descending to Carnlough, the route rejoins the coast road to Cushendall and then onto the demanding "Glendun Loop" before returning to Cushendall before the return leg to Belfast.

2.4.3.2 Off-road Cycling

Informal off-road cycling (i.e. unpermitted) takes place within Ballyboley Forest, Woodburn Forest, Glenarm Forest and Capanagh Wood using the forest drives, forest trails and informal trails.

2.4.3.3 Mountain Biking

While no formal mountain biking provisions exists within the Council area, consultation identified informal mountain biking at the following locations:

- Woodburn Forest – Network of forest tracks (13kms), with lots of short single-track loops built by local riders.¹⁸
- Ballyboley Forest – some forest tracks are used for informal mountain biking; however, activity has decreased in recent years due to extensive tree-felling.
- Glenarm Forest

2.4.4 Orienteering

There is one Permanent Orienteering Course within the study area:

- **Carnfunnock Country Park** – within the Park there are two courses. One for beginners, marked by white and/or yellow control points and one for those with some experience, marked by orange and/or light-green control points. There are no courses available for more experienced orienteers. Maps are available from Carnfunnock Country Park. Lagan Valley Orienteers use the site.

In addition, **Portglenone Forest**, **Woodburn Forest** and **Slemish College, Ballymena** are all mapped for orienteering.

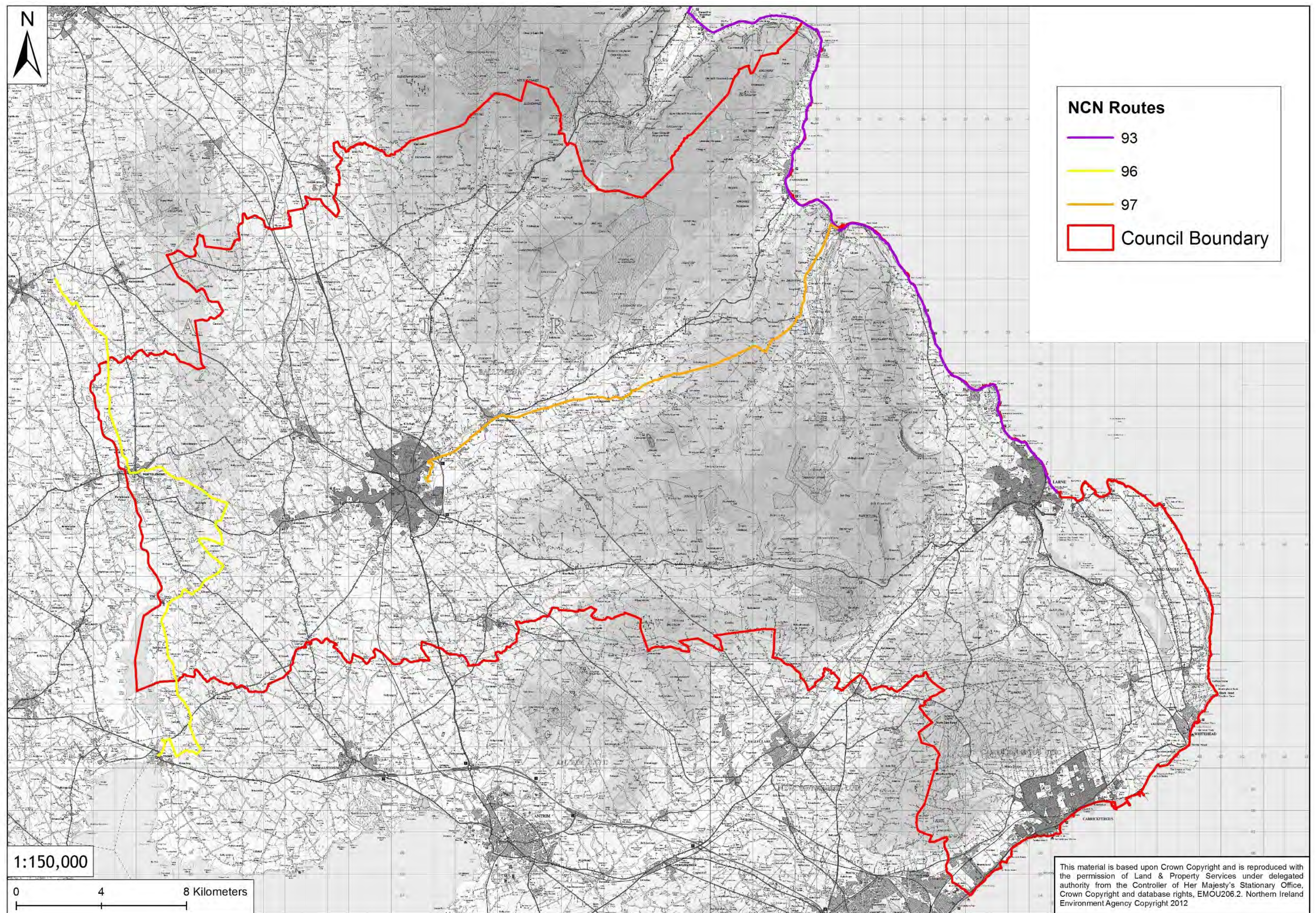


Figure 6: Current Formal Cycling Provisions

2.4.5 Horse Riding

Off-road horse-riding provision is currently limited in the area.

Consultation returned that forests in the Council Area are used frequently and informally by horse riders namely:

- Ballyboley Forest;
- Woodburn Forest.

Less popular sites for informal horse riding include Shillnavogey Forest, Capanagh Wood and Cleggan Forest.

Informal horse riding also takes place on the following beaches:

- Brown's Bay;
- Drains Bay;
- Ballygalley.

It is understood that horse riding also takes place on public roads and within privately-owned arenas. Horse riders in the study area also use facilities outside the council boundary for off-road riding.

Riding Centres and Schools approved by the British Horse Society include:

- **Galgorm Parks Riding School** which offers an outdoor arena and indoor school;
- **Islandmagee Riding Centre** which offers an outdoor arena, indoor school, hacking and trekking and a livery yard.

2.4.6 Clay Pigeon Shooting

Traditional and laser clay pigeon shooting are both provided in MEABC. Both are a form of target shooting whereby participants use either a shotgun, air rifle or laser to essentially shoot moving clay targets known as "clay pigeons" which mimic real birds.

There are three clay pigeon shooting providers in MEABC.

- **Carnview Farm** which is located between Ballymena and Glarryford and is a premier clay target shooting complex. It caters for all disciplines, including Skeet (English, Olympic & NSSA), ABT, DTL, Double trap, Olympic Trap, Universal Trap and Compac sporting.
- **Thatch Clay Target Club** located outside Broughshane and caters for various disciplines, including DTL, Olympic Skeet, and Olympic Trap.
- **Larne Lough Wildfowling and Conservation Association** uses defined foreshore areas of the Larne Lough via negotiated private access routes. Clay pigeon shooters can avail of the club's Skeet Clay pigeon layout and participate in the many club activities arranged throughout the year, such as interclub clay pigeon shoots.

2.4.7 Bush Craft

Bush craft involves learning skills to facilitate survival in the wild such as lighting fire by friction, eating wild food and making a water tight shelter from natural materials.

Bush craft is currently offered by one private activity provider within the Borough, the Northern Ireland Survival School, which provides courses from an expedition style camp in Galgorm Castle

Estate. The Survival School provides bush craft courses and wilderness living skills as outdoor activities to individuals and groups as well as catering for youth groups and public and private events.

2.4.8 Bootcamps

Bootcamps in this study refers to the use of the outdoors for the improvement of physical fitness. There are several bootcamp providers within MEABC.

- **Forest Fitness NI** offers bootcamps at a purpose-built assault course located in the forest on the Marshallstown Road, Carrickfergus. These are suitable for all fitness levels and cover various types of exercise like mud runs, circuits, HIIT (high intensity interval training), boxercise, combat PT, and group runs.
- **Tribal Fitness** run classes in Carrickfergus and their bootcamps run on a drop-in basis and take place all year round. The outdoor bootcamps include the Pramtastic Bootcamp and the Ladies Only Bootcamp which both take place in the Marine Gardens in Carrickfergus.
- **The Raw Gym** based in Ballymena also offer outdoor bootcamps, using a range of activities including kettlebells, battleropes, running, buddy training, team events, and boxing exercise all in the outdoors.

2.4.9 Kite and Land Buggy

Blokarting is a three-wheel kart with a sail. Like dinghy sailing, its power comes from the wind. The sail is designed in such a way that it captures the wind and transfers the power into a forward motion. Blokart World is a private activity provider based in Ballymena that uses mainly sites outside the Borough to provide kite and land bugging opportunities. The main site used within the Council area is Browns Bay on Islandmagee.

2.4.10 Archery

Archery is primarily delivered either by organised clubs affiliated with the Northern Ireland Archery Society or private activity providers, both site-based and mobile. Within MEABC archery is offered by Climb NI, which provides a variety of outdoor and adventurous activities on a 44-acre site on Islandmagee that it has a licence to use for recreational purposes.

2.4.11 Climbing

MEABC lends itself to the activity of climbing due to topographical features such as crags and exposed rock faces. Climb NI facilitates rock climbing and abseiling on crags within Islandmagee. Canyoning up to Glenoe waterfall, owned by the National Trust, is also a major strand within Climb NI's portfolio and attracts international tourists who visit Northern Ireland. They hold the sole licence for this activity on this site.

Crags are identified at the following sites:

- Slemish;
- Ballygalley Head;
- Garron Point.

Climb NI also offers climbing on artificial climbing walls and is currently in the process of securing planning permission and funding for an indoor centre on Islandmagee.

2.4.12 Caving

Caving, also known as potholing, is the land-based recreational pastime of exploring wild cave systems. This exploration of caves is usually undertaken by groups, led by a guide and allows participants to explore the subterranean world through walking and/or crawling through spaces of different sizes. Climb NI offers guided expeditions in caves on private farmland north of Larne.

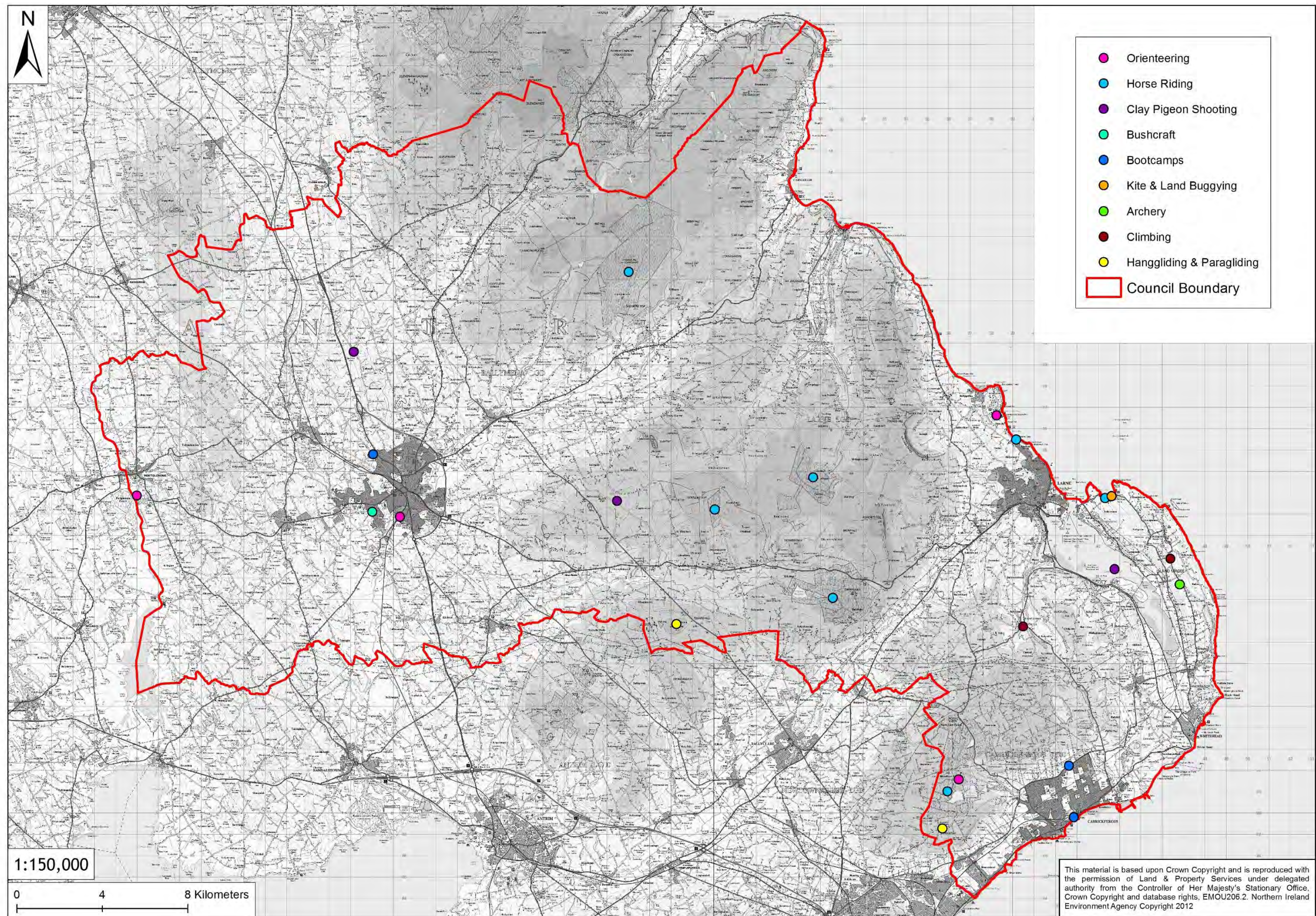


Figure 7: Current Land-based Outdoor Activity Provisions

2.5 Water-Based Recreation

Figure 8 shows the current provision in the MEABC area for the following water-based activities: angling, canoeing and kayaking, sailing, coastal rowing, and other water-based activities.

Compared to neighbouring Boroughs there is a lack of water-based activities offered by private activity providers within the study area. Providers have successfully worked with the Council in offering pop-up activities and taster sessions, for example in June 2018, the “Beach Bonanza” attracted significant visitor numbers and received positive feedback. In addition to consultation findings, this demonstrates that there is an appetite for increased water-based activity within the study area.

2.5.1 Angling

The study area provides ample opportunity for angling. This includes both inland fishing and sea fishing. Inland fisheries offer a wealth of lough and reservoir angling, predominately in the Carrickfergus area as well as river fishing which focuses on the Braid and Maine Rivers and associate tributaries in the Ballymena area. Sea fishing takes place along the Belfast Lough shore and Islandmagee Coast, both from commercial boat operators and on-shore sites.

Most of the fishing within the study area is subject to formal access and license requirements. To fish legally in Northern Ireland, anglers need:

- 1) **A rod licence for game or coarse fishing** – the rod license system is managed by DAERA with licenses available to buy online or from a local distributor (e.g. tackle shop). There is no requirement to have a rod licence for sea angling, except when fishing for salmon or sea trout.
- 2) **A game or course permit** – this gives the holder the right to fish in a specific fishery (e.g. lake or river and is obtained from the owner of the fishing rights). This can be:
 - A private individual;
 - A company;
 - DAERA;
 - An angling club (Mid Antrim Angling Association; Gracehill, Galgorm & District Angling Club; Kells, Connor & Glenwherry Angling Club; Maine Angling Club; Braid Angling Club).

Note that a permit or day ticket cannot be purchased without a licence.

Clubs within the study area own fishing rights to certain rivers. Some small rivers in the study area are not managed by a club and fishing is at the discretion of the private landowner. As there is no right of access to river banks in Northern Ireland, clubs also work directly with private landowners to establish informal access to the river banks. Formal angling locations in MEABC are outlined in Appendix 7.

2.5.2 Canoeing and Kayaking

Canoeing and kayaking are very popular outdoor activities taking place in Mid and East Antrim. This is directly related to the quality of paddling available. The MEABC area encompasses two of Northern Ireland’s Canoe Trails namely, the East Coast Canoe Trail and the Lower Bann Canoe Trail.

Lower Bann Canoe Trail

Developed in 2008, the 58km Lower Bann Canoe Trail starts at Lough Neagh and finishes at the Atlantic Ocean. The Trail offers canoeists both tranquil waters and some faster flowing sections. Formal access points in the MEABC area are:

- Newferry East;
- Portglenone.

Portglenone offers great potential for the development of water-based activity. PEG has recently secured funding for the Portglenone Paddlers, a new recreational canoe and kayak group, to run a series of “taster canoe sessions” from Portglenone Marina. These will be followed-up with more regular events to sustain participation and grow their membership.

East Coast Canoe Trail

The East Coast Canoe Trail, approximately 70 nautical miles long, starts south of Cushendall and ends at the narrows of Strangford Lough in County Down. The coastal section within the study area offers various slipway access points and rest spots along the route. Day long itineraries are documented on CanoeNI and include sections from Waterfoot to Ballygally and Ballygally to Carrickfergus. There are numerous mapped access points within the study area:

- Carnlough Harbour;
- Glencloy Bridge;
- Glenarm;
- Ballygally;
- Tweed’s Port;
- Drains Bay;
- Sandy Bay Larne;
- Ballylumford Harbour;
- Browns Bay;
- Portmuck;
- Whitehead Harbour / County Antrim Yacht Club;
- Carrickfergus Harbour / Sailing Club.

Additional locations

Consultation and desk research highlighted that in addition to the formalised Canoe Trails, informal canoeing and kayaking takes place on rivers and tributaries within the study area. Public consultation and the recreational canoe online forum “Song of the Paddle” identified the following areas as being popular with experienced and regular paddlers:

- River Braid: Broughshane to Ballymena;
- River Maine: Cullybackey to Galgorm / Slaght Bridge;
- Kells Water: downstream from Kells – dependent on water level;
- Newferry access and kayak hire on Lower Bann.

2.5.3 Sailing

Sailing is a popular recreational activity within the study area and facilities are generally good within the key coastal sites of Carrickfergus, Whitehead and Larne.

Carrickfergus Sailing Club

Carrickfergus Sailing Club, founded in 1866, is the oldest sporting club in Carrickfergus and one of the earliest rowing clubs to be established in Ireland. It is an RYA champion club and approved training centre with over 300 members. The cruising fleet has grown rapidly over the past decade both in size and number with upwards of twenty boats now competing in the IOR, SL and Ruffian 8.5 Classes. The sailing club sits adjacent to the Marina.

East Antrim Boat Club, Larne

In 2013, East Antrim Boat Club was awarded the RYA Volvo Champion Club status. There is an active keel boat fleet, with racing taking place from the beginning of May until early September. Dinghy racing continues year-round with back-to-back races in the Winter months. The summer Regatta takes place every year and dinghy sailors can look forward to the Halloween and Christmas regattas. As an RYA affiliate, the club offers ashore and afloat training courses taken by RYA certified instructors. These courses cover those interested in sailing as well as powerboating.

Sea access to the club is through The Port of Larne and all vessels must notify Larne Port Control before entering. Larne Lough provides excellent shelter and good holding along the Islandmagee Shore. If a club mooring is free it may be made available to visiting berths. The pier can accommodate boats up to approximately 12M / 40 ft depending on tide. The slipway and pier can both be used by dinghies. If the premises are open – showers, toilets, changing and other facilities are available.

County Antrim Yacht Club, Whitehead

County Antrim Yacht Club, operating since 1902, has more than 350 members. The club offers opportunities for locals to learn to sail, coastal row and kayak as well as hosting community events. The club has undergone major renovations to extend the club having received £450k from the Sports Lottery. The club is one of several on the Lough that form part of the Belfast Lough Yachting Conference.

The County Antrim Yacht Club at Whitehead and Carrickfergus Sailing Club are bases for some of the province's most experienced helmsmen and women. Competitive sailing events are held regularly in the Lough.

Portglenone Marina

Portglenone Marina offers access to recreational boating on the Lower Bann. In addition to the 30 berths, the facility also provides a trailer park, slipway rigging area, canoe steps, pump out facility, security fencing, car park, camping area and picnic areas overlooking the river.

2.5.4 Coastal Rowing

In recent years Coastal Rowing has seen an impressive revival across the UK and Ireland and more specifically along the East Antrim Coast. The sport brings with it a strong cultural heritage and offers cross-community and all-ability participation and competition in events locally, nationally and internationally.

The Irish Coastal Rowing Federation is recognised as the Governing Body of Coastal Rowing in Ireland, of which there are 7 associate members, including Antrim Coast Rowing Association.

5 Coastal Rowing Clubs are affiliated to the Antrim Coast Rowing Association (ACRA) which promotes and supports activity from a growing number of local rowing clubs with rapidly growing numbers including:

- Glenarm Rowing Club;
- Cairndhu Rowing Club, Larne;
- Carnlough Rowing Club;
- Castle Rowing Club;
- Whitehead Coastal Rowing Club.

Coastal Rowing clubs have seen a large increase in numbers in recent years with consultation highlighting a strong representation of female participants. This has been assisted with the Council's Peave IV-funded 'Beach Bonanza' at Ballygalley Beach and Slipway. Castle Rowing Club, based at Ballygalley, have already surpassed 100 members since it was founded in November 2016. MEA's most recent standalone coastal rowing club is Whitehead Coastal Rowing Club established in 2017 but breaking off as a standalone club in 2019 with 30 members.

These clubs row traditional Antrim Coast Gigs alongside modern built boats and compete in local and national regattas including the Irish Coastal Rowing Championships and the World Skiffies.

Annual ACRA Regattas are as follows:

- Whitehead Regatta, Whitehead Shorefront (June);
- Carnlough Round the Rock, Carnlough Harbour (June);
- Castle Regatta, Ballygalley Beach (July);
- Dalriada RTR and Regatta, Glenarm Harbour (July);
- Carnlough Regatta, Carnlough Harbour (August).

2.5.5 Waterski-ing and Wakeboarding

Located on the Lower River Bann, the Newferry Waterski Club affiliated to the Irish Waterski Federation offers waterskiing and wakeboarding on a calm stretch of water between Lough Beg and Portglenone Bridge. All members have access to the club carpark, jetty, kitchen facilities, hot showers, male and female changing rooms and kayaks. Occasionally they host 'taster sessions' for both waterskiing and canoeing.

2.5.6 Other Water-Sports

Diving

The waters around Islandmagee are some of the best in Ireland for diving. North Irish Lodge / Diver provide instruction and dives for experienced PADI accredited divers. Popular diving sites include:

- Ballylumford, Islandmagee;
- Ballygalley Head;
- Whitehead.

Stand Up Paddleboarding

Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP) is a growing recreational activity and currently takes place in coastal sites including Ballygally and Browns Bay (in calm conditions) and on the Lower Bann in Portglenone and Newferry.

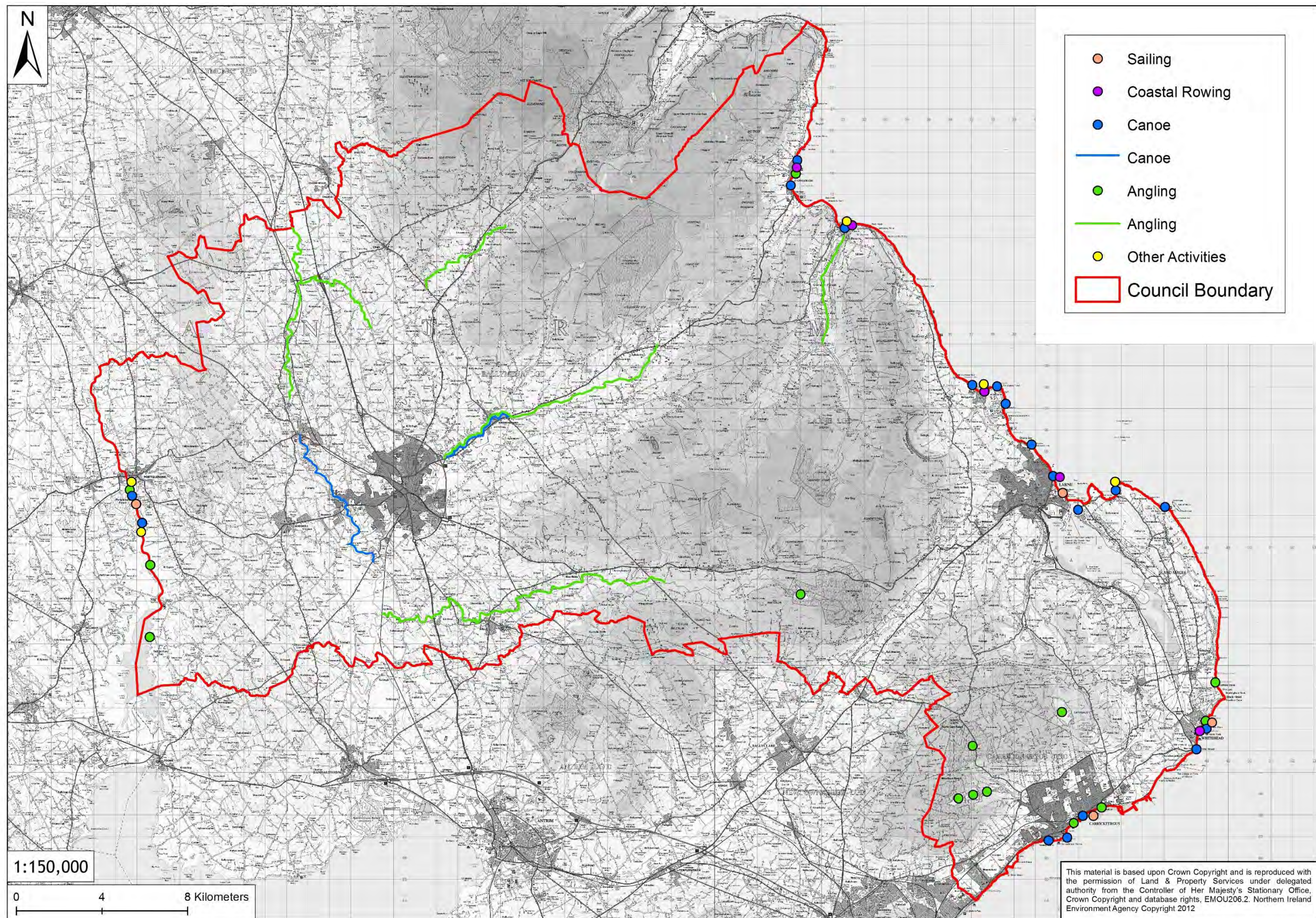


Figure 8: Current Water-based Outdoor Activity Provisions

2.6 Air-Based Recreation

2.6.1 Paragliding and Hang-Gliding

The only air-based sport that takes place in the MEABC area is hang gliding/paragliding. Hang-gliding is the non-motorised activity of flying or soaring through the air suspended in a harness from a single, fixed wing aircraft overhead whilst paragliding is where a glider sits in a harness suspended from a 'parachute-type' kite above his/her-head.

Except for experienced individuals gliding solo, the Ulster Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club is the primary provider of hang gliding and paragliding in Northern Ireland. In Mid and East Antrim, the club launch from the following sites, with prior landowner agreement:

- Big Collin and Wee Collin (south of Slemish Mountain);
- Knockagh.

PART 3 // RECOMMENDATIONS

DRAFT

3.1 Structure of recommendations

This section outlines key recommendations for the growth of outdoor recreation within MEABC over the next 10 years. The recommendations have been categorised under the following three headings:

1. **Enablers of Success** – refers to the enablers (both resources and structures) required in MEABC to ensure a high quality and consistent experience for all outdoor recreation users;
2. **Product Development** – refers to both the outdoor recreation infrastructure required to do an activity (e.g. trails, canoe steps, etc) and the supporting visitor services and facilities that enhance the experience;
3. **Marketing and Promotion** – refers to the wide range of media required to heighten the awareness of the local population and visitors to MEABC of the opportunities that exist for taking part in a wide range of outdoor recreation activities.

For each of the three headings a SWOT analysis was completed. A series of recommendations were then proposed under each heading. For each recommendation:

- A **brief synopsis of the consultation finding** related to the recommendation is given;
- The **recommendation is outlined** including the opportunities and benefits of the proposal in line with the Council's Community Plan, and;
- A **benchmarking case study** (where appropriate) has been provided to highlight good practice and key learnings on similar sites and projects that are successful in terms of activity infrastructure and visitor services.

3.2 Enablers of Success

The following SWOT analysis outlines the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with current management structures and resourcing, and the future enablers required to ensure a high quality and consistent experience for all outdoor recreation users. The information contained in the SWOT analysis is a summary of feedback gained through consultation, site visits and desk research.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><i>Management Structures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Outdoor Recreation Officer and Assistant Outdoor Recreation Officer in post; – Appreciation of outdoor recreation across Council Departments; – Good engagement between MEABC Parks and Open Spaces and Tourism teams; – The Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust has dedicated staff resource for the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ACNB). <p><i>Strategic Vision</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strong “fit” between outdoor recreation and MEABC Community Plan (e.g. the key themes of Good Health and Wellbeing; Our Environment; Sustainable Jobs and Tourism; Community Safety and Cohesion, and; Learning for Life); – Prominence of outdoor adventure/activity tourism within Emerging Tourism Strategy. <p><i>Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strong sense of community especially in rural villages and hamlets; – Well established and proactive community groups and associations; – Proactive water sport clubs, e.g. Castle Rowers, Whitehead Coastal Rowing Club, and Portglenone Paddlers; – Well established community driven events (e.g. “Gig n’ the Barn”) and Council driven events (e.g. “Beach Bonanzas”); – Recent growth of several small private sector activity providers; – Ability to engage with private landowners through Recreation Officer and Assistant Recreation Officer. 	<p><i>Management Structures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of partnership between MEABC and public, private, and voluntary sector outdoor recreation stakeholders; – Outdoor recreation is currently low on MEABC’s agenda for capital funding; – Outdoor recreation is currently low on MEABC’s agenda for revenue funding; – Lack of partnership and collaboration across the outdoor recreation industry per se across the Borough. <p><i>Strategic Vision</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of a clear vision for the contribution of outdoor recreation to MEABC Community Plan, with commensurate prioritising; – A joined-up strategic approach is required to develop, manage and promote outdoor recreation (addressed by this study); – Access legislation is weak. <p><i>Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parochial nature of community groups; – Lack of partnership approach; – Over bureaucratic funding initiatives.
Opportunities	Threats
<p><i>Management Structures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Maximise good working relationships between Council Departments (e.g. Parks and Open Spaces and Tourism teams); – Opportunities to improve collaboration between landowners/managers/funders; – Opportunities to improve collaboration between all interested parties in outdoor recreation; – Ability for Council to avail of licences with Forest Service NI and NI Water to manage sites to provide additional/new outdoor recreation facilities; – Opportunities for more partnership working between community organisations (increase opportunities for linking facilities and applying for funding); – Ability for other organisations to manage sites and provide additional/new outdoor recreation facilities/experiences. 	<p><i>Management Structures</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No mechanism in place to increase outdoor recreation partnership working across Council departments; – No forum in place to bring together landowners/managers/funders; – No forum in place to increase collaboration between all interested parties in outdoor recreation across the Borough; – Lack of funding for outdoor recreation within Council’s overall priorities; – Competing agendas of stakeholders and accompanying silo approaches. <p><i>Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Potential for apathy due to slow delivery of outdoor recreation development; – Private landowner concerns over liability restricting access and development on private land; – Poor participant retention in various outdoor recreation activities due to lack of club engagement programmes.

Table 9: SWOT analysis for Enablers of Outdoor Recreation

3.2.1 Cross-departmental Outdoor Recreation Steering Group

Consultations with key Council departments, members of Senior Management and the Operational Team and Council elected representatives identified a general appreciation of outdoor recreation across departments. Moreover, the potential contribution of outdoor recreation to the five themes of Council's Community Plan was noted, namely:

- Good Health and Wellbeing;
- Our Environment;
- Sustainable Jobs and Tourism;
- Community Safety and Cohesion;
- Learning for Life.

Also of note, is the good working relationship between the Parks and Open Spaces team and the Tourism team. There is strong overlap in the remit of the two departments, evident in the prominence of outdoor adventure and activity tourism within the Emerging Tourism Strategy and the central place of the Borough's unique landscapes in the "Shaped by Sea and Stone" tourism campaign.

However, currently there is no intra-Council mechanism to maximise good working relationships between departments. Consequently, there is an un-coordinated vision and approach to how outdoor recreation will be developed, managed and promoted to become a significant contributor to the Council's Community Plan. Therefore, outdoor recreation is low on MEABC's agenda for capital and revenue funding.

Recommendation

Establish a **Cross-departmental Outdoor Recreation Steering Group** within MEABC to improve intra-Council collaboration, made up of representatives from departments that have a direct or in-direct role in developing, managing and/or promoting outdoor recreation.

With the Parks and Open Spaces Team as the lead department, the Outdoor Recreation Steering Group would meet periodically and ensure there is buy-in, engagement and collaboration from other departments in developing, managing and promoting outdoor recreation. This mechanism would ensure that the profile of outdoor recreation is raised across the Council and help with coordination and collaboration between departments on the delivery of projects and programmes on the ground. This is essential to successfully oversee and ensure the delivery of the recommendations and actions outlined in this Strategy and Action Plan.

3.2.2 Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum

Consultations with the public, local clubs and private activity providers revealed the potential for apathy towards the Council due to slow delivery of outdoor recreation development. This sentiment emanated from past experiences whereby some respondents had taken time to feed into consultations but then did not see any outcomes, such as a report or delivery of projects and programmes on the ground. This can be damaging both to the reputation of MEABC and the long-term development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation, due to the lack of community buy-in, clear communication channels on progress and partnership working to realise projects.

It was noted that to enable outdoor recreation to grow across the Borough, stakeholders cannot work alone. There is need for improved partnership working between MEABC and public, private, and voluntary sector outdoor recreation stakeholders. From the consultation process it was clear that there is significant potential for synergy between the Council, public landowners and managers, well-established community groups, proactive clubs, the growing number of small private activity providers and major private landowners. Without the appropriate mechanism however, this cross-sector collaboration which is critical to the expansion of outdoor recreation remains untapped.

Recommendation

The formation of a **Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum** for the Borough, with representatives from all interested parties in outdoor recreation.

This Forum would be facilitated by the Council (in particular, the Outdoor Recreation Officer) and would include representation from management bodies such as the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust and the National Trust; major public landowners such as Forest Service NI and Water NI; major private landowners such as Glenarm Castle, private activity providers, local clubs and community associations and groups.

The purpose of the Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum would be to hold the Council accountable for the delivery of the 10-year Action Plan, monitor progress, identify local issues and potential actions and solutions. It is envisaged that the Forum would meet bi-annually for update briefings to ensure regular communication and the coordination of the delivery of actions across partners.

Benchmarking Case Study: *The Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Outdoor Recreation Group*



- Established in 2018 to bring together local interest groups and individuals;
- Identifies barriers to developing outdoor recreation opportunities in the Binevenagh area;
- Assists with preparing and delivering project proposals which could attract external funding;
- Consists of outdoor recreation providers, NGBs, and local clubs involved in surfing, walking, orienteering, mountain biking, and outdoor pursuits;
- There is no “automatic right” to sit on the Forum and members are encouraged to suggest additional members, expertise or interests where appropriate;
- Refer to Appendix 8 for further information.

3.2.2.1 Club Engagement Programme

It was recognised from the consultation process that one of the area’s greatest assets moving forward is the enthusiasm and competencies of local clubs and their potential to promote the outdoor recreation offering across the Borough. Proactive water sports clubs include Castle Rowing Club, Whitehead Coastal Rowing Club and Portglenone Paddlers.

From consultation with these local clubs it was clear that there are well-established community-driven events across the Borough, particularly for water-based recreation activities (e.g. Gig n' the Bann and Beach Bonanzas). While these are successful in encouraging large numbers of people to try new outdoor sports, it was acknowledged that it is difficult to retain participation and channel interested participants into local clubs that have the capacity for new members.

Recommendation

The creation of a **Club Engagement Programme** overseen by the Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum.

To facilitate these clubs and grow their capacity, it is recommended that a small grants programme for community outdoor recreation events and participation programmes is established. This would enable clubs and organisations to develop bespoke taster sessions and follow-up programmes, providing opportunities for sustained participation.

This action would increase retention rates following community events and therefore maximise the impact of Council run and sponsored events. In addition to the health benefits of being active in the outdoors, encouraging people to join a club ensures that they make the most of the social benefits that comes from a sense of belonging to a local club and participating with others in a sport/physical activity they enjoy.

Building on the increasing interest in outdoor sports by driving up long-term participation is central to creating a vibrant outdoor recreation culture across the Borough, particularly in terms of growing club memberships and volunteer bases which crucially generate social capital within communities. The Club Engagement Programme managed by the Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum would also be another important mechanism to address the lack of partnership and collaboration across the outdoor recreation industry per se within MEABC.

3.3 Product Development

The following SWOT analysis outlines the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the current and future outdoor recreation products at a local level in the study area.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><i>Outdoor Recreation Provision</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Strong canoe and kayak product (e.g. Lower Bann, East Coast Canoe Trails);– Strong water-sport offering on east coast, including coastal rowing and sailing;– Proactive clubs and strong volunteer base. <p><i>Landscape and Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Variety of scenic landscapes: mountains, coast, glens, grassland, forest;– Area includes Lower Bann, a proposed “Blueway” in Northern Ireland;– Good connectivity between communities and greenspace;– Well supported community-run events (e.g “Gig n’ the Bann”) and Council-run events (e.g. “Beach Bonanzas”);– Strong sense of community, especially in rural villages. <p><i>Visitor Services and Facilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Some good facilities (e.g. Camfunnock Country Park, slipways).	<p><i>Outdoor Recreation Provision</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Not a recognised destination for outdoor recreation;– Lack of off-road cycling and no mountain biking trails;– No horse-riding trails/bridleways;– Lack of quality walks in the Ballymena area;– Under-utilised sites (e.g. Woodburn Forest, ECOS Nature Park); <p><i>Landscape and Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Lack of community trails;– Untapped assets. <p><i>Visitor Services and Facilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Lack of visitor hubs and facilities (e.g. toilets, catering, equipment hire);– Lack of visitor welcome in forests;– Poor public transport;– Area perceived as a thoroughfare to get to the Causeway.
Opportunities	Threats
<p><i>Outdoor Recreation Provision</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Consolidate and enhance the existing watersports product as a basis for increasing provision and participation;– Develop walking opportunities between communities with a Community Trail Plan for the Borough;– Increase accommodation offer at sites;– Strengthen existing activity hubs and develop new regional and local activity hubs;– Improve disabled access where possible. <p><i>Landscape and Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Forests are largely untapped for outdoor recreation and would benefit from improvements to the visitor welcome and basic visitor servicing;– Capitalise on the Lower Bann “Blueways” proposition;– Proactive communities and voluntary groups should be a catalyst for development.	<p><i>Outdoor Recreation Provision</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– The Borough may continue to be used as a thoroughfare for tourists to reach the Causeway;– The Borough risks falling behind the growing trend for mountain-biking in NI. <p><i>Landscape and Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– A disconnect between community and local greenspace. <p><i>Visitor Services and Facilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Little to no revenue from forests coming from recreational use as they become inaccessible;– Local people feel a disconnect from facilities due to lack of connectivity and welcome;– Area perceived as a thoroughfare to get to the Causeway.

Table 10: SWOT analysis for Product Development

The Outdoor Recreation Product Development Framework in Figure 9 below demonstrates how the various products outlined in this section are aligned to the key themes of the MEABC Community Plan.

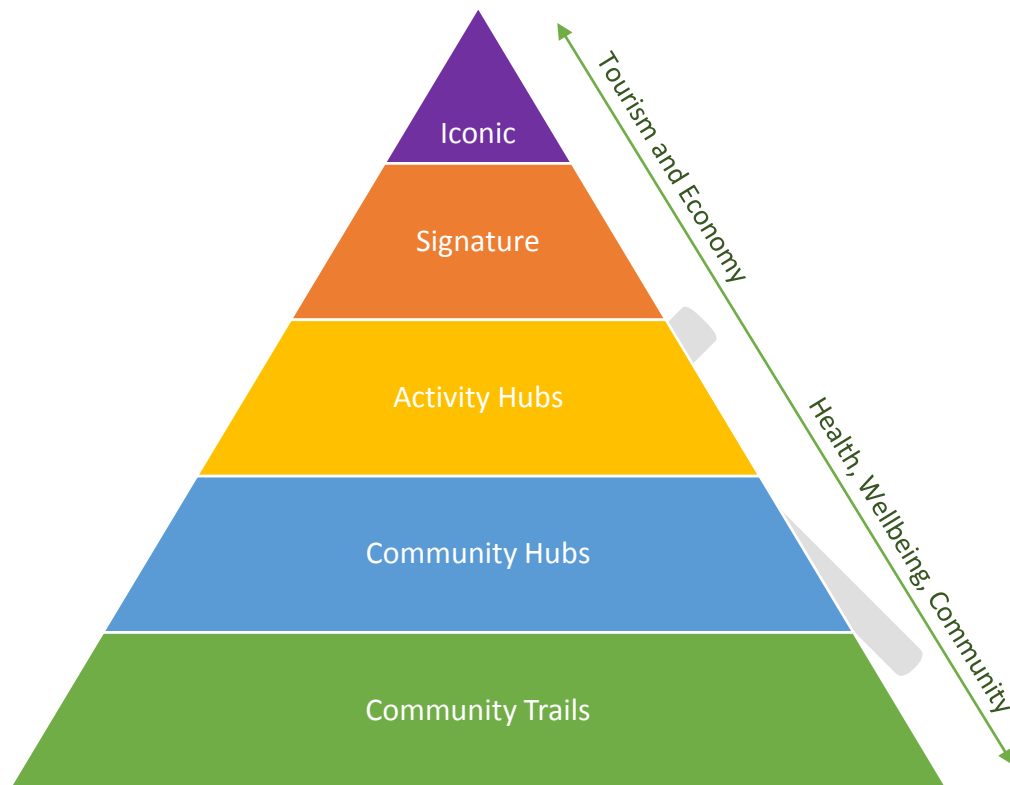


Figure 9: Outdoor Recreation Product Development Framework

Iconic – signifies outdoor recreation products and experiences that are a key driver for international and domestic tourists. Iconic products will be the key reason for visitors to come to the Borough as they celebrate and showcase the unique landscapes.

Signature – refers to outdoor recreation products and experiences that could form a key part of tourists’ wider itinerary when visiting MEABC. They also hold significant appeal to domestic visitors and the local community who want to casually explore and connect with the distinctive local landscape.

Activity Hubs – refers to the clustering of activities and supporting visitor services within a confined area (e.g. Forest Park or Country Park). Attractive to tourists as part of a wider itinerary, however, they will also draw a solid base of domestic and local users. Activity Hubs enable a variety of users to enjoy the same site through shared services and multi-use trail networks

Community Hubs – refers to outdoor recreation products that connect communities to high-quality greenspace and enable residents to be more active, therefore improving health and wellbeing, and social cohesion. Community Hubs provide connectivity between different activities, such as walking, and/or cycling, natural adventure play and water-based activities such as canoeing and angling.

Community Trails – refers to walking and/or multi-use trails that link communities to surrounding greenspace via a safe off-road route, or one community to another, for example, along a river corridor. These trails provide “doorstep” safe off-road walking/cycling opportunities at the community level and are intended to boost the sense of community as well as improve health and wellbeing outcomes.

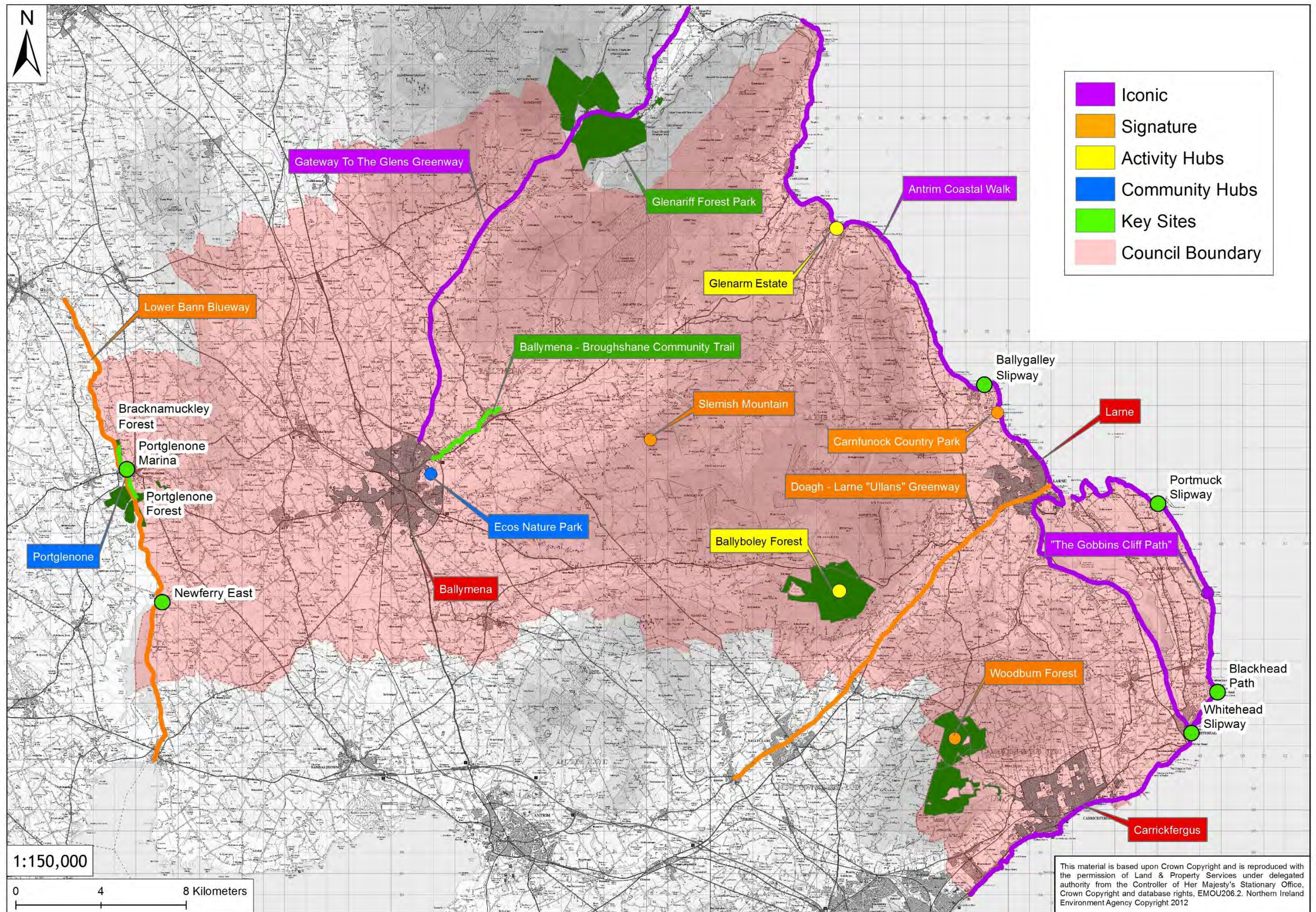


Figure 10: Proposed Key Sites for Product Development

3.3.1 Iconic Products

3.3.1.1 The Antrim Coast Path



Figure 11: Porkmuck / Island of Muck section of "Antrim Coast Path" (Image from @shapedbyseaandstone Instagram)

With approximately 90 kilometres of dramatic coastline within the Borough, stretching from Garron Point in the north, around the cliffs of Islandmagee and through the Victorian seaside town of Whitehead, it is not surprising that consultation highlighted a desire for a coastal path, both for the benefit of residents and as a significant potential tourism attraction.

Consultation with the Council, tourism organisations and the public identified a desire to create an Antrim Coast Path as a potential long-term project. The case is strengthened due to:

- Current pathways exist along the route so some sections already “on the ground”;
- Some existing sections already iconic – e.g. Blackhead Coastal Path (currently undergoing repair);
- Opportunity to create destination brand that draws out-of-state visitors to this section of coast rather than heading directly to the North Coast;
- Current visitor facilities and infrastructure in key locations on route already exist;
- Current tourist attractions already exist enabling creation of strong “Visitor Hubs” (e.g. The Gobbins Cliff Path and Glenarm);
- The route suits the development of long-distance walk trail itineraries and is easily sectioned into 1-day to 7-day itineraries (whole of Antrim Coast Path could be comfortably completed in 7-days which makes it ideal for week-long visitors);
- Opportunity to work alongside other tourism organisations to whom the creation of a national coastal path is a desire and a priority, such as Tourism Northern Ireland and National Trust;
- Opportunity to create a world-class long-distance walking route to complement the existing driving route.

Constraints to the development of the Antrim Coast Path which would need to be addressed include:

- Access issues;
- Level of investment required;
- Time required to undertake a project of this scale.

Recommendation

It is recommended that a **feasibility study is undertaken** to determine in detail the potential for the creation of an Antrim Coast Path, considering the incorporation of existing paths and the staged development of new stretches (some already proposed such as Ballygalley to Carnfunnock, and Whitehead to The Gobbins) that would require engagement with relevant landowners.

Running through an AONB, the Antrim Coast Path is an iconic project due to offering the visitor exceptional natural beauty and coastal landscapes that are unique and instantly recognisable to the Borough. Whether it is a bracing clifftop ramble, a gentle stroll on a beach or a fun day out with family and friends, the Antrim Coast Path would provide lots to enthral visitors and locals alike.

The Antrim east coast also boasts a rich cultural heritage that could be tapped into, including stories of smugglers, shipwrecks, battles, storms, and passages to and from Scotland. There is also substantial Victorian engineering and recreational heritage along the MEABC coastline, manifested in the recently restored Gobbins Cliff Path and Blackhead Coastal Path (currently under repair).

The creation of the Antrim Coast Path has the potential to set MEABC as a destination of choice for outdoor recreation, rather than a thorough-fare to the Causeway Coast. By encouraging visitors to spend more time along the Borough's coastline, the Path would increase bed nights and economic spend in the area. As well as a tourism initiative, the Antrim Coast Path would also be an important initiative in encouraging locals and visitors to walk for the health and wellbeing benefits it provides. This could be enhanced through the inclusion of looped walks and community trails off the Path route.

Benchmarking Case Study: South West Coast Path



- 630-mile SWCP launched in 1978, follows the coastline through the counties of Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset;
- In 2013, for the second time, Ramblers Walk magazine voted the path the best walking route in Britain;
- In 2015, 8.6 million visits, worth an estimated £502m and accounting for 4% of all direct tourism spend to the south west region, were made to the path;
- This expenditure is estimated to support 9771 full-time equivalent jobs.

3.3.1.2 The Glens of Antrim Greenway



Figure 12: Glenravel section of Greenway (image from <http://nigreenways.com/ballymena-to-cushendall-greenway/>)

The Glens of Antrim proposed Greenway extends 30km from Ballymena to Cushendall. It follows the line of the former narrow-gauge Ballymena, Cushendall and Red Bay Railway over the Glens from the Braid River valley to the east coast. The Greenway was included in the Department for Infrastructure's (DoI) Greenways Strategy (2016)¹⁹ as part of an overall 600km secondary network across Northern Ireland. In February 2019, it was announced that MEABC had progressed The Glens of Antrim Greenway concept to the stage where it was able to bid for capital funding for the project.

Consultation revealed that the public would greatly welcome the Greenway given the current weaknesses in relation to outdoor recreation provision in Borough. These include a general disconnect between communities and local greenspace, the lack of off-road cycling and community trails, poor public transport (that could be partly addressed through Greenways) and untapped assets, such as the engineering heritage manifest in the historic rail network across the Council area.

The Greenway would boost isolated settlements within the Glens, such as Martinstown and Cargan, and redress the sentiment in rural communities that development in the Borough is overly "town-centric". The scenery along the largely undisturbed stretch of the railway line through the Glens would appeal to many walkers and cyclists and lift the local economy by increasing footfall and bed nights in the villages along the route. Where possible, the Greenway could long-term connect with community trails as proposed in the relevant Village Plans.²⁰

The case for building this Greenway is strong:

- A rural location keen for investment;
- Strong public transport links within Ballymena;
- Existing plans to make Ballymena a greenway "hub";
- Opportunities to link with the Ecos Nature Park's cycle network and proposed community trails, such as the one proposed from Ballymena to Broughshane;

- World-class scenery able to attract domestic and international visitors;

The proposed Greenway lies between the two council areas of MEABC and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. There is also a large section of Forest Service NI land through Glenariff, however much of the route is on private ownership following the sale of railway property following closure.

Recommendation:

Central to the success of the Greenway will be the Council's ability to **negotiate successfully with all landowners along the route to secure access**. This is resource intensive and the time required should not be underestimated. Without access agreements in place, there will be no Greenway, unless the Council wishes to undertake compulsory purchase. It is recommended that the **MEABC employs a minimum of one full-time Greenway Officer** who would work daily out on the ground with landowners. This approach has led to the success of the "Great Western" (Westport to Achill) and "Waterford" (Waterford – Dungarvan) Greenways in the Republic of Ireland (ROI).

Benchmarking Case Study: Great Western



- The 42km Greenway follows the path of the old Westport to Achill Midland Railway line;
- Greenway was established through consultation with 160 landowners who were assured that they would:
 - Not face legal claims by anyone injured;
 - Retain full ownership of their land;
 - Be able to withdraw access permission.
- Landowners along the route gave land access and allowed development of the path at no cost;
- 250,000 people use the Greenway annually;
- 200 jobs created in guiding, bike rental, cafes etc.

3.3.1.3 The Gobbins Cliff Path



Figure 13: Photograph of one of the many bridges along the Gobbins coastal walk

Originally opened in 1902, the development of the coastal path at the Gobbins was the vision of Berkeley Deane Wise, Chief Engineer of the Belfast and Northern Counties Railway Company. With the expanding railway network opening up remote and scenic landscapes, the cliff path was designed to appeal to the growing “railway tourism” market and attract visitors to enjoy this stretch of Islandmagee coastline in a very elemental way.

Following four years of restoration, the 1.2-mile-long cliff walk was reopened to the public in 2015. From consultation it was evident that the Gobbins Cliff Path is already regarded as an iconic outdoor recreation product because:

- 1) It celebrates and showcases the unique coastline landscape;
- 2) Is a key attraction for drawing international and domestic tourists to the Borough.

In 2018 over 30,000 visitors had explored the coastal path. The main strengths of the Gobbins are:

- Situated on the Causeway Coastal Route;
- Located within an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI);
- Variety of landscape/terrain: caves, tunnels rocky outcrops, bridges and cantilevered platforms;
- Excellent visitor centre and services (e.g. car parking, café; exhibition; guided tours);
- Offering will be enhanced with the extension of the Path through the Belfast Regional City Deal.

Recommendation

Notwithstanding the success of the Gobbins since it reopened in 2015, there is room to improve the current offering. It is recommended that **the coast path is extended with the addition of looped walks**. This proposal for an extension to the path is already part of the Belfast Regional City Deal that was secured in March 2019 and will see the UK Government invest £350 million into the Belfast Region

over the next 10 years. The inclusion of the Gobbins in the City Deal is aimed at investing in a major tourism asset that will attract more domestic and international visitors. Furthermore, it aligns with the Council's Community Plan that positions "tourism-led regeneration" as the blueprint for a vibrant economy. With an extension to the coastal walk and the addition of looped walks, the Gobbins has the potential to facilitate increased international and domestic visitor numbers to the Borough and extend dwell-time.

3.3.2 Signature Products

3.3.2.1 Woodburn Forest



Figure 14: Woodburn Forest (image from @jonnymccormick Instagram)

Woodburn Forest, situated four miles outside Carrickfergus, is a highly valued and publicly accessible outdoor recreation site. The site owned by NI Water is leased to Forest Service NI for commercial forestry. The public are permitted to use unwaymarked gravel paths for walking and the reservoirs for angling however no other facilities have been provided for recreational activities at the Forest.

Under the NI Water Recreation and Access guidance document the following activities take place and *are permitted* within the forest:

- Walking;
- Running;
- Dog Walking;
- Angling – with a disabled fishing stand in place at North Carn Reservoir;²¹
- Horse riding.

However, additional activities take place that are *not permitted*:

- Mountain biking;
- Scrambling.

In 2017, Council established a Woodburn Forest Forum. Facilitated by Council, it meets regularly and includes representation from the following organisations:

- NI Water;
- Forest Service NI;
- Inland Fisheries;
- Council;
- Woodburn Regeneration Group.²²

Although the Ulster Way goes through Woodburn Forest, it is a “link” section rather than a quality walk section. This means that walkers are actively encouraged to make use of the public transport links when completing this section.

Recommendations

If Council wishes to see Woodburn Forest reach its potential as a recreation site, it will be necessary for it to **enter into a land management agreement with Forest Service NI**. This may involve a tri-party agreement between Council, NI Water (as the landowner) and Forest Service NI (as the leaseholder).

As the main statutory partner with a remit for outdoor recreation, it is recommended that Council considers taking on the license/lease (or similar agreement) for all outdoor recreation within the Forest. This may involve a tri-party agreement between Council, NI Water, as the landowner and FSNI, as the lease holder.

In 2018, Outdoor Recreation NI completed for the Council a review of the Forest’s outdoor recreation potential. One of the key recommendations was that a Masterplan for the site was prepared. Without such an approach, development will be piece-meal and ad-hoc. The benefits of the Masterplan approach can be seen at Gosford Forest Park, where Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABCBC) undertook a similar exercise which has directly led to the investment in the Forest of £1.5 million in outdoor recreation products over the past 18 months.

The **following recommendations** are strategic and attempt to maximise the potential of the Forest.

Recommendation	Detail	Lead organisation
Develop a Masterplan for the Forest.	This should include as a minimum, consideration of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Visitor facilities e.g. car parking, toilets within visitor building; – Signage and information throughout site; – Design of a local mountain bike facility; – Design of a multi-use trail system using existing forest roads linked with new build sections of trail. 	Partnership approach: Council, NI Water, Forest Service NI
Secure funding for the development of on-site projects	This should include as a minimum – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reinstatement of Woodburn Glen walk trail and associated heritage features. – Development of a linear heritage trail along the water channel and reinstatement of associated heritage features such as the stone bridges. 	Council Woodburn Regeneration Group (if constituted)
Constitution of Woodburn Regeneration Group including name.	This would enable the group to submit funding applications and take a more active role in the management of Woodburn Forest. A name change would help give the group a new start and help disassociate it with its previous lobbying activity on fracking in the area.	Members of the current Woodburn Regeneration Group

Table 11: Recommendations for Woodburn Forest

Benchmarking Case Study: Dalby Forest



- Dalby Forest is an 8000-acre site in North Yorkshire;
- Target market is families and activity visitors;
- 2005-2007: Structured Masterplanning approach to outdoor activities and visitor welcome;
- Redevelopment project was stages in 3 phases:
- Phase 1: Redevelopment of courtyard as a community resource centre;
- Phase 2: Design and build of a high specification visitor centre;
- Phase 3: Replacement of old worn-out cycle trails and construction of a cycle skills area;
- The result is at present the Forest receives 450,000 visitors per year;
- Income is generated from car parking;
- Visitors are estimated to spend £21-30 in the local area during their visit;
- See Appendix 8 for full case study.

3.3.2.2 Slemish Mountain



Figure 15: Photograph of Slemish Mountain from "Shaped by Sea and Stone" Instagram Page

Slemish Mountain is a signature project due to its very distinctive feature within the Borough's landscape and its rich spiritual heritage. The mountain rises 437 metres from the surrounding plain and its signature shape is the result of being the central core of an extinct volcano. In relation to its spiritual heritage, according to legend, Slemish Mountain is the first known home of Saint Patrick where he worked as a shepherd for 6 years and where he is believed to have converted to Christianity.

Although under the ownership of a private landowner, Slemish Mountain is open year-round and on Saint Patrick's Day large crowds hike to the top of the mountain as a pilgrimage. The 1.5km walk to the summit and back takes approximately one hour. With only a 15-minute drive from Broughshane and Ballymena, it is attraction for both locals and visitors to the area.

However, consultations revealed safety concerns about the steep and rocky nature of the 180-metre climb, and how after the grassy track to the foot of mountain from the carpark, users must follow desire lines or choose their own route up and down the steep slopes. In places, over-use is causing erosion and damage to the landscape. Furthermore, the lack of effective marketing to attract visitors (until recent MEABC "Shaped by Sea and Stone" tourism campaign) has meant that Slemish Mountain is another under-utilised outdoor recreation site with considerable potential in the Borough.

Recommendation

Develop a **professionally-designed, sustainable and sensitively built path from the base of Slemish Mountain to the summit**, and a **looped walk around the mountain** that incorporates surrounding historic sites connected to Saint Patrick.

These actions would maximise the outdoor recreation potential of this signature natural landmark by:

- Improving safety for walkers and making the summit more accessible to a broader range of visitors, such as families (who are weary of the current slippery nature of the path in wet weather);
- Showcasing via interpretation the expansive 360-degree views from the summit of the Antrim and Scottish coasts to the east; Ballymena town, Lough Neagh and the Sperrin Mountains to the west; and the Bann Valley and the higher summits of the Antrim Hills to the north;
- Incorporating a looped walk around Slemish Mountain that would enable more locals and visitors to enjoy longer trails and spend more time on the site and engage with its unique natural and spiritual heritage.

In addition to improving the infrastructure, improvements should also be made to visitor services, including installing visitor welcome and improving interpretation and toilet facilities. With increased visitors, a mobile catering kiosk run by a private operator could also provide refreshments during the peak tourism season, adding another important component to the visitor experience.

3.3.2.3 Lower Bann Blueway



Figure 16: Bann Valley (image from @connormcc Instagram)

The Lower Bann which stretches 60km from Toome to the Atlantic (via Coleraine) is rich in wildlife, history and built and natural heritage as evidenced by the wide range of environmental designations attributed to it. The Lower Bann has two Navigation Authorities. Coleraine Harbour Commissioners manage the 8km of navigation from the sea at the Barmouth to the Town Bridge in Coleraine while Waterways Ireland manages the remaining 52km of navigation from Coleraine Town Bridge to Lough Neagh.

Whilst considerable outdoor recreation development has taken place along the river in recent years, it is yet to maximise its full outdoor recreation potential. A recent study²³ identified that the river is currently a hidden asset, not identifiable as a destination and therefore it cannot capitalise on its role in social and economic development.

Access for water recreation is well developed along the river with a wide range of slipways, jetties, pontoons and marinas, however provision for land-based recreation (e.g. walking and cycling) is fragmented. In addition, water recreation can often be impacted by Rivers Agency's requirement to manage the water levels in Lough Neagh. The Lower Bann acts as a drainage outlet for Lough Neagh and therefore when Lough Neagh's water levels are lowered the increased water levels and rate of flow on the Lower Bann can significantly impact water and river bank-based recreation (e.g. sailing and angling).

A key outcome of the aforementioned study was the development of an action plan. Waterways Ireland in conjunction with Tourism Northern Ireland, The Honourable the Irish Society, Sport NI and the relevant local councils (Causeway Coast & Glens, Mid & East Antrim, Antrim & Newtownabbey and Mid Ulster) have established an Implementation Group ensure its delivery.

A key action within the action plan is the development of a Lower Bann Blueway. A Blueway is defined as *"A network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences."*²⁴

The "Dabbler" or "Novice" will be the best prospect visitor for Blueways in Ireland and include those that have little to no skills or prior experience in undertaking adventure activities. The "Dabbler" seeks the following:

Features:

- A mixture of land and water activities;
- A rich opportunity to experience Ireland's culture, history and scenery;
- A safe experience.

Locations:

- Attractive locations – not simply just anywhere with water, but scenery unique to Ireland which visitors do not find closer to home;
- Coastal locations – especially important to attract overseas visitors;
- Sheltered waters (e.g. not the brunt of the ocean).

Water-based activity offering should be:

- Delivered by guides;
- Focus on the easier entry level;
- Follow high safety standards.

Potential Blueway users are attracted by the proximity to water, however it is evident the preference remains to be alongside water rather than in or on the water. Hence the importance of multi-activity options. The Lower Bann therefore has significant potential to become a stand out Blueway proposition. A recent feasibility study²⁵ identified the potential to develop a walk and cycle trail between Toome and Coleraine, that would complement the existing Lower Bann Canoe Trail to facilitate a "Blueway" trail.

It is important to recognise the development on a Blueway along the entire length of the Lower Bann may take significant time to address, however, in the interim a successful Blueway proposition could be developed in numerous locations along the river to offer half day experiences suitable for the dabbler. This has approach has been successfully adopted in waterways such as Lough Derg and Shannon. *See Appendix 8 for a Case Study of the Shannon Blueway.*

Within the confines of the MEABC boundary the feasibility study identifies Portglenone as a “key hub” for prioritised development. Development would include collaboration with Mid Ulster District Council to develop the identified priority option for trails between Newferry and Bracknamuckly Wood.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council **proactively engage with Waterways Ireland and Lower Bann Implementation Group** to ensure MEABC plays a key role in the development of the Lower Bann Blueway.

It is also recommended that MEABC **works in collaboration with Mid Ulster District Council to develop the prioritised section of Blueway** between Newferry and Bracknamuckly Wood. This will involve private landowner liaison, agreement, detailed design and development.

3.3.2.4 Doagh to Larne Greenway

In 2018, £25,000 was awarded to the Council for a detailed design study of the Doagh to Larne Greenway. The proposed 26km Greenway would incorporate sections of the former railway line from Ballymena to Ballyclare and Ballymena to Larne.

Consultation identified the potential strengths of the Greenway as:

- Rural locations keen for investment;
- Increased active travel as a means for commuting, everyday journeys or leisure and recreation;
- Increased shared space and opportunities for social inclusion and interaction;
- Increased safety for walkers and cyclists (including to school and work);
- Opportunities for the growth of local economies along route;
- Synergies with long term flooding mitigation schemes.

In 2019, MEABC and Antrim and Newtonabbey Borough Council announced that they are now in a position to bid for capital funding for the project.

Recommendation

Similar to “The Glens of Antrim Greenway”, critical to the success of Doagh to Larne Greenway will be the Council’s ability to **negotiate successfully with all landowners along the route to secure access**. This is resource intensive and the time required should not be underestimated. Without access agreements in place, there will be no Greenway, unless the Council wishes to undertake compulsory purchase. It is recommended that the **MEABC employs as a minimum one full-time Greenway Officer** who would work daily out on the ground with landowners.

3.3.2.5. Carnfunnock Country Park

Carnfunnock Country Park, near Larne, is already a signature outdoor recreation facility within MEABC, with potential to offer more to the user. Covering 191 hectares of mixed woodland, gardens, walk trails and spectacular coastline, there are a wealth of activities that appeal to families. These include outdoor adventure play, golf driving range and academy, way-marked walks, orienteering course, geocaching and wildlife garden. By way of visitor services there is a visitor centre with a café and gift shop, public toilets and picnic sites.

Consultation revealed that this Council-run outdoor recreation asset is generally highly valued by residents of the Borough, particularly young families. This cohort, however, is low revenue-generating in comparison to the tourism market (e.g. emerging Tourism Strategy 2017-2027). At present, Carnfunnock Country Park is not functioning highly as a tourism asset.

In 2017, Park Hood was commissioned by MEABC to assist in addressing this issue through the creation of a Development Plan. Recommendations had a tourism-focussed approach and were themed under environmental improvements, access, visitor facilities, visitor attraction and community connectivity.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Carnfunnock Country Park **Development Plan (2017) is reviewed** and **additional improvements made** to the site, including as a minimum:

- Connectivity to Ballygally
 - A connecting trail between Carnfunnock Country Park and Ballygally would serve the local community well and would dovetail with the proposed Community Trail Plan;²⁶
 - A 2014 feasibility study undertaken by ORNI identified that although a connecting route using the coast road was the best option, a trail connecting Ballygally to Carnfunnock Country Park via Chaine's Wood was more feasible.
- Revision of Activity Provisions
 - The Council should investigate the potential for provision of new activities and varied attractions. These should suit the site's sloped topography (e.g. zip-lining, zorbing and high-ropes). Development of new activities should be incremental and appropriate to the context of the natural heritage of the Park to prevent over-commercialisation.
- Water-sports Potential
 - The potential for water sports at Cairndhu Bay could be embraced by council, private activity providers, local community groups.

3.3.3 Activity Hubs

For the purposes of this report, the term “Activity Hub” refers to the clustering of activities and supporting visitor services within a confined area providing the local/visitor with ample opportunities to undertake a single or multi-day trip. “Activity Hubs” typically have a multitude of outdoor recreation activities with good connectivity between all resources (e.g. a path may be multi-use or canoe steps may also provide access for anglers). These sites should have appropriately developed visitor facilities (e.g. toilets and catering).

Consultation identified several sites where there is demand from a wide range of outdoor recreation stakeholders for further development. Given the scale of these sites, there may also be a tourism focus to their development.

3.3.3.1 Ballyboley Forest



Figure 17: View from Ballyboley Forest from Imarsahl121 Instagram Page

Ballyboley Forest, located just over five miles from Larne, was planted in 1957 and has multiple land-uses such as providing timber for saw mills and supplying water to surrounding communities. While there are no facilities for recreational activities provided, the public can visit the forest on foot. While a car park is available at the entrance to the forest there is no visitor welcome, interpretation, waymarking or toilet facilities. From public consultation and a site visit, it was evident that Ballyboley Forest is already an important outdoor recreation asset for residents of MEABC but has the potential to become a well utilised Activity Hub for the area.

The Forest and Killylane Reservoir are owned by FSNi and NI Water, respectively. Visitors to the site currently undertake a range of informal and formal activities. Informal activities include walking, mountain biking, cycling and horse-riding, whilst angling formally takes place in the Killylane Reservoir which has accessible fishing stands. The Ulster Way passes through and over the top of Carninard (366m) within Ballyboley Forest.

Recommendation

Undertake a **Scoping Study to determine what development is required to maximise the potential of Ballyboley Forest** as an Activity Hub and **determine how Council could manage the site** in agreement with landowner(s).

Such a Scoping Study would include outlining actions and associated costs in relation to upgrading visitor welcome, trails and waymarking to increase the number of users who would use the forest for:

- Walking and running (including an All Ability Trail);
- Off-road cycling and family cycling;
- Horse-riding.

In relation to land management, the Scoping Study would also consider the benefits of MEABC entering into a MOU/licence agreement with Forest Service NI to enable the Council to develop, manage and promote recreational opportunities at Ballyboley Forest, whilst the landowner retains ownership and continues to manage felling operations. This MOU/licence agreement could be site specific or could apply to all the FSNI lands within the Council boundary, which would provide a broader framework for collaborative partnerships to create social, recreational, tourism and economic benefits (see Section 1.8 on Land Access and Management Trends for more information).

For a relevant case study please refer to “Darkley Forest” benchmarked for Portglenone (Section 3.3.4.1 and further detailed in Appendix 8), which outlines what upgrades have been achieved with a modest budget and the benefits that have been realised. It also details the agreement Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has with FSNI for the recreational development, management and promotion of the site.

3.3.3.3. Glenarm Castle

Glenarm Castle is a working estate consisting of forest, farmland and the Glenarm River. The estate welcomed 90,000 visitors in 2018 and permits walking and leisure cycling. In the past it has hosted a Red Bull-sponsored mountain biking event attended by 100+ riders, and Born2Run’s “Glenarm Castle Challenge” uses the estate and forest for a Half Marathon, 10K and 5K running event.²⁷

Key consultation findings in relations to Glenarm Castle included that:

- The 5 miles of the Glenarm River which runs through the estate is used for angling. The Glenarm Angling Club fish 2 miles;
- Informal mountain-biking and canoeing also take place in the estate;
- The estate has leased the forest for recreation from FSNI and are keen to work in partnership with MEABC to open the Estate’s assets to the public as a recognised “Activity Hub”.

Recommendation

Given the interest from Glenarm Castle to work with MEABC, it is recommended that **the Council enters into discussion with the Estate about the potential for partnership working** in developing outdoor recreation holistically across the Forest and the Estate. Following the outcome of these discussions, it may be appropriate to develop a Masterplan for the Forest and Estate in partnership

with the landowners which would set out strategically how the outdoor recreation/activity tourism potential of Glenarm could be fully realised. Such a Masterplan would include:

- Engaging relevant stakeholders;
- Ensuring environmental aspects are considered;
- Identifying connections to wider projects such as connectivity to the local community, links to the Ulster Way (which starts in Glenarm) and water access;
- Identifying appropriateness of activities within the “Hub”;
- Considering appropriateness of a private activity provider on-site to deliver specific activities;
- Identifying the tourism potential of the site;
- Identifying the Council’s role in the development and management of the site;
- Improving visitor flow and reducing potential for visitor conflict;
- Reducing a siloed approach to development;
- Considering disability access;
- Identifying ongoing management/maintenance responsibilities.

3.3.4 Community Hubs

3.3.4.1 Portglenone



Figure 18: Portglenone Marina (image from allygstewart Instagram)

Portglenone has multiple assets with the potential to make the village stand out as a “Community Hub” for outdoor recreation, namely the proximity to local forests, good water access and integration with proposals for the Lower Bann Blueway.

In terms of water access, the Marina provides a trailer park, slipway rigging area, canoe steps, pump out facility, car park, camping area and picnic areas overlooking the river, but consultation identified that more could be done at this site to create a community ethos including equipment storage, public toilets, hosting watersports events and supporting new clubs (e.g. Portglenone Paddlers).

Portglenone and Bracknamuckley Forests hold excellent potential and could be linked to Portglenone village centre via “Community Trails”, increasing connectivity and accessibility. As the more developed forest, Portglenone Forest is made up of 26 hectares of ancient woodland, with a 1.3-mile loop walk and a jetty providing excellent access to the Lower Bann. However, the site has become “tired” with little visitor welcome and lack of upkeep with trail waymarking. Currently, Bracknamuckley Forest is not developed but holds potential for walking and leisure cycling trails and water access.

From consultation and site visits it was clear that joining up the Marina with Community Trails to Portglenone Forest and Bracknamuckley Forests and upgrading the offering within these sites would make Portglenone a key “Community Hub” in the western area of MEABC.

Recommendation

To transform Portglenone into an outdoor recreation “Community Hub” it is recommended that:

- Community Trails are developed linking **Portglenone Forest to Portglenone** and **Portglenone to Bracknamuckley Forest**;
- **Portglenone Forest is upgraded** with updated trail waymarking and new branded welcome and trailhead signage. With relatively modest changes, significant improvements could be made to the user/visitor experience;
- **Bracknamuckley Forest is developed.** This small forest could provide a short 2km looped walk and family cycling trail linked to the village of Portglenone via a Community Trail paralleling the Lower Bann. This project should progress only if the Community Trail can be developed as there are no carparking facilities at the entrance to the Forest. Steps required to complete this project include:
 - Securing permissive access agreements with landowners to facilitate a Community Trail that would connect Portglenone Forest with Bracknamuckley via the Marina;
 - Agreeing a MOU/ licence agreement with Forest Service NI to develop/manage Forest;
 - Completion of a frame of reference;
 - Completion of trail design for the site.²⁸
- Portglenone and Bracknamuckley Forests should be **part of the uniform brand for all MEABC recreation sites**²⁹ (see Section 3.4.2 for further information);
- **Enhancing the Marina** – Facilities could be further improved with the extension of existing berths, installation of hoists, lowering of jetties and promotion of inclusive sports.

Implementing these recommendations would make a major impact towards improving the outdoor recreation provision in Portglenone by connecting and maximising the natural environment assets in and around the village. Whilst this would be of significant benefit to residents, it would also attract more visitors to the area and enable them to comfortably spend a day in the village going between the Marina and Portglenone Forest and Bracknamuckley Forest via Community Trails.

Benchmarking Case Study: Darkley Forest, County Armagh



- The development of Darkley Forest is a blueprint for what is required to realise the potential of Portglenone and Bracknamuckley Forests.
- **2015: Scoping Study** on behalf of ABC Borough Council found that Darkley Forest had:
 - No visitor welcome;
 - No formal walking trails, access point or car parking;
 - No interpretation, information or waymarking.
- **September 2018: Development works completed on-site**
- Development and installation of a multi-use trail network including car park, appropriate information and signage and seating;
- Branding of Darkley Forest in line with ABCBC Forest Branding in Gosford & Carnagh Forests;
- See Appendix 8 for full case study.

3.3.4.2 Ecos Centre and Nature Park



Figure 19: Image of Ecos Centre Nature Park situated along the Braid River, Ballymena

The Ecos Centre and Nature Park, located in the edge of Ballymena, opened in 2000. Over time the centre's core business has changed and it currently provides office/event space for private and start-up companies. The Nature Park is under developed in terms of outdoor recreation provision, although it does serve as a popular dog walking site with excellent links to the community and also hosts a weekly Parkrun and forms part of National Cycle Route 97 also known as the Ecos Cycle Trail.

Recommendation

Undertake a "Revisioning" exercise of the whole site, giving consideration to the potential of:

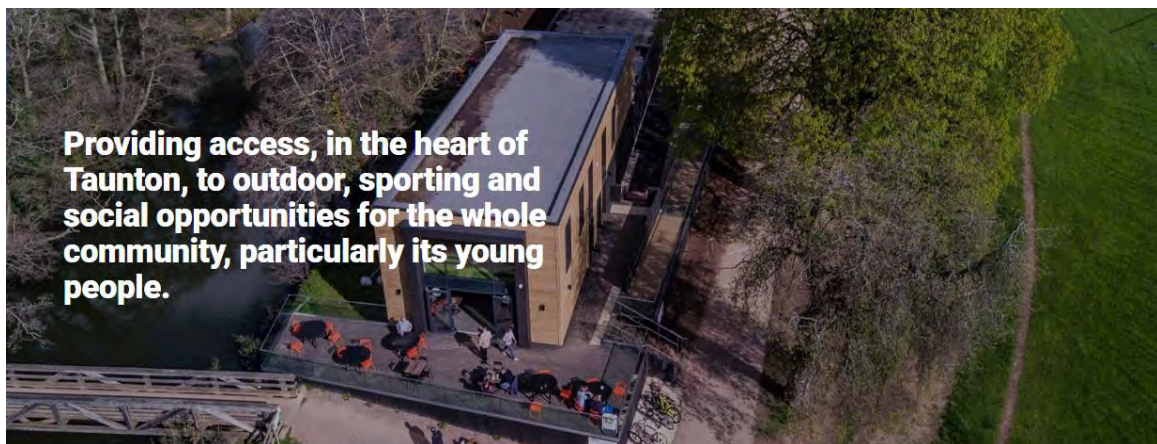
- **Transforming the Ecos Nature Park into a "Community Hub"**
 - The quality and quantity of access points should be reviewed to ensure that the Park is as accessible to the community as possible;
 - Council assesses feasibility of the Ecos Centre to provide facilities to visitors to the Park such as a café, toilets, showering and changing facilities, event space and storage for equipment for outdoor recreation activities. With these additions to the current building, the Park would offer a unique indoor/outdoor space for many outdoor recreation user groups, including local sports and youth clubs and educational groups.
- **Creating an Urban Sport Facility for local young people**
 - The acreage of the Park would allow for zoning to include an urban sport facility offering activities such as BMX, skateboarding, scootering and parkour. This could include a bike wash and space to facilitate participation programmes for on-road/off-road cycling.
- **Enhancing access to the Braid River to facilitate more water-based recreation**
 - The Ecos Nature Park could further benefit from the introduction of access/egress points in the Park for the canoeing on the Braid River. The proposed indoor facility would have the potential to include access for storage of equipment and would enable the introduction of water-sports participation programmes.

- **Enhancing trail network**

- A full trail review should be undertaken to provide an overview and assessment of the existing trail network and usage, propose new trails (with a fully costed estimate of trail works and infrastructure required), and consider how the Ecos Park can connect better with local communities through “Community Trails” (e.g. Ecos Park to Broughshane).

Rather than take away from the environmental ethos of the Park, the “revisioning” of the site to realise its potential and increase visitor numbers could serve to enhance it. For example, there is potential for the provision of a wildlife trail, engagement with community, youth and school groups with the conservation of the site, and activities such as biodiversity surveillance and pond dipping.

Benchmarking Case Study: Centre for Outdoor Activity and Community Hub (COACH), Taunton



- Situated in the heart of Taunton, the new community building is both welcoming and functional. Its location, in Taunton’s French Weir Park, links 69 acres (28 hectares) of public green space at Longrun Meadow with the River Tone and Taunton’s town centre and is accessible to the whole community – particularly its young people.
- For more information visit: coach-taunton.org.uk/about-coach

3.3.5 Community Trails



Figure 20: Image of the Tobar Mhuire Heritage Trail developed in Crossgar

Consultation identified a lack of off-road walking and cycling opportunities in settlements and between settlements within the Borough. There was a lot of expressed desire for paths to be established that would connect communities to “doorstep” greenspace, otherwise known as Community Trails. There is significant appetite across MEABC for:

- Increased access to local outdoor spaces for recreational purposes;
- Development of safe off-road links between communities;
- Desire to see Alleged Public Rights of Way reinstated;
- Increased path networks around communities as identified in Village Plans (see Appendix 2).

Community Trails are defined as trails that:

- Connect communities to outdoor spaces and is therefore close to where people live and work;
- Connect different communities (e.g. connects two villages together).

Community trails are largely off-road (at least 70%) and come in a variety of different forms, from natural grass tracks to purpose-built paths, dependant on the setting and needs of its users. When combined, they form a “community trail network” which is a system of connected paths designed and developed to be used by local people and visitors for leisure, recreation and functional trips. They provide opportunities for walking, cycling, horse riding and other activities for people of different ages and abilities.

Given the benefits to locals, such as improvements to health and wellbeing outcomes, Community Trails are becoming more to the fore in community planning. In Scotland, for example, it is a legislative requirement that all Councils have a “Core Path Plan” – a system of paths for non-motorised access which give the public reasonable access throughout their area. In Northern Ireland, Community Trails have been and/or are being developed by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council; Ards and North Down Borough Council; Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the **Council develops a Community Trail Plan for each DEA** from reviewing Village Plans and consulting with the local communities to:

- Provide a record of the community trail network in and around settlements in the DEA;
- Provide a map showing the spatial layout of trails, both existing and potential future trails, which link communities with each other and to outdoor green space and the surrounding countryside;
- Set out a Plan for development to achieve a network which in the long-term increases access, improves connectivity, is fit-for-purpose and serves the needs of its users.

Having a Community Trail Plan demonstrates a strategic approach towards access development which is one element of the overall community planning function. Further, it enables decision makers to focus resources and prioritise path development projects in the context of the wider network and longer-term vision of the Council.

If implemented this Community Trail Plan will significantly influence how people access, use and enjoy their surrounding environment and green space. It will also inform how that environment is managed for recreation and other land use purposes whilst considering the access needs of the local population.

Ultimately a Community Trail Plan sets out to achieve:

- Better connectivity within communities, between communities and the surrounding countryside;
- Increased access for people of all ages, abilities and by different means (e.g. on foot, bike or horseback, etc);
- Improved accessibility (e.g. making it easier for people to move around their local community without the use of a car for different purposes, e.g. exercising, walking the dog, travelling to school or work, etc);
- A change in behaviour by creating communities where walking is easier and safer will help to integrate physical activity into people's everyday life which has proven physical and mental health benefits, leading to a healthier, happier population with perhaps less reliance on vehicles which in turn would have environmental benefits;
- A better-connected network of paths – this can make an area more appealing to visitors/tourists, therefore bringing economic benefit to the area.

Table 12 highlights recommendations relating to Community Trails identified in the MEABC Village Plans and is evidence of the strong appetite across the Borough for safe off-road walking and cycling paths. Please see Appendix 10 for all outdoor recreation proposals contained in the Village Plans.

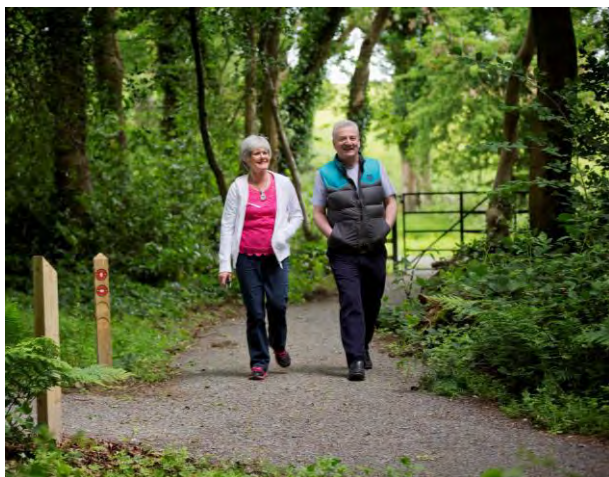
Village Plan	Community Trail Proposals
Ahoghill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Desire to see trails created within and around the new park;– Link up existing walks/paths in village and ensure key locations are joined up;– Ensure appropriate disability access around village to key sites and paths.
Ballycarry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Development of walking opportunities and paths;– Clarification of Public Rights of Way.
Ballygally	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Proposed pathway to link Ballygally with Carnfunnock via Daffodil Lane and Chaine's Wood.

Carnlough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Wildlife/flora walking trail through Gortin Quarry – Improve links between walks and village attractions e.g. Waterfall Walk
Glenarm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of trails and improve access to beach from all areas.
Glenoe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of safe walkways within and around the village; – Development of walking trails to key attractions e.g. Glenoe Waterfall.
Glenravel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – New pathways to connect settlements; – Develop woodland path at Drum Wood; – Develop walk with interpretive signage along Iron Ore Mines railway track; – Develop the narrow-gauge line from Cargan to Parkmore as a heritage trail.
Glynn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop, improve and extend walkways throughout village (undertake an audit of all existing and potential paths in terms of quality and access); – Link up existing and potential paths and ensure they are of suitable quality in terms of surface; – Ensure appropriate disability access at key sites and paths.
Gracehill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Create river walk linking the village to the River Maine and Galgorm Castle Estate. This will link the village to other tourist attractions and ensure village is not cut off.
Grange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide off road walkway and paths to encourage walking/cycling.
Islandmagee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Safe walking routes and cycle paths throughout Islandmagee area.
Kells and Connor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provision of active walkways and paths (e.g. riverside park/walk); – Expansion of heritage trails and nature walks within village area.
Millbrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop walkways in the village area; – Improve linking of walks and village attractions (harbour, waterfall, railroad).
Portglenone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Better co-operation with the Mid Ulster District Council to link river walks, pathways and joining up the tourism offering; – Improve access across the village to walks and link key areas of the village (e.g. link the marina, monastery and village centre); – Link up existing walks/paths in village and ensure key locations (monastery, forest, marina, riverside walks, Walled Garden); – Ensure disability access at key sites/paths, including forests.
Whitehead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Link from coastal pathway through to the Gobbins is essential; – Improved “walkways” in area and between other attractions/areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consolidate/improve (secure) access to existing paths and walkways; ○ Examine feasibility of new pathways including 1. Whitehead to Gobbins, 2. Port Road to Blackhead, 3. Blackhead to Gobbins, 4. (Stage 2) link coastal path to Gobbins (and to Gobbins Centre); ○ Examine feasibility of creating a path from Kings Road bridge to RPSI platform.

Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Utilisation of diverse types of large open green space e.g. Ecos Nature Park; – The Braid River presents opportunity to play a role in providing green space in the town centre.
Greenisland Development Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Better connect to green spaces through recreational areas, connectivity, pathways and bridges; – A new community hub supported by improved walking and cycling connections.

Table 12: Recommendations in Village Plans relating to Community Trails

Benchmarking Case Study: Community Trails in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council



- Seven DEA Community Trails Plan produced for NMDDC;
- 69 potential Community Trails identified;
- 5 Community Trails prioritised for each DEA;
- Funding secured to develop seven key trails;
- Being delivered in 2019;
- For further information see Appendix 10.

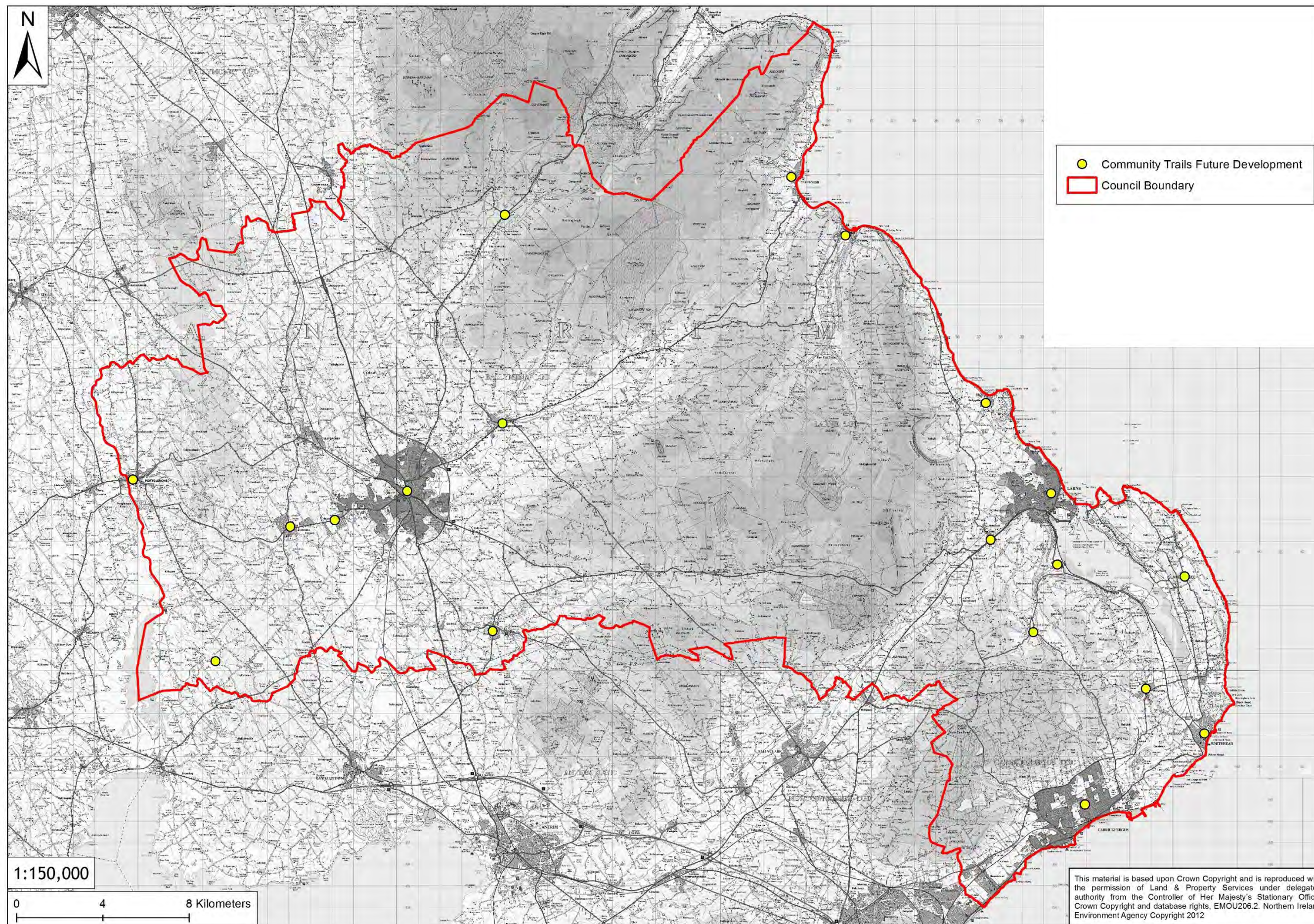


Figure 21: Sites Identified for Community Trail Development

3.3.6 Specific Product Development

3.3.6.1. Strategic Approach to East Coast Water-sports

Concern was identified during consultation about a lack of collaboration across water-sport clubs and activities on the east coast. These concerns are specifically relating to:

- Current lack of connectivity and partnership between clubs and providers of water-sport activities (canoeing, kayaking, coastal rowing, sailing) – e.g. lack of shared access and shared facilities;
- Current lack of awareness of access points to the water;
- Current perception that water-sports are not promoted enough.

Aside from the feedback on these specific issues, consultation also identified a general desire for:

- Increased facilities for those wishing to try new activities;
- Improved carparking, extended slipways, and storage units (boathouses) e.g. Ballygalley
- Increased access to equipment;
- Additional taster sessions / Beach Bonanza type events;
- More promotion of existing clubs and activities;
- Connectivity between providers and clubs – more strategic approach.

Recommendation

It is recommended that a **Water-sports Sub-group** is created under the Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum (outlined in Section 3.2.2) that would consist of representatives from Council, local clubs and private activity providers. The Consortium should seek to provide a strategic joined-up approach to water-sport development, marketing and delivery. Across the coastline area consideration should be as a minimum given to:

- Activities and increasing participation;
- Fit-for-purpose facilities (carparking, slipways, and storage etc);
- Support and promotion;
- Learning from best practise for other areas strong in water-sports (e.g. Strangford Lough);
- Long-term strategy to collaboration and pulling of resources.

3.3 Marketing and Promotion

The following SWOT analysis outlines the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the current and future marketing and promotion of outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities within MEABC for both residents and tourists.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><i>Marketing and Promotion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creative online awareness campaigns (e.g. #MEAdventure); – Successful participation events (e.g. Beach Bonanza and Gig n’ the Bann); – Recognition of importance of marketing to the success of participating in the outdoors; <p><i>Tourism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increased market awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities within MEABC due to opening of The Gobbins Cliff Path; – Potential to build partnership with Mid Ulster District Council and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to maximise joint opportunities on the development of the Lower Bann Blueway; – Potential to build partnership with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to maximise joint opportunities along the Causeway Coastal Route; – Appetite for community buy-in for tourism (leisure/activity/heritage). 	<p><i>Marketing and Promotion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of one central site for information on outdoor recreation; – No one “umbrella” marketing brand; – Lack of awareness and appreciation of existing outdoor recreation opportunities; – Lack of collaboration from various stakeholders in promoting opportunities; – No Marketing Strategy or Action Plan to market and promote outdoor recreation; – Not a recognised destination for outdoor recreation for both locals and visitors. <p><i>Tourism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tourism market is dominated by day-visitors with limited economic spend; – The visitor perception of the Borough as a thoroughfare to the Causeway; – Limited collaboration and cross-destination referrals; – Limited visitor facilities on sites; – Limited accommodation in the west of the Borough and along the Lower Bann.
Opportunities	Threats
<p><i>Marketing and Promotion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Landscape diversity and natural beauty within the Borough is largely untapped; – Utilise “Shaped by Sea and Stone” brand to outdoor recreation opportunities; – Quality of outdoor recreation activities – growing appetite for adventure; – Commitment of broad cross-section of public/private organisations to collaborate; – Develop an integrated approach to marketing/promoting outdoor recreation across MEABC, to enhance the visibility, appeal and promotion of the area for outdoor activities. <p><i>Tourism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Iconic elements that have some degree of international brand awareness, e.g. such as The Gobbins and the proposed Glens of Antrim Greenway and potential Antrim Coast Path; – The people, the welcome and hospitality; – Themed trail opportunities, e.g. Slemish Mountain and its St Patrick’s heritage; – Opportunities to more involved with national websites, including WalkNI, CycleNI, and OutmoreNI. 	<p><i>Marketing and Promotion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Poor dissemination of information about current activities; – Lack of funding and awareness of sources, availability and securing match funding. <p><i>Tourism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Perceived issues in product development related to planning from private activity providers and local clubs.

Table 13: SWOT analysis for Marketing and Promotion

Alongside strong partnerships that are central to the enablers of success and the delivery of compelling experiences through product development, it is also critical to focus on the effective promotion of outdoor recreation opportunities to residents of *and* visitors to the Borough. The following recommendations outline essential marketing and promotion actions needed to inspire people to enjoy and engage with the outdoors in MEABC.

3.4.1 Central Online Source of Information for Locals *and* Tourists

From consultation and desk research on the current marketing and promotion of outdoor recreation within MEABC, several key findings were identified:

- There is no strategic approach to communicating and marketing outdoor recreation facilities, activities, events and experiences on offer across the Borough;
- More integration is required between key Council departments, including the Parks and Open Spaces Team and the Tourism Team, to collate, disseminate and promote information on outdoor recreation in a meaningful and impactful way to local people and visitors;
- There is an expressed desire by locals to have access to high quality information on local outdoor recreation sites and facilities, particularly in relation to parking provision, access, permits etc;
- Key events and experiences (where) relevant have not recognised their potential to attract more visitors to the area and provide further bed nights (Gig n’ the Bann, FIPSeD 25th World Coarse Angling Championships for European on Lower Bann, 29-30th June 2019 etc).

Recommendation

The creation of a **central online source of information for both locals *and* tourists**. This is envisaged as a micro-site within the Council’s website or a Council run standalone public-facing website that would collate, categorise and promote all outdoor recreation information for both residents *and* tourists on:

- The unique and diverse natural landscape of the Borough, including the key assets of the coastline, hills, mountains, loughs, beaches, rivers, reservoirs and forests;
- The rich opportunities available that inspire people to engage with the outdoors through Iconic Products, Signature Products, Activity Hubs, Community Hubs and Community Trails;
- Outdoor adventure/activity tourism itineraries that inspire visitors to travel on and off-season, stay longer and enjoy the essence of the area’s natural and cultural heritage and local hospitality;
- Essential logistical information in an easy to understand format on location, access, activities available and visitor services available at each outdoor recreation site;
- Outdoor recreation activity providers, including information on location(s) and activities available;
- Outdoor recreation events throughout the calendar year across MEABC;
- Local outdoor recreation clubs with details on activities, taster sessions and membership.

While this website/micro-site within the Council website would centralise all outdoor recreation information for the Borough, multi-channel tools should also be integrated such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter to extend market reach, drive interest and inspire locals and tourists to explore the great outdoors of MEABC. This is currently being done for the Council’s “Shaped by Sea and Stone”

tourism brand, which has a strong tourism focus rather than an emphasis on outdoor recreation opportunities in the Borough.

Benefits of an integrated approach (such as a micro-site within the MEABC website) include:

- Council already has several powerful communication platforms in place. This includes the @MEABoroughCouncil Facebook Page which has over 13,500 “likes”, the @meac_bc Twitter Page which has over 4,000 Followers, its website and a magazine (Mid and East Antrim Connections) that is delivered to every home in the Borough;
- If a website was developed for outdoor recreation across MEABC, it would be difficult to drive enough visitors to merit the initial development and ongoing maintenance costs;
- The development of independent platforms could weaken MEABC branding and reputation and potentially disassociate the product from MEABC.

Whether as a micro-site hosted within the Council website or as a stand-alone Council run website, this online platform could either pool together information independently or source information such as mapping from external established websites. For example, the “Shaped by Sea and Stone” website is a standalone platform that pulls together information, whereas the online platform could also have feeds or signposts to an external national marketing website such as OutmoreNI.com that has an interactive map of outdoor trails and places across Northern Ireland.

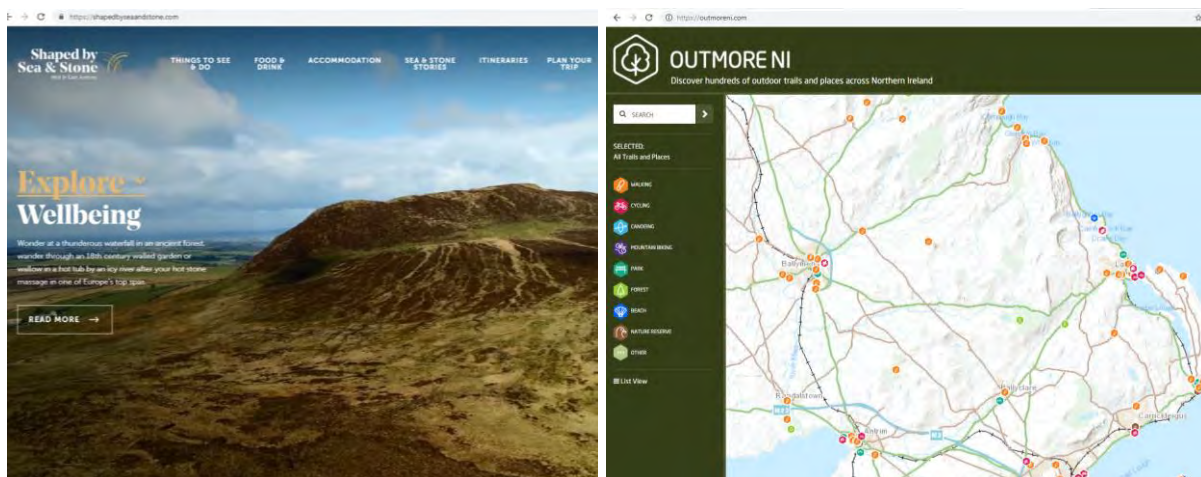
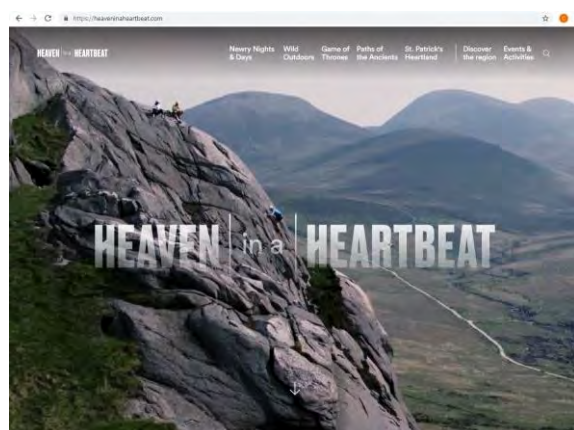


Figure 23: “Shaped by Sea and Stone” website and OutmoreNI.com that is run by Outdoor Recreation NI

Benchmarking Case Study: www.heaveninaheartbeat.com – Discover Newry, Mourne & Down



- MNDDC campaign launched Spring 2018;
- Aimed to attract both locals and visitors;
- Focused on the district’s unique natural and cultural heritage;
- “Wild Outdoors” page encourages people to “Get out. Conquer challenges. Astonish yourself.”
- Features activity providers and land and water-based recreation opportunities available across the District.

3.4.2 A Coherent Council Brand

It was recognised from the consultation process and desk research on the current marketing and promotion of outdoor recreation that:

- The Borough is not a recognised destination for outdoor recreation for both locals and visitors and that there is a perception of the area being a thoroughfare to the Causeway Coast;
- There is no one “umbrella” marketing and promotion brand for outdoor recreation for the area within a broader Marketing Strategy or Action Plan to effectively promote what is on offer;
- There is a lack of awareness of the existing outdoor recreation opportunities due to the lack of strong and impactful brand marketing and promotion, with the exception of the Gobbins.

Recommendation

That a **coherent Council outdoor recreation brand is created** as part of an integrated approach to marketing and promoting outdoor recreation across MEABC, to enhance the visibility, appeal and promotion of the area for outdoor activities.

A unified and compelling brand would:

- Appeal to the growing appetite for quality outdoor adventure and activity tourism;
- Raise awareness and inspire locals and visitors to participate in products of interest to them, whether Iconic, Signature, Activity Hubs, Community Hubs, or Community Trails;
- Provide a universal brand for all outdoor recreation sites/products that is recognisable to MEABC;
- Build on the current enthusiasm from public, private and voluntary sector organisations with a stake in outdoor recreation in MEABC to collaborate to strengthen their collective offering;
- Enable the small private activity providers within MEABC to be part of a larger, stronger brand;
- Enable local clubs to raise their profile with the aim of channelling more locals to consider taking part in taster sessions and then sustaining their participation.

It is considered important that a coherent Council brand should:

- Communicate the welcome, warmth and hospitality of the local people;
- Build on international brand awareness of The Gobbins;
- Build on creative online awareness campaigns such as #MEAdventure;
- Connect cultural heritage to natural heritage of MEABC, e.g. Saint Patrick and Slemish Mountain.

Benchmarking Case Study: Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council



- ABCBC has taken over the management of Gosford Forest Park, Darkley Forest and Carnagh Forest;
- All new forests which the Council takes management of through a licence with landowner(s), will follow the same new Brand Guidelines;
- Therefore, creating a uniform brand across the whole Borough that is recognisable and distinctive to ABCBC outdoor recreation products.

3.4.3 Responsible Use Messaging

Concern was expressed by some consultees that increased levels of footfall to outdoor recreation sites/products within MEABC could lead to a range of pressures on the natural environment and local communities. These include issues relating to car travel such as congestion and the blocking of roads and field entrances. There are also antisocial challenges to address, including waste management issues (including littering and dog fouling), unsettling natural habitats and surface erosion. For locals, these negative experiences often lead to an unfavourable attitude towards users/visitors and therefore reduce community support for outdoor recreation over time. They also have a negative impact on the visitor experience which is key to building the tourism potential of outdoor recreation.

Recommendation

Implement a **responsible user campaign** that would educate outdoor recreation users, both locals and visitors, to look after and respect the natural environment in which they explore and engage with.

It is important for the Council to champion sustainable use of the outdoors and encourage people to value the outdoors and behave responsibly towards it. By supporting and promoting good practice on protecting and sustainably managing the natural assets within MEABC, this will ensure that people can enjoy the outdoors for its many health, social, and economic benefits, without damaging the environment or upsetting landowners and local communities.

This could take the form of adopting the “Leave No Trace” campaign, an outdoor ethics programme adopted by organisations across the island of Ireland which is designed to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships.³⁰

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4.1 Action Plan 2019 – 2029

Code		Action	Delivery Partners	Timescale
A.				
A1		<p>Cross-departmental Outdoor Recreation Steering Group (intra-Council) to be established.</p> <p>Determine purpose of Steering Group.</p> <p>Meet at least 4 times per year.</p> <p><i>Details at 3.2.1</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Council, Tourism – Other key departments 	Year 1
A2		<p>Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum to be established with representatives from relevant stakeholders across the Borough who develop, manage and promote outdoor recreation.</p> <p>Determine clear terms of reference.</p> <p>Meet at least twice per year.</p> <p><i>Details at 3.2.2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Forest Service NI – NI Water – National Trust – Private Activity Providers – Outdoor recreation clubs and groups – Glenarm Castle 	Year 1
A3		<p>Club Engagement Programme to be implemented that is overseen by the Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum, including the establishment of a small grants programme.</p> <p><i>Details at 3.2.2.1</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Local clubs – Community groups 	Year 1-3

		<p>Lower Bann Blueway</p> <p>Proactively engage with Waterways Ireland and Lower Bann Group to ensure MEABC play a key role in Lower Bann Blueway Development</p> <p>Work in collaboration with Mid Ulster District Council to develop the prioritised section of the Blueway</p> <p><i>Details at 3.3.2.3</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council (lead) – Mid Ulster District Council – Waterways Ireland – Causeway Coast and Glens Council – DAERA – DFC – Forest Service NI – Community Groups 	<p>Years 1-10</p> <p>Years 1-10</p>
		<p>Doagh to Larne Greenway</p> <p>Determine preferred Greenway route following feasibility study and employ a full-time Greenway Officer to negotiate access with landowners</p> <p><i>Details at 3.3.2.4</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Tourism NI – Department of Infrastructure – Forest Service NI – Landowners 	<p>Years 1-3</p>
		<p>Carnfunnock Country Park</p> <p>Review 2017 Development Plan, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Connectivity to Ballygally – Revision of activity provisions – Water-sports potential <p><i>Details at 3.3.2.5</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Council, Tourism – Landowners – Private activity providers – Local clubs 	<p>Year 1</p>

		<p>Stage 2: Undertake Scoping Study for upgrade of Portglenone Forest and development of Bracknamuckley Forest</p> <p>Stage 3: Undertake Scoping Study to enhance Portglenone Marina</p> <p><i>Details at 3.3.4.1</i></p> <p>ECOS Centre Nature Park</p> <p>Undertake “revisioning” exercise to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Changing focus of Ecos Nature Park to a “Community Hub” for recreation – Creating an Urban Sport Facility – Enhancing access to the Braid River – Enhancing trail network <p><i>Details at 3.3.4.2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Community groups – Local businesses and start-ups – Local clubs – Private activity providers 	<p>Years 2-3</p> <p>Year 4</p> <p>Year 1</p>
B5	Community Trails Plan	<p>Community Trails</p> <p>Stage 1: Develop a Community Trail Plan for each MEABC DEA</p> <p>Stage 2: Delivery of Community Trail Plans</p> <p><i>Details at 3.3.5</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Local communities – Landowners 	<p>Stage 1: Years 1-3</p> <p>Stage 2: Years 3-5</p>
B6	Specific Product Development	<p>Creation of a Water-sports Sub-group under the Strategic Outdoor Recreation Forum</p> <p><i>Details at 3.3.6.1</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Local clubs – Community groups 	Years 1-2

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Private activity providers – Landowners 	
C.				
C1		<p>Central Online Source of Information to be created in the form a micro-site within Council website/ Council run website to provide high-quality outdoor recreation information to visitors and local community.</p> <p><i>Details at 3.4.1</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council (lead) – with information supplied by area stakeholders such as local clubs, private activity providers, etc – Website design and marketing agency 	<p>Year 2-3</p> <p>(and update as more products and events are developed)</p>
C2		<p>A Coherent Council Brand to be created that unifies all outdoor recreation products in the Borough and makes them recognisable to MEABC</p> <p><i>Details at 3.4.2</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Council, Tourism – Council, Marketing and/or website design and marketing agency – with input from stakeholders such as landowners & managers, local clubs, private activity providers, 	<p>Year 2-3</p>

			Glenarm Estate etc who will promote the brand	
C3		<p>Responsible Use Messaging Campaign to encourage sustainable use of the outdoors in collaboration with all relevant outdoor recreation stakeholders across MEABC</p> <p><i>Details at 3.4.3</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council, Parks and Open Spaces (lead) – Council, Tourism – Forest Service NI – NI Water – National Trust – Private Activity Providers – Outdoor recreation clubs and groups – Glenarm Castle 	Year 1-3

PART 5 // FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

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5.1 Funding Opportunities

Several funding programmes are available which may be suitable for Outdoor Recreation projects across the MEABC area.

5.1.1 Rural Development Programme (2014-20)

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) is jointly funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and is administered in Northern Ireland by DAERA. It supports a range of projects with the aim of developing the economic potential of rural areas.

5.1.1.1 Rural Tourism Scheme

The Rural Tourism Scheme supports capital projects which provide long-term tourism impact for the community in the rural area.

The scheme has a total budget of £10M. Small scale infrastructure is defined as a project receiving a minimum grant of £250,000 and maximum grant up to £500,000 at 75% level of support. The remaining 25% match funding must be at least 5% cash from the applicant's own resources and contribution in kind (not to include buildings and or land) to a maximum of 20%.

Projects will be typically:

- capital infrastructure
- provide increase in out-of-state visitors
- job creating (during capital build and after completion)
- promote / encourage a partnership approach with other statutory organisations sharing a common goal
- flagship unique type / notable / high impact rural tourism focused actions
- align with the aims and objectives of Tourism NI and should as priority target out of state visitors.

The following should be taken into consideration:

- The scheme is open to local authorities and local authorities in partnership with organisations operating within the Community and Voluntary / Third sector or Public sector
- Evidence of match funding commitment must be in place at the time of application. All current match funding rules apply e.g. no other EU funding can be used as match.

Further eligibility information available at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/rural-tourism-scheme>

Although this programme has now officially closed to new projects, contact should be made with the Programme's Manager in case there is any slippage funding.

5.1.2 The National Lottery Community Fund

5.1.2.1 *People and Communities*

The 'People and Communities' programme is designed to support projects that work with local people to bring about positive changes in a community. Projects must meet the three key themes of:

- **People-led:** local people are meaningfully involved in development, design and delivery
- **Strengths-based:** supports people and communities to build on knowledge, skills and experience they already have to make the changes they want
- **Connected:** projects demonstrate a good understanding of other activities and services in the community and how the project complements these.

Grants range from £10,000 to £500,000 for projects lasting 1-5 years. Grants for small scale capital projects is capped at £100,000 but up to 100% of costs.

Eligible applicants are voluntary or community groups such as a charity, co-operative, social enterprise or community interest company. Partnerships are also eligible where the lead partner is one of the above.

The programme is open for applications all year round.

For more information see - tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/people-and-communities

5.1.2.2 *Awards for All Northern Ireland*

Awards for All is an open programme, therefore **there are no closing dates** for applications.

Awards for All provides funding to support work with local people to bring about positive changes in communities.

The programme is open to:

- voluntary or community organisations
- schools
- statutory bodies

The aim is to improve people's lives and strengthen community activity by helping:

- people to participate in their communities
- people to develop their skills and broaden their experience
- people to work towards better and safer communities
- improve people's physical and mental health and well-being.

Eligible projects can apply for grants of between **£500 and £10,000**.

For more information see: tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/awards-for-all-northern-ireland

5.1.3 The National Lottery Heritage Fund

5.1.3.1 *The National Lottery Grants for Heritage: £3,000 – £10,000*

Suitable for:

- not-for-profit organisations
- private owners of heritage

Project length: up to one year.

Deadlines: There are no deadlines.

5.1.3.2 *The National Lottery Grants for Heritage: £10,000 - £100,000*

Suitable for:

- not-for-profit organisations
- private owners of heritage and partnerships

Deadlines: There are no deadlines.

5.1.3.3 *The National Lottery Grants for Heritage: £100,000-£250,000*

Suitable for:

- not-for-profit organisations
- partnerships led by not-for-profit organisations

Deadlines: 2019/20 Deadlines are quarterly and can be found below:

- March 2019 for a decision in June 2019
- 28 May 2019 for a decision in September 2019
- 20 August 2019 for a decision in November 2019
- 19 November 2019 for decision in March 2020

Assessment process: Assessment of applications take 12 weeks and following assessment, is assigned to a quarterly committee meeting.

Applicant contribution: At least 5% of the project costs.

5.1.3.4 *The National Lottery Grants for Heritage: £250,000 - £5 million*

Suitable for:

- not-for-profit organisations
- partnerships led by not-for-profit organisations

Before applying: Submit an expression of interest form and The National Lottery will let the applicant know if they are invited to apply.

Project length:

- development phase up to two years

- delivery phase up to five years

Deadlines are quarterly and can be found below:

- March 2019 for a decision in June 2019
- 28 May 2019 for a decision in September 2019
- 20 August 2019 for a decision in November 2019
- 19 November 2019 for decision in March 2020

Assessment process: Assessment of applications will take 12 weeks and following assessment, it will be assigned to a quarterly committee meeting.

Contribution: Contribute of at least 5% of project costs for grants up to £1million and at least 10% for grants of £1m or more.

For more information: heritagefund.org.uk/funding/national-lottery-grant-heritage

5.1.4 Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland

Lloyds Bank Foundation for Northern Ireland which has contributed £34.8m to the Voluntary and Community sector over the past 31 years has been re-named the Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland.

The Community Grants Programme supports charitable organisations within Northern Ireland to enable people, who are disadvantaged or with special needs, to participate actively in their communities

The programme is open to registered charities with an income of less than £1 million. The Average Grant is currently between £3,000-£4,000.

For more information see halifaxfoundationni.org/programmes/community-grant-programme

5.1.5 Live Here Love Here Small Grants Scheme

Live Here Love Here is an annual Small Grants Scheme delivered by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful in partnership with Local Councils, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Choice Housing, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and McDonald's.

The small grants scheme provides support to volunteer projects that:

- Use innovative ways to reduce littering and dog fouling
- Improve how a local environment is looked after, whether urban, rural or coastal
- Contribute to the development of civic pride within a community with a focus on environmental improvements
- Enhance or attract tourism to a community through environmental improvements

Grants are available from £500 to £5,000 and are open to volunteer and community groups, all school and third level education organisations, youth groups and sports clubs undertaking civic pride projects in supporting Council areas.

The Small Grants Scheme is also open to all Housing Association and Housing Executive residents with support from Choice Housing, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and McDonald's throughout all council areas in Northern Ireland.

Local Councils and businesses have the option to partner with Live Here Love Here as a commitment to enable people to secure tangible benefits and build stronger community spirit. Their support to Live Here Love Here will help amplify the campaign's efforts to revitalise and reenergise neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland.

The scheme forms part of the wider Live Here Love Here programme, which includes an innovative media campaign and exciting volunteering opportunities to encourage participation all year round.

The next round of the Live Here Love Here Small Grants Scheme will be launching on 16th April 2019.
For more information see www.livehereandlovehere.org.

5.2 Funding summary

Fund / Programme	Grants Available	Applicant	Timeframe
RDP Tourism	Up to £500,000 at 75%	Council (Sole Applicant) Council (Lead) in partnership with local community/voluntary organisations	1 st Call – Closed 2 nd Call – TBC
The National Lottery Community Fund – People and Communities	Up to £100,000 at 100%	Voluntary or community groups	Open all year round
The National Lottery Community Fund – Awards for All	Up to £10,000 at 100%	Voluntary or community organisations, schools and statutory bodies	Open all year round
The National Lottery Heritage Fund	£3,000 to £10,000 at 100%	Not-for-profit organisations, private owners of heritage and partnerships	Open all year round
The National Lottery Heritage Fund	£10,000 to £100,000 at 100%	Not-for-profit organisations, private owners of heritage and partnerships	Open all year round
The National Lottery Heritage Fund	£100,000 to £250,000 at 95%	Not-for-profit organisations and partnerships led by not-for-profit organisations	Set application windows each year
The National Lottery Heritage Fund	£250,000 to £5 million at 90%	Not-for-profit organisations and partnerships led by not-for-profit organisations	Open all year round
Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland - Community Grants Programme	The average grant is currently between £3,000 - 4,000.	Registered charities with an income of less than £1 million	Open all year round
Live Here Love Here Small Grants Scheme	£500 to £5,000	Voluntary, community organisations, schools & third level education organisations, youth groups & sports clubs Housing Association and Housing Executive residents	Next phase launching 16 th April 2019.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Strategic Context

Below is a brief synopsis of each document considered in the Strategic Context to be of significance in terms of how the proposed growth and development of outdoor recreation across MEABC could contribute towards the delivery of key regional and sub-regional policies and strategies.

Regional Strategic Context
<p>There are policies and strategies that are of relevant to the development of outdoor recreation that are Northern Ireland wide in terms of reach and impact. These are summarised below.</p>
<p><i>Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021 (Northern Ireland Executive, 2016)</i></p> <p>The draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework sets out the aspirations of the Executive for society and provides a strategic context for other key strategies and policies. The PfG was also to shape the development of the Executive’s budget over the course of the current mandate and provide a mechanism for ensuring funds are best directed to where they can contribute most.</p> <p>The Framework contains 14 strategic outcomes and connect to every aspect of government, including the attainment of good health and education, economic success and building confident and peaceful communities. The following outcomes are of relevance to the proposed project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Outcome 2: Live and work sustainably – protecting the environment; – Outcome 4: Enjoy long, healthy, active lives; – Outcome 12: Create a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest; – Outcome 14: Give our children and young people the best start in life. <p>These outcomes are supported by 42 indicators, with each indicator accompanied by a measure which is largely derived from existing statistics to monitor performance. The following indicators are of relevance to this project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Indicator 2: Reduce health inequality – Indicator 3: Increase healthy life expectancy – Indicator 6: Improve mental health – Indicator 30: Improve our attractiveness as a destination and our international reputation. <p>Key to the success of the PfG is the ability of Departments to work collaboratively with not only themselves but also with other public bodies and the voluntary and private sector.</p>
<p><i>Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future (DfRD, 2010)</i></p> <p>This Strategy is designed to deliver the spatial aspects of the PfG and is intended to inform the spatial aspects of other Government Departments, Councils’ decisions and investments, and guide investment by the private sector. Relevant aims of the Strategy for this study include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support towns, villages and rural communities to maximise their potential – Promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities – Improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information – Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake <p>The Strategy highlights the importance of improving facilities for walking and cycling as part of infrastructure investment.</p>

A Fitter Future for All: Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity 2012 – 2022

Obesity is a major public health challenge facing Northern Ireland and this Framework aims to empower people to make healthier choices by creating an environment that supports a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet. It recognises the factors that underpin weight gain are complex and cover factors such as social and individual psychology, physiology, food consumption, individual activity and built environment.

In addition, many wider determinants of poor health such as health inequalities, poverty, mental health, deprivation and structural barriers also play an important role. Of relevance, the Strategy outlines how environmental factors affect choices and behaviours, for example lack of access to green space reduces physical activity opportunities. Other barriers include poor urban environments, limited safe play facilities and community safety, and sedentary lifestyles.

Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, 2016)

The new Health Strategy recognises that the Health Service faces growing demand driven by successful interventions and improving life expectancy. As a result, there is a need to move beyond managing illness and instead ensure that people are supported to live well; physically, mentally and emotionally. To do this, the onus is on Departments and Agencies to work together to deliver the best outcomes.

Core to PfG Outcome 4 of people leading long, healthy and active lives is improving people's health. The Strategy outlines a future in which people are supported to keep well with the information, education and support to make informed choices and take control of their own health and wellbeing. This requires the circumstances for people to stay healthy, well, safe and independent in the first place. There is a need to:

- Build capacity in communities and in prevention to reduce inequalities and ensure the next generation is healthy and well
- Work with communities to support them to develop their strengths and use their assets to tackle the determinants of health and social wellbeing
- Tap into the innovative ideas and energies in communities themselves, and in the community and voluntary sectors.
- In all communities, every child and young person should have the best start in life, people should have a decent standard of living, and all citizens should be supported to make healthier and better-informed life choices
- Work alongside all communities to enable social inclusion and tackle health inequalities and the underlying contributory factors including poverty, housing, education and crime.

Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland (2014)

Commissioned by Sport NI and Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), this Action Plan highlights the importance of making the outdoors accessible to everyone and the opportunities that there are to participate, not only in rural areas but also in the urban fringes.

Due to the recognition that access to green space enhances physical health and mental wellbeing, and addresses issues associated with social exclusion, rural and urban deprivation and community cohesion, the vision of the Action Plan is “a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland”.

It provides key recommendations for actions and challenges that need to be addressed to make Northern Ireland a place where outdoor recreation can deliver:

- Healthy active lifestyles for local people from all communities;
- Economic growth through encouraging visitors to come and enjoy the outdoors; and
- Protection of landscapes and ecosystems for future generations.

To achieve this vision, the aim is for Northern Ireland to be a place where:

- There are increasing opportunities and improved access and infrastructure for sustained and increased participation for everyone in a broad range of outdoor recreation activities;
- There are accompanying benefits to local communities, especially those who are socially excluded in terms of health, social inclusion, cohesion, equality, and economic development;
- People enjoy the outdoors and show a high degree of responsibility for themselves, towards others and towards the environment they are using, and play their part in maintaining, supporting and enhancing our environment and heritage.

Sport Matters: Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019

Whilst Northern Ireland’s environment provides conditions of international quality for a range of activities, Sport Matters recognises that not everyone will wish to excel in performance sport and the Strategy encourages the development and use of open spaces for a variety of informal recreational and outdoor pursuits. Being out in the fresh air enjoying the scenery, whilst taking exercise, is recognised as important elements of Sport Matters.

The Strategy acknowledges that the natural environment provides many opportunities for a range of recreation activities but that access issues exist. In aspiring to the target that “By 2019 Northern Ireland will have developed a range of new, improved and shared sports facilities to a standard comparable with other similar regions of the UK” the Strategy indicates that this will require:

- Public access to and sustainable use of, publicly-owned lands across Northern Ireland for sport, physical recreation and activity tourism
- A planning system which facilitates and protects the provision of spaces for sport and physical recreation by following Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space Sport and Outdoor Recreation

Sport NI has recently approved a position statement about access to the natural environment in support of targets set out in this Strategy. The objective is to communicate position on the importance it attaches to outdoor recreation through:

- Promoting the best possible access to the natural environment for sport and physical recreation within the confines of existing legislation and organisation of the land ownership prevalent in Northern Ireland
- Encouraging and supporting full access for responsible and sustainable recreation on public land through the development of policy frameworks by other public bodies – especially those that are custodians of public land.

Sport NI Corporate Plan 2015-2020

The vision of the Sport NI Plan is: “Northern Ireland: renowned as a place where people enjoy, engage, and excel in sport.” The mission statement is for Northern Ireland “to lead world class sports development at all levels producing more participants and more winners.” To achieve this, Sport NI identified the following strategic objectives:

- To increase and support the number of people adopting and sustaining a sporting lifestyle
- To enable more people to develop and reach their sporting goals through a structured environment
- To help more Northern Ireland athletes win at the highest level.

Exercise, Explore, Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways (DfI, 2016)

This Strategic Plan for Greenways fulfils a commitment in the 2015 Bicycle Strategy to explore the potential for the development of Greenways. The Plan’s aim is to “encourage a substantial increase in the number of people walking and cycling as a regular part of everyday life through the building of a connected and accessible regional Greenway network which will significantly increase the length of traffic free routes.”

It is anticipated that realising the vision will create a region where active lifestyle and active travel can become part of everyday life for everyone – improving health and well-being, economic activity, social interaction and providing a resource for recreation and leisure. The Plan identifies potential routes that should be explored to develop a Primary Greenway Network from which a Secondary Greenway Network could progressively extend across the region. The Plan also suggests that plans in the future may provide for a third level network of community paths that would provide doorstep opportunities to connect local communities to their local green space and neighbouring communities.

Mountain Bike Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014 –2024

The vision of this Strategy, published by ORNI in 2014, is to “make Northern Ireland a world class mountain bike destination”. By delivering this vision, a wide range of significant economic and social benefits will be achieved, such as greater economic prosperity, sustained employment in the trail construction sector through the building and maintenance of trails and increased employment in the visitor services’ sector.

Social benefits include increased health and wellbeing of the population as participation levels rise and more people take up mountain biking, improved social inclusion as the trails attract a wide demographic population base, improved community cohesion, local enthusiasm harnessed and channelled into trail development, trail management and trail maintenance, physical connection of communities to trails and greater sporting success by local mountain bikers in all mountain biking disciplines as a consequence of improved formal trail facilities.

DAERA Strategic Plan 2012-2020

The vision outlined in this Strategy is for a “thriving and sustainable rural economy, community and environment to promote social and economic equality.”

The document highlights that DAERA has a responsibility for forests and wishes to improve access and facilities for the public, including the development of better activity and recreational pursuits.

NIEA “Our Passion, Our Place” Strategic Priorities 2012-2022

The priorities for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency as outlined in this document, under the following themes, includes:

Healthy Natural Environment

- A well-functioning network of protected sites and areas including enhancing the management of designated sites to benefit site features and protecting and conserving the historic environment
- Sustainable, diverse landscapes with rich biodiversity which are resilient to change

People and Places

- Extensive opportunity for everyone to appreciate and enjoy the natural and built environment
- Common understanding of the role the environment plays in the health and wellbeing of people
- Greater business and community involvement in the environment including through volunteering and community stakeholder groups
- The natural environment and built heritage assets meet the needs of society and communities

Sustainable Economic Growth

- The value of natural and built assets to the economy is fully realised
- The best outcome for the environment is obtained whilst minimising cost to business.

Assessment of Existing and Potential Tourism Development Opportunities Available from NI Forests (NI Tourist Board & Forest Service, 2013)

This study highlighted findings from a research study that set out proposals for tourism development in Northern Ireland’s forests. The study was set in the context of the Forest Service’s policy to realise further opportunities for the recreational and social use of forests, in partnership with local authorities and other recreation providers.

The study established a vision for forest related tourism which was to “use the forest estate to deliver an exceptional visitor and short break experience for all, which will increase the economic impact of forest related tourism in Northern Ireland.”

To achieve this vision, the study set out the following supporting aims:

- To increase the economic impact of forest related tourism
- To encourage visitor experience and product development opportunities that will provide an exceptional visitor experience in line with the Northern Ireland brand principles
- To promote and enable effective partnership working.

Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, 2006

This Strategy aims to tackle issues of poverty and social exclusion by targeting efforts and available resources on people, groups and areas in greatest social need. The priorities identified include:

- Eliminating poverty
- Eliminating social exclusion
- Tackling area-based deprivation
- Eliminating poverty from rural areas
- Tackling health inequalities
- Tackling cycles of deprivation

The goals and targets set out include the following:

- Allowing all children and young people to experience a happy and fulfilling childhood, while equipping them with the education, skills and experience to achieve their potential
- Ensuring that everyone has the potential to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life.

The development of outdoor recreation across MEABC aligns with this Strategy and has the potential to contribute to eliminating social exclusion and poverty and tackling health inequalities.

The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (Department for Communities, 2011)

The Northern Ireland Executive's vision for volunteering is a society where:

- Everyone values the vital contribution that volunteers make to community wellbeing
- Everyone has the opportunity to have a meaningful and enjoyable volunteering experience.

The growth and development of outdoor recreation across the Borough provides a unique opportunity for people to volunteer and become involved in their local communities.

Sub-Regional Strategic Context

Consideration is also given to relevant Council strategic documents and the positive benefits and impact outdoor recreation can make on the objectives of the Council's Community Plan, Integrated Economic Development Strategy and the emerging Tourism Strategy.

Community Plan for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council 2017-2032

Outdoor recreation fits into all five themes of the MEABC's Community Plan and sixteen of the nineteen outcomes. The themes and outcomes are outlined below:

Theme	Outcomes
Good Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Our workplaces are for health as well as wealth– Our people are able to enjoy longer and healthier lives– Our people are physically active more often– Our older people are active, respected and supported in their community
Our Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– People value our Borough's natural environment and built heritage and behave responsibly towards it– People enjoy easy access to the natural environment and built heritage

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The natural environment and built heritage of our Borough is protected and sustainably managed
Sustainable Jobs and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mid and East Antrim is a leading and competitive place to start and grow a business – Our Borough provides opportunities for all to enable and support people to reach their full potential – Our Borough is a destination of choice with increased visitor numbers and spend on first-class facilities and attractions
Community Safety and Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Our Borough has vibrant, shared and cohesive communities – Our people feel safe in their community and have a sense of belonging – The natural environment and built heritage of our Borough is protected and sustainably managed
Progress in Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Our people and wider communities place value on life-long learning – We have a skilled workforce able to adapt to the changing economy – Our borough has a culture of entrepreneurship, skills development and vocational training
<p>In terms of Tourism the following are proposed actions relevant to outdoor recreation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Place promotion: an initiative to develop promotional material which can be used to sell the area as a place to live, work, study, visit and invest in. – Develop the Causeway Coastal Route, cultural and heritage assets, and building the region's image, brand and awareness in domestic, all-Ireland, UK and international markets – Masterplans for key tourism and regeneration projects <p>Success would look like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Packages for world-class visitor attractions and experiences within cohesive clusters which work together to maximise the benefit to all – A thriving activity tourism economy that attracts more visitors who stay longer and spend more – We have built and developed the environment for the benefit of all who live/work in MEABC 	
<p><i>Tourism Strategy for Mid & East Antrim Borough Council 2017-2022 (Draft)</i></p> <p>This unpublished Strategy recognises that one of the features which sets Mid and East Antrim apart is the diversity of its natural environment, with the wild and rugged beauty of the Antrim coastline, Slemish mountain and many areas of parks and open countryside to enjoy. Furthermore, it is noted that this landscape provides a wide range of opportunities for sport and leisure, including freshwater and sea fishing, water sports at marinas in Carrickfergus, Glenarm and Portglenone, mountain climbing and hiking and rambling to mention a few. It outlines a vision that within MEABC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Tourism to be a significant contributor to the local economy; and – There a range of experiences and an environment that meets and exceeds the aspirations and cultural interests of visitors from our target markets. <p>The draft Strategy identifies outdoor recreation product gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Causeway Coastal Route falls short of quality of international visitor experience expectations 	

- The Gobbins’ experience inappropriate for elderly, infirm or very young
- Undefined outdoor activity experience
- Limited off-road cycle trails
- No off-road mountain biking trails
- Limited product for adventure activities beyond canoeing.

Current market failures and capacity issues are:

- Limited capacity of local authority and trade to coordinate and promote destination
- Limited number of activity providers.

The Causeway Coastal Route shows the importance of outdoor recreation to making an iconic visitor experience. Products on this route within the MEABC boundary were tiered in terms of their readiness for the tourism market. This included the following outdoor recreation activities.

Primary (Tier 1) Experiences to aim at international markets and require continued product development	Secondary (Tier 2) Experiences requiring product development and can be included in marketing	Developing (Tier 3) Experiences that require product development to be market ready
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Gobbins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Glens of Antrim (Glenarm, Carnlough, Broughshane and Slemish) – Carnfunnock Park – Garden Trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Natural Heritage (AONB, Coast and Rivers, Beaches and Forests) – Outdoor Activities (Walking and Cycling Trails/Routes, Sailing, Fishing, Diving) – Whitehead and Islandmagee

Integrated Economic Development Strategy for Mid & East Antrim 2018-2030

This strategic framework for the sustainable development of the MEABC economy is intended to catalyse and guide the work of stakeholders as they strive to improve the prospects of the area’s people, businesses and communities. The vision of this Strategy is for the Borough to:

- A nationally competitive economy, with output, productivity and wage rates at least 95% of the UK (including London) average.
- Northern Ireland’s leading centre of excellence for advanced manufacturing and agri-food with recognised capabilities in tourism, financial and business services and digital technologies.
- Operating with an economically active population, known for its high-level skills, and providing critical labour mass in our priority sectors.
- A proud, vibrant, and ambitious place, which collaborates with other centres, encourages business and its investment, and is recognised for people wanting to live and work here.

Strategic Priority	Enterprise and Entrepreneurship	Innovation	Employment and Skills	Infrastructure	Inclusion and Wellbeing
Rationale	<p>Too much reliance on a small number of employers</p> <p>Need more start-ups and growth from indigenous firms</p> <p>Need to attract more business investment into the area</p>	<p>Low levels of innovation and limited higher education engagement</p> <p>Low number of Knowledge Economy jobs</p>	<p>Risk of losing highly skilled workers</p> <p>Need to move skills up the value chain and improve employability skills</p>	<p>Untapped potential of environment and assets and need to regenerate towns and villages</p> <p>Need to use land / property assets better to showcase and promote the Borough for investment</p>	<p>Continuing pockets of deprivation and economic inactivity</p> <p>Insufficient awareness of job opportunities in some areas</p>
Objectives	<p>Increase birth rate and growth of local firms</p> <p>Create a culture of enterprise in the business and education system</p> <p>Grow the indigenous business base and attract new inward investment</p>	<p>Increase innovation, research and development and further/higher education engagement</p> <p>Encourage new technology firms to the area</p> <p>Develop a strong innovation ecosystem</p>	<p>Retain as many manufacturing skills as possible</p> <p>Change mindset towards entrepreneurship and vocational training</p> <p>Support local firms to grow through tailored skills support</p>	<p>Improve profile of the Borough for investment and tourism</p> <p>Improve start-up space and superfast broadband</p> <p>Improve towns and villages and east-west connections</p>	<p>Increase economic activity levels</p> <p>Promote employment and training opportunities for all</p> <p>Promote social economy</p>

Appendix 2 – Local Community Plan Recommendations related to Outdoor Recreation

Community Planning is a process led by Councils in conjunction with partners and communities to develop and implement a shared vision for their area. This long-term vision relates to all aspects of community life and which also involves working together to plan and deliver better services which make a real difference to people's lives. 15 villages in the Mid and East Antrim area have had Village Community Plans completed which have identified future opportunities for outdoor recreation. These Village Plans highlight the following recommendations that were proposed by residents:

Village Plan	Current status	Future potential
Ahoghill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of safe walking/cycling routes – Plans for the development of a new community park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop, improve and extend existing walkways throughout the village – Desire to see trails created within and around the new park – Link up existing walks and paths in village and ensure key locations are joined up – Ensure appropriate disability access around village to key sites, paths and locations
Ballycarry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of recreation provisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of walking opportunities and paths – Clarification of Public Rights of Way – A new walking group
Ballygally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 200m beach (blue flag status) which is perfect for walking, sailing and kayaking – Provides great access to the Antrim Hills Way – Offers safe access to the sea for boats with a concrete slipway and associated car park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Proposed pathway to link Ballygally with Carnfunnock via Daffodil Lane and Chainé's Wood – Signage to encourage the usage of walking routes – Designated area for jet-skiers for the protection of swimmers and rowers – Provide a fixed structure for storage of boats at slipway
Carnlough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Harbour with adjoining green space – Proximity to Cranny Falls and Gortin Quarry – A beach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Wildlife/flora walking trail through Gortin Quarry – Improve links between walks and village attractions e.g. Waterfall Walk

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council-owned green space on Hurry's Lane and beside the Glenlough Community Centre 	
Glenarm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Glenarm Forest is accessible but poorly signposted – Lack of safe walking areas in the village 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of fitness trails – Examine feasibility and options for the development of mountain bike trails – Improved access to beach from all areas – Introduce pontoons in local bay – Improve access to fishing for people with mobility issues or a disability – Improve quality and provision of safe footpaths through the village
Glenoe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Glenoe Water flows through village to Nation Trust owned Glenoe Waterfall – Lack of walking paths and safe walking areas within the village 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of safe walkways within and around the village – Development of walking trails to key attractions e.g. Glenoe Waterfall – Improve quality and provision of safe footpaths throughout the village
Glenravel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Community facilities within Cargan are limited to the small primary school, a playing field, outdoor gym and play park – Lack of community facilities, and facilities for young people and older people particularly in terms of recreation – Lack of safe footpaths or suitable paths between areas, especially between Cargan and Martinstown – Residents travel to other areas for safe walking routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Key physical improvements needed include community facilities, facilities for young people, play facilities, sports and leisure facilities, environmental improvements, and village appearance – Increased provision of walkways, community gardens and improved public space – New pathways to connect settlements – Develop woodland path at Drum Wood – Development wetlands/environmental project at Dungonnell Dam – Create an All area, enhance Newtowncrommelin community garden, and create community garden in Martinstown

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – New play facility for Cargan beside football pitch and to complement existing outdoor gym equipment – Encourage more interest in angling on the Clough River – Develop additional safer walks and improve existing paths – Develop walk with interpretive signage along Iron Ore Mines railway track – Develop the narrow-gauge line from Cargan to Parkmore as a heritage trail
Glynn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of recreation provision and facilities for young people – Idyllic setting and proximity to the Causeway Route presents opportunities to attract tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continued promotion of environment and heritage by relevant agencies and online – Greater leisure and recreation opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Development of a recreational space for all ages in the village area – possibly lined grass pitch or MUGA ○ Improve play park facilities – Provision of suitable paths and walking routes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop, improve and extend walkways throughout village (undertake an audit of all existing and potential paths in terms of quality and access) ○ Link up existing and potential paths and ensure they are of suitable quality in terms of surface ○ Ensure appropriate disability access at key sites/paths ○ Provide signage and information to increase use of walking paths – Health promotion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased provision of activities, classes and programmes to support and encourage positive health for all of the community

Gracehill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – As the only Moravian village in Ireland there are opportunities to draw on this unique heritage to attract tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Create river walk linking the village to the River Maine and Galgorm Castle Estate. This will link the village to other tourist attractions and ensure village is not cut off – Promotion of environment and heritage by relevant agencies and online – Development of walking opportunities and paths
Grange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of sport and recreation provision and facilities for young people and older people – Facilities not comparable with those in other villages (e.g. play facilities are outdated) – Lack of land which can be developed for public use – Lack of safe walking areas throughout area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improve the condition and facilities available at the play area – Multi-use sports provision – Additional activities and programmes for all age groups – Provide off road walkway and paths to encourage walking/cycling
Islandmagee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Islandmagee is a picturesque area and therefore is an attraction for tourists – Lack of environmental and landscaping schemes – Lack of sport and recreation provision and facilities for young and older people – Lack of safe walking areas, with poor access to the harbour, beach and shore areas (e.g. Mill Bay, Ballylumford) which is problematic for residents/visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improve access to harbour, beach and shore areas across Islandmagee (e.g. Mooring facility at Mill Bay) – Improve the condition and facilities available for children's play across key areas where it is currently lacking – Outdoor facility to provide leisure/recreation opportunities – Additional activities and programmes for young people (and wider population) – Safe walking routes and cycle paths throughout Islandmagee area
Kells and Connor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The natural setting of Kells and Connor is a unique strength of the area for residents and visitors – Lack of community and leisure facilities, including those for young people and older people – Improvements to local walkways (riverside paths, nature walks, heritage trails) is a priority for supporting tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improve outdoor recreation facilities (with access and lighting) – Provision of active walkways and paths (e.g. riverside park/walk) – Expansion of heritage trails and nature walks within village area – Improve upkeep and maintenance of walkways

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide programmes and activities to support young people to participate in sports and recreational activities
Millbrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of fitness trails and walking paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop walkways in the village area – Improve quality of facilities for sports and recreation – Create community allotments to support positive health and intergenerational working – Provide facilities to support sport and recreational activities – Provide outdoor fitness facilities (e.g. fitness trail/walking paths) – Improve linking of walks and key village attractions (harbour, waterfall, walk, railroad) – Increase the range, type and breath of community activities
Portglenone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Village provides access to several key tourist resources such as a marina, canoe, cycle and walking trails – The port has a quality art marina with berths for 30 boats, giving access to Lough Beg and Lough Neagh to the south, and Coleraine and the open sea to the north – On-shore facilities allow canoeists to extend their activities and store canoes and equipment – Five forests surround the village and offer more than ten miles of walks – Portglenone Forest Park attracts many visitors during the bluebell season – Vibrant community which host a range of annual events (e.g. “Gig’n the Bann”, “Big Splash” Triathlon, and “River Festival” which is a week of water-based activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Better co-operation with the Mid Ulster District Council to link river walks, pathways and joining up the tourism offering – Provision sport and recreation facilities for all groups – Improve access across the village to walks and link key areas of the village (e.g. link the marina, monastery and village centre) – Develop a “hinged/suspended” footpath to provide a safe walkway/cycle path adjacent to the narrow vehicular bridge – Deliver a wider range of activities available for all ranges focusing on health, skills, education or simply for fun and enjoyment – Improve information/interpretation signage at forest – Develop sculptures to be located throughout forest – Build on the current level of water-based activities and events for families and tourists

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lobby and build support for village area to be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – Expand seasonal activities including fun days, summer events (e.g. “Gig’n in the Bann” and “Big Splash”) – Develop a “joined up” tourism offering with other villages (e.g. form a cluster with Gracehill and Broughshane) – Develop a sports, recreation and water development plan – Provision of outdoor gym equipment and fitness facility – Increase number of berths at Marina – Improve promotion of activities at forest (to include Geocaching, mountain biking) – Develop, improve and extend walkways and signage throughout village – Link up existing walks/paths in village and ensure key locations (monastery, forest, marina, riverside walks, Walled Garden) – Ensure disability access at key sites/paths, including forest – Increase activities, classes and programmes to support positive health and wellbeing (e.g. keep fit, active lifestyles) – Develop the “Men’s Shed” project
Whitehead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Natural beauty and the scenic Antrim Coast Road are a strong asset – To the north east of Whitehead there is direct access to Blackhead Path, a coastal route popular for visitors and walkers with spectacular views of Blackhead Lighthouse – The yacht club is important for recreation and tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Stronger promotion of walks, pathways, and natural landmarks such as Blackhead Path and Blackhead Lighthouse – Link from coastal pathway through to the Gobbins is essential – Need for signs to promote walks and facilities within area and geography information on “what can be seen” from Whitehead – Seafront access should be improved – An active Whitehead and a place to discover:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to the water at Whitehead is another important aspect for the local area with a small beach, harbour and active yacht club - P.10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examine feasibility of additional/improved coastal walks ○ Improved access to sailing activities for youth and people with disability ○ Greater promotion of Whitehead as a destination for tourists ○ Improve access and information for Blackhead Path ○ Signs to promote walks facilities within the area ○ Tourist signage to detail geography of local area including "what can be seen" from Whitehead ○ Improve linking of walks and key local attractions ○ Focus on improved upkeep, maintenance (safety) of coastal pathways to provide ongoing access - Improved "walkways" in area and between other attractions/areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consolidate and improve (secure) access to existing paths and walkways ○ Examine feasibility of new pathways including 1. Whitehead to Gobbins, 2. Port Road to Blackhead, 3. Blackhead to Gobbins, 4. (Stage 2) link coastal path to Gobbins (and to Gobbins Centre) ○ Examine feasibility of creating a path from Kings Road bridge to RPSI platform - Sea Front / Marina <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve board walk, decking and access points onto beach ○ Improve access for people with a disability or reduced mobility ○ Improve provision for disability sailing and for youth training at Whitehead Sailing Club - Allotments
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examine the feasibility of developing allotments and community garden for use by local community
Larne Masterplan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Set midway between Belfast and County Antrim's famous scenic coastal attractions, Larne is seen as the "Gateway to the Glens and Coast" and the Causeway Coastal Route – Larne holds great potential as a centre for tourism, with large volumes of visitors that use the Port 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Establishment of community gardens in open disused land – Waterfront Redevelopment – Circular Road – Reconfigure land reclaimed from Circular Road for leisure development – Develop allotments/community gardens – Improve linkage and signage to the River Inver which is an important corridor for wildlife to enhance its value – Create an Urban Sports Park (skate park) under Harbour Highway – Develop a Larne Lagoon and introduce recreational activities such as boating – Create a Wetland Park in the Estuary of the River Inver
Carrickfergus Masterplan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – An old town famed for its castle and lough shore setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity tourism could build on the reputation of Carrickfergus as a leisure destination – Redesign of Marine Gardens and beach to become a public park – Restoration of Fisherman's Quay with new facilities for water sports and fishing – this would include the development of a secondary pier for jet skis and water skiers and a storage building – A State of the Art Centre for Sailing Excellence, supported by a modernised Boat Yard facility – Connect Shaftsbury Park with Marine Gardens and Leisure Centre, therefore creating better linkages and forming a larger park – Provide greater opportunities for Active Travel (walking/cycling), including linear parks or greenways, linking in Shaftsbury Park and the harbour area

Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Central large town in the Borough – High pedestrian movements with limited cycling paths – Majority of land used for property and retail with some recreation and leisure provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Utilisation of diverse types of large open green space e.g. Peoples Park, Ecos Nature Park. – The Braid River presents opportunity to play a role in providing green space in the town centre – Continuation of efforts to realise a cohesive cycle network through Ballymena Town Centre with adequate cycle storage – Identification of the Braid River Greenway from Ballymena to Broughshane
Greenisland Development Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Greenisland is a settlement with many physical and natural assets – Belfast Lough provides access to a public beach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Better connect to green spaces through recreational areas, connectivity, pathways and bridges – A new community hub supported by improved walking and cycling connections – Take advantage of its surrounding natural assets to attract more visitors through the implementation of a first-class network of parks, recreation, sporting and wellbeing facilities

Appendix 3 – Summary of Online Survey Findings

As part of the wider consultation plan a MEA Outdoor Recreation Survey was hosted on Survey Monkey between 28 October 2018 and 31 December 2018. The survey received 311 responses.

The survey was promoted through various channels:

- Consultation poster
- Websites – MEA Council, ORNI and its product sites (e.g. WalkNI)
- Social Media – MEA Council, ORNI and its product sites (e.g. WalkNI)
- Press Release issued to local media

The survey comprised 7 primary questions:

1. What current provisions for outdoor recreation are you aware of in Mid and East Antrim?

Top 5 activities of 14 options provided:

- Walking 78%
- Running 62%
- Horse Riding 53%
- Road Cycling 42%
- Angling 36%

2. In the past 12 months, which of the following activities have you or anyone in your household participated in, in the Mid and East Antrim Borough or elsewhere?

Top 5 activities of 14 options provided:

- Horse Riding 77%
- Walking 72%
- Running 37%
- Road Cycling 22%
- Mountain Biking 15%

3. Where do you participate in the above activities that you have ticked?

- Horse Riding – responses from horse riders was high as this survey was distributed through the British Horse Society Regional Office. Response identified that riders are prepared to travel to join organised rides, pay toll entry to use private bridal paths and find there is current limitation in locations for horse riding due to safety concerns.
- Walking – participants walk at various locations across the Study Area including Woodburn, Blackhead, Portglenone, Carnfunnock, Islandmagee, Slemish.
- Running – participants identified running locations across the Study Area including Woodburn, Portglenone, Ballyboley Forest, Carnfunnock, as well as urban parks and on road.

- Road Cycling – participants identified various locations across the Study Area and referenced cycling clubs.
- Mountain Biking – informal mountain biking was referenced at Woodburn and Balleyboley.

4. How satisfied are you with current provisions for outdoor recreation in Mid and East Antrim?

0 being low (extremely dissatisfied), 50 being high (extremely satisfied) – average response – 25 – neither satisfied or dissatisfied

5. Are you and members of your household able to participate in active recreation activities (e.g. sports, physical wellness, outdoor play, etc.), as often as you would like?

- Yes 30%
- No 68%
- Other Comment: 2% - yes but don't because of safety concerns

6. If you answered "No" to number 5 above, why are you and members of your household not able to participate in active recreation pursuits as often as you would like? Check all that apply.

Top 5 responses of 10 options given:

- Lack of Facilities 70%
- Lack of Provisions 55%
- Safety Concerns 32%
- Lack of personal time 28%
- Other (please specify) 22%

Other comments specified include:

"We would like more walking and safe cycle paths such as the Connswater Greenway or Comber Greenway. In particular Ballymena lacks good long walks. There should be more developed walkways along the rivers for example from Galgorm to Cullybackey."

"There needs to be off road riding for horses. England, Wales and Scotland are FULL of bridleways and we have none here. Beaches are also becoming more restricted and forests"

"There are some great mountain bike trails, but they are all over 1 hour drive away from where I live. This gives me the dilemma of staying local and cycling round somewhere like Woodburn dams or spending about 3 hours in the car. Also, when I do go to these centres I would more than likely be spending money for lunch or coffee before coming home"

7. Are there any outdoor recreation activities you would like to do more often or see introduced to the borough? If so, please write here what activity you'd like to do more often, what would make that possible and where you would suggest that this would take place.

"I would like to see more off-road running facilities for people who work during the day and want somewhere safe/traffic free to train at night time."

"BMX racing, currently unavailable within the borough, there are numerous sites available to have a track and a local club that could run it "

"I would like to see more facilities available for horse riders to ride and enjoy their horses in a safe environment e.g. access to specific horse (only) trails in public parks/forests etc within the MEA area"

"Not sure what additional activities would help but a much more understanding of those with additional needs"

"ANYTHING that is inclusion and considers basic toileting needs when taking part"

"mountain bike trails. we are missing out on what is a hugely popular pass time here, visit any of the trail centres at the weekend and they are busy. I have met people from all over the UK and Ireland, people from Spain, Germany, France, and even an Australian couple. These people will spend money travelling and staying in these areas as long as these places are well designed and have different levels of challenge for the riders. From beginners to those that want red and black trails. we are getting left behind by the rest of Ireland and GB with only a few trail centres available in the north and only one trail centre between the huge area of the Sperrins and the Antrim Glens. I and many others would love to see this change in the coming years. We live in an amazing little place that needs a helping hand to develop what is naturally there to get more people out of the sofa and attractions to keep people coming back and spending their money. I understand the funding is not there currently for many of these ideas but putting plans in place should at least be considered in case by some miracle we ever get a functioning government here and much needed investment in the outdoor facilities. maybe also consider putting up a sign to ask for a donation for using a facility. I use the Davagh trail centre and if they had an option to put a few pound into a fund to help pay for trail maintenance I and others would be happy to donate."

"I think there should be a greater emphasis on promoting sea-based activities as currently access and choices are very limited."

"Water sports- canoe and kayak trails not aware of ease of access currently to these facilities. Mountain biking- not aware where these are currently located or could be located."

Appendix 4 – Public Consultation Response Summary

Below is a summary of the feedback that was received from the public consultation meetings held in Ballymena, Carrickfergus and Larne.

CONSULTATION		
Site / Issue	Status Quo	Opportunities
Woodburn Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Safe off-road walking, running, dog walking and horse-riding – Angling (by permit) – with a disabled fishing stand in place at North Carn reservoir – Unpermitted additional activities include mountain biking and scrambling – 3 open car parks offering formal access to the forest – Only signage onsite is by NI Water and prohibitive in nature – Link section of Ulster Way transects through Woodburn Forest – Woodburn Regeneration Group is enthusiastic and proactive – a valuable local resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Completion of a site Masterplan – to include visitor facilities, signage and information, a local mountain bike facility and a multi-use trail network design as a minimum – Development of a Heritage Lottery Fund Project for the reinstatement of Woodburn Glen walk trail and associated heritage features – Constitution of Woodburn Regeneration Group – this would enable the group to be part of funding applications and take a more active role in forest management
Ballyboley Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Informal horse riding, walking and mountain biking taking place – Reports of tree disease however these are outdated and would have no influence over future developments – Seen as inaccessible for those without personal vehicles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Formal cycling, walking and horse-riding provision – Improved visitor welcome with signage and interpretation – Proper marketing of MEABC forests as recreation sites as a whole
‘Red Tape’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity providers are put off bringing outdoor recreation due to too much ‘red tape’ and misguidance over legislation and land designation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council could collaborate with NIEA to make this easier – Suggestion for employment of a ‘red tape buster’ to serve as a one-stop-shop for legislation and designation queries
Islandmagee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Locals have clashed with tourists over anti-social behaviour in the past – Brown’s Bay is used by horses but with no clear instruction if they can or cannot be there – Blo-karting takes place through activity providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Better information for horse-riders using the beaches – Heritage – coastline was used for SS Titanic speed testing
Ballyboley Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Informal horse riding, walking and mountain biking taking place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Formal cycling, walking and horse-riding provision – Improved visitor welcome with signage and interpretation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reports of tree disease however these are outdated and would have no influence over future developments – Seen as inaccessible for those without personal vehicles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Proper marketing of MEABC forests as recreation sites as a whole
Ballygally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Beach Bonanza 2018 – Popular with coastal rowing clubs – Decent car parking provisions – Slipway is limited in its length and position beside a wall causing rocks to block access to the water in low tide – No storage provisions or amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Car park extension to be considered – Extension to the slipway to be considered – Design and build of storage for boats e.g. lean-to, shed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Would require investigation in to nearby landownership – Gold Club are open for partnership
Whitehead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rowing from public slipway along with a smaller slipway at Yacht Club – Storage facilities on-site in Blackhead car park – Pro-active club members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Blackhead Path restoration – Joined up approach to water sports – Good car parking facilities are suitable for future events
Carnfunnock Country Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No formal safe access pathway from Ballygalley – Limited recreation provision compared to potential – Larne residents feel a disconnect from the site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Revision of activities – Better use of the topography – Connectivity to Ballygally to be considered
Antrim Coast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Iconic views – Seen as only suitable for vehicles despite National Cycle Route – Tight bends and poor visibility cause safety concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Feasibility of an Antrim Coastal Walk should be considered
Antrim Hills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Popular with Duke of Edinburgh groups – Some informal off-road cycling and mountain biking taking place – A popular section of the Ulster Way transects the Antrim Hills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ulster Way to receive better promotion from the Council
East Coast Canoe Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Good facilities – Clubs are proactive but no holistic approach to water sports as a whole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Suggestions to improve existing facilities and to have 1-2 'centres for excellence' along the coast for water sports
Portglenone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Marina/mooring/fresh water – Motorhome stations – River walkway – Parking – Children's playground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identified as a proposed hub on the Lower Bann Blueway to unlock the Lower Bann corridor as a leisure and tourism resource

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Events e.g. Gin n the Bann – Private jetty – Café/Shops/Public Houses – Coarse fishing stands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support Mid Ulster District Council and Portglenone Enterprise Group in the development of facilities in Portglenone including development of recreation opportunities – More interpretation, orientation and public art – Feasibility study for a community trail linking the Marina to Bracknamuckley wood
Slemish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Health and Safety concerns – People pick and choose their way up and down the mountain – Disconnect from nearby sites of significance to local heritage and history – Toilet and car park facilities on-site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If demand is great enough, suggestions for formal route up and down Mountain – Potential to improve visitor experience with
Braid River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Informal access currently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Formal access provisions
Maine River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Informal access currently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Formal access provisions
Ballymena to Glenariff Greenway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understood that council is making headway with general public support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Council to continue assessing the feasibility of its greenways with particular support between Ballymena-Cushendall Greenway

Appendix 5 – Quality Walk Criteria

What are Quality Walks?

The assessment of Northern Ireland's walking routes has been carried out by walkers for walkers. By choosing a Quality Walk you can leave home with the knowledge your selected route is one of the best Northern Ireland has to offer!

All Quality Walks have been accredited in partnership with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Tourism NI

What can you expect from a Quality Walk?

All of the quality walks contained within WalkNI.com have been assessed on the ground by walkers for walkers. The following statements can be made about Quality Walks:

1. At least 50% of the route will be off road.
2. Car parking will be available (may be formal or informal).
3. Facilities such as toilets may be available.
4. Information on the walk will be available either on site or online.
5. Signage may be in place. If the route is not waymarked, an adequate route description has been provided on WalkNI that will allow the route to be navigated.
6. As part of the overall walk assessment consideration is given as to whether the walk is through scenic landscapes and if the walk is suitable for the tourist market.

How is a Quality Walk Identified?

To identify the Quality Walks on the website, each walk has the following 'Quality Walk Stamp' located beside their title.

Quality Short Walks

0-5 miles



Quality Medium Walks

5-20 miles



Quality Long Walks

Over 20 miles



Appendix 6 – Quality Walks in Mid and East Antrim Study Area

Developed in 2007 by ORNI, the quality walks scheme recognises and promotes N. Ireland's best short (0-5 miles), medium (5-19 miles) and long-distance (20 miles plus) walking routes and includes the Waymarked Ways and sections of the Ulster Way. When the scheme was established, all Quality Walks were accredited by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. All are promoted on WalkNI.com.

The table below outlines the Quality Walks located in Mid and East Antrim along with their total lengths.

Type	Section/Name	Length (km)
Ulster Way	Ballycastle to Glenarm (partial) Link Section	13.5
	Glenarm to Ballynure Quality Section	31.5
Long Distance Quality Walk (+32km)	Antrim Hills Way	32.2
Short Distance Quality Walk (0-8km)	Blackhead Path	3.9
	Buttermilk Bridge	2.5
	Carnfunnock Biodiversity Walk	2.4
	Carnfunnock Garden Walk	1.3
	Carnfunnock Heritage Walk	2.6
	Carnfunnock Shore Walk	2.4
	Carnfunnock Woodland Walk	4
	Cranny Falls (linear)	2
	Glenarm Coast Walk (linear)	0.5
	Glenoe Waterfall	1.6
	Layde Walk	3.2
	Oakfield Glen and Bashfordisland Wood Walk	3.2
	Portmuck	3.2
	Skernaghan Point	4.8
	Straidkilly	1.1
	Whitehead Diamond Jubilee Wood	1.1
TOTAL		117km

Appendix 7 – Angling Locations in the Study Area

Formal Angling Locations within the Study Area (DAERA)				
Site Management Body	Nearest Town	Type	Access/Facilities	Permit Required
Lough Mourne (DEARA)	Carrickfergus	Brown Trout and Perch	Anglers must use the official entrances and must not trespass on adjoining lands or obstruct roads or gate entrances. Fishing from boats is not permitted. Angling is not permitted before 8am or later than 10pm	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit
Copeland (Marshallstown) reservoir (DAERA)	Carrickfergus	Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout	Anglers must use the official entrances and must not trespass on adjoining lands or park cars that obstruct roadways or gate entrances. Angling is not permitted before 8.00 am or later than 10.00 pm	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit
Lower South Woodburn Reservoir (DAERA)	Carrickfergus	Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout	Anglers must use the official entrances and must not trespass on adjoining lands or park cars that obstruct roadways or gate entrances. Angling is not permitted before 8.00 am or later than 10.00 pm	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit

Middle South Woodburn Reservoir (DAERA)	Carrickfergus	Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout	Anglers must use the official entrances and must not trespass on adjoining lands or park cars that obstruct roadways or gate entrances. Angling is not permitted before 8.00 am or later than 10.00 pm	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit
Upper South Woodburn Reservoir	Carrickfergus	Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout	Anglers must use the official entrances and must not trespass on adjoining lands or park cars that obstruct roadways or gate entrances. Angling is not permitted before 8.00 am or later than 10.00 pm	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit
North Woodburn Reservoir	Carrickfergus	Rainbow Trout	There is a smooth hardcore car park near a disabled fishing area. The area is accessible to wheelchairs via a short concrete path.	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit
River-Fishing Locations within the Study Area (Informal Access, Licence required)				
River Maine	Cullybackey	Salmon and Brown Trout	Maine Angling Club issues up to 10 daily permits to people wishing to fish on their stretch of the river. This extends to about 6.5km of fishing from both banks of the river from Hillmount Weir upstream to a point around two miles above Dunminning Bridge.	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit AND Maine Angling Day Permit

Braid River	Ballymena	Brown Trout, Dollaghan, Salmon	The fishing extends upstream from the MS bridge to Braid Chapel near the Sheddings.	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit AND Braid Angling Club Day Permit
Kellswater River	Ballymena	Brown Trout	The Kellswater is a small to medium sized river flowing from the Antrim Plateau to join the River Maine.	Kells, Connor and Glenwherry Angling Club Day Permit
River Clough	Ballymena	Brown Trout, Dollaghan, Salmon	The Clough is a small river tributary of the Maine with a good stock of brown trout, complemented by runs of dollaghan and salmon from July, dependent on rainfall.	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit
Cloughwater River	Ballymena	Brown Trout, Salmon, Dollaghan.	The Cloughwater is a medium sized tributary of the River Maine with a good stock of wild brown trout and salmon and dollaghan in season. The main fishing area runs upstream from Doury Road Bridge.	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit
Lower Bann	Portglenone	Coarse Fishing – Bream, Roach, Eels	The Lower Bann is considered to be Northern Ireland's premier coarse fishing river.	DAERA game rod licence DAERA game angling permit and Bann Systems fishing permit
Glenarm River	Glenarm	Brown Trout and salmon.	The Glenarm River is approximately 5 miles long, with the Glenarm Angling Club fishing two miles and a private syndicate fishing the remaining three miles.	DAERA game rod licence and DAERA game angling permit AND Glenarm Angling Permit

Private Fisheries within the Study Area				
Riverdale Fishery	Ballymena	Rainbow Trout	Formerly Kilgad Fishery. Fly fishing only.	Private Permit
Hillhead Fishery	Ballymena	Rainbow Trout	Fly fishing only	Private Permit
Sea-Fishing Locations within the Study Area				
Carnlough Bay Boat Tours	Carnlough	cod, pollock, conger, mackerel and herring	Sea fishing trips available through commercial operator or private charter	There is no requirement to have a rod licence for sea angling
Bangor Boat	Bangor	cod, pollock, conger, mackerel and herring	Operates out of Ards & North Down Borough (Bangor Marina) with fishing trips including Islandmagee / Gobbins	There is no requirement to have a rod licence for sea angling
Sea-fishing from Land Access Points	Various	cod, pollock, conger, mackerel and herring	Numerous sites including Whitehead Promenade, Carrickfergus Harbour and East pier, Ballycarry Causeway, nr Islandmagee	There is no requirement to have a rod licence for sea angling

Appendix 8 – Benchmarking Best Practice

Case Study 1: The Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Outdoor Recreation Group

The Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands ORG was established to bring together local interest groups and individuals to identify the barriers to developing outdoor recreation opportunities in the Binevenagh area and to assist with preparing and delivering outdoor recreation project proposals which could attract external funding (primarily National Lottery Heritage Fund).

The Group held an open call for participants via social media and direct contact with outdoor recreation providers and governing bodies etc. At present the group has representation for surfing (Long Line Surf School), walking groups (Bannside Ramblers and Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs), Orienteering (NW Orienteers), Mountain Biking (Andy Bate | Translink), Sport NI, Outdoor Pursuits (Carrowmena Activity Centre). There is no 'automatic right' to sit on the group and members are encouraged to suggest additional members, expertise or interests where appropriate.

To date the group has assisted with the preparation of project proposals which will contribute to enhanced opportunities for the public to participate in outdoor recreation in the Binevenagh area. The group has been actively involved in reviewing project proposals and making recommendations to a separate Project Board (LPS Board) as to which projects are 'in-keeping' with the aims and aspirations of local user groups.

In this sense the group has an official advisory role in the Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership Scheme with the current Chair representing the ORF at Board level. This is a good example of a very inclusive model and seems to encourage participation from local individuals and groups. The summary table below outlines the projects which are currently in development by the group.

Downhill Spatial Masterplan	Outdoor Recreation	£ 100,000
Castlerock Community Heritage Trails	Outdoor Recreation	£ 110,000
Ballycarton and Binevenagh Forest Spatial Masterplan	Outdoor Recreation	£ 200,000
Castlerock to Aghanloo Off-Road Walk	Outdoor Recreation	£ 70,000
Ballykelly to Swanns Bridge Off Road Walk	Outdoor Recreation	£ 100,000
Community Outdoor Recreation Information Points	Outdoor Recreation	£ 48,000
LiDAR Survey of LPS Area	Outdoor Recreation	£ 20,000
Brolasco Bank Walk	Outdoor Recreation	£ 60,000
Outdoor Recreation Training	Outdoor Recreation	£ 80,000
Gortmore and Avish Bothy	Outdoor Recreation	£ 90,000
Canoe Access at Potters Burn	Outdoor Recreation	£ 40,000

Terms of Reference

Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership Scheme

Outdoor Recreation Advisory Group

What is the Advisory Group?

- a group of representatives who actively advise the Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership Scheme Board and Staff on all activities or items involving outdoor recreation within the LPS area
- it is expected that those participating will act as champions of the Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership Scheme within the organisations they represent
- the purpose of their work is to provide expert advice and assist the LPS Board and Staff in the development, delivery and review of a list of priority projects which enhance outdoor recreation opportunities within the LPS area

What is the Advisory Group's remit?

The Outdoor Recreation Advisory Group will focus on achieving synergy and providing expert advice to the LPS Board and Staff on all aspects of the scheme which concern Outdoor Recreation. Specifically, the Advisory Group will work to:

- ensure that enhancement of the area's outdoor recreation facilities and offering are core principles in all project activities
- review and comment on project documentation prepared by the LPS Staff which relates to outdoor recreation
- review outdoor recreation project plans and make recommendations to the LPS Board on project activities
- identify and seek match funding for outdoor recreation project activities
- support the LPS Board and Staff in the delivery of project activities
- champion the role of the LPS in enhancing the area's outdoor recreation facilities and offering

Who is in the Advisory Group?

The Outdoor Recreation Advisory Group will bring in expertise or representation as required throughout the duration of the development and delivery phases of the scheme. Those who fail to attend meetings regularly or fail to offer constructive participation will be asked to step aside. There is no automatic right of membership. Those seeking to participate in the Advisory Group will have their request considered by the group. The decision to invite participation will be made based on the nature of the constructive contribution the representative can make to the Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership Scheme

It is anticipated at a minimum, membership will comprise a representative from each of the following organisations:

- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Sport NI
- Causeway Coast and Glens Outdoor Recreation Forum
- Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland
- Ulster Ramblers
- Roe Angling LTD
- Ulster Gliding Club
- Mountain Biking Community
- Translink
- Carrowmena Activity Centre
- Long Line Surf School

The Advisory Group will recognise and respect the unique role of each member. Its purpose is not to duplicate the work of those having a specific duty or interest in relation to a site which is the focus of a scheme activity.

How does the Advisory Group operate?

As a forum of equals, the Advisory Group will seek to operate through consensus rather than through exercise of vote. The Advisory Group will meet in person a minimum of four times a year during the development and delivery phases of the project. The group may meet more frequently should the need arise. When necessary members should be prepared to review, comment and take decisions on documents and project proposals between scheduled meetings using email.

The role of Chair will be agreed amongst those attending and will be reviewed annually. The Chair will review and sign off minutes of meetings (taken by an LPS Staff member) The Chair will act as facilitator to the Advisory Group and the link between the Advisory Group, the LPS Board and the LPS Project Manager. The Chair of the Outdoor Recreation Advisory Group will represent the group on the LPS Board.

Case Study 2: South-West Coastal Path



The 630-mile South West Coast Path (SWCP) launched in 1978, follows the coastline of England's south west peninsula through the counties of Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset. In 2013, for the second time, Ramblers Walk magazine voted the path as the best walking route in Britain. A large part of its success can be attributed to the fact that the path has received over 40 years of focus and on-going investment.

The Route

The Path traverses 17 Heritage Coasts, a National Park, two World Heritage Sites, a UNESCO Geopark and Britain's first UNESCO Biosphere.

The route mostly hugs the coast although there are some small inland diversions due to access issues and erosion. 90% of the route is off-road and most of it is suitable for walkers only.

Economic Impact

In 2015, 8.6 million visits, worth an estimated £502m and accounting for 4% of all direct tourism spend to the south west region, were made to the path. This expenditure is estimated to support 9771 full-time equivalent jobs. These figures exclude non-tourists such as regular dog walkers.

Visitors

There are no studies available that look at the profile or nationality of visitors to the trail. Based on website statistics, over 80% of visitors are from GB and of the out of state visitors, USA and Germany make up 42% of visitors.

Visitor Experience & Services

The SWCP has outstanding natural beauty with over 70% of the trail located in an AONB or National Park as well as offering interesting heritage, including maritime heritage and WWII sites. Tourism is a huge industry in the south west of England so this means that the trail can be quite busy in places although there are very remote areas also such as Hartland Point in Devon. However, the tourism offers a positive aspect for the visitor as there are ample and quality visitor services and accommodation all along the route.

In addition, there are numerous walking holiday providers who offer:

- Multi-base walking holiday providers - Many companies arrange accommodation and move bags for walkers who want to hike a long section of the Coast Path

- Single base walking holiday providers - To avoid having to pack luggage up each morning, these companies offer holidays where you stay in the same hotel or guest house, but then are transported to do a different walk each day
- Led walks- Walking with a local expert means the walk can be adapted to take in what is most interesting on the day
- Baggage Carrying - Several companies move bags between overnight stops

Another aspect highlighted by walkers that enhanced their visitor experience was the high quality of visitor information specific to the trail that allowed walkers to easily plan their walk. The 3 main elements were:

- Comprehensive, detailed website
- Book published every year detailing route and visitor servicing
- Professionally produced series of books on the walking trail with maps

The South West Coast Path team attributes the path's popularity to the following key factors:

- the importance of tourism per se in the south west of England (over £10b spend)
- a strong South West Coast Path brand
- relatively easy access from London and Midlands
- the visitor's ability to enjoy a quality coastal walk at any point along the coast

Marketing

Marketing for the path is carried out by the South West Coast Path team. Funding for the marketing has not always been consistent but the SWCP Association now provide a greater level of support.

The key elements of marketing include:

- dedicated website, which generates over 650,000 visits per year
- funding was secured in 2016 to market the trail to the German and Dutch markets. The project is ongoing and includes a public relations campaign, attendance at trade shows and online/social media advertising.
- walking app was developed (this has only generated approximately 2000 downloads)
- 6 walking festivals that take place along the route each year

Given the popularity of the Path, there is a wide range of books and maps available to purchase.

Other Initiatives

Between 2010 and 2014 the Rural Development Programme for England invested £2.1 million into initiatives for the SWCP. Within this, a number of key projects are notable:

- Website Rebuild: The website was completely rebuilt with expanded information for people considering a multi-day trip walking the path.
- Interpretation: Alongside the core walk information, new and updated interpretation has been installed along the path to improve understanding and appreciation of the wildlife, culture and heritage
- Half day and full day walks: Walk descriptions were developed for people wanting to go out for a half or full day walk. These aim to provide visitors with a choice of attractive walks close

to where they are staying, that meet their interests and abilities, and so encourage them to explore their local area rather than travelling further afield to visit the more well-known 'honeypot' sites. To ensure visitors have access to walks information both at home and while out and about they have been made available in many ways, including:

- SWCP website: 616 walks are on the SWCP website
 - Widget: A feed from the SWCP website supplies details of the walks to the Interactive Outdoor Activity Map widget
 - In print: In conjunction with a local publisher the best Coast Path walks have been used in a series of 11 books, each covering a stretch of the path.
 - On mobile phones: The mobile version of the website was tailored to meet the need of a day visitor looking for a short walk, with the assumption that someone planning a longer break will use a tablet, laptop or desktop.
 - On information panels: 62 map information panels with details of between 3 & 6 walks starting from that location,
 - Series of subsidised training courses focused on walking and cycling
- SWCP has produced an online Tourism toolkit to help businesses in the South West attract more visitors. It is made up of two key elements:
 - Tourism Marketing Toolkit: Providing a 5-step marketing programme to help businesses understand who their potential visitors are, best ways of communicating with them and how to promote the outstanding tourism offer in the South West.
 - The Outdoor Activity Map widget: This is an interactive map that can quickly and easily be embedded onto a business's website. It contains summary details and a hyperlink to around one thousand ideas for days out such as walks, cycle routes, heritage attractions and places to visit.

A total of £130,000 was spent on promotion during the project, which helped to secure PR and advertising. This primarily involved employing an external PR agency, as well as advertising and social media campaigns.

Trail Development

Sections of the path originated as a route for the coastguard to walk from lighthouse to lighthouse patrolling for smugglers. But it was during the 1970s that it became important as a recreational resource and was developed as a continuous coastal path. Initially an approach of 'path of least resistance' was adopted. However, during the 1980s, many significant improvements were made to the path, often initiated by the SWCP Association through campaigning local authorities.

Since the 1980s, there has been ongoing investment and effort to continue improving the route to ensure wherever possible it is on the coast and off-road. Most of the original issues have now been resolved, but cliff falls in recent years have resulted in some unsatisfactory inland diversions.

Access

Securing access along the path has been through negotiation with individual landowners under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) and is still on-going on some sections of the path.

Management & Maintenance

The day-to-day management and promotion of the path are carried out by a team of staff employed by the SWCP Association:

- Director
- Office Supervisor
- Administrator
- Supporter Manager
- Finance Officer
- Youth Project Officer
- Fundraising Manager
- Communications Officer
- National Trails Officer (funded by Natural England)

The team is employed and funded by the South West Coast Path Association. The Association was formed over 40 years ago as an independent voluntary organisation representing the users of the trail. Today it has evolved into a limited company and is the main body managing the trail. Its funding comes from:

- over 6000 individual and business members (fee due)
- fundraising
- some funding from Natural England

A Trail Partnership oversees the management of the SWCP and is made up of:

- SWCP Association
- Local Authorities
- National Trust (major landowner)

The partnership agrees the path priorities for maintenance works and new projects and allocates Natural England funding. In 2014-2015, Natural England's contribution towards the path's maintenance was £459,000 whilst local authorities contributed approximately £150,000. The actual practical maintenance of the path is carried out by rangers and wardens employed by the local councils and the National Trust.

The Association also funds path maintenance. The Association has a Path Committee which meets regularly to review projects and allocate funding. The local authorities and National Trust contribute 'in kind' supplying the labour, while the Association often provides the materials.

The Association's Path committee and The Trail Partnership work hand in hand to manage the maintenance and priorities on the trail.

Signage

The aim of the signage is that the walker should be able to complete the trail by simply following the way markers. Further details on waymarking are detailed in section



Signage on South West Coast Path in granite and wood

A sculpture marks the start and finish of the SWCP and have become landmarks.



Sculpture at the start of the SWCP in Minehead in Somerset

Ferries and Water Taxis

As the route of the SWCP meets a lot of rivers and streams, there are many estuaries for the walker to navigate. 16 of these are crossed by ferries and many are a formal part of the walking route.

There are large variances in the offering of the 16 ferries. Some offer a timetable whilst others are on demand, effectively operating as a water taxi.

Ferry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timetabled • Frequency of ferry sailings varies hugely from ferry to ferry and depends on time of year • Often close during the winter • Car taxis are offered as an alternative in these cases
Water Taxi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On demand through a phonecall on the day the service is required or standing at a given landing point and waving • Cost varies, but many are from £5 to £10 per person one way • Often have a minimum fee such as £30

Table 14: Summary of ferry and water taxi services on SWCP

Some ferries operate on a small scale and offer novel ways to hail the water taxi, whilst other ferries are more commercial in nature.



Examples of water taxis, SWCP

Where the ferry or water taxi are deemed part of the SWCP trail, these are grant aided in a small way as they effectively 'maintain' the path. The funding comes from Natural England and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Budget

The core budget for the SWCP comes from Natural England and is for maintenance and the employment of the National Trails Officer. In 2016, the Natural England budget for the SWCP was £452,000. There is no 'revenue' budget for marketing.

The SWCP Association raises funds through membership, fundraising and grants. In 2016, this resulted in available funds of £426,174. This money is dedicated to supporting the maintenance of the trail and marketing.

Whilst this model is proving successful for the SWCP, it may be difficult to replicate in other areas as it's based on some unique advantages including:

- SWCP Association is an existing charity with 6000 members and good trustees
- the SWCP is well established, recognised and well-loved brand
- the south west of England represents a huge tourism industry with thousands of potential tourism businesses to tap into for money.

Case Study 3: Shannon Blueway

A Blueway is a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on or closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences. Blueways can be used by all ages and abilities - with something for everyone, the slogan “Blueway, do it your way” has been adopted to reflect their accessibility and diversity. The essential aim of a Blueway is to increase the recreational use of the inland waterways and thereby to generate economic, health, social and community benefits.

Launched in October 2014, the Shannon Blueway covers the four Counties of Leitrim, Roscommon, Longford and Cavan and is the first of its kind in Ireland where a myriad of recreational activities have been developed and bundled together as a single or multiple visitor experience and tourism proposition. It is an innovative, safe and easy to use series of on-water and land-based trails. It allows guided and unguided paddling and walking along the Lough Allen Canal and River Shannon from Drumshanbo to Leitrim Village, as well as paddling on a looped trail on the Camlin and Shannon Rivers, starting from picturesque Richmond Harbour. As well as providing access to experiences on the waterways for visitors, The Shannon Blueway also connects villages and communities in a predominantly rural setting.



The Shannon Blueway comprises:

- 26.5km of canoeing trails - Camlin River Loop (10km), Drumshanbo to Carrick-on-Shannon (16.5km)

- 26km of walking trails - Battlebridge Lock to Drumhauver Bridge (10km), Cloondara to Longford Town Walking Trail (16km))
- 23.5km of cycling trails - Cloondara to Longford Town Cycling Trail (16km) and Drumleague Lock Looped Cycling Trail (7.5km)

A number of partners were involved with the lead agency, Waterways Ireland, in developing the Shannon Blueway. These included Canoeing Ireland, The National Trails Office of the Irish Sports Council, Fáilte Ireland, Local Authorities and Tourism Offices. Much work has been carried out with local communities and businesses around the Blueway, to develop packages combining activity with places to stay, eat and go. The initiative is rooted in local engagement and partnership working. Funding for the product was provided by the Rural Economic Development Zone Pilot Programme

Project Stages

Stage 1: Product Development

The project saw the creation of a network of defined trails, built to agreed technical standards upon existing infrastructure within a natural waterway environment with a consistent look and feel. A partnership approach was taken for both applying for funding and in the delivery of the product.

A feasibility study was conducted to assess existing provision and trail product. The paddling trail was created using existing waterways with work completed to provide more access points etc. The Irish Sports Council trail standards (inspection procedures, grading systems etc) for inland trails were used in the development of the trails including for the paddling trails.

Waterways Ireland worked with the councils on the land-based product to upgrade existing trails. Both regional signage directing people from the road and signage on the trails was designed and installed. This included directional signage to the existing provisions e.g. service block and toilets for people using the trails



Stage 2: Activation

The Blueway has been activated by:

- Service Providers (making access easy) - Cycle Hire, Canoe Trips, SUP instructors, Walking Guides
- Inspiration and Creativity - authentic and immersive experiences and stories

- Cohesively presenting all that the region offers - a collaborative approach between businesses to create packages

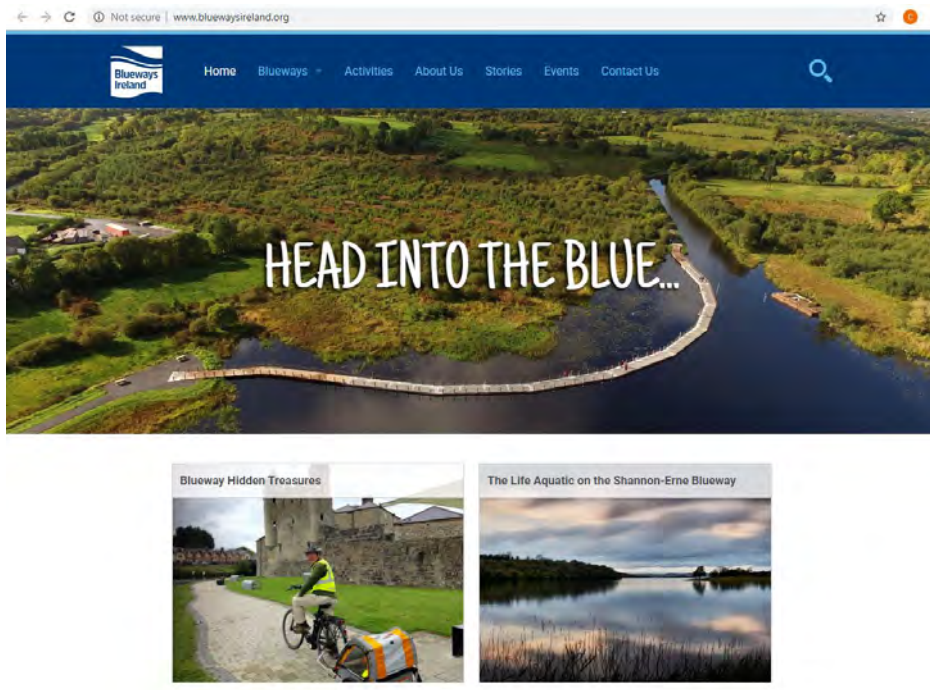
Emphasis was placed on local businesses collaborating to provide the Blueway experience for the customer. The success of the Blueway required collaboration on a regional rather than County level. Through rural tourism funding Waterways Ireland facilitated network events to engage with local businesses and encourage them to collaborate together and cross sell their products. The Blueways website provides the platform to promote the offers with the aim of creating a one stop shop for the consumer, making access to the Blueway easy and encouraging greater visitor spend in the area. Since the launch of the Blueway existing businesses have expanded and new start-ups have emerged.

Over 100,000 visitors were recorded on the navigations in the Shannon Blueway area during the April to October 2015 period, with many recreational businesses established to service the demand from Blueway visitors. The Shannon Blueway won the Lakelands & Inland Waterways 'Sport Tourism Innovation Award' at the Local Authority Members Association awards, and was nominated for 'Best Outdoor Escape' by Outsider magazine.

Support has been given for events to encourage use of the Blueway by local communities and sports groups. The Shannon Blueway Adventure Festival <https://www.bluewayadventure.ie/> is an annual event that takes place April / May. Under the guidance and support of the Waterways Ireland sponsorship programme, the event encourages outdoor fun on the Shannon Blueway, bringing communities together through a community tourism initiative supported in partnership with Leitrim County Council, Fáilte Ireland and IPB Insurance. The weekend incorporates walking, paddling and cycling along or on the Shannon Blueway, with participants enjoying historical talks and the chance to participate in the Shannon Blueway Adventure Race.

Promotion

A bespoke website was developed www.bluewaysireland.org providing information on trails, experiences, visitor services, events and news.



Case Study 4: Community Trails for Newry, Mourne & Down District Council




Outdoor Recreation NI worked on behalf of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) to develop a Community Trail Plan for all 7 of its District Electoral Areas (DEA) as part of a longer-term project to develop Community Trails across all DEA's.

Community trails are formal trails that connect communities to local outdoor spaces and bring different communities together. This includes linear routes (Community Trails) and site-based trails systems (Community Trail Hubs). Community Trails link together to create a Community Trail Network.

Each Community Trail Plan sets out a strategic approach to each DEA for a system of paths and trails used by communities, both now and in the future, for various reasons including recreation, active travel and exercise, etc. These paths are determined through extensive consultation and active engagement with the local communities and stakeholders within each DEA.

The Community Trail Plan feeds into and complements the key priorities and themes within the NMDDC's overall "Community Plan" and are used to inform the strategic planning and development of paths within each DEA which connect communities to each other and to areas of green space.

Process:

	Development of Community Trail Plan
	Assessment of potential trails within Plan
	Design and identification of project costs
	Project development – identify/secure funding
	Delivery
	Promotion
	Ongoing management and maintenance

During the initial stages of the project, gaps in provision and any barriers to development were determined. From this potential new community trails were identified and agreed priorities for future development were produced in a Community Trail Plan.

For example, the initial phase of developing the Slieve Croob DEA Community Trail Plan included:

- Identifying 69 potential linear trails:
 - Connecting communities to services & facilities e.g. shops, bus stops, sports pitches
 - Connecting communities to hubs
 - Creating looped walks taking users off road
 - Alleged & asserted PROW's (some open, some closed, some disputed)
- Community engagement then enabled priority trails to be shortlisted:
 - Prioritised trails – up to 5 per settlement
- The community's role:
 - Identifying and contacting private landowners
 - Gaining permission in principle (or not)
 - Completing of evidence forms and blank maps to complete – (for PROW's)
 - Continuing the process with next trail.
- Identifying 7 potential trail hubs
 - Forest Service NI (FSNI) sites
 - Private forests leased to FSNI
 - Private land – new access
 - Private land – enhanced access

Following this trail design was completed for feasible sites, with full costings and design, and formal agreements put in place. For these sites a trail management model has been agreed with Council, including:

- Management requirements e.g. inspections
- Maintenance requirements
- Insurance
- Resources required to implement – staff, volunteers, revenue budget
- Secure project funding
- Work with Council to secure access agreements
- Project delivery
- Marketing/ promotion – WalkNI, community trail maps

The development and delivery of Community Trail Plans for Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is an ongoing project. At time of submission of this report, a Community Trail Plan for all seven DEAs, the entire NMDDC area. A Stage 2 process has been completed for four of seven DEAs, and 6 Community Trails have been designed, developed and are in the process of being delivered on the ground.

Case Study 5: Dalby Forest Park, North Yorkshire

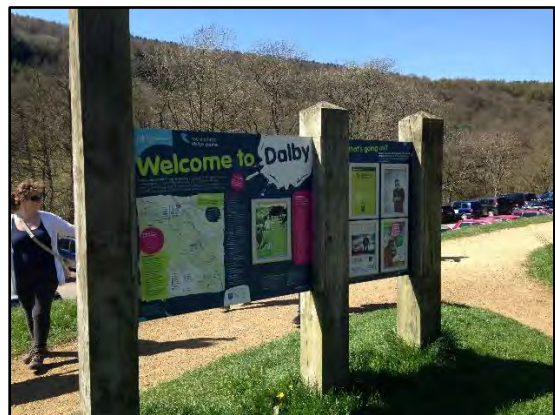
Dalby Forest is an 8000-acre forest in North Yorkshire owned and managed by the Forestry Commission. Its key target market is families and activity visitors. The profile of visitors to Dalby Forest consist of 48% families, 22% young independents (those aged 16-34 with no children), 18% aged 45-65 with no children and 11% to other groups.

Between 2005-2007 it implemented a structured 'Master Planning' approach to the development of its visitor/outdoor recreation attractions. The aim of the redevelopment project (which was implemented across the following three phases) was to refurbish, convert and reuse the existing assets on site in order to enhance the overall visitor experience.

Phase 1 included the redevelopment of the old Forestry Commission offices, estate yard and village hall to create a courtyard complex including craft workshops, a community resource centre, cycle hire and cycle wash facilities, a courtyard café and new toilets. This phase costed £1.1m and was funded by Yorkshire Forward (£375k), ERDF (£250k), Ryedale District Council (£50k) and the Forestry Commission (£425k).



Phase 2 consisted of the design and build of a high-specification visitor centre including an information desk, shop, restaurant, exhibition area, meeting room, toilets and Dalby Astronomical Centre. The building incorporated environmental and sustainable features and has won several awards for its design. Phase 2 cost of £2.6m and was funded by Yorkshire Forward (£1m), ERDF (£820k), North York Moors National Park (£25k) and the Forestry Commission (£755k).



Phase 3 of the redevelopment included the replacement of old worn-out and unsustainable cycle trails and construction of a cycle skills area. In total the cycle trail development cost £461k and was funded by ERDF and Forestry Commission. Since then a new play area has also been installed in the Forest Park.



In the context of the above redevelopment project, consultation with the Forestry Commission highlighted that the three phases of work were addressing identified needs within the Forest Park and were in line with the overall ethos and strategic direction of Dalby Forest. However, further consultation with the Forestry Commission indicated that the individual phases of the project were developed and taken forward in order to meet the criteria of certain funding streams that were available during period (e.g. ERDF).

Today the Park today receives 450,000 visitors and generates income from car parking, leases with private operators and through holding events. The annual income for the Forest Park is £800,000 of which half is direct income from visitors. Individual visitors and groups to Dalby Forest are known to spend between £21-£30 in the local area during their visit.

Dalby Forest is one of seven forest parks in England which hosts Forest Live. Forest Live is the Forestry Commission's concert series that takes place throughout England each year (with up to 24 events across various summer weekends). Launched in 2001, it is an independent programme organised by the Forestry Commission bringing music to new audiences without commercial branding or sponsorship. It is understood that there are between 5,000 and 9,500 spectators at each venue. The Forestry Commission acts as the promoter in relation to Forest Live and is responsible for organising and managing the events and for procuring key services for all seven sites including artist programming, power and lighting, staging, bars and catering, tent/marquees etc.

The Park employs both 'direct' staff (i.e. those directly involved with the day-to-day management and operations within the Forest) as well as an 'indirect' staffing complement (i.e. a proportion of the time of

individuals at a regional or national level required for the management and operations of the Forest) as follows:

- Forest Management Director - Oversight of all forests within the Yorkshire Forest District (10% in Dalby)
- Area Land Agent - Oversight of all legal contracts, disputes, advice etc. (10% in Dalby)
- Civil Engineer - Responsible for maintenance of roads, bridges, car parks etc. relating to recreation (10% in Dalby)
- Building Surveyor - Responsible for building conditions surveys and managing contractors (10% in Dalby)
- Civil Engineer - Supporting with maintenance of roads, bridges, car parks etc. relating to recreation (10% in Dalby)
- Senior Manager - Responsible for managing recreational estate across Yorkshire (30% in Dalby)
- Visitor Centre Manager - Responsible for managing staff, budgets, the visitor centre, trails and visitor servicing, primarily at Dalby (80%).
- Forest Recreation Rangers - Coordinating of contracts, events and day-to-day management/operation of Dalby (3 x 100%).

It has a staffing budget of £216-£240K per annum, a marketing budget of £20k and an operational budget of £530,00.

In addition to the paid staff, Dalby strongly support the contribution of volunteers within the Forest. The 'Friends of Dalby Forest' has been established as a registered charity consisting of volunteers who meet regularly to enhance the facilities and product offering for visitors within Dalby Forest. The group has approximately 30 members and those that regularly volunteer can earn a free annual pass to Dalby Forest as recognition for their work. Examples projects for the volunteers across the benchmark facilities include:

- Tie and cutting back overgrown vegetation and overhanging trees;
- Repainting bird hides;
- Relaying woodchip;
- Nature and wildlife projects
- Visitor 'meet and greet' activities;
- Maintenance of walking and mountain biking trails;
- Maintenance of accommodation products.

Case Study 6: Darkley Forest, County Armagh

Background

In July 2014, Outdoor Recreation NI was commissioned by Armagh City and District Council to complete a Scoping Study for Darkley Forest.

This Scoping Study assessed -

‘the current outdoor recreation opportunities available within the Forest and made recommendations for future development, taking into account what was happening in the wider area and at a National level in terms of outdoor recreation.

The study employed both primary and secondary research methods including desk top research of existing reports and strategies, site assessment and consultation with a wide range of local and national organisations, user groups and the private sector.

Key Findings

From the research, the following observations about the current provision and condition of outdoor recreation activities in Darkley Forest were made:

- Visitors do not feel welcome to the Forest
- No link exists between the village and the Forest
- There are no formal walking trails
- With the exception of game shooting which is for club members only, no other outdoor recreation opportunities exist within the Forest
- There is no interpretation or waymarking
- There is no obvious entrance to the Forest or car parking facilities
- Very limited information for the visitor is provided, either onsite, in hard copy or online

Outcomes

Following extensive consultation with the local community, the Council, FSNi and a range of other stakeholders.

Outdoor Recreation NI secured funding from Sport NI, DAERA (TRPSI) and the Council towards the:

- Development and installation of a walk trail network, including appropriate trail infrastructure e.g. boardwalk, culverts and bridges.
- Development of a trail head on the Mountain Lodge Road, including a car park, appropriate information and signage and seating.
- Installation of appropriate signage on the surrounding road network to direct visitors to the Forest using ABCBC's Forest Branding template.
- Installation of visitor monitoring equipment within the Forest.
- The development has been enhanced and supported through appropriate marketing and promotion, such as websites and events.

Several key issues and barriers were identified that could have affected development. These included the availability of funding, Council development priorities, forestry operations, partnership working with relevant landowners and organisations (both public and private), planning permission approval for the car park and forest user conflict issues.

All of these issues were addressed and Darkley Forest has become a valuable community recreation resource and also an asset to the wider South Armagh area.



Darkley Forest

Darkley Forest offers an enchantingly unique walking experience through a small and peaceful coniferous woodland. Discover this unspoilt hidden gem using its two walking routes along with the rich historic landscape of Darkley Village including Tullynawood Lake and the old Linen Mill.

Mountain Lodge Trail

Distance: 1.5 miles (2.4km)
Time to complete: 30-45 mins
Difficulty: Easy

This trail follows the path from the Mountain Lodge car park, through the forest, to the old Linen Mill. It is a gentle, well-maintained path suitable for all ages.

Maple
Moderate

Aughnagurgen Trail

Distance: 2.5 miles (4.0km)
Time to complete: 45-60 mins
Difficulty: Moderate

This trail follows the path from the Mountain Lodge car park, through the forest, to the old Linen Mill. It is a gentle, well-maintained path suitable for all ages.

Maple
Moderate

Finding your way about

Follow the colour-coded trail waymarkers (dots) on the wooden posts located throughout the forest.

Trail	Distance	Time to complete	Difficulty
Mountain Lodge Trail	1.5 miles (2.4km)	30-45 mins	Easy
Aughnagurgen Trail	2.5 miles (4.0km)	45-60 mins	Moderate

Key Contacts and Emergency Information

Armagh City, Banbridge & Enniskillen Borough Council
Armagh City Council
www.armaghcitycouncil.gov.uk

Emergency Services
call 999
Fire, Police, Ambulance & Coastguard

Hazards and Restrictions

These trails are shared with working forest machinery and may be restricted to some periods of the year. Please observe all signage and signs during your visit.

This project has been funded by:

Armagh City, Banbridge & Enniskillen Borough Council
Armagh City Council
Armagh City, Banbridge & Enniskillen Borough Council
Armagh City Council
Armagh City, Banbridge & Enniskillen Borough Council
Armagh City Council

Appendix 9 – Community Trails – Frequently asked Questions

What is a Community Trail?

A trail that connects communities to local outdoor spaces (e.g. community to a forest/open green space) and many also connect communities together (e.g. 2 communities connected via a riverside trail).

Why are Community Trails needed?

While Northern Ireland is blessed with an abundance of greenspace, there is often a lack of infrastructure to allow local communities to get outdoors, 'close to home'/on their doorstep. The trails give people an opportunity to access the outdoors safely and with confidence. Cars and buses should not be necessary to access a community trail.

What does a Community Trail look like?

Trails are clearly defined on the ground and usually waymarked. Usually have a designated 'trail head' with information – particularly important when it's a trail likely to be used by visitors.

- Can be looped or linear
- Should be at least 50% off-road – ideally 70% off-road
- May use historical routes e.g. canal towpaths, river bank walks, disused railways
- Surface may need upgrading – may need to build a new section of trail

Are they for walkers only?

No – they can also be for family cycling and horse riding – depends on what the demand is from the local community and also the topography of the land. Where possible 'new build' trails should provide for those with accessibility issues e.g. those with limited mobility, mothers and pushchairs etc and where possible be 'multi-use' i.e. accommodate walkers and family cyclists.

What is surface of a community trail?

Community trails can be grass surfaced, new build sections of crushed stone etc and obviously where they go on the road – tarmac. The most important thing is that the surface is sustainable.

Who takes on the management, maintenance and liability responsibilities of the trails?

It's important that each community trail has a written, legal agreement in place which outlines who takes on the management, maintenance and liability responsibilities.

Most trails that use private land will involve putting in place a 'permissive path agreement'. This means the landowner gives formal consent to access their land along a prescribed route. This will be between the landowner and the Council. It can be 'custom' made to suit the landowners and Council's specific terms and conditions. Without this agreement – very few public purse funders will give out money.

Trails that pass over public land – usually a licence /lease/agreement in place with the Council – can be with the Community Group. No access agreement is needed where a trail uses an existing public road or footpath.

Can a community group enter into a 'permissive path agreement' with a landowner?

No. They can however enter into their own legal agreement with a landowner as negotiated between solicitors. Community groups should always be steered away for taking on land used for public access because of the liability issue.

Can a community group help the Council maintain and manage the Community Trail?

Yes – this will not only cut down costs to the Council but also help the community take ownership of the trail. Volunteers will need to be properly trained.

What's the difference between a Community Trail and a Community Trail Network?

Very simply – a Community Trail Network consists of a series of interconnecting or looped Community Trails of various lengths. Very often they may be developed around a single Community Trail which may service as the 'spine' for the Network. e.g. River corridor is the Trail – lots of off-shoots off the main spine then turns it into a Network.

What about vesting land if the landowner will not give a permissive path agreement/does not want to sell the strip of land?

This would be a last resort as Community Trails are about the community coming together for the better good of all people in that community. Vesting is usually contentious – avoid if at all possible.

Would putting a Community trail over a stretch of land that a farmer gets a Single Farm payment on cause him to stop getting that?

Yes – but the area of land that the farmer is losing his SFP on is so small (estimated at 3m wide strip) that in real terms this is minimal financial loss. SFP are on average £100-£200 a hectare. The Community Group could buy this stretch of land from the farmer.

What is the single greatest issue causing a community group not to succeed in their efforts?

Landowner permission

Is there funding available to develop Community Trails?

Yes – through the RDP Programme – basic services and village renewal potentially and through Sport NI's Everybody Active programme.

What is the next step when a Community says they have an idea for a Community Trail?

The most important part of developing the trail is doing consultation – especially with the landowners.

Unless there is an agreement in principle from the outset of the project that the landowners are supportive of the project and willing to enter into some sort of path agreement – then the Community group is wasting its time.

After consultation then there is a step by step process to go through involving detailed site assessment, mapping, consideration of barriers/constraints, drawing up detailed construction prescription documents, costing the project. For these stages Community groups need to bring in experts.

What is the best scenario for a Council to take this Community Trail Planning forward?

In the ideal world the Council would commission a Council wide Community Trail Plan to be done. This would be an extensive, time consuming piece of work involving lots of consultation. One way forward is for the Council to put out an expression of interest to all communities to see if they have any plans to develop Community Trails. Those that respond then would need to be prioritised against a criteria such as:

- those with greatest % off-road more favourable
- those with landowners consultation all completed and agreed in principle more favourable
- those with no obvious formal greenspace nearby more favourable
- community group can show previous delivery of projects.

Appendix 10 – Endnotes

¹ <https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/news/record-year-for-causeway-coast-and-glens-as-tourism-numbers-soar>

² Benefits of Outdoor Sport for Society <http://outdoorsportsbenefits.eu/resources/> (European Network of Outdoor Sports, 2018)

³ A Countryside for health and well-being- the physical and mental health benefits of green exercise (CRN, 2005)

⁴ Learning in the Natural Environment, Understanding the diverse benefits of learning in natural environments (Natural England, 2012)

⁵ BBC online news. 20 September 2016. Kinver (2016)

⁶ Inspiring People, Improving Places. (BCTV, 2010)

⁷ Hidden Demands – uncovering the true value of sport volunteers (Join In, 2015)

⁸ Assessing the Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation in NI (SportNI, NEA, NUIB, 2013)

⁹ Information from Mid Ulster Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021 (BTS, 2016)

¹⁰ The Economic Impact of Outdoor Activity Tourism in Wales (Visit Wales, 2014)

¹¹ Survey of Overseas Travellers (Failte Ireland, 2011)

¹² MENE Survey 2012-2013. (Natural England, 2014)

¹³ Mountain Bike Northern Ireland Market Research Study (Tourism NI, 2016)

¹⁴ <https://www.nienvironmentlink.org/cmsfiles/files/Publications/Recreation-Strategy.pdf>

¹⁵ Key forests are those in which outdoor recreation has either been developed or is at an advanced stage of development.

¹⁶ All Quality Walks have been accredited by Outdoor Recreation NI in partnership with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Tourism NI. (See Appendix 3 – Quality Walk Criteria)

¹⁷ Parkrun is a series of 5k runs held on Saturday mornings in areas of open space around the UK. They are open to all, free, and are safe and easy to take part in.

¹⁸ <http://trailbadger.com/trails/antrim/woodburn-forest/>

¹⁹ Exercise Explore Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways, November 2016 (Department for Infrastructure)

²⁰ See Appendix X for breakdown of Village Plans

²¹ Angling at Woodburn reservoirs is permitted with the appropriate licencing and permits outlined in Appendix X.

²² The Group was established as a direct result of the proposed fracking within Woodburn Forest in 2015.

The fracking did not go ahead, and the Group subsequently harnessed the enthusiasm of many members to encourage the development of the forest for the benefit of the local community.

The Group is active in lobbying NI Water and Council to encourage improvements within the forest area, but also takes a practical approach to management and participation.

²³ Lower Bann Corridor Recreational and Tourism Study (BTS on behalf of Waterways Ireland, 2016)

²⁴ It is anticipated that a Blueway Development and Management Guide will be published in mid-2019 by Sport Ireland, Failte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland. This will assist developers to develop, manage and promote Blueways more effectively and outline the accreditation criteria, process and support mechanism.

²⁵ A Feasibility Study into the Development of a Walk and Cycle Route along the River Bann, from Toome to Coleraine (ORNI on behalf of Sport NI and Waterways Ireland, 2017)

²⁶ For Community Trail Plan - See Section 3.3.5

²⁷ born2runevents.com/about

²⁸ In December 2012, ORNI produced a scoping study for outdoor recreation in Bracknamuckley Forest. For a detailed breakdown of the steps required to complete the project and costings see Appendix X.

²⁹ A coherent and uniform council branding for outdoor recreation including forests is recommended in section 3.4.2

³⁰ Leave No Trace Ireland website: <http://www.leavenotraceireland.org/>